

Children and Families Committee

Agenda

Date: Monday, 16th September, 2024
Time: 5.00 pm
Venue: Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields, Middlewich Road,
Sandbach CW11 1HZ

The agenda is divided into 2 parts. Part 1 is taken in the presence of the public and press. Part 2 items will be considered in the absence of the public and press for the reasons indicated on the agenda and at the foot of each report.

It should be noted that Part 1 items of Cheshire East Council decision making meetings are audio recorded and the recordings will be uploaded to the Council's website

PART 1 – MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED WITH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS PRESENT

1. **Apologies for Absence**

To note any apologies for absence from Members.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

To provide an opportunity for Members and Officers to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests, other registerable interests, and non-registerable interests in any item on the agenda.

3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting** (Pages 5 - 8)

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 July 2024.

For requests for further information

Contact: Josie Lloyd

Tel: 01270 686466

E-Mail: josie.lloyd@cheshireeast.gov.uk with any apologies

4. **Public Speaking/Open Session**

In accordance with paragraph 2.24 of the Council's Committee Procedure Rules and Appendix on Public Speaking, set out in the [Constitution](#), a total period of 15 minutes is allocated for members of the public to put questions to the committee on any matter relating to this agenda. Each member of the public will be allowed up to two minutes each to speak, and the Chair will have discretion to vary this where they consider it appropriate.

Members of the public wishing to speak are required to provide notice of this at least three clear working days in advance of the meeting.

Petitions - To receive any petitions which have met the criteria - [Petitions Scheme Criteria](#), and falls within the remit of the Committee. Petition organisers will be allowed up to three minutes to speak.

5. **Improvement Plan Progress Update** (Pages 9 - 84)

To provide an update on progress against the children's services improvement plan to address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) conducted in February and March 2024.

6. **Youth Justice Plan 2024-27** (Pages 85 - 152)

To consider a report seeking approval of the 2024-27 Youth Justice Plan.

7. **First Financial Review 2024/25** (Pages 153 - 212)

To receive a report on the first financial review for Children and Families services for the financial year 2024/25.

8. **Update on the progress of the key areas of the Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan 2024/25 to 2030/31 - Quarter 1 2024/2025** (Pages 213 - 236)

To receive an update on the progress of the mitigations detailed within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) management plan and a forecast outturn position in relation to the DSG deficit reserve.

9. **Paediatric Speech, Language and Communication Therapy Service** (Pages 237 - 262)

To consider a report on the Paediatric Speech, Language and Communication Therapy (SLCN) Service following the review, consultation and engagement by the Council and Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board.

10. **Childcare Expansion Capital Grant and Wraparound Childcare Revenue Grant Policies** (Pages 263 - 292)

To consider a report seeking approval in relation to the Childcare Expansion Capital Grant Policy and the Wraparound Childcare Revenue Grant Policy.

11. **Consultation on Admissions Arrangements for 2026-27** (Pages 293 - 342)

To consider a report seeking approval to consult on the Co-ordinated Scheme and Admissions Arrangements to comply with the statutory duty.

12. **SEND Partnership Strategy and Governance** (Pages 343 - 376)

To consider a report seeking approval on the proposed governance structure for 0-25 SEND Partnership and plan to refresh SEND strategy.

13. **Schools Capacity Return (SCAP Return)** (Pages 377 - 396)

To note a report on the recently submitted Schools Capacity Return (SCAP).

14. **Work Programme** (Pages 397 - 404)

To consider the work programme and determine any required amendments.

15. **Minutes of Sub-Committees** (Pages 405 - 408)

To note the minutes of the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee meeting held on 5 December 2023.

Membership: Councillors R Bailey, M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, J Bird, L Buchanan, C Bulman (Chair), N Cook, E Gilman (Vice-Chair), G Hayes, B Posnett, B Puddicombe, J Saunders and G Smith

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CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Committee**
held on Tuesday, 16th July, 2024 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor C Bulman (Chair)
Councillor E Gilman (Vice-Chair)

Councillors M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, J Bird, M Edwards, G Hayes,
B Posnett, B Puddicombe, J Saunders, G Smith, J Clowes and M Goldsmith

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Rob Polkinghorne, Chief Executive
Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director Children's Services
Claire Williamson, Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration
Andrea Stone, Interim Director of Family Help and Social Care
David Brown, Director of Governance and Compliance
Lauren Conway, Business Manager
Janet Witkowski, Head of Legal
Nikki Wood-Hill, Lead Finance Partner
Karen Shuker, Democratic Services Officer

23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Bailey and N Cook. Councillors J Clowes and M Goldsmith attended as substitutes.

24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

25 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2024 be agreed as a correct record.

26 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

There were no public speakers.

27 ILACS IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The committee considered a report on the Cheshire East children's services improvement plan, which addressed the findings from the Ofsted

inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) conducted in February and March 2024. The committee also considered the approach to providing additional financial investment to ensure that the Council could deliver the plan and the necessary improvements to the quality of services.

It was acknowledged that the improvement plan ratings had caused confusion as there were two separate keys for actions and impact. While this was referenced within the plan, it needed to be clear which the ratings shown referred to. Officers undertook to ensure that two separate ratings in the plan would be clearer to reflect this. The rating currently shown in appendix 1 of the report referred only to the actions as the first impact monitoring had not yet been undertaken at the time of publication.

Some members raised concerns regarding the plans for recruitment, sufficiency and the funding of the improvement plan and it was queried what contingencies were in place. Officers advised that the work being undertaken was looking at securing funding across the system to ensure sustainable solutions were found, particularly around sufficiency. Officers were working collaboratively on a proposal to address the sufficiency need and this would be brought forward to the Improvement Board and to Committee. The plan would be monitored on a monthly basis to identify any need for any contingency action. Details would be shared at each committee, as agreed at committee on 3 June 2024, to provide assurance.

A query was raised regarding the care leavers' scheme in which apprentices were employed by the council but seconded out to carefully selected businesses in the young person's chosen field, and what liability the Council would have. Officers undertook to provide detail in writing but gave assurances that this was a tried and tested model and learning would be taken from examples of best practice.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Approve the improvement plan as set out in appendix 1 to the report and recommend to full Council on 17 July 2024 the approval of the plan.
2. Approve the approach to funding the delivery of the improvement plan, as detailed in the S151/ finance section of the report and in appendix 2 to the report.

28 WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and concluded at 6.51 pm

Councillor C Bulman (Chair)

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OPEN

Children and Families Committee

Monday, 16 September 2024

Improvement Plan Progress Update

Report of: Andrea Stone, Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care

Report Reference No: CF/25/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: All wards

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report updates committee on progress against the children's services improvement plan to address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) conducted in February and March 2024.

Executive Summary

- 2 Cheshire East Council received an Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) between 19 February – 8 March 2024. The inspection found our support to care leavers was inadequate, and all other areas required improvement.
- 3 The improvement plan to address the findings from the inspection was agreed at the Children and Families Committee on 16 July and Full Council on 17 July. As agreed at the Children and Families Committee on 3 June, committee will receive updates on progress against this plan at each meeting so it can scrutinise the impact on outcomes for children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the progress against the improvement plan.

Background

- 4 The [improvement notice](#) (appendix 3) issued to Cheshire East Council was published on 12 August 2024. This outlines the actions required from the council. A refreshed multi-agency Improvement and Impact Board, which is independently chaired by our DfE Improvement Advisor, was stepped up in July 2024. The improvement plan is being monitored and scrutinised monthly by the board in line with the requirements of the improvement notice. The notice also outlines the monitoring activity that will be undertaken by the DfE.
- 5 The improvement plan was submitted to Ofsted and the DfE on 14 August 2024. Ahead of submission, small changes were made to some of the timescales within the plan, to the wording to 4 of the actions, and to the RAG rating system to make it easier to understand, to ensure that Ofsted and the DfE received the most accurate version of the plan. These have not changed the substance of the plan from the version received at Full Council. These changes are included within the plan at appendix 2. Any further required revisions or anticipated delays to the plan will be escalated to the Improvement Board and to Committee through their regular updates.
- 6 Two new documents have been developed to communicate the improvement plan to a wider audience; a plan on a page and a timeline of activity that will be delivered over each quarter. These are included within the improvement plan in appendix 2 at pages 8 and 9.
- 7 We are awaiting confirmation on when monitoring from Ofsted and the DfE will take place, and we will keep committee informed on these arrangements and their findings through these reports.

Progress against the plan

- 8 The [report to committee on 3 June 2024](#) outlined the key improvements that had been put in place following the inspection. The improvement plan at appendix 2 includes updated RAG ratings and progress updates for each area as at 18 July 2024. Appendix 1 shows an overview of the ratings for each action and plan area.
- 9 Key improvement activity which has taken place since the last update on 3 June includes:
 - Establishing a monthly Director's Performance and Quality Clinic, with the first meeting held in July 2024, to ensure there is effective line of sight to frontline practice, and that senior managers within children's social care are held to account for performance and quality to drive improvements to services.
 - Establishing a Children's Services Strategic Quartet, which includes the council's Chief Executive, Executive Director of Children's Services, Leader and Deputy Leader, and Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and

Families Committee. This will ensure there is oversight of and accountability for children's outcomes from the senior members of the council.

- LGA corporate parenting training has been commissioned for members of the new multi-agency Corporate Parenting Strategic Board, and elected members on the Children and Families Committee and Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee. This training will support senior leaders in their role as corporate parents and will provide a strong foundation for the new Corporate Parent Working Group in October 2024. This will be taking place over two sessions on 30 September, and 10 October, and members are asked to prioritise attendance at both these sessions.
- A multi-agency Corporate Parenting Strategic Board has been established and will meet for the first time on 2 October. Work is underway to develop workstreams to support this board and contribute to the delivery of our cared for and care leavers strategy.
- The programme for councillor visits to frontline services has been reviewed to strengthen oversight of the quality of services. This will be published on the members hub.
- The mandatory training plan for care leavers launched on 4 June and is being delivered via a series of away days to support the development of the team and shared understanding.
- The pathway plan was revised with young people and launched in May 2024. This has an improved focus on preparing for independence. Audits of cases in July showed that the changes to the pathway plan have strengthened the identification of risk and need.
- Care leaver hubs have opened in Crewe and Macclesfield. The hubs are a safe space for our young people to get help and support. A variety of support and activities are being provided through the hubs, including a monthly social event to bring care leavers together for a meal which they will cook and eat together, with an opportunity for them to share their views and shape services. Some of our most vulnerable young people are attending the hubs.
- The care leaver app, Junction 16+, is available to download on the Google Play Store.
- A care leaver health group has been established and commenced a piece of engagement work with care experienced young people around the care leaver health summary.

- We have increased management grip and senior leadership line of sight of young adults in unsuitable accommodation. All young people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or in emergency accommodation are reviewed in weekly performance clinics and by the monthly risk management forum. Expectations on practice and frequency of visits has been reinforced with teams.
- We have established a director level project group for accommodation for cared for young people and care leavers, 16-25 years, to drive increased sufficiency.
- We have formalised our 21+ offer, which is now opt out rather than opt in, and a tracker is in place to ensure there is oversight of engagement with this cohort. Young adults will be contacted every 12 weeks to ensure they know support is available and to check that their needs have not changed.
- We are continuing to embed restorative practice – approximately 180 practitioners have been trained, and 15 in house trainers are being trained to deliver the model to ensure it is sustainable. From September the training will be delivered by our in-house trainers.
- We are continuing to provide masterclasses, short in-house training sessions for practitioners and managers on specific topics, e.g. frequency of visits, to support improved practice.
- Practice guidance has been updated to include the proforma for practitioners to use when recording visits, this has been briefed out to all staff. Dip samples have shown that the proforma is supporting better recording of visits.
- A bespoke leadership programme for all leaders in children's services has been commissioned to embed high support and high challenge across the whole directorate. The training will run in 3 cohorts for all children's managers. Cohort one received training in June and cohorts two and three will receive their training in September and January.
- Our in-house leadership and management programme for children's social care has been tailored around the inspection findings. Sessions have been provided on supervision, planning and cross-service working.
- Practice standards for IROs have been refreshed and IRO service development days are being held every 3 months to embed these.
- A Workforce Strategy Group has been stood up and will take place 6 weekly from September, focusing on workforce development, recruitment and retention, and staff wellbeing.

Impact for children and young people

- 10 The vast majority of impact against the inspection findings is rated as red at this stage (for 13 of 17 sections – please see the RAG summary at appendix 1). This is where we would expect to be at this stage of our improvement journey.
- 11 Overall, audits show that the majority of practice requires improvement (70%), 10% were inadequate and 20% were good quality.
- 12 Six audits of work to support care leavers found that there has been improvement in relation to the inspection findings:
 - In 5 of 6 of the audits, auditors felt the personal advisor (PA) knew young people well.
 - In 4 of 6 cases there was good evidence of visiting by PAs tailored to need and risk of the young person. There was evidence that where young people were in emergency accommodation visiting rates increased.
 - Recording was generally up to date, with the only exception being the audit graded inadequate.
 - There was extensive evidence for 5 young people of the work of the EET team.
- 13 We now have reassurance through the updated 21+ offer and tracker that the right young people are open to this service.
- 14 We are starting to see an impact on young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) as a result of the work of the EET team. NEET figures have consistently come down from 40.48% in January to 30.81% in June. There was a slight rise to 32.57% in July. Within this figure there are 20 young people who are NEET and able to work which equates to a figure of 10%. If we look at the same period last year, the figure for June 2023 was 39.61%.
- 15 There has been a significant improvement in the waiting times for therapeutic services delivered by Freedom from Torture who support the emotional health of some of our unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people (UASC). At the time of inspection waiting lists for counselling was 9-12 months and is currently now 3-6 months, with a response to referral in 1-2 weeks.

Risks/ key areas requiring improvement

- 16 Accommodation for care leavers remains our most significant challenge and we have moved from having three young people in hotel accommodation at the time of the inspection to an average of 8 at the time of writing. For these young adults, we are also exceeding the statutory limit of 48 hours in hotel

accommodation. There is senior manager oversight for all these young people and safety plans and risk management plans are in place to support and protect them. Risks to young adults are now understood at all levels and action is being taken to mitigate these risks. The weekly meetings that we are having with Housing team managers are proving invaluable in making progress in these cases.

- 17 Due to service capacity, currently we are not able to allocate PAs at 16, and there are some 17 year olds who do not have a PA. This impacts on young people's ability to build relationships with their PAs. Three additional PAs have been recruited and are due to start within the next 4 weeks which will support with earlier allocation.
- 18 Management oversight and supervision remains a key area for improvement. We need to continue to focus on achieving compliance and improving our key performance measures.

Update on Recruitment

- 19 The following roles were agreed by committee and full Council as additional capacity to support service improvements, starting from September onwards:
- Independent reviewing officers (IRO) x 2
 - Connected carer assessors x 2
 - Social worker x 6
 - Personal advisor (PA) x 3
 - Quality assurance officer x 1
 - Project manager to lead development of 18-25 accommodation x 1.
- 20 Three additional PAs have been recruited and are due to start within the next 4 weeks. We are likely to be out to advert or shortlisting by the date of committee for all the other roles with the exception of the 6 social worker roles. There is a rolling advert open for social workers, however we have previously had difficulty recruiting experienced practitioners, so we will be recruiting 4 agency social workers (which will be experienced workers) to enable us to gain experienced practitioners. Four agency workers have the same cost as 6 non-agency social workers over the same period. The workforce strategy group will be refreshing our advertising campaign and benchmarking with other local authorities to support us to attract experienced social workers moving forwards.

Consultation and Engagement

- 21 We are continuing to work together with children, young people, young adults, parents/carers, staff, and partners to develop, deliver and evaluate improvements. Children, families and practitioners' views are actively sought through our audit process.
- 22 A #talktogether session was held in July on the improvement plan for all children's services staff. Communications have been shared with staff on the improvement plan and progress to date following the improvement plan being agreed at Full Council and submitted to the DfE and Ofsted. Regular progress updates will continue to be communicated to staff each quarter.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 23 Cheshire East Council's children's services received an inadequate judgement from the Ofsted inspection. The inspection demonstrated that there are areas we need to address at pace to improve outcomes for children. The council needs to ensure the findings from the inspection are addressed in a timely way to ensure we achieve good outcomes for children and young people and members need to be assured that the arrangements in place to address the shortcomings and make the necessary improvements are sufficiently robust and will deliver good or better outcomes for our children within a reasonable timeframe.

Other Options Considered

Option	Impact	Risk
Do not scrutinise the improvement plan	Committee will not have oversight of progress against the plan so cannot be assured that outcomes will be improved for children and young people	There is a risk that improvements are not achieved at the pace needed

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 24 Members of the committee need to be assured that all requirements and recommendations within the ILACS report and the improvement notice (served upon the council by the DfE on the 24 July 2024 resulting from the Ofsted inspection findings), are complied with and that the plans in place deliver the improvements required are within the timescales set by the DfE.
- (a) Failure to comply or poor progress against the Improvement Plan can result in the imposition of directions to secure performance, which can include DfE

intervention and nomination of a person to act on its behalf to secure performance.

- 25 The protection of vulnerable people is a council responsibility. Continued regular oversight by members of the Childrens and Families Committee, alongside the overall approach to improving service provision, aligns with this obligation.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 26 The additional resources linked to the plan are expected to be starting during September 2024 or in April 2025 in line with the costed plan, therefore there are no costs incurred to date.
- 27 The improvement plan to address the findings from the inspection was agreed at the Children and Families Committee on 16 July and Full Council on 17 July, which included the approach to the funding of the plan.
- 28 Since the funding plan was agreed the first financial review of 2024/25 has been carried out, and as a result the Children and Families Directorate are forecasting an overspend at FR1.
- 29 This means that although the specific funding identified for the plan is available from the MTFS growth, that other costs in the directorate, and indeed the council as a whole, are forecast to exceed their budgets resulting in an overall overspend position.
- 30 In order to address the in year budget pressures services will be working to mitigate and reduce costs wherever possible, whilst prioritising essential activity such as delivery of the improvement plan.

Policy

A council which empowers and cares about people

Work together with residents and partners to support people and communities to be strong and resilient.

Protect and support our communities and safeguard children, adults at risk, and families from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Be the best Corporate Parents to our children in care.

Ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

- 31 Good quality practice with families ensures that all children and young people's needs are considered and supported.

Human Resources

- 32 Additional capacity has been requested to support the delivery of the improvement plan.

Risk Management

- 33 There are reputational and financial risks to not providing good quality services, as well as risks to individual children and young people. The council must continue to ensure that these risks are mitigated by ensuring effective plans are in place to improve and that these make an impact on children's outcomes. The risk of failing to deliver the improvement plan has been added to the council's corporate risk register and this risk is monitored quarterly through the Corporate Policy Committee.

Rural Communities

- 34 Vulnerable children and young people are present in all communities in Cheshire East.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 35 The improvement plan aims to improve the outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people.

Public Health

- 36 Same as the implication above.

Climate Change

- 37 There are no implications for climate change because of this report.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Lauren Conway, Business Manager Lauren.conway@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1: RAG rating overview Appendix 2: Improvement Plan Appendix 3: Improvement Notice
Background Papers:	Report on the Improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 16 July 2024 Report on the Ofsted inspection findings to the Children and Families Committee on 3 June 2024 Cheshire East's Ofsted Inspection Report published 16 May Ofsted ILACS Framework

Improvement Plan

Rating Overview

Ratings as at 18 July 2024.

Key

Colour	Action Definition	Impact Definition
Grey	Not started yet	Too early to measure impact
Red	Not on track	No impact or very limited impact / improving outcomes for a few children and young people
Amber	On track to be completed within timescales	Some positive impact but this is variable and does not consistently improve outcomes for children and young people
Green	Completed	Positive and consistent impact which delivers improved outcomes for children and young people

Chapter 1

Senior Leaders' Oversight		Impact	Red
Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
SL1	Reporting and governance arrangements	Sept 24	On track
SL2	Participation activity forward plan	Sept 24	On track
SL3	Improvement Board	July 24	Complete
SL4	Children's Services Strategic Quartet	July 24	Complete
SL5	Corporate parenting strategic board	Nov 24	On track
SL6	LGA corporate parenting training	Nov 24	On track
SL7	Care leaver champions	Dec 24	On track
SL8	Cared for children and care leavers strategy	Nov 24	On track
SL9	Quality assurance framework	May 24	Complete
SL10	Service manager thematic audit group	Aug 24	On track
SL11	Share audit findings with teams	Sept 24	On track
SL12	Vital signs performance report	Sept 24	On track
SL13	Councillor frontline visits	Nov 24	On track
SL14	Children's social care national framework implications	Nov 24	On track
SL15	'Doing the Basics Brilliantly'	Sept 24	On track
SL16	Examples of good practice	Aug 24	On track

Care Leavers: Quality of Practice		Impact	Red
Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
CLA1	Practice standards	June 24	Complete
CLA2	Mandatory training plan	June 25	On track
CLA3	Management structure	April 24	Complete
CLA4	New pathway plan format	May 24	Complete
CLA5	Restorative practice training	Nov 24	On track
CLA6	Arrangements for young adults where there are safeguarding concerns	Sept 24	On track

Care Leavers: Planning for Adulthood		Impact	Red
Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
CLB1	Planning for adulthood on care entry	Oct 24	On track
CLB2	Review Ignition Panel	Sept 24	On track
CLB3	Preparing for adulthood in practice standards	June 24	Complete
CLB4	Care leaver hubs	July 24	Complete
CLB5	Transition policy	Dec 24	On track
CLB6	Health histories development	Oct 24	On track
CLB7	PA training on health histories	June 24	Complete
CLB8	Local offer app	Aug 24	On track
CLB9	Review the local offer	Dec 24	On track
CLB10	PA training on the local offer	July 24	On track

Care Leavers: EET		Impact	Red
Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
CLC1	EET plans for young people	Sept 24	On track
CLC2	Offer of EET opportunities	Mar 25	On track
CLC3	Work with local businesses and organisations	Mar 25	On track
CLC4	Support on employment preparation	Oct 24	On track

Care Leavers: Accommodation		Impact	Red
Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
CLD1	Emergency accommodation protocol	Aug 24	On track
CLD2	Review all young people who are/ at risk of being homeless or in emergency accommodation	June 24	Complete
CLD3	Temporary and emergency accommodation meeting	June 24	Complete
CLD4	PA training on housing support	July 24	Complete
CLD5	Project group for accommodation	July 24	Complete
CLD6	Review temporary and emergency options	Sept 24	On track
CLD7	Proposals to address accommodation shortages	July 24	Complete
CLD8	Flexibilities in current contracts for 16-18 year olds' accommodation	Oct 24	On track
CLD9	18-25 accommodation offer	Mar 26	On track

Care Leavers: aged over 21		Impact	Amber
Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
CLE1	Contact all 209 care leavers over 21	Mar 24	Complete
CLE2	21+ offer protocol	July 24	Complete
CLE3	Review care leavers 21+ with a disability	June 24	Complete
CLE4	Tracker for care leavers 21+	May 24	Complete
CLE5	Quality assurance of care leavers 21+	Aug 24	On track

Quality of Plans		Impact	Red
Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
P1	Restorative practice model	Aug 24	On track
P2	Masterclasses	Apr 25	On track
P3	Management session on planning	Sept 24	On track

P4	Reflective case discussions for CP	July 24	Complete
P5	Permanence strategy	Jan 25	On track
P6	Practice standards on care planning	Aug 24	On track
P7	Review permanence decision panels	Oct 24	On track
P8	Training on partnership challenge	Dec 24	Not started

Quality and Frequency of Visits		Impact	Amber
Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
V1	Performance framework	Sept 24	On track
V2	Masterclasses on visiting	Sept 24	On track
V3	Visiting template	July 24	Complete
V4	e-learning on visiting	Aug 24	On track

Management Oversight and Supervision		Impact	Red
Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
MO1	Leadership development programme	June 25	On track
MO2	CSC management programme	Apr 25	On track
MO3	Supervision policy and guidance	Sept 24	On track
MO4	Supervision training	Mar 25	On track
MO5	Permanence tracker	Oct 24	On track
MO6	Review plans for cared for children who are not in foster care or planning to return home	July 24	On track

Effectiveness of IROs		Impact	Red
Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
IR1	IRO performance management framework	Sept 24	On track
IR2	IROs on management programme	April 24	Complete
IR3	IRO practice standards	Sept 24	Complete
IR4	Quarterly IRO development days	June 24	Complete
IR5	IRO quality assurance alert guidance	Aug 24	On track
IR6	Challenge permanence performance	July 24	Complete

Sufficiency of Placements		Impact	Red
Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
S1	Family network culture	Sept 24	On track
S2	Join Foster4	May 24	Complete
S3	Build Foster4 offer and front door	Oct 24	On track
S4	Opportunities for fostering marketing	Oct 24	On track
S5	Specialist foster carers to support step down from residential	Dec 24	On track
S6	Third Mockingbird constellation	Sept 24	On track
S7	Three council residential homes	Dec 24	On track
S8	Deep dive on reunification	Dec 24	On track
S9	Joint commissioning high needs placements	Dec 24	On track

Chapter 2

The Front Door		Impact	Amber
Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
FD1	Contact guidance	July 24	Complete
FD2	Review LA MASH arrangements	Aug 24	On track

FD3	Multi-agency workshop reviewing front door arrangements	Sept 24	Not started
FD4	Chapter 3 Working Together	Dec 24	On track

Strategy Meetings		Impact	Grey
Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
SM1	Workshop on strategy meetings	Aug 24	On track
SM2	Minute-taking training	Aug 24	On track
SM3	Management analysis box	June 24	Complete

Life-story work and later-life letters		Impact	Red
Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
LS1	Training on life-story work	Aug 24	On track
LS2	Life-story work in practice standards	Aug 24	On track
LS3	Monitoring for life-story work	Aug 24	On track

Health of Cared for Children		Impact	Red
Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
H1	Prioritisation for vulnerable children for CYPMHS support	Mar 25	On track
H2	Waiting well initiatives	Mar 25	On track
H3	Review emotional support for UASC	Mar 25	On track
H4	Joint health and CSC reviews of health assessments timeliness	May 24	Complete
H5	LA single point of contact	May 24	Complete
H6	Quarterly reporting to NHS England	May 24	Complete

Education for Cared for Children		Impact	Red
Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
ED1	Education advisor attendance meetings	Apr 24	Complete
ED2	Attendance forum	Apr 24	Complete
ED3	Multi-disciplinary attendance meetings	Apr 24	Complete
ED4	PEP training	Dec 24	On track
ED5	Review PEP form	Sept 24	On track
ED6	Benchmark cared for attainment against their peers	Sept 24	On track
ED7	Audit young adults who are NEET at 20	Aug 24	On track
ED8	Use RONI to identify at risk of NEET	Nov 24	On track

Workforce		Impact	Red
Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
W1	Financial support for the plan	July 24	Complete
W2	Capacity for the care leaver service	July 24	Complete
W3	Review IRO capacity	July 24	Complete
W4	Recruitment and retention group	Sept 24	Complete
W5	Recruitment and retention strategy	Dec 24	On track
W6	Recruitment campaign	Jan 25	On track
W7	Reporting on caseloads	Aug 24	On track
W8	Masters apprenticeship scheme	Mar 25	On track
W9	Seek practitioner views	Mar 25	On track
W10	Communicate improvement progress	Mar 25	On track

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Children's Services Improvement Plan

April 2024 – March 2025

Contents

Introduction	3
Context.....	3
Coproduction	4
Support and Challenge.....	4
Monitoring Impact.....	5
Governance and Accountability	6
Glossary.....	6
Children’s Services Improvement Plan on a Page.....	8
Children’s Services Improvement Plan Timeline	9
Chapter 1	10
1. Senior Leaders’ Oversight	10
2. Care Leavers	14
A. Quality of practice.....	14
B. Planning for Adulthood	18
C. Education, Employment and Training.....	21
D. Accommodation.....	23
E. Care leavers aged over 21	26

3. Quality of plans	29
4. Quality and frequency of visits	33
5. Management Oversight and Supervision.....	36
6. Effectiveness of IROs	39
7. Sufficiency of placements	42
Chapter 2	45
1. The Front Door	45
2. Strategy Meetings	47
3. Life-story work and later-life letters	49
4. Health of Cared for Children	51
5. Education for Cared for Children.....	55
6. Workforce	58

Introduction

This is our action plan to address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of children's services in Cheshire East which took place in February and March 2024. The findings from the inspection are available in a report on the [Ofsted website](#). The inspection gave Cheshire East's children's services an overall grading of inadequate and found that although some improvements had been made since our last inspection in 2019, the quality of practice and the experience and progress of children and young people was too variable, and for care leavers this was inadequate. We need to make significant improvements and this plan sets out how we will do this.

We are committed to improving outcomes for children and young people. We will use the inspection findings to continue to improve the support we offer. This plan responds to all the areas identified in the inspection report. Immediate action was taken to improve services, starting during the inspection, and this is reflected in the plan alongside longer-term actions and ambitions.

Through the delivery of our plan and our programme of improvement, we will continue to embed a culture of high support and high challenge and be a **child-focused** organisation that works **together with** people, through effective relationships that support positive change. We know our workforce is our most important asset and we will continue to support and regularly communicate with frontline practitioners and managers so everyone understands their role in improvement and we co-produce, deliver, evaluate and celebrate changes together.



Context

This inspection, and previous inspections, have shown that Cheshire East's children's services have not provided consistently good quality support to our children and young people. We were judged inadequate in 2013 and 2024. In developing this plan, we have critically considered what barriers have prevented us from achieving good quality services to date. We have recognised that in the past we have moved from fixing problem to problem, which has led to a 'stop/start' approach. We now need to embed a systemic approach to improvement; changing our culture, developing the right systems and processes to ensure we routinely evaluate impact, and holding our shape around the changes we expect to see – holding the right people accountable consistently at every level.

We will be reviewing and changing our services in line with the [children's social care national framework](#) to ensure that we deliver consistently good quality practice that achieves strong outcomes for children and young people.

Cheshire East Council, like councils across the country, has been experiencing unprecedented financial pressures. In February 2024, the council approved a balanced budget for 2024/25, which included spending money from reserves to cover the impact of additional financial pressures. The level of reserves is now insufficient to adequately protect the council against future risks. Forecasts indicate there is four-year funding gap of £100m to balance the budget and hold an appropriate level of reserves.

Alongside the improvement programme in children's services, Cheshire East Council has embarked on a significant transformation programme. The council-wide transformation plan will aim to address the funding gap and will be submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) as part of the criteria for exceptional financial support from the government.

We calculate that £1.986m of additional investment will be required to support children's services to deliver our improvement plan at pace. A costed proposal for additional capacity and expertise to support

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improvement was received and agreed by the Children and Families Committee and Full Council in July 2024.

Challenges for children's services are challenges for the whole council, and there is whole-council commitment and support for delivering this plan. This improvement plan is part of the council's transformation and has been informed by the findings from the LGA corporate peer review in March 2024.

The council's transformation plan will also support us to achieve our improvement plan. Cheshire East Council's transformation will include changes to the organisation's culture - embedding high standards, and effective challenge and performance management where these are not met, focusing on outcomes, not process. These messages will be echoed through our children's leadership and management programme.

The council's transformational plan will also support improved working between council services and improve the support to services from enablers.

This plan also feeds into our wider strategy for developing the council's children's services, the Together Strategy, which has the following building blocks:

- **Together supporting and enabling our workforce:** we have the right people, with the right skills and support to improve the outcomes of our children and young people
- **Together connecting as one team:** we work as one team across children's and adult services with shared skills, processes and communication to focus on the needs and experiences of children, young people and their families
- **Together improving and innovating our services:** our children, young people and their families have consistently good/ outstanding experiences of our services
- **Together collaborating with our families, colleagues and partners:** we adopt an 'experts by experience' approach that ensures that those receiving or delivering our services help to shape them.

Coproduction

In Cheshire East, we aim to work [TOGETHER](#) and adopt an 'experts by experience' approach that ensures that those receiving or delivering services help to shape them.

We will engage children and young people throughout our improvement journey in developing and delivering improvements. Children and young people's views will influence our delivery on a child, service, and strategic level. We are developing a new Corporate Parenting Strategic Board that will include care experienced young people as key members of the board. Young people will be involved in shaping and evaluating services through the Corporate Parenting Strategic Board, our young people's participation groups, through our audits, young people's surveys, and the local offer app.

We will also continue to engage with practitioners and managers within our frontline teams to ensure we are all delivering improvements together, and we will ensure their feedback, and feedback from our partners, informs our evaluation of impact.

Support and Challenge

We are committed to delivering this plan and achieving consistently good and better services that achieve strong outcomes for children and young people. We know that we cannot deliver this plan alone, and that we need to work together with our children, young people and families, with our teams, across the partnership and throughout the council.

Throughout the development of the plan, we have engaged with frontline practitioners and managers on the inspection findings and what support they need moving forwards, and we will continue to engage with our workforce throughout the delivery of the plan to ensure we are all on this journey together.

This plan has been developed together with and provided with scrutiny and challenge by:

- service managers and service leads, including partners
- the children’s social care leadership team
- the children’s services leadership team
- the council’s leadership team
- the Safeguarding Children’s Partnership
- the Improvement and Impact Board
- elected members on the Children and Families Committee and Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee.

The final plan was endorsed by full Council.

We will continue to invest in our workforce through training, development, and management and leadership support and challenge. Training has been tailored to the areas for improvement raised during the inspection and will continue to be responsive to development needs throughout the year as identified in quality assurance and monitoring activity. This includes a bespoke leadership programme for all leaders within children’s services to embed a culture of high support and high challenge, and embedding restorative practice as our practice model so we build strong relationships that support effective change. The impact of training and support on practice will continue to be evaluated through the delivery of this plan so we can adapt and respond to areas for improvement.

We will also seek to ‘infect our system’ with good practice by collecting and sharing examples of good practice with teams.

We also recognise the enormous value from learning from other areas. We are currently working with Stockport through the sector led improvement programme (SLIP) to embed our practice model, restorative practice. We have tailored this support to help to address the inspection findings. We have reviewed successful improvement plans in other areas and sought advice from other authorities and external bodies with specialist expertise, including the LGA and DfE, to support the development of this plan and will continue to use these sources throughout out improvement journey. We will

continue to learn from innovative and best practice in other areas to improve our offer for children and young people in Cheshire East.

Monitoring Impact

The first chapter of the plan is structured under the seven areas for improvement highlighted in the 2024 Ofsted inspection report. It starts with senior manager oversight, to ensure this drives continuous improvement, followed by care leavers, as this is the area requiring the greatest improvement. The second chapter considers the additional areas for development from the inspection report.

The plan sets out the actions we will take to improve services. What is most important is that what we do makes a difference, so each month we will report on impact against the inspection findings. Progress against actions and impact against the inspection findings will be rated using the following:

Colour	Action Definition	Impact Definition
Grey	Action not started yet, no risk to implementation anticipated	Too early to measure impact
Red	Action not on track	No impact or very limited impact/ improving outcomes for a few children and young people
Amber	Action not yet completed, but on track to be completed within timescales	Some positive impact but this is variable and does not consistently improve outcomes for children and young people
Green	Action completed	Positive and consistent impact which delivers improved outcomes for children and young people

Each section of the plan has a dedicated senior leader who is responsible for achieving and reporting on impact. The sources we will use to assess

our impact for each area of the plan are outlined in each section. These include:

- Seeking and listening to children and young people's experiences
- Single agency and multi-agency audits
- Performance indicators
- Listening to practitioners and managers, including within partner agencies
- Recruitment and retention information.

Our impact on work with children and young people will also be evaluated through Ofsted and DfE monitoring visits.

The plan will be a live and responsive plan, so will adapt to incorporate new actions as needed. The plan covers the activity we will carry out over a 12-month period from April 2024 to March 2025. A new plan will be developed after this plan is completed for the period from April 2025 onwards.

Governance and Accountability

Progress against the plan will be driven by senior leaders and will be assessed and monitored through usual management arrangements including senior management meetings and supervision.

An independently chaired Improvement and Impact Board will formally scrutinise progress and impact monthly. Key members of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership and the council's senior leadership team are members of the Improvement and Impact Board.

The Corporate Parenting Strategic Board will drive developments for cared for children and care leavers, and so will contribute to delivering improvements in relation to the inspection findings.

The Safeguarding Children's Partnership will receive six monthly updates on progress enabling all members to scrutinise and challenge progress.

The Children and Families Committee will scrutinise impact against the plan at every committee meeting.

The Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee will scrutinise progress pertinent to care experienced young people and will receive reports on the work of the Corporate Parenting Strategic Board and its impact on improving outcomes for these young people.

The Children's Services Strategic Quartet, chaired by the council's chief executive, will scrutinise progress against the plan at every meeting.

Progress will also be reported into the corporate assurance panel, an external panel monitoring the council's transformation.

Key stakeholders, including our workforce, will be kept informed of progress through quarterly communications. Feedback from our workforce will continue to be sought through existing forums/ mechanisms such as team meetings, senior leaders walking the floor, councillor frontline visits, and #talktogether staff sessions.

Glossary

The legal definition of a care leaver comes from The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 which states that a care leaver is someone who has been in the care of the local authority for a period of 13 weeks or more spanning their 16th birthday.

Care leavers can also be referred to as care experienced young people or young adults, as they have had experience of being in care. This term tends to be preferred by young people/ young adults. Both terms are used interchangeably within this plan.

Abbreviation	Expansion
CINCP	Child in Need and Child Protection
CYPMHS	Children and young people's mental health services
DfE	Department for Education

DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
EET	Education, employment or training
ICB	Integrated Care Board
IRO	Independent Reviewing Officer
LGA	Local Government Association
MASH	Multi-agency safeguarding hub
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
NHS	National Health Service
PAs	Personal Advisors
PEPs	Personal education plans
RONI	Risk of NEET indicators
SLIP	Sector led improvement programme
SMART	Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-based
UASC	Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

Children's Services Improvement Plan on a Page

Our improvement plan sets out how we will address the findings from the [Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services \(ILACS\)](#) in February and March 2024. It covers the 7 areas inspectors highlighted:

Senior leaders' oversight	Care leavers	Quality of plans	Quality and frequency of visits	Management oversight and supervision	Effectiveness of IROs	Sufficiency of placements
What the inspection found: We need to improve how we monitor if children are getting the right support, as some children were not getting support that was good enough	What the inspection found: We need to improve the quality and consistency of support to care leavers, including those who are homeless and those who are over 21	What the inspection found: We need to improve the quality of plans for children so they are child-focused and drive timely change	What the inspection found: Visits to children need to be purposeful. Visits should be carried out more often when children need them to be, or to make sure children are safe	What the inspection found: We need to improve the quality of management oversight and supervision to ensure this supports consistently good practice	What the inspection found: We need to improve the effectiveness of child protection chairs and IROs to escalate, challenge, and scrutinize plans for children	What the inspection found: We don't have sufficient placements to meet children and young people's needs
What we will do: Review reporting and governance arrangements Senior leaders will regularly speak to children and young people and involve them in shaping services Monitor progress against the improvement plan monthly through an independently chaired Improvement Board Embed 'Doing the Basics Brilliantly' Revise the quality assurance framework Step up a new Corporate Parenting Strategic Board to ensure there is a whole council and partnership approach to improving outcomes for care experienced young people Commission corporate parenting training for senior leaders and elected members Develop care leaver champions across the council Review councillor visits to frontline services	What we will do: Develop practice standards Roll out a mandatory training plan specific to the care leavers service Change the management structure Revise the format of the pathway plan with young people Develop care leavers hubs in Crewe and Macclesfield Launch an app for the local offer Develop EET plans for all young adults who are NEET and able to work Increase apprenticeships and other route to work opportunities Refresh the protocol for care leavers in emergency accommodation Mobilise additional accommodation options for 16-18 year olds Implement a wider 18-25 accommodation offer Review the 21+ offer and approach	What we will do: Embed restorative practice Continue to run masterclasses on plans Hold a management and leadership session on plans Establish reflective case discussion meetings to progress outcomes for children on longer child protection and repeat plans Develop a permanence strategy Refresh the practice standards on care planning Review permanence decision panels Explore what partnership training is needed to support effective challenge	What we will do: Strengthen the performance framework to ensure there is robust performance management of visits to children Deliver masterclasses on purposeful visits Reissue the visiting template to support consistent recording Develop and roll-out e-learning on visiting	What we will do: Commission a bespoke leadership development programme for all leaders in children's services Deliver an in-house leadership and management programme for children's social care tailored to our areas for improvement Update the supervision policy and develop practice guidance on reflective supervision All managers to complete supervision training Embed the permanence tracker Review the care plans for all cared for children who are not currently in foster care or planning to return home	What we will do: Review the performance management framework for IROs Include IROs in the in-house and commissioned leadership and management programmes Review and refresh the IRO practice standards Hold an IRO service development day every 3 months Revise the guidance on IRO quality assurance alerts to support outcome-focused practice Explore and challenge performance around permanence in performance clinics	What we will do: Embed a culture of considering support from the family network at the earliest opportunity Join Foster4 Work in partnership with the other Foster4 LAs to build our offer – ensuring there is an effective front door to support those who make an enquiry about becoming a foster carer Explore opportunities within the council to increase fostering marketing and raise awareness of fostering Develop specialist foster carers to support children to step down from residential care Develop our third Mockingbird constellation Open three council residential children's homes Carry out a deep dive on reunification and step down for children from care Investigate the potential for joint commissioning of high needs placements

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Children's Services Improvement Plan Timeline

Our improvement plan set out how we will address the findings from the [Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services \(ILACS\)](#) in February and March 2024. This is the timeline for what we will achieve by delivering our plan.

What we achieved by the end of June 2024

1. All 209 21+ care leavers contacted and offered support. Tracker in place to monitor engagement with 21+ care leavers
2. New management structure in the care leavers service
3. Developed and started delivering a bespoke training programme for the care leavers service
4. New practice standards for the cared for and care leavers service.
5. Coproduced new pathway plan
6. Foster4 – we joined and launched new service
7. Opened a new residential home – Flude House
8. Revised quality assurance framework
9. New Improvement and Impact Board to drive and evaluate progress against the improvement plan
10. New Children's Services Strategic Quartet to provide improved leadership and accountability for children's services
11. Director level project group for accommodation for cared for young people and care leavers

What you will see by the end of September 2024

12. Care leaver hubs (safe spaces) in Crewe and Macclesfield
13. Local offer app launched
14. Additional capacity in place to deliver the improvement plan
15. Proposals in place to address 16-18 and 18-25 accommodation shortages
16. Revised protocol for care leavers in emergency accommodation
17. All young adults who are NEET and able to work will have an EET plan
18. Reflective case discussions established for longer child protection and repeat plans
19. Third Mockingbird constellation
20. Senior leaders and first tranche of managers trained in our bespoke management and leadership programme
21. Revised supervision policy
22. Vital signs performance report in place to support evaluation of the improvement plan
23. Strengthened performance framework

What you will see by the end of December 2024

24. Two more residential homes opened
25. First meeting of the multi-agency corporate parenting strategic board, chaired by the council's chief executive
26. LGA corporate parenting training rolled out for senior leaders and elected members
27. Care leaver champions across the council
28. Cared for children and care leavers strategy 2022-26 and action plan refreshed and relaunched
29. New programme for councillor frontline visits and expansion to cared for and care leaver services
30. Revised transition policy
31. Local offer reviewed together with young people and partners
32. Additional accommodation options in place for young people aged 16-18 using flexibilities/ modifications in current contracts
33. Specialist foster carers in place
34. Deep dive completed on reunification
35. Refreshed recruitment and retention strategy

What you will see by the end of March 2025

36. New permanence strategy
37. All managers completed supervision training
38. Increased apprenticeship opportunities and other route to employment opportunities in place for care leavers
39. Approaches in place to ensure the most vulnerable children and young people are prioritised for mental health support
40. 'Waiting well' initiatives developed with key health providers and third sector provision
41. Reviewed emotional support offer for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people
42. Refreshed recruitment campaign to attract high quality practitioners and managers to Cheshire East

Improvement Plan

All ratings are accurate as at 18 July 2024.

Chapter 1

1. Senior Leaders' Oversight

What needs to improve				
Senior leaders' oversight of performance to ensure that there is a coherent approach to continuous improvement.				
Section Lead	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Senior leaders had not recognised, until this inspection, the extent of improvement required in services for care leavers. Systems to monitor and track groups of individual children have not been effective in identifying vulnerable care leavers who are not receiving the services they need. As a result, too many vulnerable care leavers are not getting the right level of help, support or protection.• Despite improvements, the quality of practice is still too variable. Improved timeliness has not been achieved for all children. Implementation of improvement plans needs to accelerate across teams but in particular within the care leavers service.• Leaders have recognised in their self-evaluation that more needs to be done to ensure that quality assurance activity is identifying all areas of poor practice and that it is consistently having an impact on outcomes for children.• Not all young people are informed of, or understand, the pledges contained within the cared for children and care leavers' strategy.			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
SL1	Ensure there is effective line of sight from frontline practice through to the Executive Director of Children's Services through a review of reporting and governance arrangements, including a review of the performance framework.	Executive Director of Children's Services	September 2024 Review effectiveness each quarter	On track

SL2	Develop a forward plan of participation activities where senior leaders will hear the experiences of children and young people directly, work with them in shaping services, and give feedback on improvement progress.	Executive Director of Children's Services	September 2024	On track
SL3	Refresh the terms of reference for the Improvement and Impact Board, and expand the board to incorporate partners, to ensure there are robust arrangements in place to drive and scrutinise impact for children and young people in response to the inspection findings.	Executive Director of Children's Services	July 2024	Complete
SL4	Establish a Children's Services Strategic Quartet to provide improved leadership and accountability for children's services in line with best practice in the LGA guide for Chief Executives , and for council leaders , and DfE statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services .	Executive Director of Children's Services	July 2024	Complete
SL5	Step-up a multi-agency corporate parenting strategic board, chaired by the council's chief executive, to drive and scrutinise progress for cared for children and care experienced children and young people and ensure there is a whole council and partnership approach to supporting our young people.	Executive Director of Children's Services	November 2024	On track
SL6	Commission LGA corporate parenting training for senior leaders across the partnership and all elected members.	Executive Director of Children's Services	November 2024	On track
SL7	Develop care leaver champions across the council to increase awareness and support for care experienced young people and young adults.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	December 2024	On track
SL8	Refresh the cared for children and care leavers strategy 2022-26 and action plan.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	November 2024	On track
SL9	Revise the quality assurance framework to include thematic audits in line with the improvement plan and to strengthen the impact of audits on practice.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	May 2024	Complete
SL10	Establish a service manager thematic audit group to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas and drive improvements.	Service Managers CINCP	August 2024	On track

SL11	Develop mechanisms to ensure audit findings are routinely shared with teams to strengthen the impact of audits on practice.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	September 2024	On track
SL12	Develop a vital signs performance report in line with the improvement plan areas to support effective evaluation of improvement activity and drive improvements.	Business Intelligence Manager	September 2024	On track
SL13	Review the programme for councillor visits to frontline services, expanding these to cared for and care leaver services, to ensure there is member oversight of quality of practice and outcomes for children and young people.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	November 2024	On track
SL14	Review the children's social care national framework and its implications for practice and processes, to embed consistently good practice that achieves strong outcomes for children and young people.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	November 2024	On track
SL15	Embed 'Doing the Basics Brilliantly' through our culture, leadership, and developing and sharing key communications on practice. Continually evaluate impact and reinforce messages through monthly performance meetings and quality assurance activity.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Principal Social Worker	Key communications in place by September 2024	On track
SL16	Collate and share examples of good practice to embed understanding of good practice across teams and to celebrate good work.	Principal Social Worker	Start sharing practice by August 2024 and continue throughout the year	On track
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<p>The pace and impact of changes will be evaluated through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> monthly reports against the improvement plan monthly performance indicators in the vital signs performance report monthly practice review audits which assess the quality of practice across services monthly thematic audits to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas feedback from children and young people from our participation groups and through audits. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements result in consistently good quality practice - over 80% of audits will be good or better quality. Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of children's outcomes and areas for development. Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the practice and development needs of staff on both an individual and workforce level. Quality assurance activity drives improvements to the quality of practice, resulting in improved outcomes for children. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ofsted monitoring visits will demonstrate whether our understanding of improvements are accurate.		<ul style="list-style-type: none">90% young people tell us they understand the pledges contained within the cared for children and care leavers' strategy.The council will have at least 20 care leaver champions across all the directorates.
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>			Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month			Red
<p>The Director's Performance and Quality Meeting has been set up, with the first meeting taking place with Heads of Service and Service Managers on 30 July 2024. Outcomes and actions from these monthly meetings will be shared with the DCS.</p> <p>The Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care will lead an initial meeting about voice and influence of children, young people and families, throughout the system on 6 August 2024.</p> <p>LGA corporate parenting training has been commissioned for members of the new multi-agency Corporate Parent Working Group, and elected members on the Children and Families Committee and Cared for and Care Leavers Committee. This training will support senior leaders in their role as corporate parents and will provide a strong foundation for the new Corporate Parent Working Group in October 2024. This training will now take place in September and October.</p> <p>Discussions are taking place to formulate mechanisms to share audit findings. This will include a refresh of the plenary sessions with auditors and practitioners. Consideration is also being given to reintroducing the celebrating practice workshops with dedicated time to sharing messages from audit.</p> <p>The programme for elected member visits to frontline services has been reviewed and proposals on changes will be considered by the Children and Families Committee on 16 September.</p>			
What impact we are achieving for children and young people <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>			
The latest audits show that the majority of practice (70%) requires improvement so is not at the quality we want to achieve.			
What our performance indicators show			
The vital signs performance report will be presented to the Improvement Board in September 2024 to evaluate impact against the improvement plan.			

2. Care Leavers

What needs to improve

The quality, consistency and responsiveness of support, advice and guidance for care leavers, including those who are homeless, with additional vulnerabilities, and those who are over 21 years of age.

A. Quality of practice

Section Lead	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers
What inspectors found	<p>The quality of practice for care leavers is inadequate.</p> <p>Relationships and transition to the care leavers' service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all children in care have the opportunity to get to know their personal advisers (PAs) to build a relationship with them before they are 18 years old. Planning for young people who transition to the leaving care service is not always robust. For some, their voice is not evident and plans lack detail which means their individual needs are not always sufficiently understood. This means that there are some young people who leave care with too much uncertainty about how they will be supported. • Not all PAs know their young people well enough to have trusted and meaningful relationships with them. For some young people, PAs do not know their stories of why, or when, they came into care. • Case records do not reflect the work undertaken with young people. <p>Pathway plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pathway plans do not consistently cover all the important elements of young people's lives. Wishes and feelings are not always clearly expressed. They do not consistently include other professionals, they are not sufficiently ambitious for young people and they do not always capture young people's voices. • Plans for unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers do not consistently acknowledge their unique cultural heritage, or identify how young people can access support for the trauma they have experienced. • Plans are not always effective in helping young people to make meaningful change in their lives. • Support for care leavers is not effective enough, which means that many do not access employment, further education or training. <p>Recognising and responding to risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of harm is not always recognised or responded to effectively.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For some young people, there is a lack of professional curiosity about their day-to-day lives and living arrangements. This has resulted in a lack of understanding of risk, or a clear recognition of how best to support young people when they are at their most vulnerable. When potential risk of harm for care leavers is identified, it is difficult to see how this risk is managed or mitigated effectively. This means that some care leavers may be exposed to risky situations and people. This was not fully understood by senior leaders until this inspection. <p>Management oversight</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PAs receive supervision, however the quality of supervision was variable. Most supervision is brief and task focused. Significant gaps in supervision exist on some young people's care files meaning there is a lack of consistent management grip on driving young people's plans forward and ensuring they are safe. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
CLA1	Develop and launch practice standards for the cared for and care leavers service to support consistently good practice. This will include clear standards on recording, visiting, transitions, and responsibilities when cases are jointly held.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Complete
CLA2	Develop and roll out a mandatory training plan that is specific for the care leavers service to support practitioners to deliver consistently good practice. This will include planning, professional curiosity, adult/ transitional safeguarding and culture/diversity.	Principal Social Worker Service Manager Care Leavers	Launch in June 2024 and deliver over the year	On track
CLA3	Change the management structure of the care leavers service, removing the role of senior PAs, ensuring that all PAs receive direct oversight and supervision from a team manager (who are qualified social workers) to support good quality supervision and drive improved outcomes for care leavers.	Service Manager Care Leavers	April 2024	Complete
CLA4	Revise the format of the pathway plan with young people to ensure it supports good practice. The new plan will include sections for multi-agency professionals' views, and contingency plans.	Service Manager Cared for Children	May 2024	Complete
CLA5	Deliver restorative practice training to the whole care leavers service together to support a change in culture and consistency in practice.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers together with Stockport SLIP support	November 2024	On track

CLA6	Formalise arrangements around young adults where there are safeguarding concerns to ensure senior leaders have oversight of these young adults and that multi-agency team around the adult meetings are held to develop safety plans with them.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers	September 2024	On track
Please also see the section on management oversight and supervision				
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and plans and will assess if PAs can tell young people's stories.Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas, for example UASC young people.Some of the thematic audits will involve phone calls to young people to understand their experience of services, the impact of their plan, and their relationships with their PAs.The percentage of young people with PAs and pathway plans at 16.	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Practice to support care leavers will be of consistently good quality and will support young people to achieve good outcomes. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality.Management oversight is good quality and drives improved outcomes. Over 80% of management oversight in audits will be good or better quality.100% of young people will get to know their PAs from age 16. 90% young people will tell us they have good relationships with their PAs and know how they will be supported once they leave care.100% PAs will be able to tell young people's stories.100% case records will accurately reflect work with young people.Pathway plans will cover all the important elements of young people's lives, and will reflect their voices and their individual needs, including their cultural heritage. Plans will consistently include other professionals and will be ambitious for young people. Over 80% plans audited will be good or better quality.There is appropriate professional curiosity, which means risk of harm is recognised and responded to swiftly and effectively. When potential risk of harm is identified, it is managed or mitigated effectively. 100% audits will show appropriate professional curiosity and that risk of harm is responded to.	
Impact to date Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found				Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month				Red
The mandatory training plan for care leavers launched on 4 June and is being delivered via a series of away days to support the development of the team and shared understanding.				

The revised pathway plan was launched in May. Some further improvements are being made in response to feedback to ensure it is as user friendly as possible.

Restorative practice sessions will be undertaken jointly with care leavers and the cared for service to ensure we support a change in culture across both services and strengthen working relationships.

A new process is in place around young adults where there are safeguarding risks, and multi-agency team around the adult meetings are being held. The new process now needs to be embedded within teams – impact will be reviewed in the autumn. A weekly update is provided to the head of service, director and executive director on young people who are high risk.

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.

In the focus audits of 6 care leavers in July:

- 2 were good
- 3 required improvement (1 of which bordered good)
- 1 was inadequate.

These audits showed that:

- In 5 of 6 of the audits, auditors felt the PA knew young people well. In the one audit where this wasn't felt to be the case there were gaps in recording.
- In 4 of 6 cases there was good evidence of visiting by PAs tailored to need and risk of the young person. There was evidence that where young people were in emergency accommodation visiting rates increased and in one instance there was daily visits to support a young person.
- Recording was generally up to date, with the only exception being the audit graded inadequate.
- 4 young people considered in the audits were in or had periods of time in unsuitable accommodation. For three of the young people there were clear plans in place evidencing strong partnership working, improved identification of risk and efforts to drive forward plans. There was regular liaison with housing. For the one young person where plans were felt to be unclear this was due to gaps in recording.
- There was extensive evidence for 5 young people of the work of the EET team.
- Only one migrant young person was audited in this cohort and the auditor felt that their cultural needs were being recognised and were strong in the recordings.
- The changes to the pathway plan have strengthened the identification of risk and need. We do still need to be more explicitly curious about our young people to ensure we fully understand their experiences.
- Supervision needs to be stronger and more reflective and plans would benefit from being SMARTer to ensure there is no drift.

In the timescales allowing for this audit, only one young person was spoken to as part of their practice review. The young person who supplied their views felt their worker was good and that he had the right support in place to help him with his housing.

What our performance indicators show

We currently have 133 16 and 17 cared for young people across all services. 12 of these young people who are eligible do not have a pathway plan. These are being monitored through routine performance meetings. This has improved since the point of Inspection in March 2024 when there were 20 young people without a pathway plan – but we know this still needs to improve.

B. Planning for Adulthood

Section Lead	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transition planning into adulthood for most care leavers is variable. There is some proactive planning for disabled care leavers with complex physical needs, and young people with neurodiverse needs. However, for other care leavers such as those with complex mental health and emotional needs, proactive transition planning does not always take place. This means that these care leavers do not access the help and support that they need. Not all care leavers have access to their full health history. This means important information that could be used to provide ongoing support to them as they transition to adulthood is not available or used to inform care planning for them. Not all PAs spoken to by inspectors could describe the local offer to care leavers or explain how care leavers could benefit from it. Not all young people are accessing the full range of entitlements or services available to them. The local offer is not communicated effectively to all care leavers, which means that they are not all aware of, nor do they access, their full range of entitlements. Care leavers can access community-based resources but do not have a dedicated place they can go to which provides a safe space for them to receive support. The plan is for the newly opened family hubs to provide this in the coming months but at present this is not available. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
CLB1	Embed within our culture and approach that we start planning for adulthood as soon as a child or young person enters care.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers Head of Service Inclusion	Review impact in October 2024	On track
CLB2	Review terms of reference and membership for Ignition Panel to ensure young people's post 18 plans are effectively tracked and reviewed from age 16 to ensure proactive transition plans are in place.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	September 2024	On track

CLB3	The practice standards will specify which preparing for adulthood roles should be undertaken by social workers and which by PAs and will set clear expectations on what care leavers should receive/ have in place.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Complete
CLB4	Develop a care leavers hub as a safe space for care leavers to access support and advice. Advice sessions will be offered from the hub to support preparation for adulthood, including housing, finances, drug and alcohol support, parenting support, careers advice, CV workshops, and interview preparation. Emotional health and wellbeing support will be available at the hub through Pure Insight and health support through the cared for nurse.	Service Manager Care Leavers Area Delivery Manager Targeted Youth Work	Interim hubs in Crewe and Macclesfield by July 2024	Complete
		Head of Service for Education Participation and Pupil Support	Permanent hub from the Crewe Youth Zone by the end of 2025	On track
CLB5	Review the transition policy.	Service Manager Cared for Children	December 2024	On track
CLB6	Engage and consult with care experienced young people on how they want to understand their health histories and adapt the current process in line with their feedback.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	October 2024	On track
CLB7	Deliver training to PAs on arrangements to support young people to understand their health histories.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	June 2024	Complete
CLB8	Launch an app for the local offer. This will ensure all care leavers have immediate access to the local offer and their entitlements through their mobile. It will also support us to keep in touch with young people and gain their feedback and allow young people to develop peer support groups.	Service Manager Care Leavers	August 2024	On track
CLB9	Review the local offer together with young people and partners.	Service Manager Care Leavers	December 2024	On track
CLB10	Deliver training on the local offer to all PAs.	Service Manager Care Leavers	July 2024	On track
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be planning for adulthood. The thematic audit will involve phone calls to young people to understand their experience of services, 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactive planning takes place for all care leavers ensuring they are prepared for adulthood. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality. 90% young people tell us they feel well supported and have the information they need to be prepared for adulthood. 90% tell us 	

	<p>what they know about the local offer, and how their plan is preparing them for adulthood.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The percentage of young people who have access to their health histories. • PAs can describe the local offer and explain how care leavers can benefit from it. • Feedback from young people accessing the care leaver hubs. 		<p>they know about the local offer, the care leavers hub, and their entitlements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% care leavers have access to their health histories. • 100% PAs can describe the local offer and explain how care leavers can benefit from it. • 90% young people will tell us they know about the care leavers hubs.
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>			Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month			Red
<p>Care leaver hubs in Crewe and Macclesfield were formally launched on 16 and 17 July. A variety of activities and support will be provided through the hubs, including a monthly evening social event to bring care leavers together for a meal which they will cook and eat together, and there will also be an opportunity for them to share their views and shape services. Young people can also access food and toiletry parcels from the hub if they need them. We will be monitoring which young people access the hub so we can tailor support to their needs.</p> <p>Young people are invited to have their say on the branding and name of the new Youth Zone in Crewe that will be opening in 2025.</p> <p>The care leaver app is available to download on Android and will be available on iphone shortly. The app will support the information on the local offer to be available in all languages. Participation events and other activities on offer through the care leaver hubs will be able to be shared with young people through the app.</p> <p>A review is taking place of all decision-making panels, including Ignition Panel.</p> <p>A care leaver service development day is being held on 31 July which will cover the local offer, the new emergency accommodation protocol, and protocol for the 21+ offer.</p> <p>The revised 21+ offer will enable more proactive support to young adults, along with support through the app and care leaver hubs.</p> <p>One care leavers team manager will lead on health outcomes for young people and act as a central point of contact with our health partners.</p> <p>A care leaver health group has been established and commenced a piece of engagement work with care experienced young people around the care leaver health summary.</p> <p>The 16+ and Care Leaver Specialist Nurse is delivering drop-in health sessions at a number of 16+ placements and the care leaver hub. Monthly sexual health drop ins at the Care Leaver Hubs have been set-up.</p>			

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.

Due to service capacity, currently we are not able to allocate PAs at 16, and there are some 17 year olds who do not have a PA. This impacts on young people's ability to build relationships with their PAs.

There is increased senior leader oversight of outcomes for young adults through the post-18 resource and accommodation panel (RAP). This panel ensures there are meaningful plans in place for young adults and supports them to take up tenancies at the right time for them.

We are really pleased to report that some of the complex young adults who were considered as part of the inspection have engaged with support through the care leaver hubs – including attending cooking sessions.

What our performance indicators show

In quarter 1 100% of cared for young people turning 18 in the quarter received a care leaver health summary.

C. Education, Employment and Training

Section Lead	Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration			
What inspectors found	• Too many care leavers are not in education, employment or training (NEET). They are not being encouraged and well supported to improve their life chances in order to achieve their aspirations for a better future.			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
CLC1	All young adults who are NEET and able to work will have a EET plan to support them towards gaining EET. Plans will be reviewed every 12 weeks.	Service Manager Care Leavers	September 2024	On track
CLC2	Develop an offer of EET opportunities, including apprenticeships, that support young people to gain employment or training in their chosen field.	Service Manager Care Leavers	March 2025	On track

CLC3	Work with local businesses and organisations, including the chamber of commerce, to secure additional corporate parenting support for cared for children and care leavers and to prepare employers for supporting young people in employment.	Service Manager Care Leavers	March 2025	On track
CLC4	Provide bespoke support to enable young people to be prepared for entering employment through job readiness training, CV and interview support.	Service Manager Care Leavers	October 2024	On track
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The percentage of young people who are in EET. • Thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas, including EET. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The percentage of care leavers who are in EET will increase – we want to increase to above 75% in EET. • By April 2025, we would have at least 10 new apprenticeship opportunities for young adults. • 90% young people will tell us they are encouraged and well supported to improve their life chances and access EET. 	
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>				Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month				Red
<p>We are on track for all young people to have a personalised EET plan in place by September. All young people who are NEET and able to work are reviewed monthly.</p> <p>From September, any of our care leavers living in Cheshire East will be able to access free bus travel, which will support them to access EET opportunities.</p> <p>We are in the process of reviewing apprenticeship schemes in other areas and developing a plan that will meet the needs of care leavers in Cheshire East. We are considering a plan that looks at a mix of work placements, internships and apprenticeships to meet the needs of our young people. We have a meeting planned with Stockport to discuss the model they use for apprenticeships.</p> <p>We are looking at ways to increase opportunities for young people and offer routes in to work. The apprenticeship co-ordinator and EET adviser are also always looking for links to employers and work opportunities for young people. The post-16 education employment and training adviser attends supported employment forums and Pledge events to link in with local businesses and other workers who support young people into employment.</p> <p>We are looking at doing joint sessions with job coaches from the Job Centre at the care leaver hubs to ensure young people are fully supported.</p> <p>We have a range of support on offer to young people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EET plans for those in education to ensure planned transitions and aim to prevent them becoming NEET • One to one support from the EET advisor and apprenticeship co-ordinator for young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET • Venture with Confidence Employability programme for NEET young people • Monthly sessions at each hub to support young people on all aspects of EET 				

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- Advice to PAs to offer support to young people around EET.

EET sessions have been held at both hubs.

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.

The work of the EET Team is starting to have an impact both in terms of our individual young people and future developmental activity. NEET levels are consistently in the low 30% and this has included 4% who are involved in re-engagement activity.

Recently almost 30 young people took part in a Bikeathon and raised over £1,000 for a local homelessness charity.

13 young people attended an open day at Keele University in July.

9 young people are graduating from the venture with confidence programme this month. 4 of these young people have firm plans in place for September. 4 young people are exploring college options and applying for places. 1 young person does not yet have a plan in place and will be supported to look at next steps. One of the young people on the venture with confidence programme won the Young Professional of the Year Award at the Pledge awards.

What our performance indicators show

NEET figures have consistently come down from 40.48% in January to 30.81% in June. There was a slight rise to 32.57% in July. Within this figure there are 20 young people who are NEET and able to work which equates to a figure of 10%. If we look at the same period last year, the figure for June 2023 was 39.61%.

D. Accommodation

Section Lead	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For care leavers who live out of the area, accessing suitable housing is challenging and some wait for extended periods in supported accommodation until suitable permanent accommodation becomes available. • A small number of care leavers are homeless. This group includes some care leavers with the greatest needs, including those who struggle with their mental health, those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or those who are in unsuitable accommodation, or have no fixed abode. • Information about where young people are living is not routinely updated. This means that the local authority cannot be assured that these vulnerable young people are safe and well cared for.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
CLD1	Refresh and relaunch the protocol for care leavers in emergency accommodation, with clear escalation requirements, to ensure all practitioners are working to expected practice standards and there is senior leadership oversight of any young adults in emergency and unsuitable accommodation.	Service Manager Care Leavers	August 2024	On track
CLD2	All young people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or in emergency accommodation will be reviewed in weekly performance clinics and by the monthly risk management forum to ensure effective plans are in place to support and protect them.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Complete
CLD3	The weekly temporary and emergency accommodation meeting will consider any care leavers who need accommodation.	Housing Options Manager	June 2024	Complete
CLD4	Deliver training for PAs on supporting young adults with housing concerns, including how to support young people to meet the criteria for housing allocation in other areas, so they can provide bespoke support tailored to young adults' needs.	Housing Options Manager	July 2024	Complete
CLD5	Establish a director level project group for accommodation for cared for young people and care leavers to drive increased sufficiency.	Interim Director of Commissioning	July 2024	Complete
CLD6	Explore and review the suitability of temporary and emergency accommodation options across Cheshire East to increase options for care leavers. Identify gaps in provision to inform commissioning to ensure we can meet young people's needs.	Service Manager Care Leavers Head of Housing Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	September 2024	On track
CLD7	Develop proposals to address 16-18 and 18-25 accommodation shortages.	Head of Housing Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	July 2024	Complete

CLD8	Mobilise additional accommodation options for cared for young people aged 16-18 using flexibilities/ modifications in current contracts.	Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	October 2024	On track
CLD9	Implement a wider 18-25 accommodation offer.	Head of Housing Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	March 2026	On track
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas, including care leavers in unsuitable accommodation.The thematic audit will involve phone calls to young people to understand their experiences.The number of young people who are homeless.The number of young people in unsuitable accommodation.	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Over 80% care leavers who live out of area access suitable housing in a timely way.90% care leavers tell us they are well supported.Effective plans and contingency plans prevent care leavers from needing to access emergency or unsuitable accommodation. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality.Records on where young people are living are accurate and there is effective oversight of young people's accommodation.	
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>				Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month				Red
<p>All young people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or in emergency accommodation are reviewed in weekly performance clinics and by the monthly risk management forum to ensure effective plans are in place to support and protect them.</p> <p>Training for PAs on supporting young adults with housing concerns was delivered to 26 officers on 12 June.</p> <p>Discussions are ongoing with YMCA and P3 with regards to securing additional dispersed accommodation with support, particularly for over 18's to 'unblock' commissioned 16-18 beds currently occupied by over 18's and UASC. We are currently on target for mobilisation by October.</p> <p>Accommodation with support for the 16+ group is now established; a project team is in place, chaired by the Interim Director of Commissioning.</p> <p>Proposals to address accommodation shortages were received by Children and Families Directorate Leadership Team on 9 July and will be discussed at CLT on 24 July. A 3 phase project plan is currently being finalised in line with the proposals which will run between July 2024 to March 2026.</p>				

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.

8 young adults are currently in unsuitable accommodation (excluding those in custody). There is senior manager oversight for all these young people - safety plans and risk management plans are in place to support and protect them. Risks to young adults are now understood at all levels and action is being taken to mitigate these risks.

A small number of young adults remain in unsuitable accommodation for too long (see below).

What our performance indicators show

For a small number of young adults, we are exceeding the statutory limit of 48 hours in hotel accommodation. The weekly temporary and emergency accommodation meeting agrees what action is needed to secure these young adults suitable accommodation.

E. Care leavers aged over 21

Section Lead

Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers

What inspectors found

- For care leavers over the age of 21, persistent efforts to engage them are not routinely made.
- When young people become 21, unless they are in education or highly vulnerable, they are no longer provided with a PA or leaving care services unless they contact a duty worker and explicitly request help. At the time of this inspection, there were over 200 young people in this category, and this included very vulnerable disabled young people. Some of these care leavers have not been receiving the services they need, or are entitled to, and the local authority cannot be assured that they are safe.
- It was not evident on young people's records that discussions had taken place to inform a decision as to young people's informed choice to move from having a personal advisor to the 21+ offer.
- Disabled care leavers who are open to the 21+ offer are not prioritised as a vulnerable group and as such the local authority cannot be assured that their needs are being met. In cases seen there was not enough evidence of persistence or curiosity in where they may be now, despite histories of having extensive engagement with services as children.
- The quality assurance of the care leaver cohort aged 21+ needs strengthening.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
CLE1	Contact all 209 care leavers aged over 21 to ensure they are aware of the support available to them and offer them an allocated worker.	Service Manager Care Leavers	March 2024	Complete

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CLE2	Review the 21+ offer and approach, formalising this in a protocol and ensuring it is clear on the local offer. The protocol will include continued proactive communication post 21 so young people know what support is available.	Service Manager Care Leavers	July 2024	Complete
CLE3	Review cases for care leavers with a disability who are open to the 21+ offer to ensure their needs are being met.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Complete
CLE4	Develop a tracker for care leavers aged over 21 and monitor through weekly performance clinics to ensure there is regular oversight of engagement and support with these young people.	Service Manager Care Leavers	May 2024	Complete
CLE5	Establish regular quality assurance around care leavers aged over 21 to ensure there is effective oversight of their outcomes and that this drives improvement.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers Head of Service for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	August 2024	On track

Please also see CLB5 – Review the Transition Policy.

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be support to those 21 and over, including those with a disability. The thematic audit will involve phone calls to young adults to understand their experience of services. The percentage of care leavers over 21 who we were in touch with within the last 3 months. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persistent efforts to engage young adults over 21 are routinely made. We are in touch with over 90% of care leavers over 21 in the last 3 months. Over 90% young adults will tell us they know that support is available if they need it. There is effective oversight of young adults aged 21+ and their outcomes, including young adults with a disability.
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Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>	Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month	Amber
The care leavers hubs and local offer app will complement the new 21+ offer by increasing the ways young adults can choose to be in touch with us and ways we can engage and communicate with them.	
What impact we are achieving for children and young people	

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<i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>	
<p>Young adults know the 21+ offer is there if they want to access it. Our 21+ process is now much clearer so we have greater confidence that the right young people are open to the offer, and the offer is responsive to changing need.</p>	
What our performance indicators show	
<p>As of 24 July, of a total of 193 young adults aged 21+:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 126 young adults were open to the 21+ offer • 59 were allocated a PA • 8 were closed. 	

3. Quality of plans

What needs to improve				
The quality of plans for children to ensure that they are more child-focused and drive forward positive change in a timely way.				
Section Lead	Head of Service for Child in Need and Child Protection			
What inspectors found	<p>Child in need and child protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The quality of child protection plans is inconsistent. Some are outcome focused although some lack purpose and urgency. Some children have been subject to protracted child protection planning. The quality of safety plans is inconsistent, mostly relying on vulnerable parents and are overly optimistic. The use of jargon makes it difficult for parents to understand what is required. Multi-agency core groups meet regularly to review progress however social workers do not routinely update children's experiences against the child protection plan. For some children who have been known to services for several years and have been the subject of repeat child protection and child in need plans, the quality of practice is too variable. Contingency thinking and planning are not strong enough for these children. This means that, for some children, plans are not effective in improving their outcomes. When child in need and child protection plans do not progress, there was drift and delay for children, and ineffective challenge from the chair and multi-agency group in child in need meetings, core groups and review conferences. <p>Cared for children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The quality of care plans for children is inconsistent. Consideration is not routinely given to permanence planning for children from an early stage. Some children are subject to statutory intervention for longer than they need to be. This is due to delays in the discharge of care orders. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
P1	Embed the agreed restorative practice model approach to support requirement for consistently good practice.	Principal Social Worker	August 2024	On track
P2	Continue to provide masterclasses – short in-house training sessions for practitioners and managers on specific topics. This will include planning.	Principal Social Worker	Starting in April 2024 and running	On track

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	The masterclass programme will continue to be responsive to audit findings to support improved practice.		throughout the year	
P3	Hold a management and leadership session on planning to ensure there is a shared understanding on what constitutes a good quality plan, and that the role of team managers and IROs is clear in scrutinising plans to ensure all plans are good quality.	All Service Managers	September 2024	On track
P4	Establish reflective case discussion meetings to progress outcomes for children on longer child protection plans and repeat plans.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager, Child Protection	July 2024	Complete
P5	Develop a permanence strategy to ensure permanence planning is considered and progressed from an early stage, with permanence plans being in place at the second cared for review. The permanence strategy should consider all routes to permanence, including reunification.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers	January 2025	On track
P6	Refresh the practice standards on care planning to ensure expectations to support permanence are clear.	Service Managers for Cared for Children	August 2024	On track
P7	Review permanence decision panels to ensure effectiveness of permanence planning.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers	October 2024	On track
P8	Explore within the multiagency safeguarding group what training is needed to support effective partnership challenge.	Children's Safeguarding Partnership Training Manager	December 2024	Not started

Please also see action MO5 - Embed the permanence tracker to monitor achieving permanence planning within statutory and children's timescales.

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of plans across all service areas. Multi-agency audits will tell us about the quality of multi-agency challenge in supporting plan progression. Permanence planning will be a focus of thematic audits. The percentage of plans judged good or better. The percentage of plans within timescales. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans will be consistently good quality, with effective contingency plans, child-focused and result in good outcomes for children and young people. It will be easy for everyone to see what needs to happen from the plan. Over 80% plans audited will be good or better quality. Drift and delay is prevented through effective management oversight and partnership challenge. Consideration is routinely given to permanence planning for children from an early stage and children achieve permanence in a timely way.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The percentage of children on repeat child protection plans.• Number of children on CP plans over 15 months.• The percentage of permanence plans in place by the second review.• The number of children on care orders and number of care orders discharged.		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Repeat child protection plans will be under 15%.• 100% permanence plans will be in place by the second review.
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>			Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month			Red
<p>Reflective case discussion meetings between the Safeguarding Service and the CIN/CP teams are now set up in the North and South. The purpose of these is to consider cases where there is risk of drift and delay and repeat CP planning.</p> <p>A review is currently taking place of all decision-making panels.</p> <p>The Safeguarding Children Partnership currently offers a 'Professional Curiosity, Critical Thinking and Professional Challenge' course twice per annum (in person). Making positive professional challenge is a thread running throughout partnership training. The training manager will explore what training needs there are across the partnership (including around professional challenge) in the partnership training alignment forum on 29 August 2024.</p> <p>On 13 August there is a session with all team managers to specifically look at planning, agreement around what makes a good plan, and expectations of managers to hold the line regarding what they approve.</p>			
What impact we are achieving for children and young people <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>			
The latest audits show that 50% of plans require improvement,10% were inadequate, and 40% were good.			
What our performance indicators show			
<p><i>Please also see the section on effectiveness of IROs for information on repeat child protection plans and permanence plans.</i></p> <p>As at 30 June, the following plans were within timescales:</p> <p>Within CINCP service: 93% cared for plans, 84% child protection plans, 67% child in need plans.</p>			

Within the cared for service: 94% cared for plans, 100% child protection plans, 71% child in need plans.

Within the children with disabilities service: 78% cared for plans, 100% child protection plans, 79% child in need plans.

Timeliness is continuing to be scrutinised and challenged through weekly performance clinics to drive increased timeliness.

4. Quality and frequency of visits

What needs to improve				
The quality and frequency of visits to children so that they are purposeful and in line with assessed needs.				
Section Lead	Head of Service for Child in Need and Child Protection			
What inspectors found	<p>Child in need and child protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits to children in need and those subject to child protection plans are not always carried out at a frequency reflecting assessed need. Not all visits are carried out within local authority prescribed or statutory timescales. There is a lack of clarity on the expected visiting times for children in need. • Some children are not visited often enough for social workers to build trusting relationships with them. Changes in social workers impacts this. • Visits to children do not always have purpose and do not link to their plans clearly enough. Records of visits vary in depth and quality of detail. Some visits are very brief, and their contribution towards the assessment or progress of the plan is limited. <p>Cared for children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits to children in care are not always carried out in line with statutory visiting schedules or their assessed need. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
V1	Strengthen the performance framework to ensure robust performance management of visits to children.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	September 2024	On track
V2	Support improved visiting practice through the masterclass training programme and briefings to team meetings.	Principal Social Worker	September 2024	On track
V3	Reissue the visiting template to practitioners to ensure consistency in recording.	Principal Social Worker	July 2024	Complete
V4	Develop and roll out e-learning on visiting to support purposeful visits that are carried out with a frequency that reflects children's needs.	Principal Social Worker	August 2024	On track

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and visits, and the quality of relationships with children and young people.• Timeliness of visits.	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visits to children are carried out at a frequency reflecting assessed need and this is clearly recorded on their files. Over 80% visits will be in line with need as shown through audit.• Children are visited often enough for social workers to build trusting relationships with them. 90% of young people will tell us they trust their social workers.• Visits to children are purposeful and clearly link to their assessments or plans.
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>			Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month			Amber
<p>Masterclasses on visiting and briefings at team meetings on visiting by the lead practitioners have been delivered to teams.</p> <p>In the cared for service, a performance management framework was introduced in June for visits that are not taking place in timescales. This has been discussed and shared in service meetings, and we are looking at how we enhance this with use of HR performance management framework.</p> <p>Practice guidance has been updated to include the proforma for practitioners to use when recording visits, this has been briefed out to all staff.</p> <p>We are developing an e-module on visiting frequency and recording expectations, which will be mandatory for all new starters and is planned to go live in August.</p> <p>On 12 August there is a planned dip sample session with team managers in the CIN/CP teams focused on the quality of child protection visiting.</p>			
What impact we are achieving for children and young people <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>			
<p>8 care leaver visits have been sampled – 5 were good, 2 required improvement and 1 was inadequate. Action has been taken on those that were requires improvement or inadequate, and examples of good practice have been shared.</p> <p>Cared for visits that were sampled found quality was variable – some practice was poor, and some was good with detailed recording, written to the young person, demonstrating good understanding of young people's lived experiences. Examples of good practice have been shared across teams.</p> <p>The new visit template with practice prompts is supporting better recording of visits.</p>			

What our performance indicators show	
<p>Visits completed within timescale for June were:</p> <p>Within the CINCP service: 100% cared for, 85% child protection, 86% child in need.</p> <p>Within the children with disabilities service: 78% cared for, 88% child protection, 79% child in need.</p> <p>Within the cared for service: 91% cared for, 61% child in need.</p> <p>New arrangements around the performance framework will support challenge and improved timeliness.</p>	

5. Management Oversight and Supervision

What needs to improve				
The quality of management oversight and supervision to ensure that consistent, good social work practice is in place.				
Section Lead	Head of Service for Child in Need and Child Protection			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management oversight and challenge are not fully embedded across all service areas. Management oversight across all service areas does not provide sufficient challenge or reflection to improve social work practice. For some children, this has led to their needs not being recognised or acted upon in a timely way. The quality of supervision is too variable. Supervision is not always sufficiently analytical or reflective. Supervision is not consistently driving children's plans forward, actions although timebound roll over for many months without completion. This means not all children's circumstances are sufficiently understood. For a small number of young children who live in children's homes there have been significant delays in driving their care plans forward to secure long-term permanence. This is because there has not been effective management oversight and supervision of children's care plans, and IROs do not routinely challenge drift and delay. Recent arrangements to track permanence for children have been introduced, but it is too soon to see the impact of this, and some children continue to experience drift and delay. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
MO1	Commission a bespoke leadership development programme to support all leaders in children's services (from team leaders and above) to develop their leadership, reflective skills, and confidence in effective challenge to improve practice and outcomes for children.	Principal Social Worker	Running between March 2024 - June 2025	On track
MO2	Deliver an in-house leadership and management development programme for children's social care, tailored to our areas for improvement, to support a culture of high support and high challenge and embed consistently good quality practice.	Principal Social Worker	To commence in April 2024 and run throughout the year	On track
MO3	Update the supervision policy and develop practice guidance on reflective supervision based on best practice.	Principal Social Worker	September 2024	On track

MO4	All managers to complete supervision training to support them to deliver reflective supervision that considers children's lived experiences, supports learning and improves practice.	Principal Social Worker	Training to be delivered between November and March 2025	On track
MO5	Embed the permanence tracker to monitor achieving permanence within statutory and children's timescales.	Service Manager Cared for Children	Evaluate impact in October 2024	On track
MO6	Review the care plans for all cared for children who are not currently in foster care or planning to return home to ensure they are on the right plan.	Head of Service Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	July 2024	On track
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and management oversight. These audits include a review of case supervision which informs the judgement on management oversight. The percentage of supervision within timescales. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management oversight and challenge are embedded across all service areas. Over 80% of management oversight in audits will be good or better quality. Supervision is consistently good quality, analytical and reflective. Management oversight improves social work practice, leading to children and young people receiving timely support and experiencing good outcomes. Children achieve permanence in a timely way. 100% children will have a permanence plan by their second review. Over 90% supervision will be within timescales. 	
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>				Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month <p>The provision tracker is being reviewed weekly to identify those children who are not on the right care plan and to support timely action to achieve permanence for this cohort.</p> <p>The permanence tracker is continuing to be used to monitor achieving permanence within statutory and children's timescales. The cohort of children in residential care have been added to the tracker.</p> <p>Work is underway on the LiquidLogic form for recording case supervision and the accompanying supervision practice guidance. We are looking at briefing the updated changes out to managers on 13 August.</p> <p>Dates for the supervision training are being agreed and it will start in November and finish in March.</p>				Red

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.

The latest audits show that the majority of management oversight requires improvement (80%), with only 10% graded good or better. Supervision remains an area of focus for us, and we are not using supervision as a tool to support practitioners to reflect on risk and impact.

What our performance indicators show

Current data for case supervision within timescales as at 25 July shows that significant improvement is required – this is being addressed with managers.

6. Effectiveness of IROs

What needs to improve				
The effectiveness of child protection chairs and independent reviewing officers (IROs) to escalate, challenge and scrutinize plans for children.				
Section Lead	Head of Service for Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child protection chairs are not consistently effective in driving forward plans for children. Some children have been subject to protracted child protection planning, some plans lack purpose and urgency. They do not consistently advocate for children. Consequently, there are missed opportunities to act when risks increase, or changes have not happened within the child's timeframe. For example, for children who experience long-term neglect. Child protection chairs recognise they need to be more specific about what needs to change within the timeframe for children. Some plans are lengthy and opaque, the use of jargon makes it difficult for parents to understand what is required. Permanence plans are not routinely identified by the time of children's second reviews, leading to drift and delay of children's plans. For some children, IROs were not seen to actively raise this within the cared for children's review. IROs do not always robustly challenge the appropriateness of plans, which are not always-outcome focused, or challenge drift. The quality and impact of care planning for cared for children was variable. For some children, the impact of multiple social workers and IROs has resulted in drift and delay of their plans and permanence. For a small number of young children who live in children's homes there have been significant delays in driving their care plans forward to secure long-term permanence. This is because there has not been effective management oversight and supervision of children's care plans, and IROs do not routinely challenge drift and delay. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
IR1	Review the performance management framework for IROs to ensure that we can evidence their impact in children's plans and children's lives.	Head of Service for Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	September 2024	On track
IR2	IROs will be included in the in-house and commissioned leadership and management development programme. This will ensure we have a consistent understanding of quality and expectations on practice and joint approach to improvement.	Principal Social Worker	IROs to be included by April 2024	Complete

IR3	Review and refresh the IRO practice standards to embed consistently good quality practice.		Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers	Review quarterly at service development days	Complete
IR4	Hold an IRO service development day every 3 months to embed consistently good practice.		Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers	Every 3 months from June 2024	Complete
IR5	Revise the guidance on IRO quality assurance alerts to support improved outcome-focused practice in line with our key improvement areas, e.g. planning, tailored visiting, and preventing drift and delay.		Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers	August 2024	On track
IR6	Explore and challenge performance around permanence in performance clinics with IROs to ensure this is achieved within children’s timescales.		Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager, Cared for Children	July 2024	Complete
How we’ll assess if we’ve addressed this area		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and plans.Themes and impact of IRO quality assurance alerts.Percentage of plans that are good or better quality.Number of children on CP plans over 15 months.Percentage of repeat child protection plans.Percentage of permanence plans at the second review.	What we will see when we’ve addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">IROs consistently drive forward plans and advocate for children. Plans are good quality, outcome-focused, and result in good outcomes for children. Over 80% plans audited will be good or better quality.Children achieve long-term permanence in a timely way.100% children will have a permanence plan by their second review.Repeat child protection plans will be under 15%.	
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>					Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month					Red
<p>The safeguarding service continue to embed the new IRO practice standards within the service. We will be utilising the practice standards to support the refresh of the IRO performance framework.</p> <p>We held a service development day on 28 June – the focus was to embed the ‘What? So What? What Now?’ model of reflective practice that we expect to see in the IRO case records and footprint. We used live case examples to support the IROs understanding of where practice improvements need to be made. Feedback from Ofsted was used to underpin the learning within the service development day. This session was extremely well received, and the impact has been seen immediately within recent escalations from the service.</p>					

The resolution protocol is being revised currently. A draft has been completed with the intention to share with key stakeholders to ensure 'buy in' against this process. The protocol intends to draw on our restorative practice model to enable more joint, collaborative resolution and greater impact for children and families.

IROs attended the leadership and management session held on 10 June.

The last cared for IRO performance meeting looked at children who did not have a plan of permanence at second review within Q4 and Q1. We have made some amendments to the outcomes form around how we record IRO reflections around permanence.

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.

It is too soon to evidence clear impact for our children and young people but there have been more escalations raised by the IROs which evidence positive, child focused challenge and a restorative approach to seeking resolution. One escalation has directly impacted a child and family who were struggling to access housing. Escalations to housing have seen this child now move into a new property.

The IRO service is running a series of focus groups with young people through the summer to seek feedback and learn from young people about what works and how we can improve our practice.

What our performance indicators show

Our performance indicators continue to demonstrate our areas for improvement. There are currently 291 children open on a child protection plan – 26 (8% of the total) have been subject to their child protection plan for over 15 months and 17 of these subject to their child protection plan for over 18 months. This suggests that the IRO is not adequately challenging when the child protection plan is not progressing in the child's timescales. A dip sample of these cases has highlighted that 15 of these children should have their plans ended within the next few weeks as we seek to issue proceedings or naturally end the child protection plan due to decreased risk.

We have also seen an increase in repeat child protection planning with 75 (26%) children having had experience of a previous child protection plan and 50% of this cohort are experiencing a second or subsequent child protection plan within 2 years of their previous plan. This is a slight reduction since the last report but continues to indicate we are not addressing risk effectively first time to achieve sustained change. The majority of these plans are for neglect, and it is positive that the Cheshire East Safeguarding Partnership have agreed to hold neglect as a partnership area of focus for 2024/2025 to support improved practice and refresh the neglect strategy.

Permanence planning remains an area for improvement also. A scheduled peer audit on 10 July 2024 completed a dip sample to look at those the children who didn't have a plan of permanence at their four month review this quarter to determine whether there were any delays with holding the review which would impact on achieving permanence and any themes around cared for reviews being stood down due to care planning challenges. This highlighted there was not consensus amongst the IROs of when a plan of permanence would be considered as being agreed. The service have now agreed that a plan of permanence is achieved when options have been narrowed down to two.

7. Sufficiency of placements

What needs to improve				
The sufficiency of suitable placements that can meet children and young people's assessed needs.				
Section Lead	Head of Service Children's Provision			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When children cannot remain in the care of their birth parents, there is variability in how quickly potential carers from within the extended family are identified. Challenges to sufficiency impact on the choice of placements and the quality of children's experiences. Some children still live in homes that do not match their needs, due to a lack of choice. Sufficiency of in-house foster carers is a challenge. Some children experience multiple placement moves, which are unsettling for them. There are inconsistencies in management oversight and recording as to the rationale for this. A small number of young children who now live in children's homes have experienced frequent moves in foster care placements and too many changes in social worker. Some young children live in residential children's homes for long periods of time. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
S1	Embed a culture of considering support from the family network at the earliest opportunity, including identifying potential carers from within the extended family where children can't remain in the care of their birth parents.	Head of Service Child in Need and Child Protection Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	September 2024	On track
S2	Join Foster4, which will provide additional resources for fostering recruitment and training.	Head of Service Children's Provision	May 2024	Complete
S3	Work in partnership with the other local authorities to build our Foster4 offer, ensuring there is an effective front door to the fostering service so we can effectively support those who make an enquiry and increase the number of foster carers within Cheshire East.	Head of Service Children's Provision	October 2024	On track
S4	Explore opportunities within the council to increase fostering marketing and raise awareness of fostering to increase the number of people considering fostering.	Head of Service Children's Provision	October 2024	On track

S5	Develop specialist foster carers to support children and young people to step down from residential care.	Head of Service Children's Provision	December 2024	On track
S6	Develop our third Mockingbird constellation to increase support for foster carers and children and young people in foster care.	Service Manager for Fostering	September 2024	On track
S7	Open three Cheshire East Council residential children's homes, which will include one emergency bed, to increase the placement options for Cheshire East's young people.	Head of Service Children's Provision	Flude House to open in April 2024	Complete
			Claremont House to open in November 2024	On track
			Victoria Lodge to open in December 2024	On track
S8	Carry out a deep dive on reunification and step down for children from care as part of the council's transformation programme.	Head of Service Children's Provision	December 2024	On track
S9	Investigate the potential for joint commissioning of high needs placements for children with relevant system partners, developing costed business cases where required, to support increased placement options for young people.	Strong Start Programme Lead Head of Service Children's Provision	December 2024	On track
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area		What we will see when we've addressed this area		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase in in-house fosters and increase in range of foster carers to support different groups, for example older young people.• Percentage of children and young people in foster care with Cheshire East carers.• Reduction in the timeframe to bring in new foster carers.• Number of children and young people with 3 or more placement moves.• Children and young people will report that their placements meet their needs and they feel safe and supported.		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When children cannot remain in the care of their birth parents, their networks are explored at an early stage to support them to remain with their wider family where possible.• There is sufficient choice of placements to meet children and young people's needs, which means children are placed in a home that is right for them.• Children and young people experience stable homes and placement moves are prevented/ limited wherever possible.		

Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>	Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month <p>In July we have implemented our plan to merge the connected carers team with the mainstream assessment team, to ensure we have one big assessment pod and one larger pod doing support and supervision. This has enabled us to upskill staff in different forms of assessment, to ensure caseloads are more evenly spread and that the demands of the service are prioritised.</p> <p>We have appointed a new Mockingbird team leader, as well as appointing our new home hub carers. We are now looking for our satellite carers to join the constellation.</p> <p>Foster 4 seems to be working well and new carers are arriving steadily.</p>	Red
What impact we are achieving for children and young people <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>	
<p>A full service audit of the fostering service will be completed in August which will evaluate support to foster carers and recruitment and retention. Our first regulation 44 inspection for Flude House was overwhelmingly positive and this has been sent to Ofsted, as per the regulations.</p>	
What our performance indicators show 	

Chapter 2

1. The Front Door

Section Lead		Head of Service Early Help, Prevention and Domestic Abuse		
What inspectors found		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For some children and families, there is a delay in the step-up from early help services to statutory services. The step-up process is not as streamlined as it should be. For a small number of children, obtaining information from partner agencies and the voice of the child can lead to a delay in decision-making when the threshold is clearly met. Issues relating to parental consent are not always well recorded. The multi-agency partnership is not routinely included in social care decisions about next steps to help and protect children, or, when managers make decisions to close referrals. 		
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
FD1	Update the contact guidance to include that where the threshold for a referral is clearly met, cases must be actioned immediately. This guidance will also include ensuring consent is clearly recorded. Embed the guidance to support consistently good practice.	Service Manager Integrated Front Door	July 2024	Complete
FD2	Review multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) arrangements in other local authorities to learn from good practice and inform the development of multi-agency decision making in the front door.	Head of Service Early Help, Prevention and Domestic Abuse Service Manager Integrated Front Door	August 2024	On track
FD3	Hold a collaborative workshop to review the current front door provision and agree actions to establish multi-agency decision-making, informed by the inspection findings and observation of good practice in other areas.	Head of Service Early Help, Prevention and Domestic Abuse	September 2024	Not started
FD4	Consider chapter 3 of Working Together 2023 in the safeguarding partnership to establish agreed multi-agency working arrangements.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	December 2024	On track

		Chair of the Safeguarding Partnership and statutory partners within the partnership		
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Monthly multi-agency front door thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be step up to social care. These audits also consider consent and timeliness of decisions.The percentage of contacts that are referred to children's social care completed within 24 hours.	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Families stepping-up from early help services to statutory services will swiftly receive support. Over 90% of referrals to children's social care will be within 24 hours.90% parental consent will be well recorded.All decisions for referrals to children's social care will be made swiftly. Over 80% referrals audited will be good quality.The multi-agency partnership is routinely included in social care decisions about next steps to help and protect children and when managers make decisions to close referrals.	
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>				Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month				Amber
The contact guidance has been updated, distributed to each team member and team managers are providing oversight daily and weekly audit to ensure timescales are being met. We have contacted Derby MASH and are meeting with them on 30 July. We have reached out to Sunderland to arrange a meeting and have the operating model for Gloucestershire and Essex and are also looking at the joint adult and children's model in Nottinghamshire. Bar Nottinghamshire, these are based on recommendations from our DfE Improvement Advisor.				
What impact we are achieving for children and young people <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>				
Team managers review timescales every day and audit any cases that go over the timescale. There were 3 contacts that didn't meet timescale in the last month's audit and reasons included not being able to contact parents, needing specialist partner responses from adult social care and community mental health to inform threshold. Waiting for partner information will be addressed in the short term through engagement with partners and longer term with the introduction of a MASH model.				
What our performance indicators show				
In June 2024 89.3% contacts to ChECS that were referred to children's social care were completed within 1 day.				

2. Strategy Meetings

Section Lead		Head of Service Children’s Safeguarding and Quality Assurance			
What inspectors found		• Strategy meetings do not consistently capture the discussion about risk, which means that the rational for decisions made, and next steps, is not always clear.			
Ref	Action		Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
SM1	Deliver a workshop on strategy meetings for team managers to support consistently good practice.		Service Managers CINCP	August 2024	On track
SM2	Deliver training for unit coordinators on minute taking to support consistently good practice across the team in capturing discussions on risk.		Children and Family Service Business Support Lead	August 2024	On track
SM3	A management analysis box to be added to the strategy discussion form to ensure a clear rationale for decisions is included.		Service Managers CINCP	June 2024	Complete
How we’ll assess if we’ve addressed this area		• Strategy discussion audits within the 8-weekly multi-agency liaison meetings will tell us about the quality of strategy discussions and whether the rationale for decisions is clearly recorded.	What we will see when we’ve addressed this area	• Strategy meetings consistently capture the discussion about risk which means that the rational for decisions and next steps is clear. 90% strategy discussions will have a clear rationale for decisions.	
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>					Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month					Grey
A dip sample of strategy discussions was requested in the last multi-agency liaison meeting.					
What impact we are achieving for children and young people <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>					

The learning from the dip samples will be disseminated once all the findings have been collated. The police took an action to collate the learning from this audit and we await the findings.

What our performance indicators show

Our conversion to section 47 from strategy discussion is currently 80%. The quality assurance work around this improvement action needs to consider whether we conduct too many single agency s47 investigations and whether we are utilising strategy discussions in the right way.

3. Life-story work and later-life letters

Section Lead		Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers			
What inspectors found		• Life-story work and later-life letters are not usually started in a timely way. This means that children have limited opportunities to understand their journey into care at a time that is right for them.			
Ref	Action		Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
LS1	Commission external training on life-story work to ensure practitioners understand the expectation, importance, and how to complete it.		Principal Social Worker	August 2024	On track
LS2	Include in the practice standards for care planning that the expectation for every child is that life story work and later life letters are started early.		Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers	August 2024	On track
LS3	Establish a process for monitoring and reviewing life-story work and later-life letters.		Service Managers Cared for Children	August 2024	On track
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area		• Feedback from children and young people, and their carers – children will tell us they have a better understanding of their life stories.	What we will see when we've addressed this area	• Life-story work and later-life letters are started early so children understand why they are in care.	
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>					Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month					Red
A tracker is now in place for later life letters and we are making progress against the tracker. Student social workers and apprentice social workers have been supporting work to address cases which needed later life letters and life story books. Moving forwards, the permanence strategy will clearly set expectations about completing this work early.					

We need to ensure that life story work is undertaken for all children who come into care to help them understand their journey. We will be looking at how we can embed this within our development and training moving forwards.

The workforce development team are working with training providers to identify dates for the courses to run. Discussion has taken place with service managers to ensure the content of the course meets the needs of the service.

Life story work and later in life letters will be added as an agenda item within performance clinics.

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.

Significantly more children now have later in life letter and life story books in place, however we still have more work to do to ensure this is in place for all children and that all children understand their journey into care.

What our performance indicators show

As of 16 July, there were 18 children on the adoption tracker following an adoption order being granted because of missing later in life letters or life story books.

4. Health of Cared for Children

Section Lead		Associate Director Quality and Safety Cheshire East, Cheshire and Merseyside NHS		
What inspectors found		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waiting lists result in some delay in children accessing emotional support services. A small number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and young people wait too long to access emotional support and counselling due to waiting lists. Initial and review health assessments are not always completed within appropriate timescales. 		
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
H1	Develop prioritisation matrices/ approaches to ensure the most vulnerable children and young people are prioritised for mental health support based on an understanding of the additional and differing needs and risks for children with experience of the care system.	Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs Programme Lead for Mental Health and Neurodiversity – Cheshire East NHS ICB	March 2025	On track
H2	Develop 'waiting well' initiatives with key health providers and third sector provision to support children and young people while they wait based on an understanding of protective factors and how they can be increased and developed in response to needs.	Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs Programme Lead for Mental Health and Neurodiversity – Cheshire East NHS ICB	March 2025	On track
H3	Review the current emotional support offer for UASC young people in Cheshire East, taking into account any recommendations/ good practice from the Cheshire and Merseyside scoping exercise on support to UASC young people.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	March 2025	On track
H4	Health and children's social care to jointly review the timeliness of health assessments on a six-weekly basis to support improved timeliness.	Service Manager Cared for Children Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	May 2024	Complete
H5	Develop a single point of contact for health assessments within the local authority to support increased timeliness.	Service Manager Cared for Children	May 2024	Complete

H6	Report quarterly to NHS England on out of area initial and review health assessments that are out of timescale to drive improved timeliness.		Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	May 2024	Complete
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Waiting lists for children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS).• Timeliness of annual health assessments, initial and review health assessments.	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children and young people access children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS) without delay. 90% of non-urgent referrals receive an assessment within 6 weeks. 90% wait no more than 6 weeks between assessment and treatment.• 90% annual health assessments will be completed within timescales.		
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>					Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month					Red
Emotional Health of Cared for Children <p>The strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) task and finish group are aligning their work to the Cheshire East iTHRIVE transformation work.</p> <p>There has been a significant improvement in the waiting times for therapeutic services delivered by Freedom from Torture who support the emotional health of some of our UASC. At the time of inspection waiting lists for counselling was 9-12 months and is currently now 3-6 months, with a response to referral in 1-2 weeks.</p> <p>Waiting well initiatives are being progressed through the Cheshire and Merseyside Neurodiverse and Mental Health recovery plans, and Place level implementation plans. Impact is already being seen since last summer on wait times for key assessments from provider data.</p> <p>Work is progressing with our mental health provider to enable specific reporting for cared for children who are open or awaiting their services.</p> Health Assessments for Cared for Children <p>A new weekly meeting has been setup to resolve barriers to initial health assessments (IHAs) being completed within timescale. This is led by the ICB team with attendance of administrators from all local health providers and children's social care. This is ensuring that any issues are identified and resolved earlier than they would have done previously. The six-weekly meeting with service managers is continuing and can now focus on escalations and themes.</p> <p>The main reason for timescales not being met is due to children not being brought to appointments. This has been recognised by all agencies and is a current focus for improvement.</p> <p>There has been a significant improvement in the compliance with IHA timescales for children placed out of area due to the decision to bring children placed in Staffordshire back to Cheshire East for their assessment.</p>					

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.

Children are now able to access support for their mental health quicker than they did at the time of inspection. More children are being seen for their initial health assessment within 20 working days.

Feedback from cared for children in quarter 4 tells us that they value their annual health assessment with 100% reporting that they felt their health assessment was useful, that they felt listened to and taken seriously and that their overall experience was excellent or good.

What our performance indicators show

Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS)

The average waiting times in June 2024 for a Choice Assessment were 6 weeks for South Cheshire and 5 weeks for East Cheshire (reduced from 11 weeks and 6 weeks respectively at the time of the inspection).

Average Choice Assessment Waiting Times (in weeks)

	2023			2024					
Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
0-18 South Cheshire	5	15	7	9	11	8	7	10	6
0-18 East Cheshire	5	7	3	7	6	9	6	4	5

The waiting times in June 2024 for a Partnership Appointment were 15 weeks for South Cheshire and 10 weeks for East Cheshire.

Average Partnership Appointment Waiting Times (in weeks)

	2023			2024					
Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun

0-18 South Cheshire	2	4	6	10	18	15	7	10	15
0-18 East Cheshire	11	5	4	9	12	23	7	8	10

The data is available at [Waiting times - Children and Young People's Mental Health Services :: Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust \(mymind.org.uk\)](https://www.mymind.org.uk/)

Health Assessments for Cared for Children

Q1 data shows that the percentage of initial health assessments (IHAs) completed within 20 days was 84% for children placed in area and 72% for children placed out of area. This is an improvement on 62% and 14% in Q4.

2023/24 annual data shows that the percentage of review health assessments (RHAs) completed within timescale was 91% for children placed in area and 62% for children placed out of area. Q1 data for RHAs will be available in next month's report.

The main reason for delay for both IHAs and RHAs was children not being brought to appointments (children living in area) and capacity issues with out of area providers (children living out of area).

5. Education for Cared for Children

Section Lead		Head of Service for Inclusion		
What inspectors found		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too many primary-aged children in care experience attendance issues as they move into secondary school. Personal education plans (PEPs) contain the required information, but outcomes for children in care overall are low. Many children in care are ill-prepared for adulthood and struggle to cope with the challenges that they face when they leave care. The identification of children and young people who are at risk of not being in employment, education or training (NEET) does not begin early enough. 		
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
ED1	Review attendance through education advisors' fortnightly attendance meetings and determine clear actions for young people to improve their attendance.	Head of Service for Inclusion	April 2024	Complete
ED2	Review the plans for those with lower than 50% attendance, in alternative provision, or not in full time education, in a forum chaired by a head of service, to ensure there are clear actions on what needs to happen and there is senior leader oversight of these young people.	Head of Service for Inclusion	April 2024	Complete
ED3	Hold multi-disciplinary team meetings for individual children and young people when required to improve attendance. These meetings develop a plan to improve attendance and continue to meet until attendance has improved.	Head of Service for Inclusion	April 2024	Complete
ED4	Improve the quality of PEPs through delivering training, ensuring we are ambitious for young people, targets are SMART, and there is a clear early planning for preparing young people for adulthood and securing EET.	Head of Service for Inclusion	Delivery from September - December 2024	On track
ED5	Review the PEP form to ensure that this supports improvement in areas where care experienced young people attain less well than their peers, for example reading.	Head of Service for Inclusion	September 2024	On track
ED6	Report cared for children's attainment against their peers within scorecards and performance reports to drive improved performance.	Head of Service for Inclusion	September 2024	On track

ED7	Audit young adults who are NEET at 20 and look what learning can be taken from their preparation for adulthood to improve our support.		Head of Service for Inclusion Service Manager for Care Leavers	August 2024	On track
ED8	Use the risk of NEET indicators (RONI) to identify which cared for young people in Year 11 are at risk of NEET and ensure that the right support is in place to support them into EET.		Area Delivery Manager Youth Support Service – NEET and Preparing for Adulthood	November 2024	On track
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Percentage attendance for cared for children.• Educational outcomes for cared for children.• PEP audits will tell us about the quality of PEPs and impact, and how well they support preparation for adulthood and prevent young people becoming NEET.• Percentage of PEPs that are good or better quality.• Percentage of young people in care in Year 12 and 13 that are NEET.	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 95% attendance for all cared for children• Educational outcomes for cared for children are good and in line with their peers.• Cared for young people are well prepared for adulthood.• Identifying children and young people who are at risk of NEET begins early and helps to prevent them becoming NEET.• 95% of PEPs are graded as good or better• 90% of young people in care in Year 12 and 13 are EET.	
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>					Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month					Red
<p>The education advisors attendance meeting has changed to monthly now that this is an established group with representatives from across education and social care. This now includes referral processes for all children and young people in care to allow for timely and joint targeted supported for individual children and young people where attendance is becoming a concern.</p> <p>The multi-disciplinary attendance team meetings process and impact will be reviewed in August 2024 to support next steps for the start of the academic year. This will ensure that we have clear and robust meetings in place to support and ensure recording and monitoring of targets/intervention and impact.</p> <p>The PEP form will be reviewed in a virtual school team workshop session during August 2024, including a review of best practice from other local authorities, to coproduce a draft to test and trial as a pilot in the new academic year. This will include a session with our young people. Preparation has been made for audits and moderation to take place during August following all PEPs being completed for this term and received from schools and settings for the end of the academic year. This will inform our 12-month training programme that will be developed and shared at the start of the academic year.</p> <p>We will be working to develop our current data reporting following this years' summer examinations.</p>					

A new business intelligence report has been completed to identify which cared for young people in Year 11 are at risk of NEET and information will be shared with schools in September.	
What impact we are achieving for children and young people <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>	
The number of our young people whose attendance is below 75% and 50% has risen, however, this is largely due to our Year 11 cohort finishing their examinations and therefore attendance dropping each day due to S Codes (study leave). However, if we remove the Year 11 cohort from this dataset our numbers stay static and consistent to June 2024. We have advocated for 10 of our more vulnerable Year 11s to continue attending school and almost all of these now have attendance above 90%.	
What our performance indicators show Please see above.	

6. Workforce

Section Lead		Director of Family Help and Children’s Social Care			
What inspectors found		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Frequent changes in social workers impact on the quality of relationships and the progress of plans for some children, leading to delay.• Too many children have experienced changes in social worker, which means they must retell their story, and this prevents them from being able to build trusting relationships.• The impact of multiple social workers and IROs on care planning has resulted in drift and delay for some children in achieving permanence.			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating	
W1	Review capacity across children’s social care and supporting services to deliver the improvement plan and develop a costed proposal to the Children and Families Committee.	Director of Family Help and Children’s Social Care	July 2024	Complete	
W2	Assess demand to the care leavers service and determine what capacity is needed to support allocation at 15 years 9 months and to increase support to care leavers aged 21+.	Service Manager Care Leavers	July 2024	Complete	
W3	Review capacity across the two IRO teams to look at how we can create dedicated time for supporting and driving improved outcomes for care leavers.	Head of Service Children’s Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	July 2024	Complete	
W4	Reestablish a workforce, recruitment and retention group for children’s social care.	Director of Family Help and Children’s Social Care	September 2024	Complete	
W5	Refresh the recruitment and retention strategy.	Head of HR Principal Social Worker	December 2024	On track	
W6	Develop and launch a refreshed recruitment campaign to attract high quality practitioners and managers to Cheshire East.	Head of HR Principal Social Worker	January 2025	On track	
W7	Develop reporting on caseloads specific to each service on what we would expect to see to support effective oversight.	Director of Family Help and Children’s Social Care	August 2024	On track	

			Business Intelligence Manager		
W8	Launch a level 7 apprentice scheme (a masters equivalent programme, so a shorter programme than our current BA equivalent level 6 apprenticeships) to supplement our current scheme supporting people to train as social workers with Cheshire East.		Principal Social Worker	To start in March 2025	On track
W9	Seek practitioners' views on the support they receive to deliver good practice, workloads, and progress to date, through the practice review audits, elected member frontline visits, and walking the floor.		Executive Director of Children's Services	Quarterly review	On track
W10	Keep the children's workforce updated on developments around the inspection findings through the monthly children's newsletter and monthly talk together sessions with the DCS to ensure there is a joined up approach to improvement.		Executive Director of Children's Services	Quarterly review	On track
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice across all service areas and include feedback from children and families on their relationships with their workers.Caseload data.The percentage of social worker vacancies and the percentage turnover rate for social workers.	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Social workers build effective and trusting relationships with children and families, which supports improved outcomes for children and young people. 90% young people tell us that they trust their social workers.Teams are stable, meaning children and young people don't experience frequent changes in social worker or IROs.Average caseloads are 15 for AYSEs, 20 for cared for, and 23 for CINCP.80% practitioners tell us that their caseloads are manageable and they feel well supported by managers.	
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>					Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month					Red
A costed proposal for additional capacity and expertise to support improvement was received and agreed by the Children and Families Committee on 16 July 2024 and Full Council on 17 July 2024. This included three additional PA posts, and two additional IROs.					
Further improvements to the recruitment process have been made with the introduction of additional guidance for hiring managers.					
The DCS held a #talktogether session on 9 July for all children's services staff on the improvement plan. A process for feedback to staff on any issues raised or suggestions made has been put in place.					

<p>The Workforce Strategy Group has been stood up and will take place 6 weekly from 9 September. This meeting will have a focus on workforce development, recruitment and retention and staff wellbeing. Work within this group will fall in line with the wider corporate workforce strategy.</p> <p>Work has been completed between Business Intelligence team and the operational service to develop caseload average data for frontline workers.</p>	
<p>What impact we are achieving for children and young people</p> <p><i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i></p>	
<p>Relationships are a key feature where practice is deemed to be good. The latest audits found that quality of practice continues to be impacted by the inexperience in the workforce and the turnover of workers across services. Children, young people, and families are more effectively supported where there is longevity and good quality relationships.</p>	
<p>What our performance indicators show</p>	
<p>At the end of July 2024:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The average caseload for CIN/CP and CWD was 21. - The average caseload for cared for was 17. 	

Improvement Notice

To: Cheshire East Council ('the Council')
Westfields
Middlewich Road
Sandbach
CW11 1HZ

This Improvement Notice is issued to Cheshire East Council on 24 July 2024, following significant concerns highlighted by the publication of Ofsted's inspection report of the Council's Children's Social Care Services, published 16 May 2024.

1. This Notice is given to address all the areas for improvement identified in the report of the inspection of children's social care services dated 16 May 2024.
2. To comply with this Notice, the following actions are required of the Council, working with its partner agencies ("partners") as identified by the Children Act 2004 (Section 11).

Adviser arrangements

3. The Secretary of State has chosen to retain the support of an Improvement Adviser in Cheshire East, to provide advice to the Department for Education ("the Department") and the Council. The Council will continue to work with the Adviser until some such time that the Secretary of State is satisfied that this is no longer required.

Improvement plan

4. The Council's improvement plan will deliver appropriate and sustainable improvement. The plan should cover the areas identified in the Ofsted report published 16 May 2024, as well as recommendations made by the Improvement Adviser appointed by the Department. The plan should be submitted to the Department by a date determined by the Improvement Adviser.
5. To ensure there is clear evidence of progression:
 - a. the content of the improvement plan and a record of progress against it must be kept up to date;
 - b. the Council must ensure it establishes and maintains an improvement board, which the Council will be responsible for. The improvement board is to have an independent chair in place who will

oversee the implementation of the improvement plan and report to the improvement board on progress against the objectives in the plan, to a timetable agreed with the Department. It can commission updates from partners in order to do this;

- c. reports to the improvement board should include data, analysis and recommendations supported by evidence of the impact of improvements on the quality of practice and experience of children and families;
- d. the Council should highlight those objectives which are slow to progress and highlight where contributions need to be strengthened; and
- e. the views of frontline staff, children and young people will be taken into consideration in the development of practice and standards.

Department for Education reviews

- 6. Officials or advisers from the Department will undertake reviews of progress against the improvement plan at least every six months and more regularly where appropriate.
- 7. These reviews may cover but are not exclusive to: culture; performance; leadership, management and governance; workforce and management oversight; arrangements at the front door/ Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH); early help; and multi-agency arrangements.
- 8. From time to time, the Improvement Adviser may require that a diagnostic review or assessment of performance in a specific service area is undertaken by a local authority or other party agreed with the Department.
- 9. For any review or assessment, the Council must provide the persons conducting it with:
 - a. access to, and time with, staff and leadership.
 - b. accurate and up to date data on performance and quality.
 - c. facilities to carry out the reviews.
 - d. access to case files, minutes of meetings, supervision records or any other relevant information.
- 10. Prior to any reviews, the Council should provide its own assessment of improvement. This may reflect, but is not limited to:
 - a. progress against the improvement plan objectives
 - b. involvement of safeguarding partners and the Improvement Board
 - c. staff surveys
 - d. staff supervision and the quality of feedback

11. Taking account of the measures set out in this Improvement Notice and the Improvement Adviser's feedback, the Council should aim for actions included in the improvement plan to be delivered by the end of November 2025 or sooner, where appropriate.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

12. The Improvement Adviser will provide to the Department quarterly reports of progress or concern against the areas set out in this Notice; progress against the Improvement plan; and any other such information relevant to the improvement journey.
13. The Department will be represented at the Council's Improvement Board.

Failure to comply with this Improvement Notice by the assessment dates or poor progress:

14. Should the Council be unwilling or unable to comply with this Improvement Notice or should ministers not be satisfied with the Council's progress at any stage, ministers may choose to invoke their statutory powers of intervention (under s497A Education Act 1996) to direct the Council to enter into an appropriate arrangement to secure the improvements required in children's services.

Signed:



Date: 24 July 2024

Mark Taylor

A senior civil servant in the Department for Education

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OPEN

Children & Families Committee

16 September 2024

Youth Justice Plan 2024-27

Report of: Tom Dooks (Head of Cheshire Youth Justice Services)

Report Reference No: CF/24/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of Report

- 1 Local authorities have a statutory duty to submit an annual youth justice plan relating to their provision of youth justice services (YJS). Section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 sets out the youth justice partnership's responsibilities in producing a plan. It states that it is the duty of each local authority, after consultation with the partner agencies, to formulate and implement a youth justice plan, setting out how youth justice services in their area are to be provided and funded, how they will operate, and what functions will be carried out.
- 2 Cheshire East have a shared service arrangement for Youth Justice Services with the other three Local Authorities in the sub-region and as such the Governance arrangements for Youth Justice are overseen by a pan Cheshire Partnership Management Board. The Youth Justice Service have drafted a three-year strategic plan 2024-27 in partnership with Cheshire Police and other statutory partners and it was approved by Cheshire Youth Justice Management Board on the 27th of June.
- 3 This report will brief committee on the content of the 2024-27 Youth Justice Plan for Cheshire and seek formal sign off in compliance with Youth Justice Board Guidance (Ministry of Justice) and Regulation 4 of the 'Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000'.

Executive Summary

- 4 The Cheshire sub-region is a large complex area and the Youth Justice partnership between and across the four local authorities provides a powerful base to meet the various complexities and challenges faced by the county's children, families, and victims.
- 5 Despite the scale, Cheshire YJS is a comparatively small organisation comprising fewer than 75 WTE staff, including seconded workers plus approximately thirty active volunteers. The human resource arrangements for the entire workforce currently involve eleven different employing organisations but also includes police, probation, three different NHS Trusts and two independent providers (speech and language and substance misuse specialists). This committee approved in April the transition to a simpler fully hosted model for the Youth Justice Service which will see Cheshire West Council acting as 'lead authority' on behalf of the pan Cheshire partnership. The statutory responsibilities remain with each of the four local authorities so an annual refresh of the three-year Youth Justice Strategic Plan will still be presented formally for approval at this committee in 2025 and beyond.
- 6 The national body responsible for inspecting Youth Justice Services are His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMiP) with national oversight provided by the Youth Justice Board (YJB). Both HMiP and the YJB recognise Cheshire YJS as of a high standard. The former rated Cheshire YJS as 'Good' in a 2021 full joint inspection (Governance and leadership were rated as 'Outstanding') and the latter granted 2-year pathfinder status for Cheshire's successful youth diversion programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Formally approve the 2024-27 Youth Justice Plan

Background

- 7 Youth justice plans are an opportunity to review performance and developments and plan for the year (or in this case years) ahead. This allows services to be able to respond to any changes that have taken

place including new legislation, demographic changes, delivery of key performance indicators, and developments in service delivery. The production of a youth justice plan is beneficial to partnership working and service delivery to ensure the best outcomes for children.

- 8 The Plan has been produced in accordance with national Youth Justice Board guidance and follows their prescribed template to include, Introduction, vision and strategy, Governance, leadership and partnership arrangements, Board development, Progress on the previous year(s), Resources and services, Performance including National key performance indicators, Priorities, information on Children from groups which are over-represented, Prevention, Diversion, Education, Restorative approaches and victims, Serious violence and exploitation, Detention in police custody, Remands, Use of custody, Standards for children in the justice system, Workforce Development, Evidence-based practice and innovation, Service Development, Challenges, risks and issues.
- 9 Performance figures included within the YJ Plan show that Cheshire YJS continue to achieve good levels of performance against the main performance indicators: First Time Entrants to the criminal justice system (FTEs), Custody rates and re-offending (detailed within the YJ Plan)
- 10 In 2023-24 there were just twenty-five Cheshire East first time entrants to the justice system and only two Cheshire East children were sentenced to custody. Rates of Serious Youth Violence in Cheshire in 2023-24 were well below the national average at 2.7 offences per 10,000 children compared to a regional average of 4.7 and national average of 5.5.
- 11 The priorities for Youth Justice in Cheshire are described fully in the YJ Plan but include; 1) Further developing participation and relationship based practice across Cheshire to facilitate a culture of collaboration where children, volunteers and community groups are enabled to promote pro-social identity and desistance from crime 2) Ensuring the YJS support offer to victims is compliant with the new duty to collaborate responsibilities outlined in the new Victim and Prisoners Act. and 3) Design a new comprehensive performance reporting and quality assurance framework, ensuring the service is data driven and makes full use of the management information system to drive practice and improve outcomes for children, families, and victims.

Consultation and Engagement

- 12 The Youth Justice Service have consulted with children, young people, parents, carers, and stakeholders in the development of the Youth Justice Plan 2024-27

Reasons for Recommendations

- 13 There is provision within the national YJB guidance for the Chair of the local Youth Justice Management Board to sign off the Youth Justice Plan and for retrospective approval to be sought from Full Council. Given the timescales and complex multi-authority configuration of Youth Justice Services across Cheshire this is the approach that was given approval by committee last year. It is recommended again that Cheshire East council (along with the other three councils in the partnership) delegate sign-off of next year's annual update to this Youth Justice Plan to the Chair of the pan Cheshire Management Board so it can be submitted by the end of June again next year before then being presented to committee.

Other Options Considered

- 14 The only other option is for the annual Youth Justice Plan to be presented to full council in four local authority areas prior to the deadline for submission at the end of June. Given the timelines and different processes across four separate councils this would be logistically challenging hence the recommendation for councils to delegate authority for sign-off to the Chair of the pan Cheshire Board which is permissible within the guidance.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 15 Production of an annual YJ Plan is in compliance with section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and with the refreshed guidance published by the Youth Justice Board in March 2023, which made clear that in order to comply with Regulation 4 of the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 there is a requirement for Full Council to approve and sign off their local areas annual Youth Justice Plan

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 16 Cheshire Youth Justice Service is a shared service partnership arrangement and is funded by the four Local Authorities, with contributions from statutory partner agencies (Police, Health, National Probation Service) with the largest amount of funding coming from the national Youth Justice Board as a ring-fenced national grant.

- 17 Cheshire East Councils financial contribution to the Youth Justice Service in 2024/25 will be £444,538 (Total budget for the service is £3.22m)

Policy

- 18 No policy implications

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

- 19 The Youth Justice Plan has been produced with due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equalities Act 2010 and to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Human Resources

- 20 None

Risk Management

- 21 No risks identified.

Rural Communities

- 22 No specific implications identified.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 23 The Youth Justice plan takes full consideration of and makes and explicit reference to Cared for Children and those with SEND – both of whom are over-represented in the Criminal Justice System.

Public Health

- 24 No specific public health implications of this report other than to state the strategy for Youth Justice partnership is to minimise the volume of children with previously unmet health needs that are criminalised for offences/behaviour that is symptomatic of previously unidentified health needs.

Climate Change

- 25 No specific or relevant implications

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Tom Dooks Head of Cheshire Youth Justice Service tom.dooks@youthjusticeservices.org.uk
Appendices:	Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2024-27 (Cheshire YJS)
Background Papers:	N/A

Youth Justice Services

Cheshire East, Cheshire West,
Halton and Warrington

Strategic plan
2024-27



Page 91

Head of Service: Tom Dooks

Chair of the Management Board: Helen Brackenbury

Contents

Abbreviations	2
Foreword	3
Executive Summary	4
Vision	6
Regional and local context	7
Governance, leadership and partnership arrangements	10
Board membership and leadership	11
1. Update on 2023-2024	14
1.1 Progress on priorities in previous plan	14
2. Performance over the previous year	18
2.1 National Standards Audit	21
3. Risks and issues	22
4. Building on our strengths: Plan for 2024-2025	24
4.1 Child First	24
5. Resources and services	27
6. Board development	27
7. Workforce development	28
8. Evidence-based practice and innovation	30
9. Evaluation	33
10. Priorities for the coming year	34
10.1 Standards for children	35
10.2 New performance framework	35
10.3 Service development	36
11. National priority areas	38
11.1 Children from groups which are over-represented	38
11.2 Policing	41
11.3 Prevention	41
11.4 Diversion	42
11.5 Education	43
11.6 Restorative approaches and victims	44
11.7 Serious violence, exploitation and contextual safeguarding	45
11.8 Detention in police custody	49
11.9 Remands	50
11.10 Use of custody and constructive resettlement	52
11.11 Working with families	54
Appendices	55

List of abbreviations

AYM	Association of Youth Offending Team Managers
CJB	Criminal Justice Board
CJS	Criminal Justice System
CJI	Centre for Justice Innovation
ETE	Education Training and Employment
FTE	First Time Entrant
GRT	Gypsy, Roma and Traveller
HNA	Health Needs Assessment
HMCTS	HM Courts and Tribunal service
HMIP	HM Inspectorate of Probation
ICB	Integrated Care Board
LGA	Local Government Association
JSNA	Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
JTAI	Joint Thematic Area Inspection
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
NS	National Standards
OCG	Organised Crime Group
OPCC	Office of the Police Crime Commissioner
PACE	Police and Criminal Evidence
PNC	Police National Computer
SVS	Serious Violence Strategy
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
VRU	Violence Reduction Unit
YJAF	Youth Justice Application Framework
YJB	Youth Justice Board
YJS	Youth Justice Services (Cheshire)

Foreword

Cheshire has some unique opportunities and challenges, being one of only two youth justice services to operate over multiple local authorities' footprints and an entire policing constabulary area. This 3-year plan sets out a journey and commitment for a service that will be "child first" and evidence-based in its principles, recognising the traumatic impact of children's offending on victims - most of whom are other vulnerable children.

The last 12 months have seen an extended transition to embed a new leadership team following the retirement of a long-standing Head of Service and some significant infrastructure changes. This plan includes a proposal to simplify the operational arrangements by moving to a new fully hosted model for the service - with Cheshire West and Chester Council becoming the lead authority on behalf of the sub-regional partnership.

The murder of Brianna Ghey by two 15-year-olds in Warrington last year was shocking for everyone both in its brutality and pre-meditation. Intense media attention surrounded the trial and sentencing but the bravery and compassion shown by Brianna's mother, Esther Ghey has been inspirational. Youth Justice Services (YJS) is contributing to an independent learning review commissioned by Warrington Children's Safeguarding Partnership due to be published in summer 2024.

While offences such as these by children are incredibly rare in Cheshire, there is an increasing complexity and seriousness to some children's behaviour. Professionals sometimes have a difficult task in building trusted relationships with children to try and help keep them and those around them safe and move forward positively in their lives. Helping some children achieve an identity shift, to desist from offending and see a brighter future is not easy. It requires empathy, compassion and persistence – characteristics we in Cheshire are proud to have in such a skilled, dedicated, multi-disciplinary workforce.

The YJS Management Board is committed to delivering this plan and will oversee its progress, ensuring an annual refresh is produced and published through local channels.

Helen Brackenbury
Chair of YJS Management Board

Executive summary

It is evident from national research and two recently commissioned local needs analyses¹, that children entering the Youth Justice System experience multiple adversities and trauma. Early childhood exposure to violence, abuse, neglect, poverty, school exclusion and poor health among justice-involved-children are all disproportionate to the general 10-17 population. This understanding has influenced the strategic direction of travel for Youth Justice Services (YJS) across Cheshire. The priorities and content included in this plan will align with those relating to children and young people from across the four Cheshire places and with the public health approach to violence prevention as articulated in the Serious Violence Strategy² for the county. There has been a significant decrease in the overall number of children entering the justice system over several years, and the historically low levels have been sustained across Cheshire despite the backdrop of the cost-of-living crisis and other societal pressures. Some regions with similar reductions have witnessed an upturn in the last couple of years, so we are proud to see the sustained impact of our pan-Cheshire youth diversion model. We will work with the police to ensure national developments such as the new child gravity matrix for children is incorporated into the decision-making process for out-of-court disposals.

The previous Head of Service retired in the summer of 2023, with a long-standing Senior Manager appointed through an internal promotion. A new and very experienced Senior Manager was subsequently recruited externally and joined the service in February 2024, bringing new insight and fresh perspectives, so the right balance of continuity and change is assured. This is an exciting time for Cheshire and an opportunity to build on existing performance and partnership working, while modernising the service and embracing the latest national and international evidence on youth justice.

Some change has been forced on the service by financial inflationary pressures particularly in relation to the provision of ICT, but some of it is informed by what the latest research, evidence and data tells us about children, the offences they commit and the most effective ways of helping steer them away from crime.

This plan will outline a new “three pillars” vision for the service (Figure 1) which is rooted in the latest evidence and research on what works. But the new leadership team will also be implementing some modest service re-design intended

¹ [Public Health research institute HNA of Cheshire YJ service users July 2023](#)

² [Cheshire Serious Violence Strategy](#)

to retain the economies of scale and equity of service at a sub-regional level, while aligning more effectively with local place-based services for children, victims and caregivers.

YJS has a very good regional and national reputation for delivering positive outcomes for children, victims and caregivers and, in common with all youth justice services across England and Wales, will be reporting against 10 new key performance indicators (KPIs) in addition to the three main outcome measures First Time Entrants (FTE) to the justice system, reoffending and the use of custody.

In 2024-2025, Cheshire YJS will enter a period of substantial infrastructure and organisational change. The current shared service arrangements for youth justice delivery have evolved across the sub-region over two decades and have been through several iterations as Cheshire County Council separated into two unitary authorities and youth justice teams merged incrementally. A comprehensive review of governance arrangements undertaken in 2021, commented on the historical legacy arrangements of a service that had evolved over time with a complicated mix of cash and 'in-kind' contributions. One authority provides the ICT for YJS, another holds the accounts and all four employ the staff, and as local authorities have updated their own ICT systems and security compliance has tightened (and licensing costs increased) it has revealed a degree of organisational fragility.

Consequently, a sub-regional review into the governance arrangements, structure, and future sustainability of YJS as a pan-cheshire partnership, recommended the service should be 'fully hosted' by one local authority. This proposal was agreed by all statutory partners and formerly approved by all four councils in the spring of 2024 and will necessitate multiple workstreams to land the significant infrastructure change needed for a smooth transition by the end of this fiscal year. Cheshire's Youth Justice Plan for 2024-2027 is written against the backdrop of this major organisational change so maintaining service continuity, while in transition to a hosted model is flagged in Section 3 as the principal risk for the partnership.

Service development priorities for the next 12 months include reviewing the pathway and joint decision-making process for out of court disposals, ensuring our offer to victims is fully aligned with the new Victims' Bill, developing participation and designing a new performance management framework, which incorporates the 10 new national KPIs.

Vision

The vision for youth justice across Cheshire is:

‘To be a national leader in Youth Justice, where children and victims are at the heart of everything we do and where children are supported to achieve a positive, offence-free journey into adulthood.’

We will continue to value diversity, challenge social inequality and listen to children while developing trusted relationships that take their views into account. We understand the wider causes of offending behaviour are often rooted in trauma and social inequality, so trauma-informed practice and systemic ideas are at the heart of how we work. We will work in a restorative way and strive to achieve the best possible outcomes for our children. The YJS will work with partners on diverting children away from the formal Criminal Justice System (CJS) and will seek to detain a minimal number of children in custody, believing they are best supported to make changes in their lives whilst in the community, for all but the most serious of offences.

The latest research and evidence say services working with children who cause harm to others should adhere to Child First principles³ and be Trauma-Informed and Relationship-Based in the way they are configured and delivered. Cheshire has taken these tenets and adopted them as our three pillars (Figure 1) to inform the Youth Justice strategy from point of arrest, right through to the resettlement of children following release from custody.

Mission

Supporting children, young people and parents and carers to make positive changes through working collaboratively;

- Promoting safer communities and reducing the likelihood of reoffending and harm caused – by tackling the root causes of children’s offending.
- Listening and responding to the voice of the victim and empowering them to become involved.
- Connecting with children, helping them to understand the impact of their behaviour and achieve improved outcomes.

³ Child First recognises that children have different needs and vulnerabilities to adults and should not be treated in the same way

Regional and local context

The Cheshire footprint covered by YJS comprises the four unitary local authorities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West, Halton and Warrington (Figure 2). Each local authority area has a Children's Safeguarding and Community Safety Partnership and Cheshire is divided into three Probation delivery units (North, West and East) and has nine local policing units. The workforce of Cheshire YJS has staff employed by Warrington, Cheshire West and Cheshire East Councils and seconded workers from Halton Borough Council, Cheshire Constabulary, the Probation Service, three different NHS Trusts and two private providers. The service also has support in a variety of different roles from over 50 volunteers. This provides a strong partnership base to meet the various complexities and challenges faced by the county's children, caregivers and victims. An organisational structure chart of staff is shown in Appendix A along with ethnicity and gender and whole time equivalent and contract details (Appendix B).

Around 250,000 Cheshire residents are below the age of 18 with 101,077 aged 10-17. Across the four local authorities, there are over 1,000 cared for children. The large geographical area of 905 square miles does present some logistical challenges for the service, which has offices in Crewe, Winsford and Widnes. Staff work on a hybrid basis with additional virtual working areas in Macclesfield, Warrington, Chester, Runcorn, and Ellesmere Port. The children we work with tend to live in these larger more urban locations.

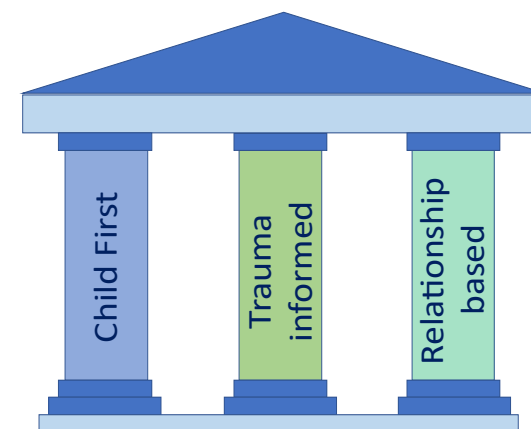


Figure 1. Cheshire YJS Three Pillars Strategic Vision

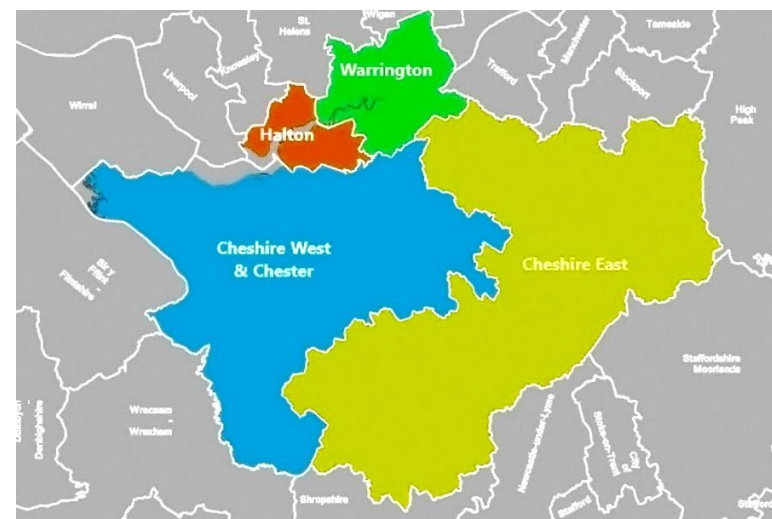


Figure 2. Cheshire and surrounding local authorities

Cheshire can be viewed as an affluent and rural county with pockets of urban deprivation. There is a marked difference in terms of local authority ranking of socio-economic indices and out of 317, Halton is ranked 23, Cheshire West 175, Warrington 183, and Cheshire East 228. Halton also has eight 'Left Behind' neighbourhoods with Cheshire East and Warrington having one each. Although highly diverse in terms of age, the county is not as diverse compared to other areas of England, with around 95% of residents identifying as 'White British'. The Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT) community also has a presence in some areas. The region shares borders with 15 other local authority areas (Figure 2) and has excellent road and rail links to the three closest cities of Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham. Although these provide improved economic and lifestyle experiences, they also enable organised criminal activity such as County Lines and other forms of child exploitation. Cheshire Police have implemented a model for tackling County Lines and although the number fluctuates throughout the year, the average number identified has become more consistent, reducing from 44 in 2022-2023 to 38 in 2024 (range 32-63 and 22-68 respectively).

The place-based graphics presented in figure 3 show contextual demographic data provided by local authorities, Public Health England and from the internal YJS case management system. The information is presented for context only and comparisons between areas should be treated with caution because the data is not exactly like for like. The number of '*children with harmful sexual behaviour*' refers to the number of children resident in that local authority area who received specialist Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB) assessment and intervention from YJS following a conviction or out of court disposal for a sexual offence.

The volume of children in the justice system fluctuates between local authority areas but is broadly what would be expected based on population size relative to social deprivation. Cheshire East and Cheshire West have the largest populations and Halton the smallest, but levels of social deprivation are significantly higher in Halton. Local authority contributions to the service are made according to a percentage funding formula, calculated following a comprehensive zero-based review exercise into service demand and activity.

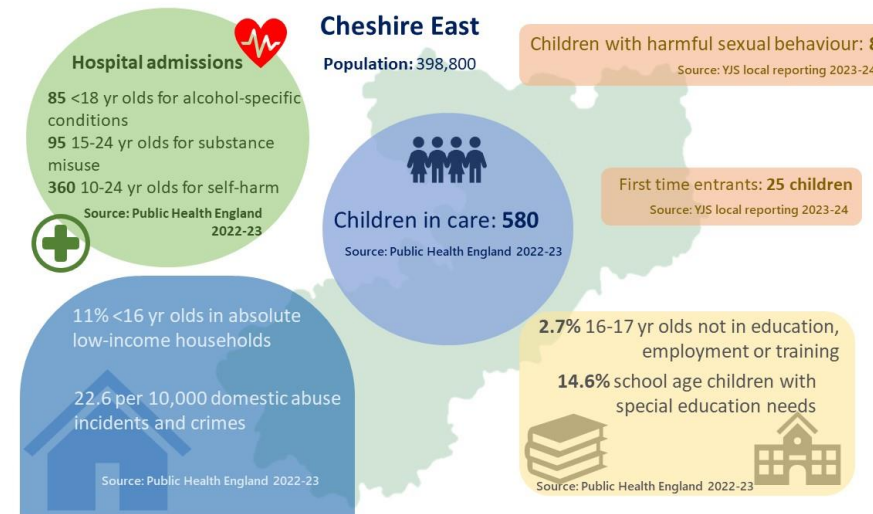
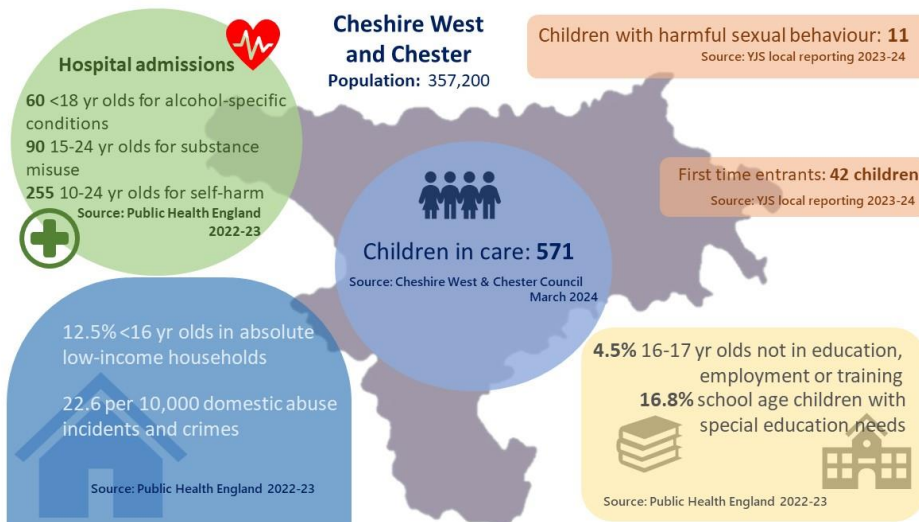
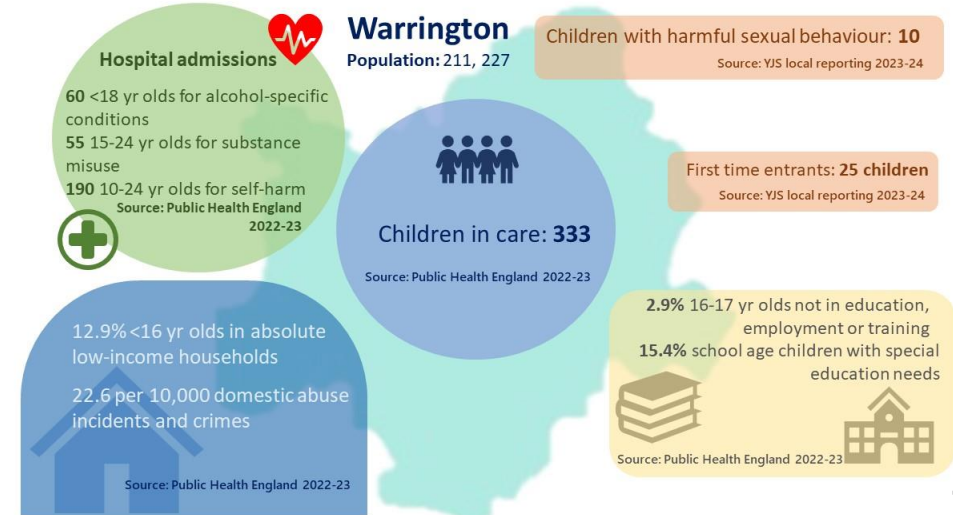
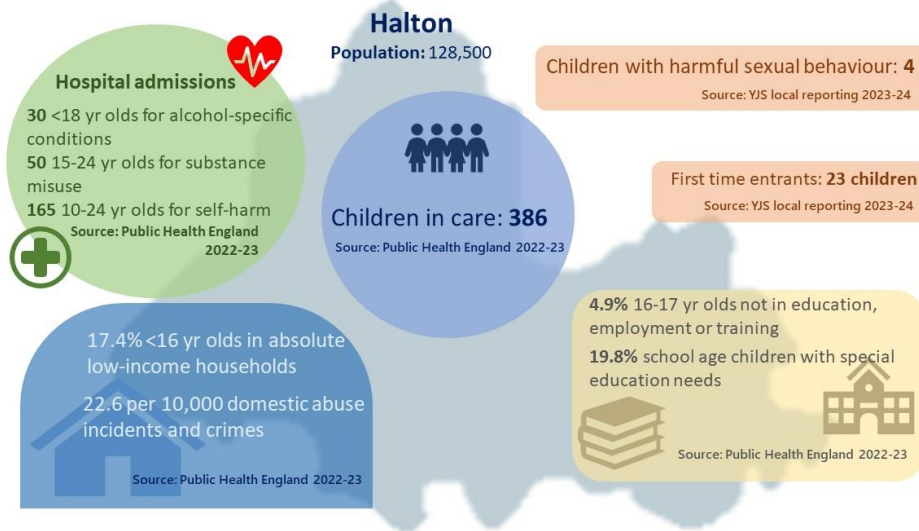
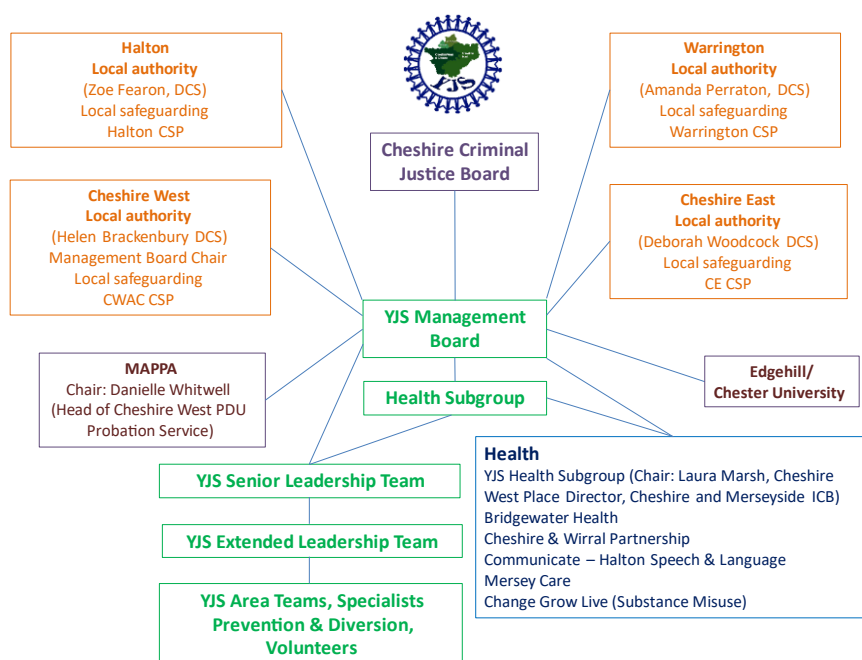


Figure 3. Figure place-based demographics for Halton, Warrington, Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East



DCS Director of Children's Services. CSP Children's Safeguarding Partnership, PDU Probation Delivery Unit, ICB Integrated Care Board

Figure 4. Sub-regional Youth Justice System Strategic Partnership

Cheshire YJS is also a core member of the four Children Safeguarding Partnerships, the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), and well linked to the Cheshire Integrated Offender Management model. These links have been enhanced by the adoption of a more youth justice-focussed role for the police officers, as recommended by the last HMIP inspection of Cheshire. YJS now has three police officers fully seconded and embedded within the service. A review will take place in 2024-2025, in partnership with Cheshire Constabulary to ensure the role of our seconded officers is in line with recently revised national guidance.

Cheshire does not have a Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) so as a sub-region, it does lack some of the investment, infrastructure and collaborative commissioning at scale brought by a VRU to urban metropolitan areas. Cheshire YJS

Governance, leadership and partnership arrangements

A strength of Cheshire YJS is the strategic and professional links it has with colleagues at a sub-regional level in the public, private, academic, and voluntary sectors (Figure 4). The YJS Head of Service is a core member of both the pan-Cheshire Criminal Justice Board (CJB) and Serious Violence Duty Partnership Board with senior youth justice management representation at the other CJB sub-groups (Reducing Reoffending, Disproportionality and Victims).

YJS is well placed to influence strategy and decisions at scale despite working in a complex governance landscape comprising four children's safeguarding partnerships, four community safety partnerships and a plethora of other place-based and subregional strategic groups, where Cheshire YJS has a duty (or need) to cooperate.

is an example of how strong governance and leadership can oversee the delivery of an effective multi-agency / multi-disciplinary service across local authority boundaries. However, the intention to move to a single local authority hosted model reflects the need to simplify the operating environment, solve some of the organisational challenges and improve efficiency, enabling the YJS, to focus more time on delivering a quality service.

Neglect, Domestic Abuse and Exploitation often feature in the lives of justice-involved children and these are the priority thematic areas for all four safeguarding children partnerships. This plan specifically refers to the youth justice system but the strategic vision to improve outcomes for children, victims and communities across Cheshire is shared by the wider pan-Cheshire partnership. Timelines for approval at full council are complicated given the sub-regional arrangement. However, there is commitment from the four Directors of Children's Services to take this Youth Justice Plan (with an annual update) through their respective council governance channels.

Board membership and leadership

The Management Board Chair usually rotates every 2 years, across the four local authorities. Cheshire West and Chester Council's Director of Children's Services took over from Halton in 2022 and was due to handover the chairing to Warrington in April 2024. However, the Chair agreed to stay on to lead the Transitions Board overseeing the multiple project workstreams necessary to transition YJS to Cheshire West and Chester Council as a hosted service.

Board membership is fully constituted with membership at a sufficiently senior level from all statutory partners, supplemented by other key members including a leading academic advisor, an independent safeguarding advisor and a magistrate. Job descriptions and induction processes are in place for new Board members but the over-arching legal partnership agreement, which constitutes the service as a sub-regional arrangement, is due for review and will form one workstream of the Board overseeing transition to the hosted model. The Youth Justice partnership (Board) will utilise the children's committee of Cheshire and Mersey Integrated Care Board (ICB) to highlight service achievements and risks. The Director of Children's Services in Warrington bridges the Youth Justice Management Board and the children's committee of the ICB. Notwithstanding the financial pressures on the ICB, we will be signaling that cash contributions from health to YJS across Cheshire have not increased in line with inflation for several years, so a new funding formula to ensure equitable flow from Cheshire and Merseyside ICB to Place is required.

The YJS Management Health Sub-Group was established as the only explicitly sub-group of the Board because of the complexity of Health commissioning and provider arrangements across the sub-region. The Chair of the Health Sub-Group also acts as Management Board representative for health, while also ensuring connectivity to Place Directors and Cheshire and Merseyside ICB.

The subgroup commissioned the Public Health Research Institute at Liverpool John Moores University to undertake a comprehensive Health Needs Analysis (HNA). Published in 2023⁴, the HNA was based on in-depth analysis of 70% of the children Cheshire YJS worked with in 2022. To date, it is one of the most comprehensive and statistically valid studies into the presenting health needs (sometimes undiagnosed, and frequently unmet) of children in/on cusp of the justice system anywhere in the UK. In early 2024, the terms of reference of the health subgroup were reviewed and with the help of public health representation, the group will pivot towards informing the commissioning of services further upstream (at the place level). Since 2017, the Chair of the Health Sub-group has been a long-standing former Chief Clinical Officer and in June 2024, he will hand over this role to the Cheshire West and Chester Director of Place.

Given the multi-authority constitution elected members are not on the Youth Justice Management Board, but to raise their awareness of the service, we held a bespoke open day for them in February 2024. This was an opportunity for elected members to learn more about the child first, trauma-informed and relational way our staff, from different professional disciplines, work together across authorities to support children, caregivers and victims. The event was very positively received by elected members, and YJS staff also welcomed the opportunity to share real examples of how they make a positive difference to the lives of some of the county's most vulnerable people.

This 3-year strategic plan (and subsequent annual updates) will progress through formal local channels for scrutiny, oversight and formal sign off by all four councils in accordance with the legislative requirement after it has been approved by the sub-regional management board. This process will remain in place even after the service has transitioned to a fully

⁴ [Cheshire Youth Justice Services Health Needs Assessment Summary July 2023](#)

hosted model because each authority will retain the statutory requirement for provision, scrutiny and oversight of youth justice delivery in their area.

Under a new senior leadership team in 2024-2025, YJS has undertaken some re-design to mirror the area delivery units of policing and probation and to align more effectively with place-based services for children, caregivers and victims (see Section 10.3 Service Development).

1. Update on 2023-2024

1.1 Progress on priorities in previous plan

Priority 2023-2024	Progress, what have the outcomes/outputs been?
Ensure transitional arrangements are in place following change of Head of Service in summer 2023	The long-standing Senior Manager in YJS was swiftly appointed to take over as Head of Service. This provided a degree of continuity but meant there was only one youth justice strategic manager covering four place-based partnerships until the replacement Senior Manager came into post in February 2024. YJS in Cheshire now has two very experienced senior leaders who will endeavour to build on the current strengths and reputation of the service to become outstanding.
Ensure the findings of the HNA are considered by relevant strategic partners to improve access to services for children in and at risk of entering the youth justice system	<p>The completion of the HNA was a major undertaking and represents one of the most comprehensive (validated) analyses of the wider health needs of justice-involved-children undertaken anywhere in the UK in recent years.</p> <p>The Head of Service has presented findings at Health and Wellbeing Boards and several other partnership forums across the sub-region. Data and analysis from the HNA were provided to Crest Consultancy for their collation of a Strategic Needs Assessment to inform the Serious Violence Strategy (SVS) for Cheshire.</p> <p>A newly commissioned provider for Liaison and Diversion (Midland Partnership Foundation Trust [MPFT]) now covers the whole of Cheshire and there is improved provision, communication and a more effective pathway in place following productive meetings between YJS and MPFT.</p> <p>Issues are still being worked through with senior commissioners and Cheshire Wirral Partnership Trust around the dedicated speech and language therapy offer to justice-involved-children across Cheshire East and Cheshire West footprints, which is currently insufficient to meet the volume/demand revealed by the HNA. The Head of Service has written a paper to be tabled at Cheshire and Merseyside's Integrated Care Board in summer 2024, outlining regional funding discrepancies and requesting a review of cash contributions to youth justice services across the Cheshire and Merseyside region.</p>
Explore with an aspiration to move to a single host	A report providing the rationale and clear business case, with costings to deliver YJS as a fully hosted model, was completed in December 2023. This report was presented to corporate

arrangement to reduce inefficiency, inequity of employment and clarify partnership responsibilities, whilst also improving local Place based delivery and reporting models	<p>leadership teams across Cheshire with approval to proceed given by cabinets (committee for Cheshire East Council) in spring 2024.</p> <p>This major infrastructure and organisational change project will be overseen by a Transitions Board, chaired by Cheshire West and Chester Council's Director for Children and Families. Multiple workstreams will be established, a priority for the YJS partnership for 2024-2025 with a go-live date of April 2025.</p>
Child-first, trauma-informed and relationship-based practice will continue to be embedded as routine	<p>The new Head of Service has articulated Child First, Trauma-Informed and Relationship-Based Practice as the three key pillars upon which the service will continue to develop. The new Senior Manager launched the revised 'area-based' service design for 2024-2025.</p> <p>Cheshire YJS have further developed social prescribing through partnerships with the Canal and River Trust (fishing as mindfulness), Rage Fitness (Health and Wellbeing Centre) and other bespoke psychosocial therapeutic activities for children. The Local Government Association (LGA) and Youth Justice Board (YJB) have cited Cheshire's social prescribing approach as an exemplar of innovative best practice.</p> <p>In 2023, the service rolled out Schwartz⁵ rounds to provide a safe reflective space for staff across all teams and levels (front line practitioners, back-office staff and managers) to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings on topics of their choice. This is an important but sometimes overlooked aspect of Trauma-Informed Service Development because staff can experience trauma vicariously. The Schwartz rounds in Cheshire are facilitated by specially trained in-house therapeutic practitioners and have been well received by staff who have attended them. Schwartz rounds will continue to run quarterly in 2024-2025 and beyond.</p>
Embed Turnaround project with an expanding Prevention and Diversion Service to work with more children on the cusp of the youth justice system	<p>Turnaround was embedded within the Prevention and Diversion Team with a c£300k Ministry of Justice (MOJ) Grant. This was used to recruit additional front-line practitioners and build reporting and management capacity to ensure the fulfilment of grant requirements. This opened pathways to work with children referred because of concerns over anti-social behaviour.</p>

⁵ [Schwartz Rounds](#)

	<p>By the end of March 2024, 135 children in Cheshire had been supported through the Turnaround project. Eighty-six of whom have successfully completed the programme, with the remaining 49 continuing to receive YJS support.</p> <p>The MOJ have confirmed Turnaround funding will end in March 2025 so YJS will ensure transition planning is in place prior to Q4. This will ensure children are supported into accessing alternative programmes of intervention, including newly commissioned delivery providers Remedi and Queensberry Alternative Provision.</p>
Continue to develop anti-exploitation strategies in partnership with the Police, local authorities, and other partners such as health and education	<p>Cheshire YJS is an active and influential participant in both pan-Cheshire and place-based partnership groups focusing on tackling criminal exploitation. Team Managers and local 'exploitation champions' attend contextual safeguarding operational meetings and share intelligence and contribute to 'mapping' meetings to help local responses. Exploitation of vulnerable children in/on the cusp of the justice system remains a high concern/high priority for the wider partnership and earlier targeted intervention and support for children to get 'upstream' was included in the Cheshire SVS.</p> <p>The YJS leadership team will continue to use our data and insights (e.g. from HNA) to inform and influence the wider partnership. A good example of this is YJS data being instrumental in influencing the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) to use Serious Violence Duty funding to commission the Voluntary Community Sector to provide targeted support. Services are now in place to help children identified by education, early help, and social care as being 'at risk' of exclusion and exploitation, if left unsupported.</p> <p>Organised criminality is dynamic to emerging markets and opportunities and there were some concerning reports from Merseyside that county lines had evolved to become international. A few Merseyside children were trafficked to distribute drugs for a Dubai-based (but Merseyside linked) organised crime group (OCG). Given the proximity and known lines from Merseyside into Cheshire, the YJS Head of Service raised this at the Youth Justice Management Board and at local Serious Organised Crime Strategic groups. At the start of 2024, Cheshire YJS also participated in Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) benchmarking exercises with partners.</p>

Disproportionality review to be completed in line with the Cheshire CJB subgroup methodology	A response to the Lammy report was undertaken by the Disproportionality Sub-group to Cheshire CJB. YJS contributed data and insight to this work (see Section 7.1) and remains a member of the sub-group, which has renewed terms of reference under a new chair.
Explore potential of an early safeguarding diagnostic tool with CACI	This was explored as a tri-partite “Knowledge Transfer Partnership” with Edge Hill University and CACI (YJS software supplier) and an initial grant application to undertake the research and development necessary was made to Innovate UK. It subsequently transpired however YJS would become liable for two-thirds of the cost of employing research associates and because there was no cash in the budget and no obvious return on investment for the children we work with, it was ruled as unviable. CACI are a private organisation and are exploring other avenues for developing predictive analytics that may deliver them a commercial return on investment.

Some other notable achievements in 2023-2024 include: -

- YJS were ‘early adopters’ of the new national Prevention and Diversion assessment tool, with Cheshire contributing to the development of a quality assurance tool at national level with the YJB.
- Our social prescribing model has been cited by the LGA, YJB and NHS England as innovative practice for supporting children and young people in or on the cusp of the justice system.
- Several children embraced an opportunity to visit Chester University to work alongside graphics students and professionals in the co-design of a new youth justice planning template (see Section 4). An example of the kind of child first, participatory practice and co-design the service will be developing over the next 3 years.
- Cheshire YJS helped to facilitate some ‘art therapy’ with a cared for child who was struggling with being under a deprivation of liberty order and her painting won a Koestler arts award (see Section 8).

2. Performance over the previous year

Performance against nationally measured targets continues to be strong. Since rolling out the Divert scheme in 2017 across all Cheshire local authorities, we have seen fewer children entering the CJS.

Total volume and rates per 100,000 are significantly below regional and national averages and Section 11.4 contains a longer-term trend of FTE data, disaggregated by local authority. Figure 5 shows initial sharp reductions in FTE with the low base level being sustained again in 2023 (NB the lowest level of FTE in 2021 was due to the impact of covid/lockdowns).

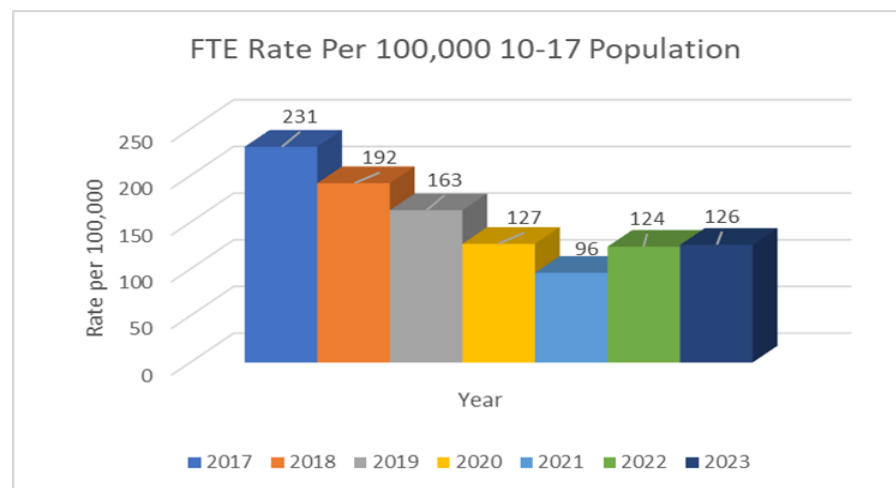


Figure 5. FTEs to the justice system in Cheshire

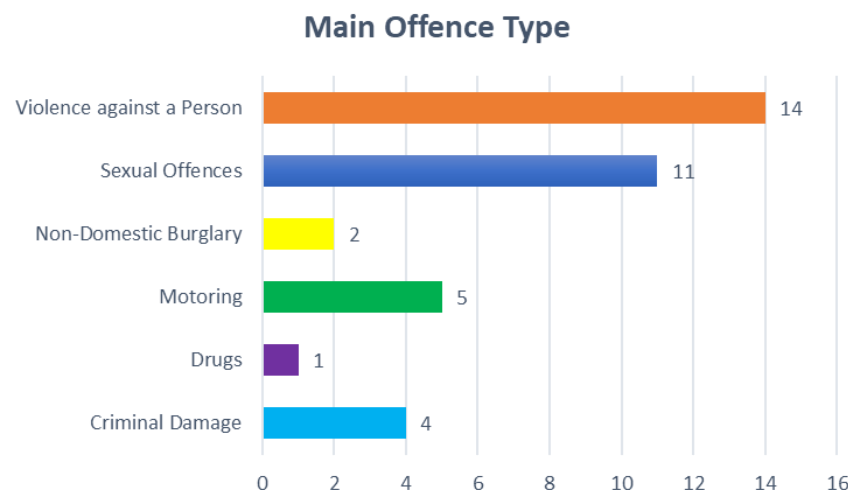


Figure 6. FTE offences in 2023

Figure 6 shows violent or sexual offences represent the bulk of those committed by children entering the justice system for the first time. This is what we would expect and is compatible with 'Child First' youth justice principles and an effective youth diversion scheme that ensures children are dealt with according to risk and need.

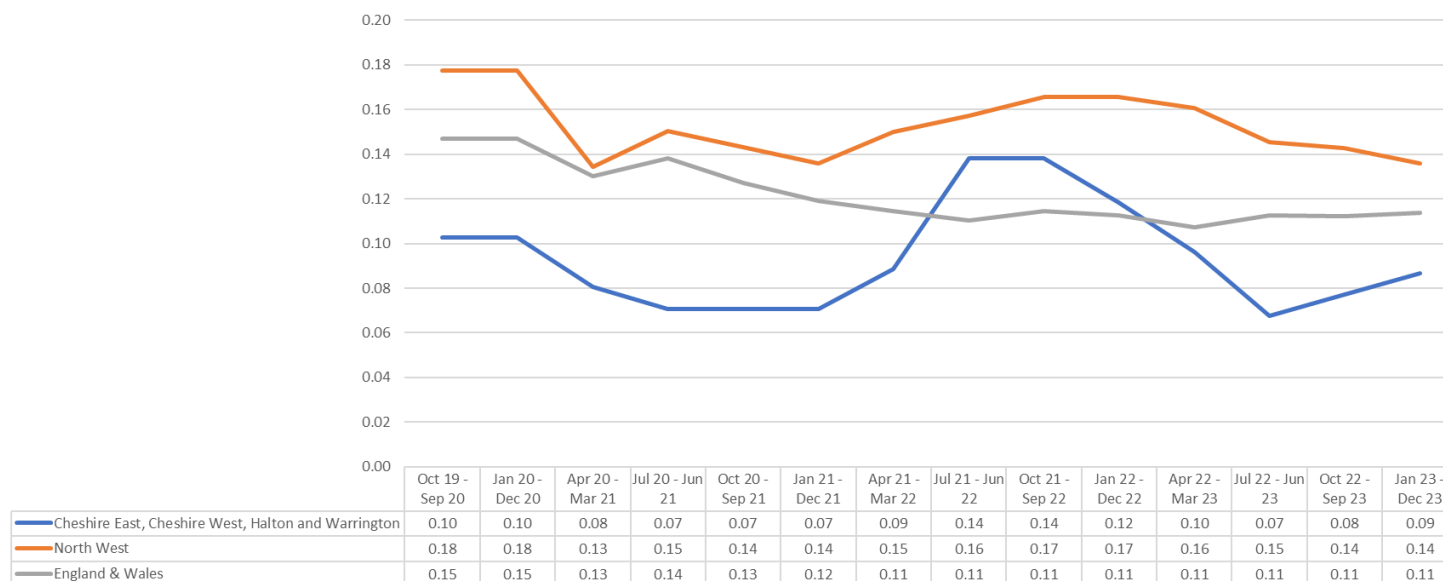


Figure 7. Custody Rate per 1,000 for Cheshire 10-17-Year-olds with regional and national comparisons

Source: National Youth Justice Application Framework (YJAF)

Cheshire also has consistently low numbers of children remanded and sentenced to custody (see Sections 11.9 and 11.10 for 2023-2024 place-based detail). Fewer than five children across the whole of Cheshire have been sentenced to custody in any quarterly period going right back to Q2 of 2019.

It is rare for there to be more than 10 children from the four places in Cheshire combined, serving custodial sentences at any one time. While reoffending rates of those children in the system are slightly higher than regional averages, this is attributable to the fact children sentenced by the courts tend to be those with whom we have already exhausted all diversionary options. They are the children who are often more entrenched in criminality and exploitation so require more intensive intervention and support.

We are also seeing consistently reliable results for those children subjected to out of court disposals, in terms of successful completions and reoffending rates, with fewer than one in 10 children diverted away from formal sanctions going on to reoffend.

As a service, we are committed to focusing our efforts on reducing reoffending by our children. However, as we continue to prevent children entering the system and, running parallel have relatively few children in custody, we recognise re-offending rates are understandably our area of greatest challenge. Figure 8 below provides the latest published re-offending data, taken from the Police National Computer (PNC). However, whilst this serves to give us a national picture, it is important to recognise the following limitations of this PNC data:-

- The re-offending of adults who we no longer work with or have been never known to us
- The re-offending of children from outside areas who have offended in Cheshire but are not or have never been open to Cheshire YJS
- PNC re-offending data is published 2-years behind the current quarter.

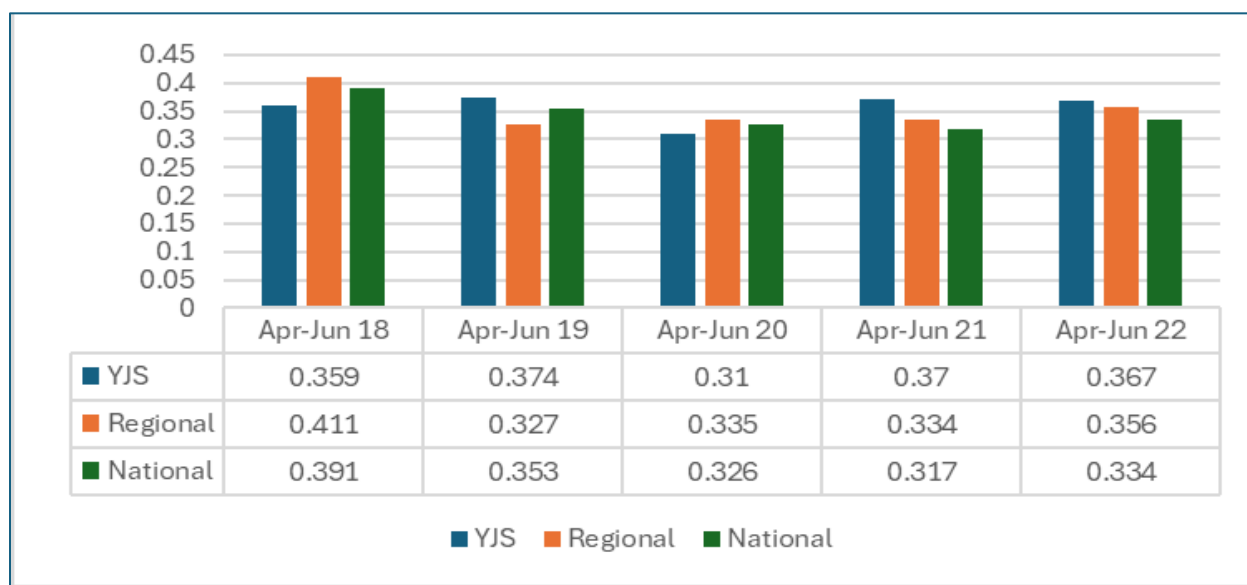


Figure 8. Binary reoffending data for YJS compared with regional and national rates 2018-2022

Source: YJAF via PNC

Desistance from crime for children who experience significant adversity and trauma is not a linear journey. It requires long-term, trusted, relational support from professionals to try and help children achieve a shift toward a more positive self-identity. This is why the vision for the service is underpinned by the three key pillars of Child First, Trauma-Informed and Relational-Based Practice (Figure 1).

The KPI charts in Appendix A1 show performance against a range of other key performance metrics, introduced in 2023 by the national YJB, who have rated YJS as being in Performance Quadrant 2 (Satisfactory).

YJS will be developing a new comprehensive performance reporting and quality assurance framework in 2024 so the Management Board, partners and staff can all see the strengths and areas of challenge across the 10 KPIs. We will be data driven, making full use of the management information system to target our improvement activity in the areas where it is most needed.

2.1 National Standards Audit

Submission of a National Standards (NS) audit is a condition of the YJB national grant and the most recent NS audit was undertaken in October 2023, against NS2: Work in Courts. Cheshire YJS received positive feedback from the YJB Regional Oversight Manager on the quality of both the audit process and its findings.

This NS audit was a comprehensive quality assurance audit of the services delivered before, during and after children's appearances before the three magistrate courts and one crown court in Cheshire. Section A looked at Strategy, Section B on Reports and Section C on Process. Sections B and C involved a deep dive practice audit involving 20 cases.

There were nine areas in Section A 'Strategic performance' with four rated **Outstanding** and five rated as **Good**. Cheshire YJS enjoys a strong partnership with HM Court and Tribunal Service (HMCTS), Magistrates, Police and Crown Prosecution Service. The Head of Service is a member of Cheshire CJB and meets quarterly with youth bench magistrates who sit in Cheshire's three youth courts. A former chair of the Cheshire youth bench and a representative from HMCTS are also members of the Management Board.

For sections B (Reports) and C (Process), the audit revealed the overall quality of work was **Good** or **Outstanding**. One criterion required improvement and this related to the adequate referencing of the impact of the child's offence on their victim, by authors of pre-sentence reports. Improvement action is being addressed through local changes to case management guidance, emphasis on managerial oversight and explicitly evidencing the possible impact on victims (even where victim personal statements are unavailable).

A priority for 2024-2025 will be to review the victim contact and support offer ensuring the service remains fully compliant with the Victims' Code of Practice and the new Victims and Prisoners Act (see Section 11.6).

3. Risks and issues

The main risk to service delivery and the achievement of positive outcomes for children, victims and care givers, relates to the complexity of the pan-Cheshire shared service arrangements. A combination of escalating ICT costs due to national licensing and security compliance issues, as well as inefficiency that comes from having staff employed by authorities other than the one providing their ICT, has rendered the current arrangement unsustainable.

YJS staff currently must navigate four separate systems for corporate information such as finance and human resources. Lack of a sustainable ICT system will inhibit performance management, data collection and case recording and increase costs for each partner authority. In addition, the safety of children and the public could be compromised if these inefficiencies continue to impact on staff time. This results in less time spent with children and young people (and those harmed by children and young people).

The move to a hosted arrangement with Cheshire West and Chester Council as the lead authority, will mean a more productive and efficient organisation. This model will also provide financial transparency and the new legal memorandum of understanding will mitigate the risks associated with provision of ICT that is a cost Halton Borough Council can no longer absorb as a benefit in kind.

Not progressing to a fully hosted model (and agreeing a sustainable funding formula) will, over time, undermine the integrity of the YJS and compromise service delivery for our children, caregivers and victims.

All four councils have now confirmed their support for transitioning to a new hosted model, with each authority paying a management fee. The infrastructure work involved in transitioning the service will be significant and require multiple workstreams overseen by a Transitions Board.

As with any major organisational change and infrastructure project – particularly one involving decommissioning and transfer of ICT systems, there is a risk of service disruption, or the work not being completed within the intended timescale of this fiscal year. The Transitions Board, overseen by the Director for Children and Families in Cheshire West and Chester Council, will be responsible for agreeing any mitigation measures, should they be required.

4. Building on our strengths: Plan for 2024-2025

4.1 Child First

In Cheshire, we are committed to Child First principles. As mentioned earlier, these principles, along with Trauma-Informed and Relationship-Based Practice will inform all practice and development activity. We will continue to apply the principle of “*Would this be good enough for my child?*” and prioritise the best interests of children, recognise their needs, capacities, rights, and potential. As well as being child-focused, our work will be developmentally informed, acknowledge structural barriers and done with children rather than done to them.

YJS has made great strides in this direction of travel in the last couple of years but recognises there is more to do, particularly in relation to meaningful and active participation of children in the justice system.

This is why **Participation** is a strategic, operational and practice priority flowing from this Strategic plan.

The new Service Development Hub will be the engine room to drive forward participation across all areas of YJS. This will not be easy as children sentenced by the courts often feel they have no power and no voice and they have usually experienced significant trauma and adversity. Offending for many children is in part symptomatic of their own childhood abuse or neglect. YJS will hold a Service Development Day in July 2024, with **Participation** as the theme and have invited the leading children’s and social justice charity Peer Power to co-facilitate the session. Through the lived experience of their ‘peer leaders’, Peer Power will help YJS to better harness the power and potential of children and young people and be the catalyst for scaling up some of the co-produced (Child First) activity started in 2023-2024 and outlined below.

In summer 2023, a partnership project with a local community enterprise in Crewe ‘Recycle Cycles’, combined children gaining skills in bike maintenance with designing and painting a large outdoor container (Figure 9a). The inspiration for the design came from a child being encouraged to visualise his pathway toward a brighter future having participated in evening sessions on topics such as, healthy relationships and respect for women, substance misuse and self-esteem. A group of our children worked collaboratively with YJS staff and graphic design students at University of Chester to co-produce Figure 9b. This is now the cover of the planning document, *My Change Plan*, used with all YJS children.



Figure 9a.
Original artwork
created on a
container by YJS
children working
with Recycle
Cycles in Crewe



Figure 9b. Adapted
artwork for *My Change
Plan* made by YJS
children in collaboration
with YJS staff and graphic
design students from
University of Chester

The above artwork is one illustration of the kind of participatory practice Cheshire YJS will be seeking to build on over the coming years. It also exemplifies how we can take a strengths-based approach and co-produce with children. By knowing they have a voice in co-producing their own intervention plans, children will be more motivated to achieve the objectives and successfully complete their work with us.

Our relationship-based model also offers a way to improve the interactions children have with police officers. The Cheshire Youth Commission is facilitated by Leaders Unlocked, a social enterprise that delivers the Youth Commission peer-led model and exists to allow young people across the UK to have a stronger voice in their communities on issues that affect them. During October 2023 half term, YJS arranged two bespoke events with Cheshire Youth Commission enabling the voices of children with lived experience of the system, to be heard by the OPCC and other leaders and to inform policing in Cheshire. Five children open to YJS, participated in a bespoke workshop on relationships with the police. The workshops included interactive situational scenario activities, an animation film and quizzes to elicit rich feedback on justice-involved-children's authentic lived experience.

"It was good to get listened to. I have not had the opportunity of this before in relation to my experiences with the Police. The person running the group seemed to be really interested."
(Child)

Some children felt the Police should receive training around mental health issues, specifically neurodiversity and officers should have more awareness of how best to engage with neurodiverse children. (Cheshire HNA confirmed neurodivergent children are over-represented in the youth justice system). This was one of several recommendations made in the final report to the OPCC as part of the annual “Big Conversation” and YJS will facilitate a similar bespoke session with Leaders Unlocked later in 2024.

“I used to get regularly stopped and searched if I was stimming and under suspicion of drug use when I am actually just autistic.”
(Child)

“I just want to say a huge thank you to you and the team for giving us an opportunity to speak to the amazing young people you work with. They were my favourite sessions of this year”
(Project Manager, Leaders Unlocked)

Figure 10 shows a young person open to YJS helping a traffic officer wash his motorbike. This example of relationship-based practice was arranged by a Divert Worker who was aware of the young person’s interest in motorbikes.



Figure 10. Young person helps a traffic officer to wash his motorbike

5. Resources and services

The YJS operates as a complex shared service arrangement with pooled funding from four local authorities, statutory partners, Cheshire OPCC and the YJB core grant (see Appendix B Budget). Cheshire YJS will pool the YJB core grant with other funding to:

- Ensure we have a well-trained, supported and motivated team of staff, with the specialist skills to engage children, caregivers and victims;
- Continue to contribute towards funding our relationship-based practice model and further developing participatory work with children, care givers and victims;
- Continue to pool funding to develop social prescribing and other interventions with children to improve self-identity, health and wellbeing and reduce the likelihood of re-offending;
- Continue to develop diversionary and participatory interventions to divert children away from formal sanctions (supported by contributions from the OPCC);
- Ensure YJS can continue to provide robust, intensive supervision to children in the community to maintain public and judicial confidence and minimising the use of custody.

6. Board development

The YJS Management Board will continue to meet quarterly and receive reports from YJS and partners to facilitate scrutiny and discussion around key service delivery and performance areas. The Board's key purposes are:

- To determine strategic direction of YJS, ensuring all statutory partners are fully engaged.
- To oversee and monitor the operational work of YJS.
- To ensure YJS is adequately resourced to carry out its statutory function of preventing offending by children and young people.

The leadership, composition and role of the Management Board are critical to the effective delivery of local youth justice services and Cheshire has senior representation from all statutory partners. The YJS Management Board also has long standing representation from HMCTS, the Magistracy, children's safeguarding, and academia.

The main development area for 2024-2025 will be the overseeing of a parallel Transitions Board by the Chair of the YJS Management Board. This will ensure the smooth transition to the new hosted model with Cheshire West and Chester Council becoming lead authority on behalf of the partnership.

7. Workforce development

As a service, and in line with our three pillars vision, we are committed to learning and development. It is vital all staff have the appropriate skills and knowledge, are effective in their roles and equipped to deliver high-quality services to everyone they work with. We also place high value on relevant opportunities to promote personal growth and professional development.

As a pan-Cheshire partnership, we can maximise opportunities arising in each of the four Safeguarding Children Partnerships and local authority areas. In 2023-2024, in response to our HM Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) 2021 inspection report and updated case management guidance, we commissioned and facilitated a broad range of learning and development opportunities. Cheshire YJS were also privileged this year to inputs from leading academics, with international reputations, for research on working with children in the justice system. The table below summarises the main staff development events held, highlighting how we have drawn on expertise from many sources.

Our commitment to the workforce will continue into 2024-2025 and we will seek to further strengthen workforce development through:

- Development of a more centralised approach to identifying training needs across the service
- Developing an enhanced training monitoring system and connecting with Cheshire West Learning and Development Team as we move to a single hosted model.
- Revising the Training Plan to be highly relevant, achievable, and accessible to the whole workforce.
- Continued membership of the Youth Justice Legal Centre, which brings timely and specialist legal advice for professionals and managers and access to a range of in-person training events and remote learning.

Table 1. Summary of key work force development activities in 2023-2024

Title	Course Type	Overview
Relationship Based Practice by Jackie Dwayne Limerick University	Academic Guest Speaker	Youth justice in Ireland is in a fortunate position as on the back of the research from Limerick, they were awarded funding to 2027 to implement RBP (Relationship Based Practice). Our approach has no additional resources and will come via the new development hub to ensure a more centralised approach but still drawing on what is available in local areas. Once children have finished their time with YJS we will be able to signpost them to groups/activities they have been linked to as part of exit plan to help sustain desistance from crime while avoiding dependency on YJS
Presentation on the Lundy Model by Laura Lundy Queen's University Belfast	Academic Guest Speaker	Presentation covering the aspects of the Lundy Model of Child Participation we have adopted within the work of the Service Development Hub (see Section 8).
Child Participation in Youth Justice Research Louise Forde Brunel Law School	Academic Guest Speaker	Whole service presentation on participation in youth justice from Louise Forde again to back up work on participation which will be the theme of the Service Development Day.
YJLC Gravity Matrix Training	Commissioned	Training from Youth Justice Legal Centre to Prevention and Diversion staff and police officers on the application of revised gravity matrix for youth out of court disposals
Case management guidance	In-house	Major internal briefings and training on application of revised case management guidance
Equality and Diversity training	Commissioned	Delivered by Wipers Youth social enterprise. Specifically tailored training for youth justice professionals to improve cultural competency and awareness of disproportionality in the justice system

Having considered the local data analysis and in support of service priorities, the following training is currently planned for 2024-2025:

- Specialist Harmful Sexual Behaviour (AIM3) to broaden the pool of trained practitioners
- Court Skills
- UNITAS courses: Youth Diversion; Child First Effective Practice; Professional Certificate in Effective Practice
- Equality and Diversity for all staff.

8. Evidence-based practice and innovation

YJS will continue to root all intervention and support with children on the evidence base, but Cheshire will also explore new and innovative ways of connecting with children who find it difficult to access mainstream services. Our approach was described recently by an NHS England lead as the best application of social prescribing in a justice context that she had come across. It was also cited by the LGA as one of their *‘innovation in local government’* case studies⁶.

Social prescribing in YJS emerged from the recognition that justice-involved-children often arrive with previously unmet health needs and traditional/clinical models of care had failed to reach them. An example being the socially prescribing of fishing as a mindfulness activity in partnership with the Canal and River Trust’s ‘Let’s Go Fishing’ programme (Figure 11).



Figure 11. ‘Let’s Go Fishing’ Programme at Winsford

⁶ [Cheshire: Using social prescribing to reduce reoffending among young people | Local Government Association](#)

Adopting a psychosocial therapeutic approach, health workers in YJS are socially prescribing creative and flexible activities to help children improve their health and wellbeing. This has proven particularly effective for males who have experienced intra and/or extra familial violence and are often in a state of hyper-vigilance or hyper-arousal. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is often ineffective with this increasingly large sub-set of our children, so the service has tailored the health offer to become far more psychosocial and adaptable to the needs (and interests) of the children we work with. Our health offer is also supportive towards addressing the impact of trauma.



The artwork in Figure 12 was created by a cared for child working with the YJS. “L” had experienced a lot of childhood trauma and was struggling with being in care under a deprivation of liberty for her own safety. She was being supported to make sense of her experiences through art therapy and discovered she had a real talent. YJS supported her to enter this piece for a Koestler arts award and it won a commendation award. On winning the award, she told her YJS worker it was the first certificate she had ever received in her life. This is a perfect illustration of the impact that child first, trauma-informed, and relational practice can have on children who have experienced complex trauma.

**Figure 12. ‘Day in the Life of a Deprivation of Liberty Order’
Koestler commendation award winning artwork 2023**

Cheshire YJS has a well-developed “*Research in Practice*” working group that was recognised by HMIP in 2021 as an exemplar of collaboration between academia and the youth justice sector. As mentioned above the group was able to secure several key researchers to speak to the service about their findings.

One such speaker was Professor Laura Lundy, a leading international authority on the meaningful participation of children and author of The Lundy Model (Figure 13). YJS will be adopting the Lundy Model as our frame of reference in developing Participation across all aspects of service delivery in 2024-2027.

The YJS is in a knowledge-transfer partnership arrangement with two local universities (Chester and Edge Hill University) and two senior lecturers in criminology, with a national profile for research on youth justice will co-chair the YJS Research group from 2024-2025. This collaboration will ensure Cheshire YJS retains a national reputation for evidence-based practice and stays at the leading edge of innovation in the sector.

Although YJS has been fortunate to have a number of key speakers talking to staff about the research behind participation, the Service Development Day in July 2024 will be the catalyst for the development of a participatory model across the service with Peer Power Youth facilitating the session.

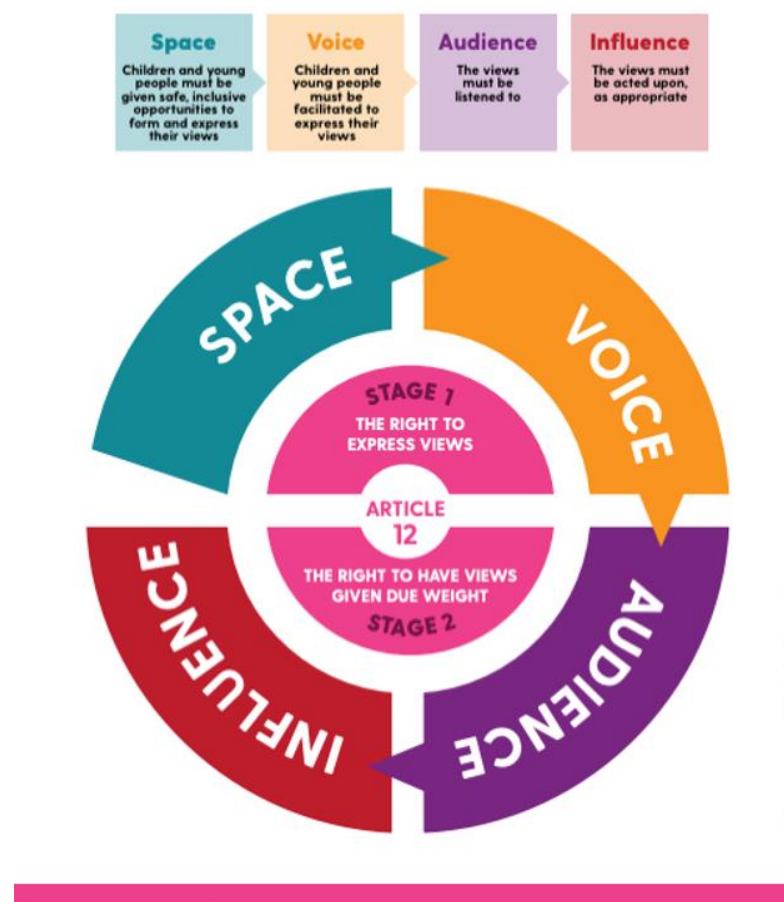


Figure 13. The Lundy Model of Child Participation

We have used previous service development days to launch Trauma-Informed Practice (2019) and Relationship-Based Practice (2022). The Service Development Hub will bring together a range of working groups focusing on various aspects of participation from involving children in staff recruitment to using technology to gain children's views and ideas.

9. Evaluation

The HNA by the Public Health Research Institute at Liverpool John Moores University evaluated and validated the trauma-informed and relationship-based practice approach adopted by Cheshire YJS professionals. The passage below is taken directly from their full technical report, based on a statistically valid research sample of 70% of the children YJS were working with at the time:

“The (Cheshire YJS) offer now provides that key link into mental health, substance use and Speech Language Therapy support, through an equitable healthcare assessment available to all young people entering the YJS. This provided a key opportunity to assess and identify any unmet health needs in these three areas (and wider health and safeguarding needs), which may not have otherwise been identified, and for many was the first time they had access to such healthcare screening. This multi-agency approach not only allowed for quicker identification during the healthcare screening, but it also meant more timely specialist support for families who would have otherwise had long waiting lists to see specialists from CAMHS and SLT. This was identified as an effective way to open the door to this pathway of wider support, recognising that these health needs were associated to the offending behavior and need to be addressed to prevent further re-offendingThe Cheshire YJS model also provides an opportunity for multi-agency working, not only to provide that overarching multi-disciplinary offer for children and young people, but also in terms of how services work together across Cheshire....The HNA highlights the key work from YJS and wider services across Cheshire in support of families to reduce inequalities, improve wellbeing, and reduce offending. This required skilled, experienced staff working in a trauma-informed way, using a child-focused approach.”

10. Priorities for the coming year

Building on what we have achieved in the previous year, a service development plan outlining management activity will sit underneath this higher-level Strategic Youth Justice Plan and will be used to deliver against the new service development priorities for 2024-2025 summarised below:-

We will 'ramp-up' participation in creative ways right across the service and facilitate a culture of collaboration where children, volunteers and community groups are enabled to promote pro-social identity and desistance from crime. This will include co-production or co-design of plans, developing projects to support children to desist from crime and reduce harm to victims/communities.

We will develop a new comprehensive performance reporting and quality assurance framework, ensuring we are data driven and make full use of the management information system to drive practice development

We will refine our internal governance processes to ensure management and back-office functions help facilitate the delivery of high-quality services including enhanced training monitoring and a training needs assessment to inform the staff training plan

We will benchmark the YJS support offer to victims against the Victims Code of Practice, new Victims' Bill and HMiPs new inspection criteria (refining the role of Restorative Justice workers in YJS if required) identifying and progressing areas for development

In partnership with Cheshire Constabulary, we will review the current joint decision-making arrangements for the use of out of court disposals for our children. We will ensure they incorporate the Child Gravity Matrix and children are diverted to the appropriate service according to their level of risk and need

We will collaborate with partners to deliver against Priority 1 (Prevention) of Cheshire's 2024-2029 SVS by ensuring funding is targeted appropriately to support children at risk of involvement in SV

10.1 Standards for children

Cheshire YJS has developed a “conversational audit” methodology to undertake practice audits where managers visit or speak to children, caregivers and (where appropriate) victims too. This is now a ‘business as usual’ audit methodology for the service and has been adopted by some of our partners in children’s social care. Direct quotes from children, caregivers or partner agency professionals obtained through conversational audit are illustrative of the kind of trauma-informed, relational practice Cheshire YJS is striving to provide to the children we work with. This methodology will feature in this year’s audit on Victims and Restorative Justice. The new participatory model also aims to gather the views and ideas of the children we work with.

“I made a connection with Rich, he understands me better than anyone else and that was important to me. We talked about...films and Wrexham FC... so it was less boring than I thought it would be and helped me think about education, jobs and stuff”
(Child)

10.2 New performance framework

Striking the right balance between local place-based and pan-Cheshire performance reporting is a challenge for YJS and disaggregating Cheshire-wide data to place often renders the data invalid because the volumes are so low. But we will be developing a new performance management framework, using a mix of the recently introduced 10 national KPIs (Appendix A1) alongside better use of Child View (YJS case management system) so the Management Board and service really know our children.

10.3 Service development

It is critical for a sub-regional youth justice partnership to work closely with statutory agencies and community organisations at a local level, to properly support children in their own communities. To better facilitate this, YJS have implemented a modest service redesign for 2024-2025 to enable front-line professionals to work more closely and effectively with place-based partners. Figure 14 opposite shows how YJS will remain co-terminus with both police and probation footprints, while aligning closely to the four children's services and community safety partnerships. The Staff Structure in Appendix A2 shows how our Teams align with place.

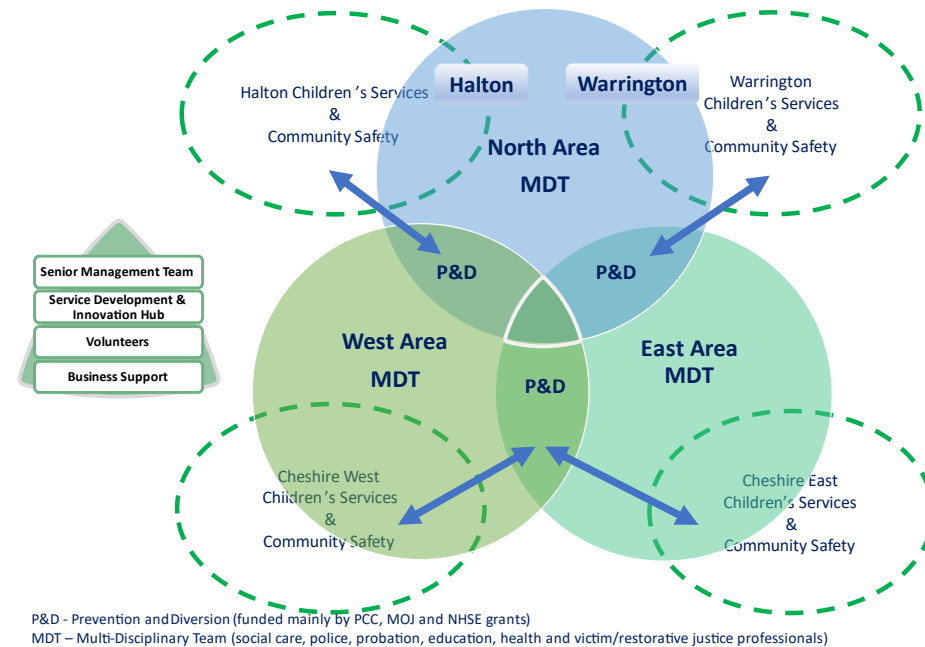


Figure 14. New Area-Based Service Design Model for YJS (from April 2024)

The service redesign aligns with the shift toward restorative and participatory approaches and the importance of supporting children to connect (or reconnect) with their local community. The new structure will empower front-line professionals and locality (area-based) operational managers to develop creative partnerships with the voluntary sector. By harnessing previously untapped human and social capital within communities (such as recruiting more local volunteers and establishing mutually beneficial partnerships with small local charities) we will be better able to help children, and some victims to move on positively beyond an offender (or victim) identity.

The new Service Development Hub will function as the central engine room for innovation within the service and the new leadership team will ensure quality of practice at a pan-Cheshire level, while empowering (through a distributed leadership model) creative area-based partnerships in the places where children, caregivers and victims live.

Cheshire YJS has also begun a review of our internal governance processes to ensure we are as productive as possible with a lean service spanning a large geography and complex network of partners. There are over 100 place-based and sub-regional partnership boards or groups and YJS needs to focus our human resource where it can have the greatest influence and improve outcomes for children in or at risk of entering into the justice system.

11. National priority areas

11.1 Children from groups which are over-represented

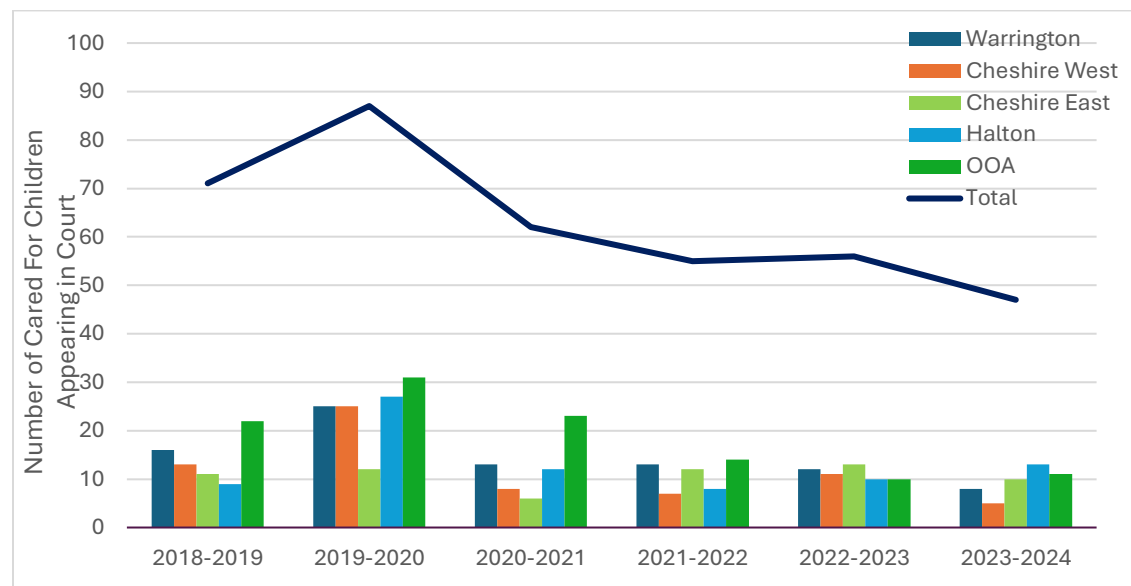


Figure 15. Number of cared for children appearing in Cheshire courts by local authority between April 2018-March 2024

The data above also includes children placed in Cheshire under the care of local authorities outside the county (out of area [OOA]) who receive the same diversionary options.

Sustained lower volumes since the protocol was produced in early 2020 is good evidence of what can be achieved through collective commitment at scale across YJS and Children's services.

A task and finish group are meeting to review the protocol in 2024-2025.

An over-represented group of children in the justice system are cared for children and care leavers. The YJS Management Board's response to data revealing disproportionality in this group was to agree a pan-Cheshire protocol. This aims to minimise the criminalisation of cared for children and care leavers and details a '3D' police and partnership response of *"Discretion, Delay and Diversion"*.

Since the protocol was launched, there has been a clear downward trend of cared for children appearing in court (Figure 15). This shows the impact from a high point in 2019.

The high prevalence of our children struggling with health or neurodevelopmental difficulties prompted the Health Sub-group of the YJS Management Board to commission the Public Health Research Institute at Liverpool John Moore University to look at the health needs of children open to YJS (see Management Board and Leadership).

The HNA revealed a stark over-representation of neurodiversity in our children which has been replicated elsewhere due to wider determinants of health. Public health consultants on the Health Sub-group have used this analysis in a place-based Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and SEND specific Strategic Needs Analysis. The HNA revealed there is a correlated trajectory for children who ‘camouflage’ their SEND through disruptive behavior, experience fixed-term or permanent exclusion and then enter the CJS some time thereafter. In 2024, the Head of Service for YJS will continue to raise awareness at local Health and Wellbeing Boards and be a strong advocate for improved upstream identification and support for children with SEND.

*“Karen understands C’s SEND. The team have been really understanding and flexible around C’s appointments and Karen worked hard to earn his trust. She was approachable and down to earth, and I appreciate the work she is doing with my son”
(Caregiver).*

The alarming racial disparities in the youth justice system nationally are not replicated in Cheshire. Figure 16 and Table 2 below show the most current data available (offences committed in the year ending March 2023 and drawing from 2021 census data). Comparing the youth offending population with Cheshire’s 10-17-year-old population as a whole reveals white children are very slightly overrepresented and ethnic minority groups slightly underrepresented.

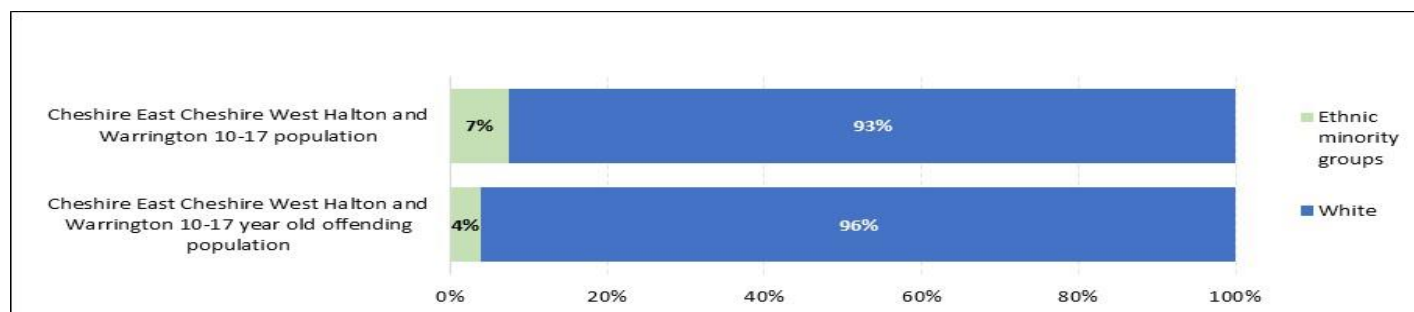


Figure 16. Ethnic minority groups vs white in the 10-17 population and offending population in Cheshire

Table 2. Ethnic minority groups vs white in the 10-17 population in Cheshire East, Cheshire West, Halton and Warrington

Ethnic group	2022/23 Offending Population	Share of total (¹)	2021 Census 10-17 pop'n by ethnic group	Share of total % (²)	% Point Difference	Overrepresented, offending pop'n >10 & statistically significant
Asian	1	0%	2,563	3%	-2%	No
Black	2	1%	561	1%	0%	No
Mixed	6	3%	3,603	4%	-1%	No
Other	0	0%	796	1%	-1%	No
Ethnic minority groups ⁽³⁾	9	4%	7,523	7%	-3%	No
White	218	96%	93,563	93%	3%	Yes

***“Jess and Kevin were
respectful of our
culture (travellers)
and that matters”
(Caregiver)***

One potential area of ‘invisible over-representation’ in Cheshire that YJS has raised with partners at the CJB’s Disproportionality Sub-group, relates to children (or adults) from GRT communities. Anecdotal (and student) research suggests children from these communities are sometimes recorded on police and other criminal justice databases as White British, White Irish or White European.

There is a GRT self-identity classification, but some individuals choose not to identify themselves because of a cultural mistrust of authorities. Therefore, CJS data on arrest, detention, and sentencing in respect of GRT children may not be accurate. The cultural competence of staff is the key aspect here and Cheshire YJS do have an in-service GRT ‘champion’ who is well linked with specialist advocacy and support services. We will ensure our data is as accurate as possible by hearing from the child about their identity.

11.2 Policing

The Chief Superintendent with the portfolio of protecting vulnerable people, sits on the Management Board and all four Children's Safeguarding Partnerships. This valuable connectivity provides useful constructive challenge and support, for example, renewed focus on detention of children overnight in police custody (Section 11.8). Cheshire Constabulary delivered on the recommendations made by HMIP to place fully seconded police officers into YJS and the three officers in Cheshire work well as part of the multi-disciplinary teams. They have participated in both police and YJS-led training and have improved both the flow and response to intelligence in respect of harm to or from children.

The National Police Chief's Council guidance on the role of police officers within youth justice was recently updated⁷ and YJS and Cheshire Constabulary will be reviewing the job descriptions of seconded officers to strengthen focus on victims and prevention and diversion activity. The level of police resources dedicated to (or aligned with) Cheshire YJS will be explored

so the partnership can collectively meet our joint responsibilities for diversion and out of court disposals.

Cheshire Constabulary continue to invest in their Complex-Youths scheme which has dedicated officers delivering targeted prevention and support work with children on the cusp of the justice system. This is a voluntary scheme closely aligned to place-based contextual safeguarding partnership arrangements, with children at risk of criminal exploitation often identified for support. YJS officers and place-based youth officers routinely share intelligence to help safeguard children and disrupt criminal groups.

11.3 Prevention

Unlike many single local authority youth justice teams, YJS is not part of a wider adolescent and family support service providing a broader prevention offer. The funding and delivery model spanning four authorities means we are more of a purist youth justice service that only works with children *after* they have been arrested for an offence. Prevention and targeted youth support forms part of each local authority's early help offer with some sub-regional services commissioned by Cheshire OPCC. YJS will seek to align our diversionary work to continue to divert **away from** formal criminal sanctions when it is safe and appropriate to do so and **into prevention** projects entirely outside the justice

⁷ [NPCC Guidance on Role of Police Officer in Youth Justice Services](#)

system . The principles of avoiding ‘net widening’ and the unintended consequences of ‘labelling’ or entrenching a criminal self-identity for a child are critically important and are evidenced principles underpinning this strategy and continue to apply across Cheshire.

11.4 Diversion

The Head of Service for YJS holds the national portfolio on Diversion for the Association of YOT Managers (AYM) and engages with ministers, national charities and think tanks such as Criminal Justice Innovation in roundtables on best diversionary practice. Cheshire will continue an evidence-based approach to diversion that avoids criminalising children for behaviors symptomatic of trauma, abuse, and unmet need. This not only provides better outcomes and improved prospects for children but because children diverted away from receiving formal sanctions are less likely to re-offend, it also results in fewer victims.

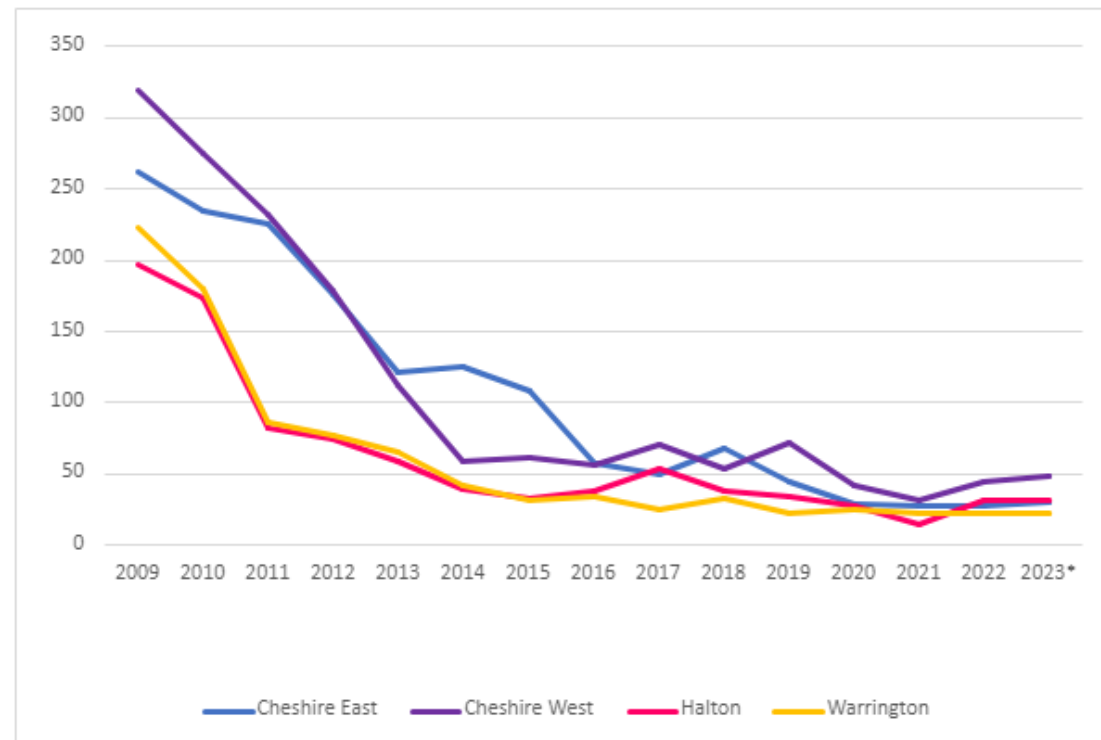


Figure 17. Trends in FTEs in Cheshire by local authority 2009-2023

Figure 17 shows significant reductions in FTEs since the incremental introduction of Divert across Cheshire. The current operating model began in Halton and Warrington in 2010, was introduced into Cheshire West in 2013 and Cheshire East in 2015. FTE numbers have remained low and stable below regional and national averages since 2016 when Cheshire

became a pan-Cheshire shared service, covering the entire policing footprint. This contrasts with many of our geographical and statistical 'Neighbours' that have begun to see an increase in FTEs in recent years.

The helpful 3-year grant investment from the MOJ (Turnaround Programme) will end in March 2025. This investment enabled YJS to get a little further upstream while also enabling us to support children and caregivers who needed longer or more intensive support. We will ensure individual children have transition plans in place where continued support beyond the end of the Turnaround programme is necessary. We will also work with the OPCC as part of the serious violence duty to ensure the new Voluntary and Community Sector providers (Remedi and Queensberry Alternative Provision) are targeting help and support to the right children, in the right ways, at the right time.

11.5 Education

Our HNA chimes with national research in showing a correlation between educational exclusion and subsequent entry to the CJS. Children who get excluded from school tend to be children who have experienced childhood trauma. There is a concerning trajectory (nationally not just in Cheshire) of early childhood exposure to violence and SEND being camouflaged as conduct issues leading to educational exclusion (for some children). Then a sub-set of these excluded children go on to use illicit drugs to self-medicate their trauma and criminal exploitation and criminality follows.

Audits and learning reviews across Cheshire also show the powerful protective effect education can have on children who have suffered childhood trauma. Positive self-identity and belonging are critical to helping children achieve desistance from offending, and the significant role education and training providers play in reducing risk through promoting pro-social identity cannot be overstated. Inclusive, trauma-informed-values-led-educational establishments not only manage risk well within their own environment, but also contribute hugely to reducing risk of harm in their communities.

Most children receiving YJS support are beyond school age, so the emphasis is more on helping them into post-16 training or employment, with flexible and bespoke support offers being most suitable for those children who have typically experienced considerable educational disruption. YJS has dedicated Education, Training and Employment (ETE) specialists for each of the four local authority areas to support children directly or indirectly by brokering tailored support in partnership with the respective local offer. As an inclusive-employment lead for post-16, the educational representative on the Board is a good advocate for justice-involved children and provides both challenge and support to managers in the service.

For a partnership that covers four local authorities, with over 100 high schools and post-16 colleges - the majority of which are academies - YJS and even Directors of Children's Services have limited influence on admissions or exclusions. Promoting inclusion and supporting trauma-informed practice in educational settings is something Children's Trusts have pushed and YJS will continue to advocate for the needs of children. The Head of Service will continue to provide data to inform local joint strategic need analyses and deliver presentations to forums of educational leaders. The KPI data in Appendix A1, shows the percentages of children who are in suitable education or training placements at the end of their intervention with YJS.

11.6 Restorative approaches and victims

Cheshire YJS will continue to work with victims and will deliver the full range of restorative support:

- **Restorative Justice Conferencing** – a structured meeting between the victim and the child
- **Direct Reparation** – repairing any damage caused by the child
- **Shuttle Mediation** – similar to the conferencing model but where both parties do not meet but have someone as the go-between
- **Letter of Apology/explanation** – child is supported to write to the victim
- **Indirect reparation** – work done within the community on placements.

*“Mark ensured my son's issues were heard and a structure was put in place to ensure his safety”
(Caregiver of Victim)*

In 2023-2024, the YJS contacted and offered the above range of restorative approaches to 201 victims of youth crime. Assault is the most frequent offence type committed by children, but a quarter of all offences in 2023-2024 had no direct victim (e.g. drug and knife possession).

Sixteen direct restorative justice conferences between children and victims took place in 2023-2024. These meetings can be incredibly powerful and are handled sensitively by skilled professionals. We will continue to facilitate restorative meetings between children and their victims when it is appropriate to do so.

Cheshire YJS have a range of community partnership projects enabling children to contribute in practical ways to repair harm and develop a sense of pro-social identity. The photographs in Figure 18 show how a victim who did not want to

meet the children who assaulted him, asked if they could do something to improve the local park. This community reparation was arranged in partnership with the 'Friends of Winsford Town Park' community group.

Reviewing victim processes and ensuring the support offer from Cheshire YJS is in line with the new Victims and Prisoners Act is a priority for 2024-2025.



Figure 18. An example of where the victim suggested reparation by improving the local park

11.7 Serious violence, exploitation, and contextual safeguarding

This plan draws from and is closely aligned with the Cheshire SVS, which covers a 5-year period from 2024-2029, with annual reviews to reflect on progress against planned outcomes and update delivery plans against emerging trends.

YJS contributed data and insights to the production of a Strategic Needs Analysis (SNA), to inform the SVS and the Head of Service is a core member of the SV Duty Leadership Group. Cheshire has relatively low levels of SV so does not have the infrastructure of a Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). Lifting an approach from a large metropolitan city would be unlikely to deliver the same successes here so we have had to think differently about our approach. The SNA highlighted Domestic Abuse and Youth Intervention as two clear priority areas for reducing SV in Cheshire and revealed the extent to which SV affects children and young people. Amongst all forms of SV explored, children under 18 appear prominent amongst the victim and offender cohorts for possession of weapon offences and knife crime incidents.

Understandably, public concern about SV increases when people witness or experience it themselves – or when tragic events such as the murder of Brianna Ghey bring considerable media attention to it. Fear of knife crime and serious youth violence are also amplified by social media, with children being exposed to violent content that can distort their perceptions of safety in public spaces. Table 3 below shows in 2023, 28 serious violent offences were committed in Cheshire by children (convicted by the courts). This is a decrease of 19 from 2022 and the rate of serious youth violence (per 10,000 children) was only 2.7 for Cheshire in 2023 (less than 2022 and below both regional and national averages).

Table 3. Serious violence offences committed by children in Cheshire compared regionally and nationally

	Year ending December 2023							
	2020		2021		2022		2023	
	Number of SV offences	Rate of SV offences	Number of SV offences	Rate of SV offences	Number of SV offences	Rate of SV offences	Number of SV offences	Rate of SV offences
YJS region								
Cheshire East, Cheshire West, Halton and Warrington	58	5.9	32	3.2	47	4.5	28	2.7
North West	409	6.0	291	4.1	302	4.2	341	4.7
East Midlands	220	4.9	207	4.6	193	4.2	194	4.1
Eastern	327	5.5	348	5.8	316	5.2	369	6.0
London	1,143	13.8	1,030	12.4	868	10.4	859	10.5
North East	65	2.7	32	1.3	88	3.6	114	4.6
South East	366	4.5	307	3.8	283	3.6	321	4.1
South West	151	3.0	102	2.0	143	2.8	170	3.3
Wales	73	2.6	60	2.1	64	2.2	94	3.2
West Midlands	451	7.8	315	5.4	386	6.5	352	5.8
Yorkshire	259	5.0	250	4.8	263	5.0	255	4.9
England and Wales	3,464	6.3	2,942	3.9	2,906	5.2	3,069	5.5

The data in Figure 19 relates to numbers of arrests for knife crime across Cheshire. It confirms that while the number of children arrested for carrying or using knives increased slightly in 2022, it reduced in 2023 and have remained at broadly low levels for the last 5 years. Apart from two profoundly serious events with tragic outcomes, Cheshire has not seen the significant and sustained increase in knife crime experienced elsewhere in the country.



Volumes of youth knife crime have dropped in the current financial year, following a brief peak in 2022/23

Figure 19. Overall trend of knives and bladed items 2019-March 2024
Chart reproduced with permission from Cheshire Constabulary

The comprehensive needs analysis that informed the Cheshire SVS showed 73% of youth justice children had convictions for violent offences, but also revealed a similar proportion of these children had themselves experienced violent victimisation *prior* to the onset of their own offending. Violence breeds violence and needs to be 'treated' in a similar way to transmittable diseases, which is why the Cheshire SVS has adopted a public health approach.

Contextual safeguarding partnerships are established at place and the YJS is an integral partner of these arrangements in all four areas. Good partnership and intelligence sharing with police (including cross border with Merseyside in particular, which is the major 'exporter' of county lines into Cheshire) ensures the National Referral Mechanism is applied appropriately. There have been several cross-force-operational examples of sensitively managed police investigations to tackle organised crime and protect Cheshire children, who have been exploited to supply drugs for high tier Merseyside OCGs.

YJS managers will continue to contribute to the design and delivery of multi-agency, contextual safeguarding training at place, particularly in relation to child criminal exploitation. Specialist independent experts in county-lines such as St Giles Trust via the joint Cheshire and Merseyside consortium training group have been commissioned. YJS also participates in safeguarding audits, rapid reviews, and independently chaired learning reviews when necessary.

11.8 Detention in police custody

Figure 20 shows the numbers of children detained overnight are extremely low and equates to fewer than five children per month across the three custody suites. This is typically fewer than 4% of children arrested by Cheshire police each month.

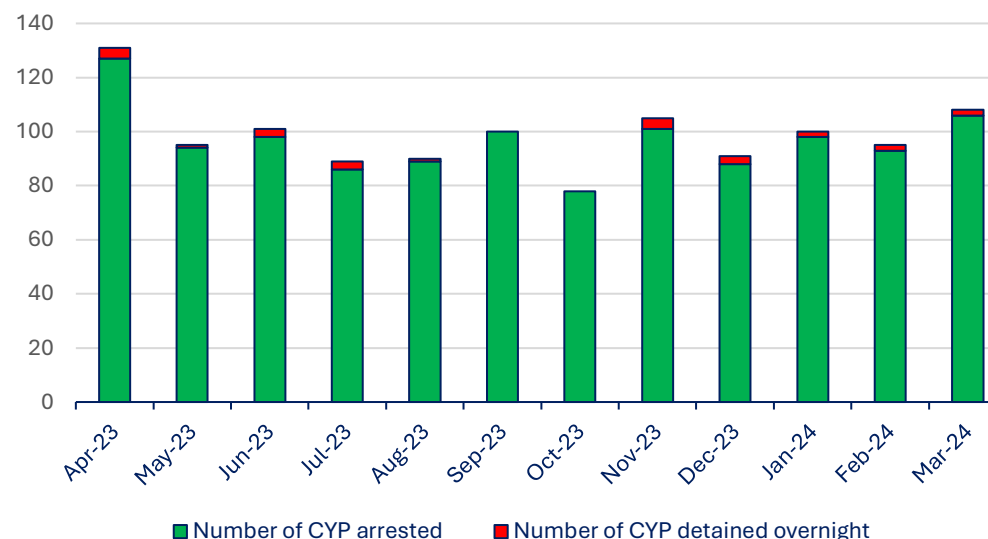


Figure 20. Numbers of children detained overnight in Cheshire compared to number of arrests from April 2023-March 2024

The low and unpredictable demand on local authorities for emergency Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) beds means they have not always been available when required, so occasionally children are detained in police custody as a last resort. Overnight detentions in custody will continue to be a standing agenda item for scrutiny at the YJS Management Board and as a partnership, we are taking decisive action. From 2024, Directors of Children's Services will receive a notification every time a child from their area is detained overnight due to an alternative PACE bed not being available. The police representative on the YJS Management Board is also the senior accountable officer for police on all four children's safeguarding partnerships and has formally raised the paucity of PACE beds at executive partnership Boards. Cheshire and Merseyside Commissioners will be exploring shared PACE beds as part of the Commissioning Workstreams for both Fostering and Residential as there is a lack of sufficiency in both areas. Consideration is being given to Residential and other Safe Spaces, but Foster Care is the preferred option. Whilst numbers of children detained

are low for each individual local authority, collectively a solution could be viable. This workstream is led by a commissioning manager in St Helens Council on behalf of the Cheshire and Merseyside local authority Directors of Children's Services.

11.9 Remands

There were only seven children in total across Cheshire remanded to Youth Detention Accommodation in 2023-2024 (Figure 21). All remands were for serious offences where a community alternative to remand was not viable. Four of the seven remanded were charged with murder or attempted murder and the remainder for section 18 wounding with intent and possession with intent to supply class A drugs. The child remanded for drug offences had an extensive history of offending and several periods in secure welfare placements previously. He had offended while remanded into local authority care and presented a significant risk of harm to other cared for children he had 'introduced' to organised crime.

Cheshire YJS retains the confidence of the courts by ensuring children are assessed promptly for robust packages of bail support as an alternative to remand. We have a proactive partnership with local children's social care and policing regarding remands into local authority care, but, as mentioned in Section 11.8, options are constrained by the paucity of safe, suitable accommodation where risk (to victim or wider public) and the child's own complex needs can be adequately managed. Placement sufficiency for local authorities is a national issue that the Association of Directors of Children's Services and others are very vocal on because accommodation for children facing serious criminal charges is an added complexity (and cost).

Through the current national framework for remands, the MOJ provides local authorities with a small financial contribution toward the costs of remands (Table 4). The allocation is based on historical bed night data*. A consultation on the funding of remands to youth detention accommodation was published in early 2024 and Cheshire YJS responded on behalf of the partnership, highlighting Cheshire's low remand number. Table 4 shows the uncontrollable costs incurred by Cheshire local authorities (particularly for Warrington) due to CJS timescales. Local authorities have no control over length of time from initial charge through to conclusion of trial and a fundamental review and fairer funding formula for remands is required.

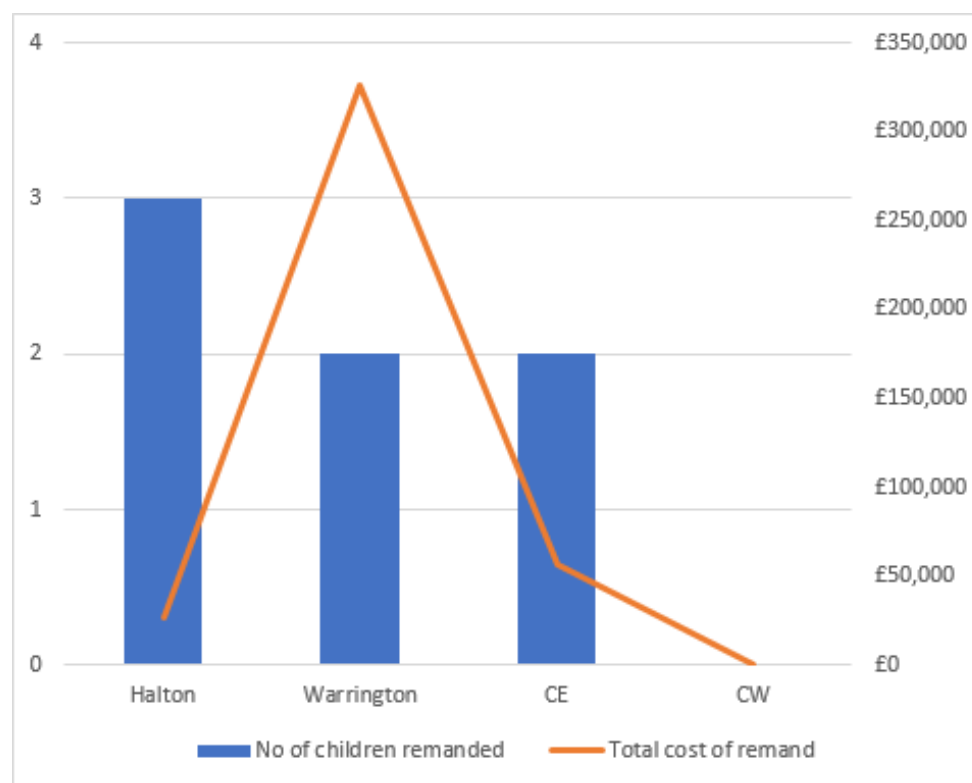


Figure 21. Number of children remanded in Cheshire 2023-2024

Table 4. Remand allocation from the MoJ for Cheshire East, Cheshire West, Halton and Warrington 2023-2024

Local Authority RIC	2023/24 Budget*	2023/24 Actual Spend	2023/24 Remaining/Deficit
Cheshire East	£107,483	£56,088	£51,395
Cheshire West	£18,859	£0	£18,859
Halton	£0	£26,896	-£26,896
Warrington	£11,740	£326,230	-£314,490
Total for YJS	£138,082	£409,214	-£271,132

Table 5 shows the number of bed nights children were remanded into local authority accommodation as a direct alternative to custody (note this is only for those children who were charged with offences that met the secure remand criteria).

The MOJ has committed to producing a national concordat relating to youth remands and is encouraging local Youth Justice partnerships to sign up to it. When the concordat is published, the Head of Service will ensure it is tabled at the YJS Management Board for consideration.

Table 5. Number of bed nights by local authority 2023/2024

Remand to local authority accommodation	2023/24 Bed Nights
Cheshire East	14
Cheshire West	0
Halton	122
Warrington	0
Total Cheshire wide for YJS	136

11.10 Use of custody and constructive resettlement

The number of children in Cheshire who receive a custodial sentence is low, with typically fewer than 10 children across the whole of the county serving custodial sentences at any one time. Use of custody is rightly reserved for those children who have committed serious crimes, usually for serious violent or sexual offences.

Table 6 shows in 2023-2024, custodial sentences were imposed on nine children from Cheshire ranging from four months to 23 years. The 23-year sentence being imposed on the 16-year-old Warrington child sentenced for murder.

All children released from custody before reaching 18 have individual resettlement plans in line with the principles of constructive resettlement. The low number in Cheshire means we do not have a specialist resettlement team but our children do benefit from the continuity of multi-disciplinary support (YJS worker plus health and education professionals) that follows them from court, through their time in custody and after release.

Table 6. Number and duration of custodial sentences imposed on Cheshire children in 2023-2024

Local Authority	Young Offenders Institute	Detention Training Order	Section 250	Section 259
Cheshire East	0	4 Months	27 Months (2yrs 3m) 50 Months (4yrs 2m)	0
Cheshire West	30 Months (2yrs 6m)	0	40 Months (3yrs 3m)	0
Halton	0	8 Months 12 Months	0	0
Warrington	0	0	54 Months (4yrs 6m)	276 Months (23 yrs)
Total for YJS	30 Months (2yrs 6m) (1 child)	24 Months (3 children)	171 Months (14yrs 3m) (4 children)	276 Months (23 yrs) (1 child)

11.11 Working with families



Frontline practitioners are encouraged to adopt a whole family approach in their work. Where relevant and appropriate, practitioners work collaboratively with Early Help, Social Care and other locality-based services to ensure that caregivers have access to help and support where this is needed.

As a service, we are committed to promoting this approach within practice and will be reviewing opportunities to strengthen this area over the coming years.

Caregivers are also a key strand in our work to develop participation.

To have such a breakthrough is really empowering and showcases the benefits of joint working with the family!!
(Social Worker)

"I didn't know what to expect. I felt like we was going to be judged because of what's happened. But that's not what they've been about. Everybody has been fantastic. What's been a really awful experience personally for us, the help and support that's there and things that they've done has been amazing"
(Parent)

Sign off, submission and approval		
Helen Brackenbury Chair of YJS Board Director of Children's Social Care Cheshire West and Chester Council		27 June 2024
Tom Dooks YJS Head of Service		27 June 2024

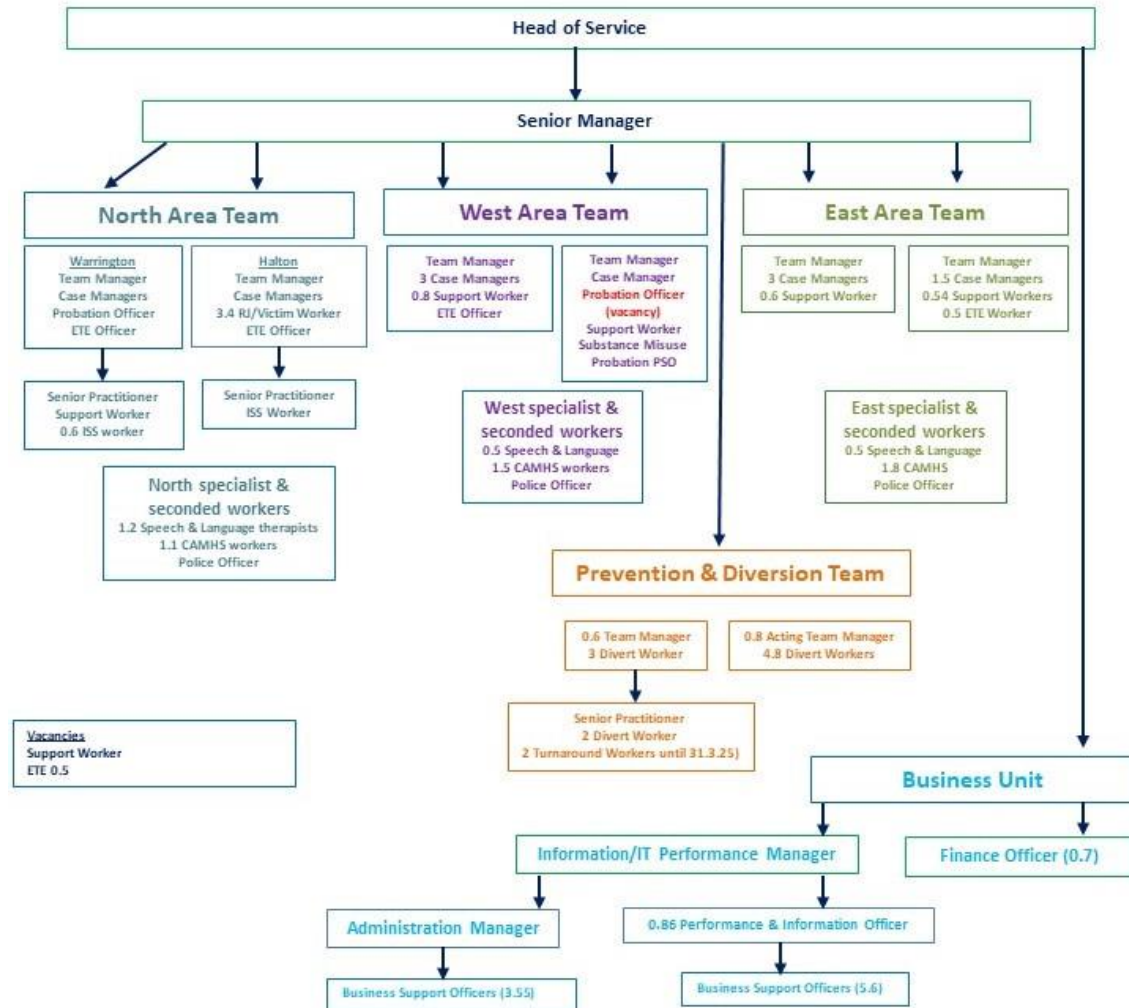
Appendices

Appendix A1: Key Performance Indicators (YJB data)

KPI	Explanation	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
KPI 1 – Accommodation	% of children in the community and being released from custody with suitable accommodation arrangements	100% (48/48)	100% (66/66)	98.9% (93/94)	100% (87/87)
KPI 2 – Education, Training & Employment	% of children in the community and being released from custody attending a suitable ETE arrangement	81.3% (39/48)	75.8% (50/66)	84% (79/74)	68.6% (67/87)
KPI 3 – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities /Additional Learning Needs	% of children who have an identified SEND need (or Additional Learning Need in Wales), are in suitable ETE and have a formal learning plan in place for the current academic year	100% (8/8)	90% (9/10)	92.9% (13/14)	78.6% (13/14)
KPI 4 – Mental healthcare and emotional wellbeing	% of children in the community and being released from custody with a screened OR identified need for an intervention to improve mental health or emotional wellbeing; and of that the % of planned/offered interventions; of that % of children attending interventions.	81.2% (36/48) Screened 55.5% (20/36) Offered 65% (13/20) Attended	51.5% (34/60) Screened 67.6% (23/34) Offered 78.2% (18/23) Attended	48.9% (46/94) Screened 65.2% (30/46) Offered 70% (21/30) Attended	67.8% (59/87) Screened 72.8% (43/59) Offered 93% (40/43) Attended
KPI 5 – Substance misuse	% of children with a screened OR identified need for specialist treatment/intervention to address substance misuse; and of that the % of children with planned or offered intervention/treatment; and of that the % number of children attending intervention/treatment.	16.6% (8/48) Screened 87.5% (7/8) Offered 100% (7/7) Attended	27.2% (18/66) Screened 77.7% (14/18) Offered 85.7% (12/14) Attended	43.1% (14/94) Screened 71.4% (10/14) Offered 100% (10/10) Attended	22.9% (20/87) Screened 75% (15/20) Offered 100% (15/15) Attended

KPI	Explanation	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
KPI 6 – Out of Court Disposals (OOCs)	% of OOC disposal interventions that are completed/not completed.	91.7% (11/12)	90.6% (29/32)	98.2% (56/57)	95.8% (46/48)
KPI 7 – Management board attendance	Monitoring senior partner representation at management boards and monitoring if partners contribute data from their individual services that identify areas of racial and ethnic disproportionality.	5/5	2/5	3/5	5/5
KPI 8 – Wider services	% children who are currently on either an Early Help (EH) plan; on a child protection (CP) plan or classified as Child in need (CIN) or a looked after child (LAC).	31.3% (15/48)	57.6% (38/66)	48.9% (46/94)	50.6% (44/87)
KPI 9 – Serious youth violence	Proportion of children convicted for SYV on the YOT Children.	3.4% (7/206)	7.8% (16/205)	6% (11/182)	4.4% (8/181)
KPI 10 – Victims	Number of victims who consent to be contact by the YOT, and of those, the number of victims: engaged with about Restorative Justice opportunities; asked their view prior to OOC decision-making and planning for statutory court orders; provided information about the progress of the child's case (when requested) and provided with information on appropriate services that support victims (when requested).	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC

Appendix A2. YJS Organisational Structure



Appendix B1: YJS Budget, Costs and Contributions

Agency	Staffing Costs	Payments in kind	Other delegated funds	Total
Youth Justice Board			*1,248,480	1,248,480
Local Authority	49,022	697,599	*1,651,138	2,397,759
Police	184,905			184,905
Police Crime Commissioner			217,928	217,928
Probation	144,638		15,500	160,138
Health	336,689		20,594	357,283
Other			2,500	2,500
Total	715,254	697,599	3,156,140	4,568,993

* Exact contributions may be subject to change

**Appendix B2: Staffing of the YJS by contract type;
No. of full-time equivalent staff**

Type of Contract	Strategic Manager	Operational Manager	Practitioner	Admin	TOTAL
Permanent	2	6.51	37.2	11.83	57.54
Fixed-term		0.8	3.54	1	5.34
Vacant			3		3
Seconded Probation			2		2
Seconded Police			3		3
Seconded Health (Substance Misuse)			0.2		0.2
Seconded Health (Mental Health)			3.9		3.9
Seconded Health (Speech/ language)			2.4		2.4
Total	2	7.31	55.24	12.83	77.38
Disabled (self-classified)	0	0	0	0	0

Appendix B3: Staffing of the YJS by sex and ethnicity; No. of individual people

Ethnicity	Managers Strategic		Managers Operational		Practitioners		Administrative		Referral Order Panel Volunteer		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Asian											0	0
Black						1					0	1
Mixed		1						2	1		2	2
White	1		1	7	5	38		14	9	35	16	94
Any other ethnic group											0	0
Not known											0	0
Total	1	1	1	7	5	39	0	16	10	35	18	97



OPEN

Children and Families Committee

16 September 2024

First Financial Review 2024/25

Report of: Adele Taylor, Interim Director of Finance and Customer Services (s151 Officer)

Report Reference No: CF/07/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: Not applicable

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report provides the current forecast outturn for the financial year 2024/25 based on our income, expenditure and known commitments as at the end of July 2024. It also identifies actions that are being taken to address adverse variances to urgently address our financial sustainability.
- 2 The report provides the forecast outturn for all services, to provide Members with contextual information on the position for the whole Council. Members are asked to focus their scrutiny on the forecasts and supporting information relating to services within the remit of the Committee whilst understanding the overall context as a whole.
- 3 The report highlights any changes and external pressures that are impacting the Council since setting the budget in February 2024. Annex 1, Section 2 of the report highlights what the Council is forecasting to achieve as part of the 2024/25 approved budget changes per line (growth and savings).
- 4 It is clear that further actions need to be identified to bring the Council back to a position where we are living within our means, and it will be important that these actions are closely monitored, and appropriate action taken to manage our resources. This report includes information on the actions that are currently underway.
- 5 Reporting the financial forecast outturn at this stage, and in this format, supports the Council's vision to be an open Council as set out in the Cheshire East Council Plan 2024-25. In particular, the priorities for an open

and enabling organisation, ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making.

- 6 The report also requests member approval for amendments to the Council's budget in line with authorisation levels within the Constitution.

Executive Summary

- 7 The Council operates a financial cycle of planning, review, management and reporting. This report ensures that we review where we are and provides a forecast **outturn** position for the 2024/25 financial year whilst also identifying the actions that need to be taken to manage our overall resources. The information in this report also supports planning for next year's budget by identifying issues that may have medium term impacts.
- 8 The Council set its 2024/25 annual budget in February 2024. The budget was balanced, as required by statute, with planned use of reserves of £22m, plus £30m of savings to achieve in year, and included important assumptions about spending in the year. The budget is part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024 to 2028.
- 9 The First Financial Review (FR1) forecast revenue outturn is an **adverse variance of £26.5m**, (prior to application of any Exceptional Financial Support) as detailed below in **Table 1**:

Table 1 2024/25	Revised Budget	Forecast Outturn	Forecast Variance
	(NET) £m	£m	£m
Service Committee			
Adults and Health	138.0	158.7	20.7
Children and Families	91.5	98.8	7.3
Corporate Policy	41.7	41.7	0.0
Economy and Growth	28.1	25.5	(2.6)
Environment and Communities	48.4	49.1	0.6
Highways and Transport	16.0	15.5	(0.5)
Sub-Committee			
Finance Sub:			
Central Budgets	23.9	24.8	0.9
Funding	(387.6)	(387.6)	-
TOTAL	-	26.5	26.5

- 10 The FR1 forecast reserves, after agreed movements budgeted for in the 2024-28 MTFS, are currently £14.0m, being £4.5m of General Fund Reserve and £9.5m of Earmarked Reserves. The Council's level of reserves

is therefore insufficient to cover the current forecast revenue outturn for the year without further action.

- 11 This forecast does not assume use of the Exceptional Finance Support (EFS) that was requested in 2023/24 and 2024/25 that was agreed in principle, subject to a number of conditions being satisfied, including the submission of a transformation plan at the end of August 2024. It also does not assume the cost of accepting that EFS support which would impact on the cost of borrowing over the medium term.
- 12 The FR1 forecast position indicates that further urgent action to reduce the overspend, and bring spending back in line with budget, is required. Failure to do so would require the Council to use the existing conditional Exceptional Financial Support (£17.6m) which would be the only way for the S151 Officer to avoid having to issue a S114 notice to the Council.
- 13 The level of EFS support would need to be agreed and finalised with the government and the financial impact of this would need to be built into the overall financial modelling for the Council. As reported to members in June 2024 in the 'Medium Term Financial Strategy Assumptions and Reporting Cycle for 2024/25 to 2028/29' the Council faces a significant four-year funding gap, with the shortfall in 2025/26 currently estimated at £41.9m. There is a risk that pressures leading to the FR1 forecast position may increase that shortfall figure if rapid action doesn't take place to stabilise our financial position.
- 14 The FR1 forecast position for capital spending for 2024/25 indicates forecast capital expenditure of £164.5m against the MTFS budget of £215.8m. Re-profiling of Capital expenditure to future years to match scheme delivery as well as an ongoing capital review to ensure that our capital borrowing remains affordable is underway and there will be further reporting on this at FR2.
- 15 **Table 2** sets out the capital programme profiling changes:

Table 2		2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2024/28
		Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Total
		£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
Capital Programme MTFS		215,779	177,633	66,772	132,054	592,238
Funded by:						-
Borrowing		55,199	53,218	19,318	30,215	157,950
Grants and other contribution:		160,580	124,415	47,454	101,839	434,288
		215,779	177,633	66,772	132,054	592,238
Capital Programme FR1		164,545	141,232	109,679	231,837	647,293
Funded by:						
Borrowing		51,878	53,566	10,180	27,779	143,403
Grants and other contribution:		112,667	87,666	99,499	204,058	503,890
		164,545	141,232	109,679	231,837	647,293
Movement from MTFS		(51,234)	(36,401)	42,907	99,783	55,055

- 16 **Table 3** sets out the summary revised capital programme:

Table 3	MTFS	C/Fwd	SCEs	Virements	Budget	Revised
	Budget	from	in Quarter	in Quarter	Reductions	FR1
	2024/28	2023/24	2024/25	2024/25	2024/25	Budget
	£m		£m	£m	£m	2024/28
						£m
Adults and Health	0.8					0.8
Children and Families	86.8	1.9	21.6	(1.4)		108.9
Highways & Transport	270.2	8.1	9.8		(1.1)	287.0
Economy & Growth	175.6	9.9	1.3	2.1	(4.2)	184.7
Environment &	39.4	2.2	0.4	0.1	(0.1)	42.0
Corporate Policy	19.4	4.4				23.8
	592.2	26.5	33.1	0.8	(5.4)	647.2

- 17 As part of the urgent actions required to reduce the overspend a full review of the capital programme is being undertaken. The forecast borrowing that is included in the capital programme will have the following revenue impact:

Table 4	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2024-28
	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Total
	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
Forecast borrowing to fund capital programme	51,878	53,566	10,180	27,779	143,403
MRP	-	3,916	5,392	6,854	16,162
Interest	2,610	3,796	3,469	4,302	14,177
Total annual revenue impact	2,610	7,712	8,861	11,156	30,339

- 18 In order to alleviate the revenue pressure from external borrowing an immediate reduction in capital spend is required. This will reduce the related revenue impact of interest costs and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) both of which are charged to revenue through the Capital Financing Budget (CFB). The council must aim to optimise use of all other available sources to fund our capital programme and must minimise the use of borrowing to reduce the pressures on the revenue budget. Identification of any additional capital receipts that can be realised in year would also reduce revenue pressures from borrowing in year or could be used to assist with funding of transformation activity if a capitalisation direction could be agreed to use them in that way with Central Government.
- 19 Due to the long-term nature of capital investment the revenue implications of decisions taken by the council now will extend well beyond the term of the current year and into the medium term.
- 20 In the review of the capital programme the long-term capital repayment commitments (MRP) will be the initial area of focus. Reducing the annual MRP associated with any new borrowing on a scheme-by-scheme basis will be a priority. There will be a secondary impact of reducing forecast interest which will also reduce the effect on the revenue account, but it is the reduction in new borrowing and new commitment to long term capital

repayments that will allow the programme to remain affordable and sustainable.

- 21 Reductions in borrowing can be achieved through:
 - (a) Reduce, delay or remove schemes funded by borrowing;
 - (b) Focus on exiting contractual commitments, fulfilling statutory services and public safety requirements;
 - (c) Prioritise the capital projects that will have most beneficial impact on the revenue budget in the medium term;
 - (d) Remove forward funding;
 - (e) Reprioritise use of grants and apply appropriate S106 contributions to schemes.
- 22 A Strategic Finance Management Board has been set up to lead on a number of key tasks to urgently reduce spend and identify additional savings, including:
 - Line by line reviews of all budgets to further identify immediately any underspends and/or additional funding;
 - Stop any non-essential spend;
 - Actively manage vacancies, particularly agency usage and reduce any overspends on staffing as soon as possible;
 - Review of Section 106 legacy budgets;
 - Review of capital receipts available and potentially surplus assets that can be sold (for best consideration);
 - Identification of any other areas of discretionary spend including grants awarded, where spend can be reduced or stopped.
- 23 In addition, any directorate that is identified as being off target by more than 5% is now subject to a detailed finance and performance review on a weekly basis through a financial recovery review process. This includes a detailed action plan, identifying what can be done to sustainably reduce the pressure and gaining assurance over the management of those actions to deliver improved financial outturns. This process has been put in place for Adults Services and Children and Families and is being chaired by the S151 Officer.
- 24 Paragraphs 58-60 below provides a summary overview of the forecast against the approved 2024/25 budget change items, including RAG rating. In addition, there is further detail per change item with accompanying commentary, as reviewed by the Council's Corporate Leadership Team, in respect of each item within **Annex 1, Section 2**.
- 25 **Annex 1: Detailed First Financial Review 2024/25**
 - **Section 1** 2024/25 Forecast Outturn
 - **Section 2** 2024/25 Approved Budget Change Items
 - **Section 3** Revenue Grants for approval

- **Section 4 Capital**
- **Section 5 Reserves**

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee to:

1. Review the factors leading to a forecast adverse Net Revenue financial pressure of:

Council: £26.5m against a revised budget of £387.6m (6.8%)

Children and Families: £7.3m against a revised budget of £91.5m (8.0%)

To scrutinise the contents of **Annex 1, Section 2** relevant to services within the committee's remit, and review progress on the delivery of the MTFS approved budget policy change items, the RAG ratings and latest forecasts, and to understand the actions to be taken to address any adverse variances from the approved budget.

2. Consider the in-year forecast capital spending of:

Council: £164.5m against an approved MTFS budget of £215.8m

Children and Families: £37.9m against an approved MTFS budget of £38.9m

due to slippage that has been re-profiled into future years.

3. Note the available reserves position as per **Annex 1, Section 5**.
4. Note the Capital Virements above £500,000 up to and including £5,000,000 as per **Annex 1, Section 4, Table 3** will be approved in accordance with the Council's Constitution.
5. Note that Council will be asked to approve Supplementary Revenue Estimate Requests for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding over £1,000,000 as per **Annex 1, Section 3, Table 1**.

Background

- 26 This single view of the financial picture of the Council provides the overall financial context.
- 27 The management structure of the Council is organised into four directorates: Adults, Health and Integration; Children's Services; Place; and Corporate Services. The Council's reporting structure provides forecasts of a potential year-end outturn within each directorate during the year, as well as highlighting activity carried out in support of each outcome contained within

the Corporate Plan. Budget holders are responsible for ensuring they manage their resources in line with the objectives of the Council and within the approved budget.

- 28 For the purposes of each committee, these directorate budgets are aligned to a specific committee and the appendices to this report provides information at a level that the committee should have the ability to be able to scrutinise what is causing any variations in budget and appropriate actions to bring the council back into line in terms of managing its resources.

Key issues causing the pressures

- 29 There are a number of key issues causing the forecast revenue overspend, including:
- Ongoing adverse effects of the extended period of high inflation and interest rates;
 - Continued increasing demand and complexity of care beyond the levels that had been previously identified;
 - Increase in staff costs, including use of agency staff and impact of National Living Wage which also impacts on our third party commissioned contracts;
 - Increased borrowing costs associated with the unfunded Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit;
 - Non delivery of some previously agreed savings and/or income targets;
 - The financial impact of investment in transformation and improvement activity over the medium term.

Specific commentary on the forecast outturn position by Committee

Adults and Health adverse variance of £20.7m

- 30 The Adults, Health and Integration budget is forecast to overspend by £20.8m. This is in part a consequence of the full year impact of activity levels identified in the 2023/24 year-end outturn. The department started 2024/25 with a higher level of commitment than originally planned for when the MTFS was set in February 2024, and therefore unfunded. An additional £7m of in-year savings would be required to off-set one-off funding received in 2023/24 that will not be received in 2024/25.
- 31 The key drivers of forecast expenditure remain price increases, staff costs and increase in complexity, however, at the beginning of this year we have seen an unusual increase in the number of former self-funders seeking local authority funding to meet the ongoing cost of their care.
- 32 As set out in the 2024/25 to 2027/28 MTFS, the forecast anticipates several serious and significant risks, including pressure on prices due to unfunded increases in the National Living Wage. The department is currently in negotiations with a number of providers who are seeking above inflation increases. The department has recently acquired a negotiation tool to

ensure full cost and price transparency which will be used before agreeing increases, to ensure greater fairness and consistency.

- 33 As in previous years, increases in discharge activity in the NHS continues to drive additional price and activity in adult social care. A reduction of over 50 acute beds across the local NHS trusts is intensifying the impact on adult social care. A review by specialist consultants, commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Care is attempting to analyse the impact.
- 34 The department is undertaking significant work to address the budget pressures. This includes:
- The financial impact of changes agreed to the charging policy for this financial year;
 - Reviewing our pricing strategy;
 - Reviewing our use of agency members of staff;
 - Whole system review of supported living operations to reduce the number of under-utilised placements;
 - Considering transformation options that may be able to be delivered earlier;
 - Reviewing use of technology to support service delivery.

Children and Families adverse variance of £7.3m

- 35 At the end of the last financial year the outturn for Children and Families was an overspend of £8.2m. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy included growth to address the pressures that were emerging throughout 2023/24. The costs of children's social care are a concern for many local authorities and not unique to Cheshire East. The First Financial Review for 2024/25 reflects a £7.3m in-year pressure.
- 36 The key pressure areas for the directorate include:
- 37 Children's social care agency placements where the complexity of children in care has continued to increase and also the number of children in care has increased from 528 at April 2024 to 534 at June 2024 (compared to a decrease from 586 at April 2023 to 576 at June 2023). Placement costs are increasing by significantly more than inflation and more than was projected for growth in-year. This has in part been affected by the disproportionate number of asylum seeking children in Cheshire East.
- 38 The use and cost of agency staff in children's social care to cover vacancies, sick absence, and maternity leave.
- 39 The number of staff is greater than the planned establishment to ensure we are able to meet our statutory needs.
- 40 Home to school transport costs – where a mix of increasing numbers of pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHCP), driver shortages and increasing fuel costs have seen overall costs rise.

- 41 Schools Catering – where the costs of the service are above the current charged income level and base budget.
- 42 Work is underway in the services to look at mitigating actions which can be taken to reduce this forecast position in-year, and these pressures will be considered as part of the developing MTFS for 2025/26. These include:
- Reviewing costs of placements as more detailed reviews are underway focusing on the expected length that some placements may need to be in place for
 - Staffing establishment reviews now scheduled on a 6 weekly basis including a review of agency staff and alternative working
 - Reunification children to be identified with targeted work in place for individual cases
 - Tracking of similar spend across teams to be held in the same place as residential and supported accommodation spend to increase overall grip and understanding
 - Work on Edge of Care Service proposals to identify early intervention that may reduce admissions and costs

Dedicated School Grant (DSG)

- 43 The key pressure on DSG relates to the high needs block where the SEND service continues to see a significant increase in the number of pupils with an EHCPs, and the associated school placement costs.
- 44 This has placed pressure on the grant used to provide funding for children with SEND in various settings and led to a £31.7m deficit in 2023/24. This adds on to the brought forward deficit of £46.9m to take the DSG Reserve to a £78.6m deficit position at the end of 2023/24.
- 45 This is an improvement on the budget gap as determined by the Council's DSG Management Plan that was reported to Children and Families Committee in April 2024 and set out the planned expenditure and income on high needs over the medium term.

Corporate Policy £23,000 overspend

- 46 The Corporate Services Directorate has a net budget of £41.7m. At First Financial Review, the budget is forecast to overspend by £23,000.
- 47 However, it must be noted that, following a recent review of staffing establishments, there are pending staffing budgets realignments to be actioned which will change individual service forecasts but not the overall figure for Corporate Services.
- 48 Vacancy management in Corporate Services has resulted in the majority of services forecasting underspends on staffing budgets totalling just over £2m.

- 49 This has been combined with tighter control on non-pay spending across all services which is achieving a forecast underspend of £0.7m, and additional income of £0.2m is forecast in the Registrations Service.
- 50 However, these underspends have been offset by:
- a forecast £1.3m under-recovery of Rent Allowances;
 - a forecast overspend of £0.4m on the Transactional Service Centre (TSC), hosted by Cheshire West and Chester, mainly due to the additional costs of the stabilisation programme;
 - a £0.5m shortfall in charging staff time to capital projects within ICT Strategy;
 - and a £0.1m overspend in ICT Shared Service due to lower than budgeted project income and schools recharge income.
- 51 There is a forecast overspend of £0.5m in Revenues and Benefits, and Accountancy due to additional costs including Bank Charges and External Audit fees, and a staffing budget pressure of £0.1m across Corporate Services relating to the estimated impact of the latest pay award offer versus the amount included in the MTFS.

Place Directorate favourable variance of £2.5m

- 52 Overall, the Place Directorate is reporting an underspend of £2.5m at the first Financial Review against a £92.6m budget. Pressures from reducing planning application income (£0.5m), increased waste collection and disposal costs (£0.7m) and yet to be secured savings against leisure (£0.2m) have been mitigated through vacancy management, reducing expenditure and maximising funding opportunities.

Economy & Growth favourable variance of £2.6m

- 53 Growth and Enterprise Directorate and Place Directorate have an underspend of £2.6m against a net budget of £28.1m, the key reasons for the underspend are:
- Facilities Management: £1.7m underspend is forecast. This reflects pressures against maintenance budgets of £0.7m (additional pressures and delivery of savings), costs of workplace initiatives and equipment of £0.3m, the transfer of underspends to offset Place MTFS targets across the Directorate £0.6m have been offset by:
 - Savings against gas and electricity compared to much higher budgeted costs £3m.
 - Business rates underspend £0.1m due to revaluations and appeals.
 - Underspends from vacancy management £0.2m.
 - Economic Development: £0.4m forecast underspend from vacancy management, reduced expenditure on supplies and increased income.

- Assets Service: £0.1m underspend from managing vacancies offset by lower property income.
- Housing: £0.2m underspend from vacancy management.

Environment & Communities adverse variance of £0.6m

54 Environment and Neighbourhood Services has an overspend of £0.6m against a net budget of £48.4m. The key reasons for the overspend are:

- Development Management: £0.6m overspend is forecast reflecting pressures from a shortfall in income from planning applications £0.5m plus one-off costs of the new planning system £0.1m. These pressures are offset by vacancy management savings of £0.1m.
- Environmental - Commissioning ANSA: £0.4m overspend comprising pressures of £0.3m relating to the estimated impact of the latest pay award, Ansa Contract pressures of £0.5m (includes £0.1m Emergency HWRC Closures, £0.2m Place Saving Target (MTFS 2023/24), £0.2m waste collection crew costs) and £0.2m Recycling contract pressure. Ansa mitigations £0.1m and additional use of ASDV Reserve £0.5m are offsetting these pressures.
- Libraries: £0.2m overspend. Pressures of £0.5m delivery of MTFS savings offset by £0.2m vacancy management and £0.1m underspend relating to MTFS growth for exploring a charitable trust model.
- Leisure Commissioning: £0.2m overspend relating to delivery of MTFS savings.
- Other service issues: £0.8m net underspend.
 - Building Control: £0.2m building control income pressure offset by £0.3m from vacancy management savings.
 - Local Land Charges and Planning Support: £0.2m underspend from vacancy management savings.
 - Strategic Planning: £0.3m underspend reflecting £0.1m vacancy management plus £0.2m delayed Local Plan costs.
 - Environmental Management Services: £0.1m underspend (capital financing costs offset by Green waste income).
 - Regulatory Services: £0.1m (£0.2m vacancies offset by £0.1m CCTV costs).

Highways & Transport favourable variance of £0.5m

55 Highways & Infrastructure are reporting an underspend of £0.5m against a net budget of £16m. The key reasons for the underspend are:

- Car Parking: £0.4m underspend: through vacancy management £0.1m and increased income £0.3m.

- Strategic Transport: £0.1m underspend from vacancy management.

Finance Sub adverse variance of £0.9m

- 56 Finance Sub Committee are reporting an adverse variance of £0.9m against a net budget of £23.853m.
- Financing & Investment £0.4m net pressure reflecting £1.6m increased cost of interest payments on borrowing offset by £0.9m increased interest receipts from investments.
 - Reserves use (change from MTFS) reflects £0.5m additional Flexible Capital Receipts to offset by £1m reduction in available Capital Financing Reserve at outturn compared to forecast balance reflected in the February 2024 MTFS.

Overall mitigations planned to manage pressures

- 57 A Strategic Finance Management Board has been set up to lead on a number of key tasks to urgently reduce spend and identify additional savings as noted in paragraphs 22-23 above.

Progress on delivery of the 2024/25 approved budget change items

- 58 Table 5 presents a summary of the progress on the delivery of the 2024/25 approved budget change items. For items rated as Amber these are for items where there are risks and/or mitigating actions in place. For items rated as red these are for items where services are projecting an adverse variance and there is risk of in year non delivery/achievement. New mitigation items have also been included that have come forward since the approval of the MTFS to help the in year position where identified.
- 59 As the green and blue columns show, £10.2m of the budget change items are either delivered or on track to be delivered or even exceed in some cases. However, there is also a pressure of £41.4m as shown in the red column that has a high risk of not being achieved within this financial year. There are new in year mitigations of £7.5m, unrelated to the change item rows that has been identified to assist the outturn position. The table below summarises the progress by Committee:

Table 5: Summary of the progress on the delivery of the 2024/25 approved budget change items

Committee	Approved Change Budget £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000	Completed £'000	Could Exceed £'000	Green £'000	Amber £'000	Red £'000	Mitigations £'000
Adults & Health	1,136	21,853	-3,223	0	-6,430	0	34,601	-3,095
Children & Families	9,909	17,238	482	0	14,002	295	915	1,543
Corporate Policy	489	512	-507	0	250	-232	1,581	-580
Economy & Growth	3,316	728	-92	0	3,896	33	690	-3,799
Environment & Communities	-52	623	1,130	-1,480	-3,754	2,456	3,310	-1,039
Finance Sub	-19,667	-18,748	600	0	-19,348	0	0	0
Highways & Transport	4,869	4,393	2,638	0	1,647	245	351	-488
TOTAL	-	26,599	1,028	-1,480	-9,737	2,798	41,448	-7,458

- 60 A complete list of all approved budget change items, with progress noted against each item, can be found in **Annex 1, Section 2**.

Revenue Grants for Approval

- 61 Approvals for Supplementary Revenue Estimates for allocation of additional grant funding are detailed in **Annex 1, Section 3**.

Reserves Position

- 62 On 1 April 2024, Earmarked Reserves totalled £32.278m and the General Fund Reserve Balance totalled £5.580m. Of the total earmarked reserves, more than £22m (70.46%) will be spent in 2024/25, on supporting the revenue budget for 2024/25.
- 63 Table 6 and 7 shows the forecast level of Earmarked and General reserves by the end of 2024/25.

Table 6: Earmarked Reserves

Earmarked Reserves	Opening Balance 1 April 2024 £000	General Fund Transfers £000	Forecast Reserve Movement in year £000	Additional Drawdown Requests* £000	Forecast Closing Balance 31 March 2025 £000
Adults and Health Committee	5,226	(2,795)	(90)	0	2,341
Children and Families Committee	1,724	0	(1,593)	(131)	0
Corporate Policy Committee	20,773	(6,551)	(2,680)	(4,695)	6,847
Economy and Growth Committee	2,777	(662)	(1,004)	(765)	346
Environment and Communities Committee	870	(390)	(402)	(78)	0
Highways and Transport Committee	908	(205)	(415)	(288)	0
EARMARKED RESERVES	32,278	(10,603)	(6,184)	(5,957)	9,534
TOTAL MOVEMENT					

*** All 'Additional Drawdown Requests' are still subject to review and are yet to be approved.**

**** Totals excludes Schools' balances**

Table 7: General Reserves

General Reserves	Opening Balance 1 April 2024 £000	General Fund Transfers £000	Forecast Reserve Movement £000	Additional Drawdown Requests £000	Forecast Closing Balance 31 March 2025 £000
General Fund Reserve	5,580	(1,051)	0	0	4,529
GENERAL FUND RESERVE	5,580	(1,051)	0	0	4,529
TOTAL MOVEMENT					

64 The Council is currently forecast to have £9.534m of earmarked reserves at the end of the financial year 2024/25. Of this £2.279m can be considered ringfenced, with specific conditions limiting their use.

65 A full list of all earmarked reserves can be found in **Annex 1, Section 5**.

Dedicated Schools Grant Reserve

66 The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is ring-fenced funding received for: schools; high needs / special educational needs; and early years provision. In recent years there has been a pressure on the DSG high needs block where funding has not kept pace with the increasing numbers and cost of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan. This has created a deficit DSG reserve balance which is held in an unusable reserve.

- 67 The on-going pressure is regularly reviewed; at the end of 2023/24 the deficit was £78.6m and this is forecast to increase by £43.0m by the end of 2024/25. This is an improvement on the Council's DSG Management Plan approved in April 2024, which sets out the planned expenditure and income on high needs over the medium term. The DSG Management Plan is currently being updated and will be reported to Committee on completion.

Table 8	
Dedicated Schools Grant Deficit	
	£m
Deficit Balance Brought forward	78.6
Additional In-year Pressures	43.0
Deficit Balance at 31st March 2025	121.6

Debt

- 68 Sundry debt includes all invoiced income due to the Council except for statutory taxes (Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates). The balance of outstanding debt at 31 July 2024 has increased by £0.375m since 2023/24 Outturn (end of March 2024).
- 69 Annually, the Council raises invoices with a total value of over £80m. Around a quarter of the Council's overall sundry debt portfolio relates to charges for Adult Social Care, the remainder being spread across a range of functions including Highways, Property Services, Licensing and Building Control.
- 70 The Revenue Recovery team (using their experience gained in collecting Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates) engage with services to offer advice and assistance in all aspects of debt management, including facilitating access to debt collection/enforcement agent services (currently provided by Bristow & Sutor).
- 71 After allowing for debt still within the payment terms, the amount of outstanding service debt at the end of July 2024 was £17.3m.
- 72 The total amount of service debt over six months old is £10.5m; provision of £6.8m was made at year ended 31st March 2024 to cover doubtful debt in the event that it needs to be written off.
- 73 The level of Adult Social Care debt can fluctuate depending on when in the month the snapshot is taken, for example if it is before or after the Direct Debit income is received and allocated. The debt also has different levels of risk depending on the type of debt. For example, around £3.5m is linked to deferred arrangements which is debt that is secured on property or assets, and therefore carries a low risk. There is also around £5m of debt which is deemed to be lower risk as its linked to areas such as probate, property sales or deputyship.

Table 9 – Debt Summary as at 31st July 2024

	Outstanding Debt £000			Over 6 months old £000		
	Outturn	FR1	Increase / (Decrease)	Outturn	FR1	Increase / (Decrease)
Adults and Health Committee						
Adults, Public Health and Communities*	13,691	14,534	843	8,556	9,091	535
Children and Families Committee						
Children's Social Care (Incl. Directorate)	219	182	(37)	-	14	14
Prevention and Early Help	141	72	(69)	(5)	(4)	1
Schools	24	22	(2)	(1)	2	3
Highways and Transport Committee						
Highways and Infrastructure	1,598	1,189	(409)	678	751	73
Economy and Growth Committee						
Growth and Enterprise	581	704	123	328	393	65
Environment and Communities Committee						
Environment and Neighbourhood Services	384	355	(29)	189	209	20
Corporate Policy Committee						
Finance and Customer Services	111	109	(2)	73	73	-
Governance and Compliance	20	37	17	1	-	(1)
Human Resources	3	8	5	-	1	1
ICT	184	119	(65)	1	1	-
Total	16,956	17,331	375	9,820	10,530	711

Council Tax and Business Rates

Council Tax

- 74 **Table 10** details each precepting authorities share of the budgeted collectable rates income.

Table 10	Band D	Collectable
Share of Council Tax Collectable Rates	Charge	Rates
		£m
Cheshire East Council	1,792.59	287.1
Town and Parish Councils	71.57	11.5
Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner	262.94	42.1
Cheshire Fire Authority	90.09	14.4
Total	2,217.19	355.1

- 75 The collectable rates valuation is based on the assumption that of the total amount billed, at least 99% will be collected. **Table 11** demonstrates that, excluding a slight reduction during the Covid-19 pandemic, the target to collect at least 99% of Council Tax within three years continues to be achieved.

Table 11	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Council Tax Collection Rates	%	%	%	%	%
After 1 year	97.4	97.8	98.2	98.0	*28.43
After 2 years	98.6	98.5	98.8	**	**
After 3 years	98.9	99.0	**	**	**

OFFICIAL

* 2024/25 rate is up to 30th June 2024.

** Data is not yet available.

- 76 After accounting adjustments, the Council Tax Collection Fund is forecasting a £0.9m deficit for 2024/25, of which, £0.8m is attributable to Cheshire East Council. This deficit will be repayable in 2025/26 and will be managed through the Collection Fund Earmarked Reserve.

Non-Domestic Rates (NDR)

- 77 Collectable rates are distributed between Cheshire East Council (49%), Cheshire Fire Authority (1%), and Central Government (50%).
- 78 Non-domestic Rates valuations for 2024/25 were set out in the NNDR1 return to Central Government in January 2024. Any variance to this forecast is included in the following years' NNDR1 return and any gain or loss will be recovered in 2025/26. The total Net Rates Payable into the Collection Fund was forecast at £155.7m.
- 79 **Table 12** demonstrates that the target to collect at least 99% of Non-Domestic Rates within three years continues to be achieved.

Table 12 Non-Domestic Collection Rates	2020/21 %	2021/22 %	2022/23 %	2023/24 %	2024/25 %
After 1 year	92.4	95.6	98.2	97.7	*29.19
After 2 years	97.4	98.3	98.8	**	**
After 3 years	99.0	99.2	**	**	**

* 2024/25 rate is up to 30th June 2024.

** Data is not yet available.

- 80 After accounting adjustments, the Non-Domestic Rates Collection Fund is forecasting a £3.8m deficit for 2024/25, of which, £1.9m is attributable to Cheshire East Council. This deficit will be repayable in 2025/26 and will be managed through the Collection Fund Earmarked Reserve.

Treasury Management Strategy update

- 81 Treasury Management income to 31 July 2024 is £895,000 which is higher than the budgeted £620,000. However, borrowing costs are also higher than budgeted at £6m compared to budget of £5.3m. This is caused by a combination of increasing interest rates with an increased borrowing requirement. From the projected cash flows for the remainder of 2024/25 the net additional financing costs (borrowing less investment interest) is expected to be £0.7m in excess of that budgeted.
- 82 Interest rates have seen substantial rises over the last 2 years which has significantly increased the cost of borrowing. The expectation is that borrowing costs will start to fall later in 2024/25 and beyond.

- 83 At the moment, cash shortfalls are generally being met by temporary borrowing from other Local Authorities which for a number of years has been considerably cheaper than other sources of borrowing and allowed the Council to keep financing costs low. The cost of these loans is currently relatively high compared with longer term loans, but interest forecasts suggest it is still the cheaper option in the long term. However, liquidity risk remains an issue as funds become more scarce towards year end and the request to the Government for exceptional financial support has raised credit worthiness concerns with some lenders. To reduce liquidity risk and any potential credit related penalisation on interest costs, consideration is being given to taking more longer term PWLB loans.
- 84 The cost of short term borrowing for the first 4 months of 2024/25 is 5.54% which is an increase from 4.82% for 2023/24. These costs are now expected to reduce as the outlook is for reducing interest rates.

Investment Strategy

- 85 There have not been any material changes to the Investment Strategy since that reported at Final Outturn 2023/24, see link [Final Outturn 2023-24 Annex 1.pdf \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](#)

Consultation and Engagement

- 86 As part of the budget setting process the Pre-Budget Consultation provided an opportunity for interested parties to review and comment on the Council's Budget proposals. The budget proposals described in the consultation document were Council wide proposals and that consultation was invited on the broad budget proposals. Where the implications of individual proposals were much wider for individuals affected by each proposal, further full and proper consultation was undertaken with people who would potentially be affected by individual budget proposals.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 87 The overall process for managing the Council's resources focuses on value for money, good governance and stewardship. The budget and policy framework sets out rules for managing the Council's financial affairs and contains the financial limits that apply in various parts of the Constitution. As part of sound financial management and to comply with the constitution any changes to the budgets agreed by Council in the MTFS require approval in line with the financial limits within the Finance Procedure Rules.
-

- 88 This report provides strong links between the Council's statutory reporting requirements and the in-year monitoring and management processes for financial and non-financial management of resources.

Other Options Considered

- 89 None. This report is important to ensure Members of the Committee are sighted on the financial pressure the Council is facing and the activity to date to try and mitigate this issue and are given an opportunity to scrutinise this activity and identify any further actions that could be taken to learn to live within our means Do nothing. Impact – Members are not updated on the financial position of the Council. Risks – Not abiding by the Constitution to provide regular reports.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 90 The Council must set the budget in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and approval of a balanced budget each year is a statutory responsibility. Sections 25 to 29 of the Local Government Act 2003 impose duties on the Council in relation to how it sets and monitors its budget and require the Council to make prudent allowance for the risk and uncertainties in its budget and regularly monitor its finances during the year. The legislation leaves discretion to the Council about the allowances to be made and action to be taken.
- 91 The provisions of section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, require that, when the Council is making the calculation of its budget requirement, it must have regard to the report of the chief finance (s.151) officer as to the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.
- 92 The Council should therefore have robust processes in place so that it can meet statutory requirements and fulfil its fiduciary duty. It must ensure that all available resources are directed towards the delivery of statutory functions, savings and efficiency plans. Local authorities are creatures of statute and are regulated through the legislative regime and whilst they have in more recent times been given a general power of competence, this must operate within that regime. Within the statutory framework there are specific obligations placed upon a local authority to support communities. These duties encompass general and specific duties and there is often significant local discretion in respect of how those services or duties are discharged. These will need to be assessed and advised on as each circumstance is considered.
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- 93 The financial position of the Council must therefore be closely monitored, and Members must satisfy themselves that sufficient mechanisms are in place to ensure both that savings are delivered and that new expenditure is contained within the available resources. Accordingly, any proposals put forward must identify the realistic measures and mechanisms to produce those savings or alternative mitigations.
- 94 This report provides an update on progress for 2024/25 for all services.
- 95 It also provides updates and comments regarding the Council's request for Exceptional Financial Support under The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 which inserted an amended Section 12A as a trigger event within the Local Government Act 2003, in relation to capital finance risk management. The legislation also provides for risk mitigation directions to be given to the Council which limit the ability to undertake certain financial action. The limitations are based on identified risk thresholds.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 96 The Council's financial resources are agreed by Council and aligned to the achievement of stated outcomes for local residents and communities. Monitoring and managing performance helps to ensure that resources are used effectively, and that business planning and financial decision making are made in the right context.
- 97 Reserve levels are agreed, by Council, in February each year and are based on a risk assessment that considers the financial challenges facing the Council. If spending associated with in-year delivery of services is not contained within original forecasts for such activity it may be necessary to vire funds from reserves.
- 98 The unplanned use of financial reserves could require the Council to deliver a greater level of future savings to replenish reserve balances and / or revise the level of risks associated with the development of the Reserves Strategy in future.
- 99 As part of the process to produce this report, senior officers review expenditure and income across all services to support the development of mitigation plans that will return the outturn to a balanced position at year-end.
- 100 Forecasts contained within this review provide important information in the process of developing the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Analysis of variances during the year will identify whether such
-

performance is likely to continue, and this enables more robust estimates to be established.

- 101 The risk associated with the scale of these challenges is that the Council could act illegally, triggering the requirement for a s.114 report from the Chief Financial Officer. Illegal behaviour in this context could materialise from two distinct sources:
- i) Spending decisions could be made that exceed the available resources of the Council. This would unbalance the budget, which is unlawful.
 - ii) Spending decisions to restrict or hide pressures could be made that avoid an immediate deficit, but in fact are based on unlawful activity.
- 102 The consequences of the Council undermining a budget with illegal activity, or planned illegal activity, is the requirement to issue a s.114 report. Under these circumstances statutory services will continue and existing contracts and commitments must be honoured. But any spending that is not essential or which can be postponed must not take place.
- 103 Further consequences would be highly likely and could include the appointment of Commissioners from the MHCLG, and potential restrictions on the decision-making powers of local leaders.

Policy

- 104 This report is a backward look at Council activities and predicts the year-end position. It supports the Corporate Plan aim Open and priority to be an open and enabling organisation.
- 105 The forecast outturn position, ongoing considerations for future years, and the impact on general reserves will be fed into the assumptions underpinning the 2025 to 2029 Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
- 106 The approval of supplementary estimates and virements are governed by the Finance Procedure Rules section of the Constitution.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 107 Any equality implications that arise from activities funded by the budgets that this report deals with will be dealt within the individual reports to Members or Officer Decision Records to which they relate.
-

Human Resources

- 108 This report is a backward look at Council activities at outturn and states the year end position. Any HR implications that arise from activities funded by the budgets that this report deals with will be dealt within the individual reports to Members or Officer Decision Records to which they relate.

Risk Management

- 109 Financial risks are assessed and reported on a regular basis, and remedial action taken if required. Risks associated with the achievement of the 2023/24 budget and the level of general reserves were factored into the 2024/25 financial scenario, budget, and reserves strategy.

Rural Communities

- 110 The report provides details of service provision across the borough.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 111 The report provides details of service provision across the borough and notes the pressure on Children in Care.

Public Health

- 112 This report is a backward look at Council activities at the first review and provides the forecast year end position. Any public health implications that arise from activities funded by the budgets that this report deals with will be dealt within the individual reports to Members or Officer Decision Records to which they relate.

Climate Change

- 113 There are no direct implications for climate change.
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Access to Information	
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Appendices:	Annex 1 including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Section 1 2024/25 Forecast Outturn• Section 2 2024/25 Approved Budget Change Items• Section 3 Revenue Grants for approval• Section 4 Capital• Section 5 Reserves
Background Papers:	The following are links to key background documents: Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024-2028

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First Financial Review 2024/25

Results to end of July 2024

Contents

Section 1: 2024/25 Forecast Outturn..... 3

Section 2: 2024/25 Approved Budget Change Items5

Section 3: Revenue Grants for approval24

Section 4: Capital27

Section 5: Reserves30

Section 1: 2024/25 Forecast Outturn

- 1.1. Table 1 provides a service summary of financial performance based on information available as at the end of July 2024. The current forecast is that services will be £25.6m over budget in the current year.
- 1.2. It also shows that central budgets are forecast to be £0.9m over budget resulting in an overall outturn of £26.5m overspend against a net revenue budget of £387.6m.
- 1.3. The overall revenue position does not include the impact of applying any Exceptional Financial Support.
- 1.4. The forecast outturn position is based on a full financial management review across all service and reflects the following assumptions:
 - Includes those savings that have been identified as non-achievable though the tracker on our High Level Business Cases (HLBC) with no/some alternative actions currently presented;
 - A review of the on-going impacts of adverse variances identified in 2023/24;
 - Any identified, emerging items of significance:
 - Within Adult Social Care, significant growth is forecast for care costs in line with position seen year to date, less mitigations linked to delivery of the Impower savings;
 - Includes the assumptions around additional revenue resources in Childrens Services to resource the draft improvement plan in relation to the recent OFSTED inspection;
 - Forecast impact of the proposed increased 2024/25 pay award £1.6m (unfunded);
 - Detailed review of any vacancy underspends in all areas;
 - One-off items that have been identified so far through line by line reviews and/or identification of additional funding that has been announced since the MTFS was set.
- 1.5. Further items impacting on the level of the Council's balances are detailed in **Section 5**.

Table 1 Service Revenue Outturn Forecasts 2024/25	Revised Budget £m	Forecast Outturn £m	Forecast Variance £m
Adult Social Care - Operations	146.1	167.8	21.7
Commissioning	(8.1)	(9.1)	(1.0)
Public Health	-	-	-
Adults and Health Committee	138.0	158.7	20.7
Directorate	1.6	2.9	1.3
Children's Social Care	56.5	61.1	4.6
Education, Strong Start & Integration	33.4	34.8	1.4
Children and Families Committee	91.5	98.8	7.3
Directorate	(0.3)	(0.4)	(0.0)
Growth & Enterprise	28.5	25.9	(2.6)
Economy and Growth Committee	28.1	25.5	(2.6)
Environment & Neighbourhood Services	48.4	49.1	0.6
Environment and Communities Committee	48.4	49.1	0.6
Highways & Infrastructure	16.0	15.5	(0.5)
Highways and Transport Committee	16.0	15.5	(0.5)
Directorate	1.4	1.2	(0.2)
Finance & Customer Services	12.1	14.1	1.9
Governance & Compliance Services	10.9	9.7	(1.2)
Communications	0.7	0.7	(0.0)
HR	2.4	2.1	(0.3)
ICT	12.2	12.0	(0.1)
Policy & Change	2.0	1.9	(0.0)
Corporate Policy Committee	41.7	41.7	0.0
TOTAL SERVICES NET EXPENDITURE	363.7	389.3	25.6
CENTRAL BUDGETS			
Capital Financing	31.7	32.0	0.4
Transfer to/(from) Earmarked Reserves	(18.3)	(17.2)	1.1
Parish Precepts & Other Operating Expenditure	11.5	11.4	(0.1)
Income from Use of Capital Receipts	(1.0)	(1.5)	(0.5)
Finance Sub-Committee - Central Budgets	23.9	24.8	0.9
TOTAL NET EXPENDITURE	387.6	414.1	26.5
FUNDING	(298.5)	(298.5)	-
Council Tax	(56.6)	(56.6)	-
Business Rates Retention Scheme	(32.4)	(32.4)	-
Unringfenced Grants			
Finance Sub-Committee - Net Funding	(387.6)	(387.6)	-
NET (SURPLUS) / DEFICIT	-	26.5	26.5

Section 2: 2024/25 Approved Budget Change Items

The following table provides up detailed commentary on the progress against the approved budget change items that were agreed as part of the budget agreed in February 2024. These are split by relevant committee.

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets	2024/25 MTFS £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
	Adults and Health Committee	+1.136	+21.853	+20.717	
1	Fees and Charges	-1.800	-1.800	0	Green
2	Client Contributions Increase	-0.800	-2.097	-1.297	Green
3	Working Age Adults - Prevent, Reduce, Delay	-1.467	-1.467	0	Green - Multiple activities contributing to these savings. Validation of delivery and measures being developed by SROs and Finance.
4	Older People – Prevent, Reduce, Delay	-1.566	-1.566	0	Green - Multiple activities contributing to these savings. Validation of delivery and measures being developed by SROs and Finance.
5	Market Sustainability and Workforce grant	-1.100	-1.100	0	Completed
6	Revenue grants for Adult Social Care	-2.480	-2.480	0	Completed
7	Pension Costs Adjustment	-0.493	-0.493	0	Completed
8	Investment in Adult Social Care	+7.600	+32.497	+24.897	Red – MTFS growth for Care Costs not sufficient to cover the pressure seen in 2023/24 plus the expected growth in 2024/25. Mitigations to reduce pressure reported separately.
9	Pay Inflation	+1.892	+2.104	+0.212	Red - NJC Pay Claim process has started - over spend against budget is based on £1,290 or 2.5% increase. Compared to flat percentage budget increase of 3%
10	Resettlement Revenue Grants – reversal of 2023/24 use	+0.850*	+0.850*	0	Completed
11	Adult Social Care Transformation Earmarked Reserve Release – reversal of 2023/24 use	+0.500*	+0.500*	0	Green

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets	2024/25 MTFS £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
12	Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care – Removal of Grant Income	-	-	-	Green
13	Asset Management	TBC	TBC	-	Green - It is expected that the NHS will confirm their intentions for usage of one of the key CEC sites in question by September 2024. Once this is received, the business case for future usage of the site will be revisited and taken through the appropriate CEC governance procedures. The model of care in relation to high-cost adult social care and health provisions will be part of this work.
14	Investigate potential agency creation	TBC	TBC	-	Green - This proposal has been consistently delivered in relation to the usage of a Care Workers agency in all but name. Care4CE, the Council's in house care provider, has been utilising workers, both casual and agency, as a bank of workers for several years to successfully deliver operational requirements. The establishment of a CEC.
In year	Other variances to reconcile to 2024/25 FR1 forecast	0	+4.612	+4.612	
In year	Mitigations reducing the FR1 reported forecast position	0	-7.707	-7.707	

* Item represented a one-off spend in 2023/24. As it is not a permanent part of the budget, the value of the proposal is reversed in 2024/25.

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets (some of the budget change items have been separated out since the publication of the MTFS)	2024/25 MTFS £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
	Children and Families Committee	+9.909	+17.238	+7.329	
15	Discretionary offer to children with disabilities	-0.900	-0.901	-0.001	Green - On track, project team progressing multiple improvements to redesign the service offer, ensuring consistency and efficiency.
16	Remove school catering subsidy	-0.516	+0.027	+0.543	Red - In progress, rate uplift to be applied in September 2024 in order to cover the costs of the service through to the end of March 2025 when it ends.
17	Review of structure to further integrate children and families services	-1.000	-0.167	+0.833	Red - Delivery Planning in progress to address saving. Including: further Establishment review, service redesign, cross directorate risk management.
18	Reduce discretionary Post-16 Travel Support	-0.400	-0.250	+0.150	Red - Agreed by Committee so progressing, too early to confirm take-up.
19	Achieve the Family Hub model	-0.250	-0.250	0	Green - Committee approved permission to consult. Following the consultation period, a report will go back to Committee in November for a decision to move forward with the new model. Savings are not going to be delivered in year therefore alternative saving being found to cover this.
20a	Other Service Reviews – Review of commissioned services across the C&F directorate. Review of the current Domestic Abuse Service	-0.100	-0.132	-0.032	Completed.
20b	Other Service Reviews – Maximise grant allocation to cover all costs	-0.100	0	+0.100	Red - Plan to explore current / future grants to ensure where T&Cs allow, contribution to fund base costs (e.g. staffing and on costs) is maximised.
20c	Other Service Reviews – Traded services	-0.050	+0.017	+0.067	Red - Part delivered but may need to look for alternative options to cover the remaining saving for this year.
21a	Reduce Growth in expenditure – review of high cost, low outcome external residential placements	-1.000	-1.000	0	Red - Whilst work has been happening to open CE Children's Homes and our first open is now open, with our second due imminently and our collaboration with foster 4 working well to increase our foster carers, we still are seeing more children coming into care, with a steady increase. There is also increasing instability with the residential market, driving up prices. Complex young people need high packages of support, which are extremely expensive. We are due to review all high cost placements and weekly on-going Triple S (Stability, Step up and Step Down) meetings are happening to review placement outcomes and costs.

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets (some of the budget change items have been separated out since the publication of the MTFS)	2024/25 MTFS £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
21b	Reduce Growth in expenditure – increase commissioning approach to establish greater opportunities to provide accommodation for +16 young people	-0.400	-0.400	0	Amber - 16+ and 18+ Commissioning Plans / Market Shaping in Progress. Responding to increasing demand and complexity.
21c	Reduce Growth in expenditure – Foster Care	-0.250	-0.250	0	Amber - Developing a Delivery Plan to increase Foster Care provision.
21d	Reduce Growth in expenditure – reduced spend on expert assessment in court proceedings and services post public law proceedings	-0.250	-0.250	0	Amber - Establishing a Task & Finish Group to explore and develop processes and capacity to reduce costly legal proceedings.
22	Pension Costs Adjustment	-0.515	-0.451	+0.064	Red. CEC pension reduction completed. Teacher's pension legacy costs are not reducing as anticipated.
23	Growth to deliver statutory Youth Justice service, and growth to ensure budget is sufficient to meet Safeguarding Partnership duties	+0.170	+0.200	+0.030	Red.
24	Growth to provide capacity to deliver transformation for SEND	+0.500	+0.500	0	Green.
25	Wraparound Childcare Programme (funded)	+0.587	+0.587	0	Amber - Currently reviewing sufficiency and funding details to manage delivery within budget.
25	Wraparound Childcare Programme (funded)	-0.587	-0.587	0	Amber - Currently reviewing sufficiency and funding details to manage delivery within budget.
26	Legal Proceeding - Child Protection	+0.770	+0.532	-0.238	Amber.
27	Growth in School Transport budget	+0.936	+1.286	+0.350	Red.
28	Pay Inflation	+1.374	+1.915	+0.541	Red - NJC Pay Claim process has started - over spend against budget is based on £1,290 or 2.5% increase. Compared to flat percentage budget increase of 3%

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets (some of the budget change items have been separated out since the publication of the MTFS)	2024/25 MTFS £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
29	Use of Children & Families Transformation Reserve – reversal of 2023/24 use	+1.065*	+1.065*	0	Completed.
30	Growth in Childrens Placement costs	+10.825	+14.203	+3.378	Red - Will need to be closely monitored throughout the year to ensure that funding is sufficient to meet demand and complexity.
31	Revenue costs for the Crewe Youth Zone (as above) aligned to Supporting Families Funding	-	-	-	Amber.
31	Early Help budget to support funding towards the Crewe Youth Zone	-	-	-	Amber.
32	SEND Capital Modification	TBC	TBC	-	Amber - Contingent upon wider asset management and associated timelines. Extensive work underway to plan and progress development opportunities. Captured as part of the Capital Program reported to Committee.
33	Childrens Social Work Bank	TBC	TBC	-	Red - Various options currently being explored as part of wider C&F Establishment review and potential peripatetic resource options.
34	Safe Walking Routes to School	TBC	TBC	-	Green - Features as part of School Transport Programme.
35	Withdrawal of the CEC School Meals Service	TBC	TBC	-	Green - Features as part of School Catering subsidy project - CF2428-16.
In year	In-year emerging variance Education, Strong Start and Integration	0	-0.500	-0.500	Green. Underspend relates to vacancy management, reduced spend and income generation across services.
In year	In-year emerging variance Children and Families Directorate	0	+0.427	+0.427	Red. Overspend relates to supplier compensation payment, external Quality Assurance Agency costs and cost of establishment.
In year	In-Year emerging variance Children's Social Care	0	+1.616	+1.616	Red. Overspend mainly relates to staffing costs.

* Item represented a one-off spend in 2023/24. As it is not a permanent part of the budget, the value of the proposal is reversed in 2024/25.

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets (some of the budget change items have been separated out since the publication of the MTFS)	2024/25 MTFS £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
	Corporate Policy Committee	+0.489	+0.512	+0.023	
36	Reduce leadership and management costs	-0.540	-0.190	+0.350	Red - The feedback from the DMA review is that senior management vacancies will require recruitment to in order to complete the complement of Corporate Managers. In year vacancy savings will continue but will be time limited. There is potential to increase costs by additional management support during transformation. This will result in increased budget pressure. This pressure is being mitigated through the four in-year items at the end of this table. Most of those will be permanent and used to deliver this saving. Presentation will be reviewed for FR2.
37	Close the Emergency Assistance Scheme	-0.220	-0.220	0	Completed
38	Reduce election costs and increase charges where possible	-0.150	-0.150	0	Green - The proposal is to make a payment during 2024/25 of £70k-£80k from the existing election account, as part of this one-off saving. The remainder will be delivered by reducing the sum which would normally be paid into the election reserve. This might be mitigated in the year of the next local elections by monies which will be raised by charging town and parish councils for their elections in 2027. However, this will not be sufficient and will be likely to lead to the need for a supplementary estimate.
39a	Accelerate Digital Transformation (ICT Operational efficiencies)	-0.100	-0.100	0	Green – third party costs have been reduced and there are plans to reduce further during the year.
39b	Accelerate Digital (Digital efficiencies)	-0.150	-0.150	0	Green – Removal of temporary budget for Solutions Architect Resource, now covered by an Earmarked Reserve.
40	Enforce prompt debt recovery and increase charges for costs	-0.150	-0.150	0	Completed - The award of costs is a matter for the Magistrates at each court hearing. However, only by exception will they vary from the level already agreed by us with the Court Manager. The approach to the Court Manager has been made and the revised level agreed. The action is therefore complete, but the financial benefits will accrue as we continue the regular recovery process during the year.
41a	Other efficiencies and reductions across Corporate Services – School Subsidy (ICT)	-0.032	-0.032	0	Green

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets (some of the budget change items have been separated out since the publication of the MTFS)	2024/25 MTFS £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
41b	Other efficiencies and reductions across Corporate Services – Organisational Development	-0.100	-0.100	0	Completed
41c	Other efficiencies and reductions across Corporate Services – Registration Services	-0.050	-0.050	0	Green
41d	Other efficiencies and reductions across Corporate Services – School Subsidy	-0.018	0	+0.018	Amber - Part of the £50k School Subsidy saving - Finance team to assist in identifying options. These are listed at the end of the table.
41e	Other efficiencies and reductions across Corporate Services	-0.010	0	+0.010	Amber - Finance team to assist in identifying options. These are listed at the end of the table.
41f	Other efficiencies and reductions across Corporate Services – Printing	-0.050	-0.010	+0.040	Amber - Finance team to assist in identifying options. These are listed at the end of the table.
41g	Other efficiencies and reductions across Corporate Services – Hybrid working / mileage	-0.050	0	+0.050	Amber – Options being considered regarding reduced travel spend including ensuring efficient planning around meeting attendance and minimising unnecessary movements across the area. This maximises efficient use of time as well for teams.
42	Pension Costs Adjustment	-0.378	-0.378	0	Completed
43	Mitigation of reduction in the Dedicated Schools Grant	+0.136	+0.136	0	Completed
44	Pay Inflation	+1.446	+1.581	+0.135	Red - NJC Pay Claim process has started - over spend against budget is based on £1,290 or 2.5% increase. Compared to flat percentage budget increase of 3%. Mitigations are listed at the end of the table. Presentation will be reviewed for FR2.
45	Legal Services Capacity	+0.455	+0.455	0	Completed
46	ICT Review 1	+0.450	+0.450	0	Green
47	Workforce Strategy Review	TBC	-	-	Amber - There are no savings attributed to this area in 2024/2025. Opportunities to explore workforce options are being considered alongside transformation

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets (some of the budget change items have been separated out since the publication of the MTFS)	2024/25 MTFS £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
					work. Any savings are likely to be realised in 2025/26 at the earliest. It is recommended that this item is removed from the list.
48	Parish Compacts – it is recommended that this item is removed.	TBC	-	-	Red - An extension of parish compacts would provide a budget for every parish council. This has been assessed but is considered unaffordable to progress this year. Presentation will be reviewed for FR2.
In year	Recognising the increased level of Registration service income of £350k.	0	-0.350	-0.350	This will be a permanent change to deliver the Red ranked items above.
In year	Recognising the receipt of £45k of Police and Crime Commissioner grant income.	0	-0.045	-0.045	This will be a permanent change to deliver the Red / Amber ranked items above.
In year	Taking the underspend on phones in corporate services (mobiles and rental) compared to budget.	0	-0.060	-0.060	This will be a permanent change to deliver the Red / Amber ranked items above.
In year	Additional mitigations to balance to FR1 position of +£23k for corporate incl ICT.	0	-0.125	-0.125	These will be a mix of permanent and temporary items to assist the in-year position.

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets	2024/25 MTFS £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
	Economy and Growth Committee	+3.316	+0.728	-2.588	
49	Service Restructures within Place based Services	-0.787	0	+0.787	Red – achievement through permanent savings remains challenging without a full restructure – which is pending the LGA review. This item is being mitigated by the items at the end of the table which are a mix of permanent and temporary measures. Presentation will be reviewed for FR2.
50	Reduce opening hours for main offices	-0.050	-0.050	0	Completed
51	Office estate rationalisation	-0.550	-0.250	+0.300	Red - due to the timeline for the transfer of buildings being extended. This item is being mitigated by the items at the end of the table which are a mix of permanent and temporary measures. Presentation will be reviewed for FR2.
52	Tatton Park	-0.046	-0.046	0	Amber rating reflects the fact that the Tatton Vision capital programme is currently under review.
53	Transfer of Congleton Visitor Information Centre	-0.020	-0.020	0	Green - Transfer of Congleton VIC to the Town Council has already occurred.
54	Pension costs adjustment	-0.157	-0.157	0	Completed
55	Tatton Park ticketing and electronic point of sale (EPOS) upgrade	+0.005	+0.005	0	Green - A procurement process is currently underway to source a supplier who can ensure onsite and web-based delivery of a new system which aligns with present and future needs.
56c	West Park collection	+0.012	+0.012	0	Green - Cost for vital conservation and storage of West Park Museum collections and ongoing temporary storage requirements.
56d	CEC archives	+0.008	0	-0.008	Amber - Timescales for implementation of the Archives capital project have slipped due to grant funding decisions, with revised opening date of Spring 2026.
57	Property Information and Management System - Estates – Revenue Adjustment	+0.030	+0.030	0	Green - Procurement of new contract to commence shortly.
58	Housing	+0.035	+0.035	0	Green - Consultation on the Housing Restructure commences 22nd May and includes the post that the funding is attributed to. The new structure will be implemented by 1st August 2024
59	Environmental Hub Waste Transfer Station	+0.040	+0.040	0	Green - Project on track delivery Q1/2. The replacement of bay 1 in the Councils Environmental Hub Residual Waste Transfer Station building with a new design

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets	2024/25 MTFS £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
					more likely to provide long-term resilience to wear and tear, to enable the continuation of waste processing at the transfer station.
60	Rural and Visitor Economy	+0.045	+0.045	0	Green - Additional revenue support is required to cover the increase in electricity charges for the Rural and Culture Economy Service to maintain existing service provision at Tatton Park and Countryside sites.
61	Minimum energy efficiency standards (MEES) - Estates - Revenue Adjustment	+0.079	+0.079	0	Amber – Prioritised negotiations with 3rd parties/tenants occupying premises being expedited to avoid delays on obtaining access for surveys, completing necessary improvement works and legally completing lease renewals.
62	Public Rights of Way Income Realignment	+0.115	+0.115	0	Completed. Adjustments made to budget forecasts 2024-25
63	Pay inflation	+0.788	+0.940	+0.152	Red - NJC Pay Claim process has started - over spend against budget is based on £1,290 or 2.5% increase. Compared to flat percentage budget increase of 3%. This item is being mitigated by the items at the end of the table which are a mix of permanent and temporary measures. Presentation will be reviewed for FR2.
64	Crewe town centre maintenance and operation	+0.650	+0.630	-0.020	Green
65	Assets - Buildings and Operational	+3.119	+3.119	0	Green
66	Landfill Site Assessments revenue adjustment - Estates – CE Owned Landfill sites (53 sites) Review and Risk Assessment completions	-	-	-	Amber - £10k cost growth in for 25/26. Second stage of the review to commence shortly. Internal capacity within Environmental Service to be identified.
67	Tatton Park Estate Dwellings Refurbishment	-	-	-	Completed - Provision for response maintenance issues for 8 onsite dwellings to ensure properties meet standards required as part of tenancy agreements and the National Trust lease.
68	Improving Crewe Rented Housing Standards	-	-	-	Green
In year	Growth & Enterprise 2024/25 mitigations to balance back to finance review position	0	-2.984	-2.984	

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets	2024/25 MTFS £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
In year	Place Directorate 2024/25 mitigations to balance back to finance review position	0	-0.815	-0.815	

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets	2024/25 MTFS £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
	Environment and Communities Committee	-0.052	+0.558	+0.610	
69	Refresh wholly owned company overheads and contributions	-1.000	-1.500	-0.500	Green - ASDV Review recommendations have now been approved in full by Finance Sub-Committee in their role as shareholder of the wholly owned companies. The process of insourcing these services is now underway which will release an element of their reserves in year to meet this one-off contribution.
70	Strategic Leisure Review (Stage 2)	-1.305	-1.250	+0.055	Amber - Initial savings secured via committee decision on 11th March 2024. Proposals are being developed with EHL and town and parish councils to secure the residual £250k amount - dialogue is ongoing.
71	Mitigate the impact of contract inflation and tonnage growth	-0.490	-0.490	0	Completed - Mitigate the impact of contract inflation and tonnage growth.
72	Emergency reduction of Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) to four core sites	-0.263	-0.200	+0.063	Red - Full saving on basis of original HLBC will not be achieved due to introduction of mobile provision offer as a result of Full Council decision and costs associated with trial of booking system. Following implementation of temporary closures final negotiations with supply chain are nearing conclusion in relation to savings in year, which include adjustment for waste diversion. This item is being partly mitigated by the item at the end of the table which is a mix of permanent and temporary measures. Presentation will be reviewed for FR2.
73	Libraries Strategy	-0.365	-0.200	+0.165	Red - Development of and consultation on Libraries Strategy ongoing. Need to secure committee decisions to implement final Strategy (target Nov 2024) – engagement with Town and Parish Councils undertaken to shape the Strategy proposals and seek funding contributions, which is continuing. This item is being partly mitigated by the item at the end of the table which is a mix of permanent and temporary measures. Presentation will be reviewed for FR2.
74	Reduce costs of street cleansing operations	-0.200	-0.200	0	Green - Value of saving now reduced from ANSA Management Fee for 2024/25, proposals to achieve which include immediate reductions in service resilience, due to removal of any vacancies and under utilised fleet.
75	Reduce revenue impact of carbon reduction capital schemes	-0.336	0	+0.336	Red – Carbon Neutral Council target deferred from 2025 to 27, as agreed at Full Council on 27.02.24, large scale prudential borrowing funded schemes spend now reprofiled to suit, however budget not sat within E&C Committee. Discussion with Corporate Financing team to re-allocate.

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets	2024/25 MTFS £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
					This item is being partly mitigated by the item at the end of the table which is a mix of permanent and temporary measures. Presentation will be reviewed for FR2.
76	Increase Garden Waste charges to recover costs	-0.045	-0.045	0	Green – Increase Garden Waste charges for the calendar year 2025 to recover costs
77	MTFS 80 (Feb 23) – Waste Disposal – Contract Inflation and Tonnage Growth (updated forecast)	+3.577	+3.977	+0.400	Amber – Amber rating due to fluctuations in waste markets relating to recyclates and continued levels of inflation, outside CEC control and not aligned to projections. Mitigation is to continue with monthly financial monitoring and detailed update of forecasting to year end, based on market intelligence from suppliers and historical seasonal trends data.
78	Pay Inflation – CEC & ASDV	+1.861	+2.397	+0.536	Red - NJC Pay Claim process has started - over spend against budget is based on £1,290 or 2.5% increase. Compared to flat percentage budget increase of 3%. This item is being partly mitigated by the item at the end of the table which is a mix of permanent and temporary measures. Presentation will be reviewed for FR2.
79	Pension Costs Adjustment	-0.151	-0.151	0	Completed
80	MTFS 90 (Feb 23) Strategic Leisure Review	+1.250	+1.250	0	Completed - Growth item budget adjustment only - replacing 2023/24 £1.3m savings target.
81	MTFS 91 (Feb 23) – Green Spaces Maintenance Review	-0.200	-0.200	0	Green - Year 2 saving - Policy now implemented and full saving secured from ANSA contract.
82	MTFS 92 (Feb 23) - Review Waste Collection Service - Green Waste	-3.150	-3.150	0	Green - Subscription levels in line with original business model.
83	Review MTFS 92 (Feb 23) Garden waste subscription financial model in line with latest subscription levels and with actual observed position on any waste migration	-0.429	-0.429	0	Green - Continued monitoring of subscription levels and any adverse impacts is already in place, update to original business plan assumptions.
84	MTFS 93 (Feb 23) Libraries - Service Review	-0.200	-0.200	0	Amber - Year 2 of Service Review - reduction in staffing levels have been implemented and now include vacancy management in year to ensure achievement of saving. Currently covered temporarily by vacancy savings

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets	2024/25 MTFS £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
85	Explore a Trust delivery model for Libraries and other services	+0.150	+0.020	-0.130	Green - Growth item to cover one off costs relating to implementation of alternative delivery model(s) for libraries service. Aligned to development of Libraries Strategy.
86	CCTV – Service Efficiencies	-0.030	-0.030	0	Green – Ongoing actions to increase customer base for existing services, identification of new chargeable services/customers and service efficiency savings as well as increased fees and charges to meet the target.
87	Congleton Town Council Collaboration Agreement – Grounds Maintenance	-0.062	-0.062	0	Completed - Congleton Town Council Collaboration Agreement on Grounds Maintenance Cheshire East Contribution reduced in line with reductions in Cheshire East Maintained green space.
88	Closed Cemeteries	+0.005	+0.005	0	Completed - Inflationary adjustment to previous budget allocation only.
89	Environmental Hub maintenance	+0.023	+0.023	0	Completed - Inflationary adjustment to previous budget allocation only.
90	Review Closed Landfill Sites	+0.300*	+0.300*	0	Completed - The Council has responsibility for a number of closed landfill sites across the borough for which it holds a provision.
91	Land Charge Income Adjustment	+0.050	+0.064	+0.014	Amber - Uncertainty around implementation timescales of HMLR changes to centralise some aspects of land charges functions hence understanding of actual impact, to be regularly monitored.
92	Building Control Income Alignment	+0.203	+0.403	+0.200	Red - Due to current national trend of downturn in planning and related building control income. To be monitored through more regular financial forecasting in service. This item is being partly mitigated by the item at the end of the table which is a mix of permanent and temporary measures. Presentation will be reviewed for FR2.
93	Local Plan Review	+0.255	+0.255	0	Completed - Budget adjustment to provide additional one-off funding towards development of new Local Plan, now commenced.
94	Planning income	+0.400	+0.910	+0.510	Red – Forecast reduced income due to current national trend of downturn in planning applications and hence income. To be monitored through more regular financial forecasting in service. Partially mitigated by continued high level of vacancies and the item at the end of the table. Presentation will be reviewed for FR2. Recent planning reforms announced by Govt now subject to consultation process may help to alleviate the income position, but will require vacancies to be filled to cater for the likely increase in applications.

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets	2024/25 MTFS £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
95	Planning Service Restructure	-	-	-	Green - No action for 2024/25. Growth for 2025/26 to be kept under review.
96	Review of Household Waste Recycling Centres	+0.100	+0.100	0	Green - Additional one-off funding to support procurement of new contract permanent service provision of HWRCs.
In year	Environment & Neighbourhood Services mitigations 2024/25 to balance back to finance review position	0	-1.039	-1.039	

* Item represented a one-off saving in 2023/24. As it is not a permanent part of the budget, the value of the proposal is reversed in 2024/25.

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets	2024/25 MTFS £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
	Highways and Transport Committee	+4.869	+4.393	-0.476	
97	Highway maintenance savings	-0.750	-0.750	0	Green - Savings are being achieved through: - reducing the number of cuts on grass verges from 10 to 8; - directly employing staff to carry out surveys, rather than sub-contracting; - reductions in staffing and vacancy management; and - reliance on the council's adverse weather reserve for snow clearance. Service budgets have been reduced to reflect the savings being made.
98	Introduce annual increases to car parking charges	-0.150	-0.150	0	Green - Annual inflation adjustment to existing P&D tariffs can be implemented by 1st July 2024, in advance of bringing charges into effect in the "free towns". This is 3 months earlier than planned.
99	Pension Costs Adjustment	-0.052	-0.052	0	Completed
100	Highways	-0.031	-0.031	0	Completed - This saving was delivered by changes to response times to defects in 2023/24.
101	Safe Haven outside schools (Parking)	-0.023	-0.023	0	Amber - WARN procedure has been used for sole-source procurement of type-approved equipment from the supplier authority.
102	Transport and Infrastructure Strategy Team - Restructure	+0.120	+0.120	0	Green - Vacancies in existing structure provide some flexibilities of resourcing and recruitment planning.
103	Pay Inflation	+0.339	+0.351	+0.012	Red - NJC Pay Claim process has started - over spend against budget is based on £1,290 or 2.5% increase. Compared to flat percentage budget increase of 3%. This item is being mitigated by the item at the end of the table which is a mix of permanent and temporary measures. Presentation will be reviewed for FR2.
104	Parking - PDA / Back Office System contract	+0.100	+0.100	0	Green - Market testing completed - exploring a direct award opportunity with implementation testing and data migration.
105	Flood and Water Management Act 2010 SuDS & SABs Schedule 3 Implementation	+0.100	+0.100	0	Green - The requirement is to be ready to implement changes when regulations are implemented nationally. A training plan for existing staff has been identified. Recruitment is to be progressed.
106	Energy saving measures from streetlights	+0.242	+0.242	0	Completed - This entry was in the MTFS to cancel an unachievable saving from 2022-3. There is no further action.

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets	2024/25 MTFS £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
107	Parking	+0.245	+0.245	0	Amber - Following decisions in January 2024, arrangements are in place to adjust existing Pay & Display tariffs from 1st July 2024 and extend pay and display to car parks in "free towns" by October 2024. Statutory consultations on Sunday and Evening charges will start in July. A trial of demand-responsive tariffs will begin with the opening of the new multistorey car park in Crewe.
108	Highways Revenue Services	+2.479	+2.479	0	Completed - This is a growth item. The growth has been factored into 2024/25 service levels and business plans. No further action.
109	Local Bus	+2.250	+2.250	0	Green
110	FlexiLink Service Improvement Plan	-	-	-	Green - A bus service review consultation is underway, including proposals relating to flexible transport.
111	Highways Depot Improvements	-	-	-	Red - This later year saving is subject to the approval of the business case for capital investment in depots. This will be reviewed during 2024/25.
112	Bus Stop Advertising Revenue Generation	-	-	-	Amber - Opportunity to shadow CWAC council's extension of the existing contract in the interim period.
In year	Highways & Infrastructure 2024-25 mitigations to balance to finance review	0	-0.488	-0.488	

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Central Budgets	2024/25 £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
	Finance Sub-Committee	-19.667	-18.748	+0.919	
113	Capital Financing - Minimum Revenue Provision	+9.508	+9.903	+0.395	Amber – assumes use of reserve of £2.135m (not yet approved). Ongoing capital review seeking to significantly reduce spend funded by borrowing.
114	Central Bad Debt Provision adjustment	+0.600	+0.600	0	Completed - budget adjustment.
115	Use of Earmarked Reserves – MTFS Reserve	+0.255	+0.255	0	Completed - budget adjustment / planned use of reserve.
115	MTFS Reserve – reversal of 2023/24 use	+1.536	+1.536	0	Completed - budget adjustment / planned use of reserve.
116	Collection Fund Reserve - Use of Earmarked Reserves	-0.834	-0.834	0	Completed - budget adjustment / planned use of reserve.
116	Collection Fund Reserve – reversal of 2023/24 use of reserves	+2.234	+2.234	0	Completed - budget adjustment / planned use of reserve.
117	Brighter Futures Transformation – reversal of 2023/24 use of reserves	+1.271	+1.271	0	Completed - budget adjustment / planned use of reserve.
118	Use of General Reserves – Fund in-year budget shortfall [NEW]	-11.654	-11.654	0	Completed - Drawn down in line with the MTFS forecast.
Amber19	Council Tax - % increase	-13.527	-13.527	0	Green - Council tax and business rates income collection managed through the Collection Fund therefore no impact on current year funding target.
120	Council Tax – Base increase	-2.461	-2.461	0	Green - Council tax and business rates income collection managed through the Collection Fund therefore no impact on current year funding target.
121	Business Rates Retention Scheme – use of S31 compensation grants	-1.350	-1.350	0	Green - Grants to be received in line with final settlement from MHCLG.

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Central Budgets	2024/25 £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2024/25 (RAG rating and commentary)
122	Unring-fenced Grants + Revenue Support Grant	-5.245	-5.245	0	Green - Grants to be received in line with final settlement from MHCLG.
123	Council Tax and Business Rates Collection [NEW]	TBC	-	-	Initial case was to implement a working group to review council tax collection. No savings value was assigned to the case. The intention now is to bring forward via an informal briefing to include options around the council tax support scheme review (FS2428)
124	Council Tax Support [NEW]		-	-	Preparations to be made during 24-25 with a view to amending the council tax support scheme in 25-26. No value is assigned to 24-25 as any savings/growth will be realised in 25-26. Consultation dates / material to come via Finance Sub-Committee for summer launch. Final decision point will be December Council meeting 2024.
In year	Adjustment to use of Earmarked reserves budgeted figure within Service Budgets		+0.525	+0.525	

Section 3: Revenue Grants for approval

- 3.1. Cheshire East Council receives two main types of Government grants; specific purpose grants and general use grants. Specific purpose grants are held within the relevant service with a corresponding expenditure budget. Whereas general use grants are held in central budgets with a corresponding expenditure budget within the allocated service area.
- 3.2. Spending in relation to specific purpose grants must be in line with the purpose for which it is provided.
- 3.3. **Table 1** shows additional specific purpose grant allocations that have been received over £1m that **Council** will be asked to approve.
- 3.4. **Table 2** shows additional specific purpose grant allocations that have been received which are over £500,000 and up to £1m, and are for **Committee** approval.

Table 1 – Council Decision

Supplementary Revenue Estimate Requests for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding (Specific Purpose) over £1,000,000

Committee	Type of Grant	£000	Details
Children and Families – Schools	Teachers Pay Additional Grant (Specific Purpose)	1,645	This grant is from the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). In July 2023, alongside the increase for last financial year, an additional £900 million was announced in 2024 to 2025 to support schools with the 2023 teachers' pay award. The ESFA will pay the teachers' pay additional grant (TPAG) funding to local authorities for mainstream maintained schools.
Children and Families – Schools	Teachers Pension Grant (Specific Purpose)	2,393	This grant is from the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). The Teachers' Pension Employer Contribution Grant (TPECG) supports schools and local authorities with the cost of the increase in employer contributions to the teachers' pension scheme. Local authorities must follow the terms and conditions set out in the conditions of grant.
Children and Families – Children's Services	Household Support Fund (Specific Purpose)	2,200	This grant is from the Department for Work and Pensions. This is an extension to the Household Support Fund (HSF) and will cover the period from April 2024 to September 2024. The HSF is to provide crisis support to financially vulnerable households most in need.
Economy and Growth	Homelessness Prevention Grant (Specific Purpose)	1,054	<p>This grant is from the Department for Levelling-Up and Communities (DLUHC). The purpose of the grant is to provide support to local authorities in England towards expenditure lawfully incurred or to be incurred by them in supporting local authorities to discharge their homelessness duties under homelessness legislation. The grant is ring-fenced for 2023-2024 and is to be spent in adherence with the following principles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To fully enforce the Homelessness Reduction Act and contribute to ending rough sleeping by increasing activity to prevent single homelessness. 2. Reduce family temporary accommodation numbers through maximising family homelessness prevention and reduce the use of unsuitable B&Bs for families. <p>This grant is from the Home Office (HO). Available where an individual or family has settled in the borough, to provide ongoing integration support.</p>

Committee	Type of Grant	£000	Details
Highways and Transport	Bus Service Improvement Plan+ (BSIP+) Phase 2 (Specific Purpose)	1,188	This a grant from the Department for Transport DfT). This is a continuation of the Bus Service Improvement funding and allows Local Authorities to support existing bus services and/or create new services with the overall aim of ensuring long term sustainability of this provision.This is the second phase of allocations.
Highways and Transport	Bus Service Improvement Plan+ (BSIP+) Phase 3 (Specific Purpose)	2,268	This a grant from the Department for Transport DfT). This is a continuation of the Bus Service Improvement funding and allows Local Authorities to support existing bus services and/or create new services with the overall aim of ensuring long term sustainability of this provision.This is the third phase of allocations.

Table 2 – Committee Decision

Supplementary Revenue Estimate Requests for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding (Specific Purpose) over £500,000 up to £1,000,000

Committee	Type of Grant	£000	Details
Adults and Health	OHID SSMTR Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment & Recovery Grant (Specific Purpose)	525	This grant is from the Department of Health and Social Care and is additional funding for drug and alcohol treatment recovery services as part of Local Authorities' public health responsibilities.

Section 4: Capital

Table 1: Financial Parameters for 2023/24 to 2026/27

Parameter	Value (£m)			
	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Repayment of Borrowing				
Minimum Revenue Provision*	17.5	18.8	23.3	25.2
External Loan Interest	14.3	18.0	16.5	15.0
Investment Income	(3.8)	(3.8)	(2.1)	(1.8)
Contributions from Services Revenue Budgets	(1.2)	(1.3)	(2.0)	(2.7)
Total Capital Financing Costs	26.8	31.7	35.7	35.7
Use of Financing EMR	(7.9)	(2.1)	0	0
Actual CFB in MTFS	19.0	28.5	35.2	35.5
Budget Deficit	(0)	1.1	0.5	0.2
Capital Receipts targets*	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Flexible use of Capital Receipts	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0

*Anticipated MRP based on achieving capital receipts targets

1.1. The revised programme is funded from both direct income (grants, external contributions) and the Council's own resources (prudential borrowing, revenue contributions, capital reserve). A funding summary is shown in **Table 2**.

1.2. **Table 3** lists details of

- Capital Supplementary Estimates over £500,000 and up to £1,000,000 that requires approval by Committee and
- Capital Virements over £500,000 and up to and including £5,000,000 that requires Relevant Member(s) of CLT and Chief Finance Officer in consultation with Chair of the relevant Committee and the Chair of Finance Sub-Committee to approve.

Table 2: Capital Programme Update

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL CAPITAL PROGRAMME SUMMARY					
CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2024/25 - 2027/28					
	Forecast 2024/25 £000	Forecast 2025/26 £000	Forecast 2026/27 £000	Forecast 2027/28 £000	Total Forecast 2024-28 £000
Committed Schemes - In					
Adults and Health	800	0	0	0	800
Children and Families	36,127	21,515	16,356	17,749	91,747
Highways & Transport	44,910	31,161	26,296	130,138	232,505
Economy & Growth	45,786	30,397	41,366	64,065	181,614
Environment & Communities	14,752	17,444	1,418	0	33,614
Corporate Policy	11,710	6,998	3,276	1,834	23,818
Total Committed Schemes - In Progress	154,085	107,515	88,712	213,786	564,098
	Forecast 2024/25 £000	Forecast 2025/26 £000	Forecast 2026/27 £000	Forecast 2027/28 £000	Total Forecast 2024-28 £000
New Schemes					
Adults and Health	0	0	0	0	0
Children and Families	1,738	7,200	5,248	3,000	17,186
Highways & Transport	895	23,500	15,051	15,051	54,497
Economy & Growth	3,124	0	0	0	3,124
Environment & Communities	4,703	3,017	668	0	8,388
Corporate Policy	0	0	0	0	0
Total New Schemes	10,460	33,717	20,967	18,051	83,195
Total	164,545	141,232	109,679	231,837	647,293
Funding Requirement					
Indicative Funding Analysis: (See note 1)					
Government Grants	96,620	76,091	67,707	122,543	362,961
External Contributions	15,406	10,698	13,611	65,226	104,941
Revenue Contributions	389	0	0	0	389
Capital Receipts	252	877	18,181	16,289	35,599
Prudential Borrowing (See note 2)	51,878	53,566	10,180	27,779	143,403
Total	164,545	141,232	109,679	231,837	647,293

Note 1:

The funding requirement identified in the above table does not currently represent a balanced and affordable position, in the medium term. The Council will need to transform the capital programme to reduce the number of schemes requiring Cheshire East Resources and the need to borrow. The level of capital receipts are based on a prudent approach based on the work of the Asset Management team and their most recently updated Disposals Programme.

Note 2:

The schemes marked **and highlighted in the MTFS cannot proceed until the Capital Programme Review has been completed. Any urgent requests to continue prior to the reviews completion will require approval from the Chair of Finance Sub Committee and the S.151 Officer

Note 3:

Appropriate charges to the revenue budget will only commence in the year following the completion of the associated capital asset. This allows the Council to constantly review the most cost effective way of funding capital expenditure.

Table 3: Requests for Supplementary Capital Estimates (SCEs) and Virements

Committee	Capital Scheme	Amount Requested £	Reason and Funding Source
Service Committee are asked to approve the Supplementary Capital Estimates and Virements			
Supplementary Capital Estimates above £500,000 up to and including £1,000,000			
Highways & Transport	Transport		
	Department for Transport - Traffic Signal Obsolescence Grant (TSOG)	577,003	Additional grant to upgrade traffic signal systems, replacing unreliable and obsolete equipment to improve reliability.
Highways & Transport		577,003	
Total Supplementary Capital Estimates Requested		577,003	
Capital Budget Virements above £500,000 up to and including £5,000,000			
Children & Families	Education and 14-19 Skills		
	WorkplaCE	1,000,000	Virement to Facilities to support the transfer out of Westfields
Children & Families		1,000,000	
Corporate	ICT Hybrid Model	1,896,161	Virement from Infrastructure Investment Programme (IIP) to ICT Hybrid Model as project work funded from IIP now falls under the ICT Hybrid work programme
Corporate		1,896,161	
Economy and Growth	Facilities Management		
	Premises Capital	1,140,086	Due to the change in scope in the "PSDS - 3B - Lot 1" scheme, Cheshire East funding previously allocated from the Premises Capital Programme as "match" funding to be returned for use in Future Years.
Economy & Growth		1,140,086	
Total Capital Virements requested		4,036,247	
Total Supplementary Capital Estimates and Virements		4,613,250	

Section 5: Reserves

Management of Council Reserves

- 5.1. The Council's Reserves Strategy states that the Council will maintain reserves to protect against risk and support investment.
- 5.2. The opening balance at 1 April 2024 in the Council's General Fund Reserves was £5.6m, as published in the Council's Statement of Accounts for 2023/24.
- 5.3. The closing balance at 31 March 2025 in the Council's General Fund Reserve is forecast to reduce further still, to £4.5m.
- 5.4. The current balance on reserves is insufficient in order to provide adequate protection against established and newly emerging risks, such as inflation and particularly the DSG deficit, which is projected to rise to £121.6m by year end and has been highlighted in the MTFS as having no alternative funding.
- 5.5. The Council also maintains Earmarked Revenue Reserves for specific purposes. The opening balance at 1 April 2024 was £32.3m.
- 5.6. During 2024/25, a net total of £10.6m has been drawn down to the support the in-year deficit position. A further £6.2m is being forecast to fund expenditure specifically provided for by services. These balances fall within the forecasts approved during the MTFS budget setting process.
- 5.7. Additional drawdown requests, above those forecast during MTFS, have been made by various services to support specific expenditure totalling £6.0m. These drawdowns, as detailed in the tables below, will be subject to approval by the Section 151 Officer.
- 5.8. The closing balance at 31 March 2025, is forecast at £9.5m.
- 5.9. Unspent schools' budgets that have been delegated, as laid down in the Schools Standards Framework Act 1998, remain at the disposal of the school and are not available for Council use. These balances are therefore excluded from all reserve forecasts.

Table 1 - Reserves Position	2023/24 Outturn £m	2024/25 Forecast £m
General Reserves	5.6	4.5
Earmarked Reserves (Excluding Schools)	32.3	9.5
Total Reserves Balance at 31st March	37.9	14.0

Table 2 - Earmarked Reserves Summary

Committee Reserves	Opening Balance 1st April 2024 £000	Transfers to General Fund £000	Forecast Movement in Reserves £000	Additional Drawdown Requests £000	Forecast Closing Balance 31 March 2025 £000
Adults and Health	5,226	(2,795)	(90)	0	2,341
Children and Families	1,724	0	(1,593)	(131)	0
Corporate Policy	20,773	(6,551)	(2,680)	(4,695)	6,847
Economy and Growth	2,777	(662)	(1,004)	(765)	346
Environment and Communities	870	(390)	(402)	(78)	0
Highways and Transport	908	(205)	(415)	(288)	0
TOTAL EARMARKED RESERVE MOVEMENT	32,278	(10,603)	(6,184)	(5,957)	9,534

* All 'Additional Drawdown Requests' are subject to review and are yet to be approved.

* Total excludes schools' balances

Table 3 - Adults and Health Committee

Reserve Account	Opening Balance 1 Apr 24 £000	Transfers to General Fund £000	Forecast Movement in Reserves £000	Additional Drawdown Requests £000	Forecast Closing Bal 31 Mar 25 £000	Notes
Adults Social Care Commissioning						
PFI Equalisation - Extra Care Housing	2,857	(2,795)	0	0	62	Surplus grant set aside to meet future payments on existing PFI contract and the anticipated gap at the end of the agreement.
Public Health						
Public Health Reserve	2,369	0	(90)	0	2,279	Ring-fenced underspend to be invested in areas to improve performance against key targets; including the creation of an Innovation Fund to support partners to deliver initiatives that tackle key health issues.
ADULTS AND HEALTH TOTAL	5,226	(2,795)	(90)	0	2,341	

Table 4 - Children and Families Committee

Reserve Account	Opening Balance 1 Apr 24 £000	Transfers to General Fund £000	Forecast Movement in Reserves £000	Additional Drawdown Requests £000	Forecast Closing Bal 31 Mar 25 £000	Notes
<u>Childrens Social Care</u>						
Domestic Abuse Partnership	131	0	0	(131)	0	To sustain preventative services to vulnerable people as a result of partnership funding in previous years.
<u>Strong Start, Family Help and Integration</u>						
Troubled Families Initiative	1,593	0	(1,593)	0	0	Crewe Youth Zone and ACT have been assigned funding from shared outcomes of the Supporting Families Programme.
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES TOTAL	1,724	0	(1,593)	(131)	0	

* All 'Additional Drawdown Requests' not forecast as part of MTFS 24-28 are subject to review and are yet to be approved.

Table 5 - Corporate Policy Committee

Reserve Account	Opening Balance 1 Apr 24 £000	Transfers to General Fund £000	Forecast Movement in Reserves £000	Additional Drawdown Requests £000	Forecast Closing Bal 31 Mar 25 £000	Notes
<u>Corporate Directorate</u>						
Corporate Directorate	1,164	(935)	0	0	229	To support a number of widespread projects within the Corporate Directorate.
<u>Finance and Customer Services</u>						
Collection Fund Management	8,154	(1,235)	(2,915)	0	4,004	To manage cash flow implications as part of the Business Rates Retention Scheme.
Capital Financing Reserve	4,531	0	0	(4,531)	0	To provide for financing of capital schemes, other projects and initiatives
MTFS Reserve	2,914	(741)	255	0	2,428	To support the financial strategy and risk management. £1.2m of the remaining reserve balance had previously been earmarked for future voluntary redundancy costs.
Section 31 Revenue Grants	14	0	0	(14)	0	Unspent specific use grant carried forward into 2024/25.

*Corporate Policy Committee reserves continued overleaf

Table 5 - Corporate Policy Committee Continued

Reserve Account	Opening Balance 1 Apr 24 £000	Transfers to General Fund £000	Forecast Movement in Reserves £000	Additional Drawdown Requests £000	Forecast Closing Bal 31 Mar 25 £000	Notes
<u>Governance and Compliance</u>						
Insurance Reserve	3,098	(3,098)	0	0	0	To settle insurance claims and manage excess costs. The full reserve has been released to the general fund to support the in-year deficit pressure.
Elections General	132	0	0	0	132	To provide funds for Election costs every 4 years.
Brexit Funding	13	(13)	0	0	0	Residual reserve balance has been released to the general fund to support the in-year deficit pressure.
<u>Human Resources</u>						
HR (CARE4CE Review, Culture Change, Pay realignment, Learning Mgt System)	59	(59)	0	0	0	Residual reserve balance has been released to the general fund to support the in-year deficit pressure.
Pay Structure (M Grade Review)	54	0	0	0	54	Created to help fund ongoing changes to pay structure.
<u>Governance and Compliance</u>						
Brighter Futures Transformation Programme	490	(470)	(20)	0	0	To fund the Council's four year transformation programme and its five outcomes of Culture; Estates and ICT systems; Customer Experience, Commercial Approach and Governance.
<u>ICT</u>						
Digital Solutions Architect	150	0	0	(150)	0	New reserve created in 23/24 to fund a role for the Digital Customer Enablement programme and will be key to realising the cost savings and efficiencies across the Council from the deployment of a number of digital initiatives.
CORPORATE POLICY TOTAL	20,773	(6,551)	(2,680)	(4,695)	6,847	

* All 'Additional Drawdown Requests' not forecast as part of MTFS 24-28 are subject to review and are yet to be approved.

Table 6 - Economy and Growth Committee

Reserve Account	Opening Balance 1 Apr 24 £000	Transfers to General Fund £000	Forecast Movement in Reserves £000	Additional Drawdown Requests £000	Forecast Closing Bal 31 Mar 25 £000	Notes
Directorate						
Place Directorate	1,164	0	(473)	(385)	306	To support a number of widespread projects within the Place Directorate.
Investment (Sustainability)	610	0	(427)	(143)	40	To support investment that can increase longer term financial independence and stability of the Council.
Growth and Enterprise						
Legal Proceedings	212	0	(104)	(108)	0	To enable legal proceedings on land and property matters.
Investment Portfolio	534	(534)	0	0	0	The full reserve has been released to the general fund to support the in-year deficit pressure.
Homelessness & Housing Options - Revenue Grants	129	0	0	(129)	0	Grant committed for the purchase and refurbishment of properties to be used as temporary accommodation to house vulnerable families.
Tatton Park Trading Reserve	128	(128)	0	0	0	The full reserve has been released to the general fund to support the in-year deficit pressure.
ECONOMY AND GROWTH TOTAL	2,777	(662)	(1,004)	(765)	346	

* All 'Additional Drawdown Requests' not forecast as part of MTFS 24-28 are subject to review and are yet to be approved.

Table 7 - Environment and Communities Committee

Reserve Account	Opening Balance 1 Apr 24 £000	Transfers to General Fund £000	Forecast Movement in Reserves £000	Additional Drawdown Requests £000	Forecast Closing Bal 31 Mar 25 £000	Notes
Environment and Neighbourhood Services						
Strategic Planning	568	(281)	(287)	0	0	To meet costs associated with the Local Plan - site allocations, minerals and waste DPD.
Trees / Structures Risk Management	139	(55)	(55)	(29)	0	To help respond to increases in risks relating to the environment, in particular the management of trees, structures and dealing with adverse weather events.
Air Quality	36	0	(17)	(19)	0	Air Quality Management - DEFRA Action Plan. Relocating electric vehicle chargepoint in Congleton.

*Environment and Communities Committee reserves continued overleaf

Table 7 - Environment and Communities Committee Continued

Reserve Account	Opening Balance 1 Apr 24 £000	Transfers to General Fund £000	Forecast Movement in Reserves £000	Additional Drawdown Requests £000	Forecast Closing Bal 31 Mar 25 £000	Notes
Licensing Enforcement	8	0	0	(8)	0	Three year reserve to fund a third party review and update of the Cheshire East Council Taxi Licensing Enforcement Policies.
Flood Water Mngmt (Emergency Planning)	2	0	(2)	0	0	Relating to Public Information Works.
Neighbourhood Planning	82	(41)	(41)	0	0	To match income and expenditure.
Spatial Planning - revenue grant	13	(13)	0	0	0	Residual reserve balance has been released to the general fund to support the in-year deficit pressure.
Street Cleansing	22	0	0	(22)	0	Committed expenditure on voluntary litter picking equipment and electric blowers.
ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITIES TOTAL	870	(390)	(402)	(78)	0	

* All 'Additional Drawdown Requests' not forecast as part of MTFS 24-28 are subject to review and are yet to be approved.

Table 8 - Highways and Transport Committee

Reserve Account	Opening Balance 1 Apr 24 £000	Transfers to General Fund £000	Forecast Movement in Reserves £000	Additional Drawdown Requests £000	Forecast Closing Bal 31 Mar 25 £000	Notes
Highways and Infrastructure						
HS2	385	(185)	(200)	0	0	To support the Council's committed costs in relation to Government's cessation of the HS2 rail network in borough.
Flood Recovery Works	400	0	(200)	(200)	0	To help the service manage risks such as the impact of adverse weather, specifically flooding or extensive periods where winter maintenance is required.
Highways Procurement Project	104	(20)	(15)	(69)	0	To finance the development of the next Highway Service Contract. Depot mobilisation costs, split over 7 years from start of contract in 2018.
LEP-Local Transport Body	19	0	0	(19)	0	Contribution to LEP transport studies/consultancy. Ongoing working around Transport Legacy issues.
HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT TOTAL	908	(205)	(415)	(288)	0	

* All 'Additional Drawdown Requests' not forecast as part of MTFS 24-28 are subject to review and are yet to be approved.

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Children and Families Committee

16 September 2024

**Update on the progress of the key areas
of the Dedicated Schools Grant
Management Plan 2024/25 to 2030/31 –
Quarter 1 2024/2025**

**Report of: Claire Williamson – Director of Education, Strong Start
and Integration**

Report Reference No: CF/30/24-25

Purpose of Report

- 1 To provide the Children and Families Committee with up-to-date information on the progress of the mitigations detailed within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) management plan and to provide a forecast outturn position in relation to the DSG deficit reserve.
- 2 Progress and the forecast outturn position within this report are based on quarter 1 April 2024 – 30 June 2024.
- 3 Monthly updates outside of the committee system have been provided to all members of the Children and Families Committee. Details of the monthly updates have been loaded on to the committee hub for member reference. This report captures the previous updates.

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Scrutinise and note the key areas of progress outlined in this report regarding the DSG Management plan 2024/25 to 2030/31.
2. Note that this briefing report outlines the progress on mitigations and the forecast outturn position, based on quarter 1 April 24 to 30 June 2024.
3. Note the caveat of the financial forecast.

Executive Summary

- 4 The authority's outturn position for the financial year 2023-24 resulted in a reduced deficit position of the DSG of £79.5 million compared to the forecast deficit of £89.6 million resulting in a reduction of £10.1 million.
- 5 This trajectory can also be seen within the latest quarterly forecast of the deficit position, a further £8.4 million reduction.
- 6 The DSG management plan shows a forecast deficit reserve position of £141 million as at 31 March 2025, whereas the latest quarterly forecast shows a forecast deficit position of £121.6 million, representing a total of £19.4 million reduced deficit compared with the DSG management plan forecast.
- 7 However the forecast deficit position includes a caveat. Although growth and the use of trends and data have been applied to the forecast, consideration to the timing of this report and the recognition that we are currently at the end of an academic year may impair the forecast.
- 8 Appendix 1 details the progress on mitigations and provides a RAG rating against each objective. Although work is progressing, capacity is a concern and poses a risk to the programme. The recruitment of SEND transformation team members should help to mitigate this risk.
- 9 Appendix 2 provides a data set of impact on education health and care needs assessments (EHCNA), education health and care plans (EHCP), SEN support and the financial forecast for 2024/2025.
- 10 There has been a 23% reduction in the number of EHCNAs received during the period January to March 2024 compared with the same period in 2023. The growth of EHCPs during the same period has also seen a reduced growth of 33%. These percentage reductions are moving towards the national benchmark figures.
- 11 SEN support is growing steadily, indicating that more of our children and young people are receiving the **right support** and early intervention at the **right time** and is contributing to the reduced number of education health and care needs assessments and education health care plans.
- 12 We would expect to see that the number of children receiving SEN support will continue to grow as increased early intervention and support takes place.
- 13 An updated overall DSG management plan forecast will be produced to reflect the reduced deficit position and reduced number of total EHCPs.

This will be shared with the Children and families Committee in November 2024.

Background

- 14 The DSG management plan provides a forecast for both an unmitigated position and a mitigated position.
- 15 The unmitigated financial forecast is the do-nothing position. Whereas the mitigated financial forecast includes carefully considered interventions. Cumulatively mitigations are forecast to amount to £916 million. The mitigated forecast provides an in year balanced position by year 7.
- 16 The unmitigated forecast position for 2030-31 shows total expenditure of £340.4 million against an expected grant of £68.6 million, resulting in an in-year deficit of £271.8 million and a total deficit reserve position of £1.2 billion.
- 17 The mitigated forecast position for 2030-31 shows total expenditure of £70.2 million against an expected grant and school block transfer of £70.7 million, resulting in an in-year surplus of £0.6 million and a total deficit position of £284.8 million.

	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
In year mitigated deficit	(51.3)	(48.1)	(38.7)	(28.7)	(19.8)	(9.2)	0.6
Unmitigated cumulative deficit	(154.6)	(244.6)	(363.5)	(514.8)	(702.2)	(929.1)	(1,200.9)
Mitigated cumulative deficit	(140.9)	(189.0)	(227.7)	(256.5)	(276.2)	(285.4)	(284.8)
Impact of mitigations	(13.7)	(55.6)	(135.8)	(258.3)	(426.0)	(643.7)	(916.1)

	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Total UNMITIGATED Expenditure	122.40	149.20	179.80	214.10	252.10	293.50	340.40
Total MITIGATED Expenditure	110.20	109.40	101.80	93.70	86.60	78.00	70.20
Total DSG Income & Block Transfer	58.90	61.30	63.10	64.90	66.80	68.70	70.70

- 18 The overall strategy and mitigations focuses on **RIGHT TIME, RIGHT SUPPORT, RIGHT PLACE**. This includes:
 - The need to continue to increase local specialist provision and become less reliant on the independent sector
 - Embed the graduate approach and inclusion across all schools and settings and strengthen SEN support

- Strengthening decision making and governance
- 19 Following approval of the Designated Schools Grant (DSG) Management Plan 2024/25 to 2030/31 by the Children and Families Committee on the 29 April 2024, members approved an additional recommendation that they see and scrutinise monthly reports outlining key areas of progress against the Plan.
- 20 The Children and Families Committee have received the following updates
- (a) 3 June 2024 public Children and Families Committee – update on the DSG management plan outturn position for 2023/24
 - (b) 8 July 2024 non-public meeting – update on the progress of the mitigations for the first quarter (April 24- June 24)
 - (c) 12 August 2024 non-public meeting – update on the financial forecast for the first quarter (April 24- June 24)

Briefing Information

- 21 As stated under the purpose of the report, this paper is to provide a briefing to the Children and Families Committee and asks members of the committee to scrutinise and note the progress of the mitigations within the DSG management plan and the impact on the financial forecast.
- 22 This report is not for seeking a decision but is to support a broader discussion and to provide an update on the DSG management plan.

Implications

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 23 Under the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the council has a statutory duty to use resources efficiently and effectively against priorities and to achieve a balanced budget. Section 28 (budget monitoring: general) of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Council to review its calculations from time to time during the year and to take such action, if any, as it considers necessary to deal with any deterioration in its financial position.
- 24 The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is paid to the Council by the Secretary of State under section 14 of the Education Act 2002. (power of Secretary of State to give financial assistance for purposes related to education or children etc.). It is a specific ring-fenced grant given outside the local government finance settlement. The terms of the grant require it to be used to support schools budgets for purposes defined in

regulation The Schools and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2023. Local authorities are responsible for determining the split of the grant between central expenditure and the individual schools budget (ISB) in conjunction with local schools forums. Local authorities are responsible for allocating the ISB to individual schools in accordance with the local schools' funding formula.

- 25 The Education and Skills Funding Agency Guidance on DSG: Conditions of grant 2023-24 require any local authority with an overall deficit on its DSG account to present a Plan to the DfE for managing their future DSG spend and to keep the schools forum regularly updated about the authority's DSG account and plans for handling it including high needs pressures and potential savings.
- 26 This report provides a further update as agreed at the meeting on 3 June 2024, to receive regular updates regarding the progress of this plan at least monthly via Microsoft Teams or in committee meetings. It is intended to provide members with ongoing oversight and assurance regarding the plan and actions associated with the DSG deficit.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 27 Accounting Override – Dedicated Schools Grant adjustment account (England) 53 From the 2020/21 financial year the accounting arrangements for the deficit on the DSG grant were changed.
- 28 The council holds usable and unusable reserves on the balance sheet. Usable reserves are cash backed whereas unusable reserves are not. Examples of unusable reserves are pensions and the revaluation of land and buildings.
- 29 In April 2020 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) introduced new legislation to switch the DSG deficit reserve from a usable to an unusable reserve and allowed the creation of an adjustment account on the balance sheet.
- 30 When MHCLG set up the accounting override it prevented local authorities from funding a DSG deficit from General Funds without the permission of the Secretary of State. It was made clear to council treasurers that this override was in place to allow time to find suitable arrangements to address the issue.
- 31 The current override has been extended and will now end on 31 March 2026, unless further extensions are announced. Without the override the size of the negative reserve for council expected as of 31 March 2026 would present a financial stability issue for the 2026/27 financial year. The council does not have sufficient reserves to be able to cover the cost of the cumulative deficit if the override is removed.

- 32 The size of the deficit has negative cash flow implications for the council, as we are spending more money than we receive. This results in revenue interest costs linked to the cost of borrowing.
- 33 The 2023/24 closing DSG balance was lower than in the original management plan, and the end of 24/25 balance is also forecast to be lower. This is positive for both the delivery of the plan as well as for the financial impact of interest costs. The impact on the council's revenue costs through the cost of interest in 2023/24 was around £2.6 million and is forecast to be in the region of £5 million in 2024/25. This cost will increase annually as the DSG cumulative deficit continues to increase.
- 34 As detailed in the Cheshire East MTFS the council is experiencing financial challenges at a scale that it has not faced before. This makes the approval and delivery of the DSG Management Plan imperative as the council is not able to fund DSG pressures.
- 35 The council applied for Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up. This application included a request to be able to capitalise the estimated cost of interest on the DSG deficit for years 2023/24 and 2024/25, which is now estimated to be £7.6 million.
- 36 This request has been approved in principle and if supported and taken forward it will remove the cost of interest for these two years from the revenue costs and allow us to spread the cost over a longer timeframe. However this does not address the ongoing cumulative deficit, or the interest costs which will continue to be a pressure in year 2025/26 and onwards linked to the deficit.

Policy

- 37 Local authorities are under a duty to ensure sufficiency of school places in their area (section 14 of the Education Act 1996).
- 38 The SEND Code of Practice (January 2015) provides statutory guidance on duties, policies and procedures relating to Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014 and associated regulations and applies to England.
- 39 The DfE issued the "SEND Review: Right support, right place, right time" - a SEND and AP green paper which is a consultation on the future of SEND services. The SEND Partnership response is in support of the proposals and promptly making those legal requirements will support the council in delivery of the necessary changes.
- 40 Following the green paper consultation in March 2023 DfE published their SEND and alternative provision improvement plan which sets out

their plans to change the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and alternative provision system in England. The partnership will ensure we keep up to date with the DFE roadmap and change programme as this is progressed nationally. [SEND and alternative provision roadmap - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672112/SEND_and_alternative_provision_roadmap.pdf)

41 The statutory duties include:

- (a) the need to undertake a needs assessment where a child may have additional needs,
- (b) to issue an education, health and care plan within 20 weeks where assessment provides evidence this is required to meet the assessed needs.
- (c) the local authority must then secure an appropriate school place and must consult with parental preference

An open and enabling organisation (Include which aim and priority)	A council which empowers and cares about people Support all children to have the best start in life. Increase opportunities for all children and young adults with additional needs. Ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential	A thriving and sustainable place Reduce impact on the environment. Thriving urban and rural economies with opportunities for all Be a carbon neutral council by 2025
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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 42 An Equality Inclusion Assessment has been completed previously for the DSG Management Plan, this is available on the website.
- 43 The SEND Code of Practice looks to ensure the assessed additional needs of children with special education needs are provided for, to enable them to reach agreed outcomes.

Human Resources

- 44 Additional budget of £500,000 has been secured for 2024/2025 via the MTFS to provide transformation support for the implementation of the plan.
- 45 A SEND Transformation team is currently being created to drive forward the programme of mitigations required to achieve financial sustainability in the future.

Risk Management

- 46 An impact on the council's base budget (council tax, national nondomestic rates and general grants) as a contribution may be required to manage the high needs pressures or DSG deficit reserve balance.
- 47 Service levels reduce as funding is not sufficient and future Ofsted inspections raise issues which damage reputation and result in the council being required to produce a "written statement of action" to remedy failings.
- 48 The council continues to make payments to settings but it is not able to fund them from the overall resources it has available.
- 49 The DSG Management Plan is based on a series of assumptions over EHCP numbers and average costs. These are subject to change and this risk will be mitigated through regular reviews of the plan.

Rural Communities

There are no direct implications for rural communities.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 50 The council has approved its Children's Vision which contains a priority around children with additional needs.
- 51 The SEND Partnership Strategy sets out the Partnership vision for meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND. This strategy was refreshed to include the DBV opportunities and mitigations within the DSG Management Plan in 2023

Public Health

- 52 There are no direct implications for public health

Climate Change

- 53 Many pupils are educated out of borough at high costs and with long travel journeys.
- 54 Where possible systems that save on energy consumption will be considered, particularly for electricity.
- 55 Any internal works required to update buildings to make them fit for purpose will include a comprehensive review of the impact on climate factors.
- 56 Any significant changes that may take place will require full compliance with the latest building regulations relating to such factors as insulation/heat loss and energy efficiencies. Such factors will be key considerations as the scheme is developed through to full handover.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	<p>Claire Williamson</p> <p>Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration</p> <p>Claire.williamson@cheshireeast.gov.uk</p>
Appendices:	<p>Appendix 1 – highlight report on progress of mitigations</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Financial impact and impact on EHCNA, EHCPs and SEN support</p>
Background Papers:	<p>Update on the progress of the key areas of the Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan 2024/25 to 2030/31 CEC Briefing Report Template (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</p> <p>Revised Dedicated Schools grant Management Plan 2024/25 to 2030/31 C&F Committee 29 April 24 CEC Report Template (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</p> <p>Appendix 1 - Safety Valve DSG Management Plan.pdf (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</p> <p>DSG Management Plan 2022-23 – C&F Committee September 2022 - Decision report template (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</p>

	<p>15 DSG Management Pan 2023-2024 – C&F Committee September 2023 CEC Report Template (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</p> <p>Delivering Better Value Update C&F Committee March 2023 - Decision report template (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</p> <p>SEND & AP Green Paper - SEND and alternative provision improvement plan - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p> <p>Children and Families Committee 18 September 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEND Strategy 2. SEND Strategy.pdf (cheshireeast.gov.uk) • SEND Sufficiency Statement CEC Report Template (cheshireeast.gov.uk) • Capital Programme CEC Report Template (cheshireeast.gov.uk) <p>This link provides information on Safety Valve agreements with other local authorities - Dedicated schools grant: very high deficit intervention - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p>
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Designated Schools Grant (DSG) Management Plan Progress Highlight Report

RAG rating colours for mitigation objectives (June 2024)

Colour	Definition
Grey	Action not started yet, no risk to implementation anticipated
Red	Action not on track, risk to implementation
Amber	Action not yet completed, but on track to be completed within timescales
Green	Action completed

Please note: The RAG ratings given in the following sections are based on the original action completion dates as submitted for our original safety valve submission, but these may change going forward in line with the refresh of the DSG management plan (as requested by our DfE advisor).

Mitigation - Governance and Accountability	
Objective/Purpose	
1. Strengthen SEND governance, accountability and oversight arrangements, including stronger financial oversight and authorisation, to ensure scrutiny, challenge and full financial oversight is provided from the leaders at the most senior levels.	In progress
2. Facilitate delivery of transformational changes to improve the local SEND system for children and young people through an increase in dedicated capacity with appropriate skills and knowledge.	In progress
3. Ensure clear, robust and equitable decision-making systems and processes are in place across education, health and care for decisions relating to placements, provision and funding, including specific arrangements for complex cases, to provide accountability across the workforce and a consistent approach that enables all children and young people to have access to the correct provision and levels of support.	In progress
Progress Update June 2024	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terms of Reference for a new SEND Executive Oversight Panel (to replace SEND Transformation Board and current SEND Executive Leadership Board) agreed by Children and Families Committee on 3 June 2024. However following advice from our Safety Valve DfE advisor, further developments to the governance structure have been designed. These are to be presented to Children and families Committee for comment and approval in September 2024. • Director of Education has been working with Strategic leads in SEND to develop a SEND Transformation team to drive the required changes as identified in our DSG management plan. Two additional colleagues (an additional Transformation Strategic Lead and a Send Programme Lead) started in post within this transformation team on 26 June 2024 • SEND Strategic leads have continued to review the structure of the SEND service and discuss potential new structure options to ensure effective service delivery in line with new ways of working • A review and initial re-design of SEND decision making processes (across all panels and forums) has taken place; further developments will be carried out once the impact of initial changes has been assessed. 	
Concerns/Issues/Risks	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting dates/times for new SEND Executive Oversight Panel to be agreed and circulated, and SEND governance structure to be updated • Risk of timescale slippage around actions to create a complex cases panel, linked to adult social care, and arrangements to regularly review new and existing high-cost placements – additional capacity through SEND Transformation Team should support this. 	

- The impact of revised decision-making through panels on other services, including increased demand on specialist outreach programme and increased number of exclusions, requires further investigation.

Mitigation - Rebalance the Profile of Plans and Strengthen Annual Reviews

Objective/Purpose

1. Rebalance the profile and improve the quality of EHC plans for children and young people in pre-16 education to ensure their plan, support and setting is appropriate, aligns with need, and is supporting them to make progress towards their outcomes	Not on track
2. Rebalance the profile and improve the quality of EHC plans for children and young people in post-16 education by embedding preparing for adulthood across the system, and upskilling and raising the confidence of the wider workforce and key stakeholders on preparing for adulthood, SMART outcomes and the offer in adult social care	Not on track
3. Review and refine the process and guidance for EHCP annual reviews and ensure effective processes and training on annual reviews are embedded	In progress

Progress Update June 2024

- Initial meetings have been held between local authority officers and local colleges to consider our local offer for post-16, with plans to establish a task and finish group to work on this area (ties with mitigation on 'Review of Cheshire East Specialist Provision and Capital Programme').
- A Task and Finish group looking at Annual Review actions has been established, and initial work has begun around reviewing the current process for annual reviews (building on previously completed work).

Concerns/Issues/Risks

- Issues with timescales of actions across both rebalancing the profile of plans and annual reviews due to capacity issues – SEND Transformation Team and SEN restructure should address this.

Mitigation - Banding and Top Up Funding

Objective/Purpose

1. Introduce a banding system for the allocation of funding associated with EHCPs across all age ranges and all institutions, which provides an equitable system for all children and young people, accurately represents children and young people's needs and is aligned to national plans	In progress
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2. Provide fair and appropriate funding and support to all children and young people with EHCPs that enables them to be effectively supported to make progress towards their individual outcomes	In progress
3. Provide flexibility to schools and settings to facilitate delivery of effective, high quality and more inclusive provision	In progress
Progress Update June 2024	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A High Needs Funding Working Group has been in place since December 2021 and has focused on the funding model used for EHCPs and the introduction of banding. Funding for children with EHCPs in mainstream schools continues to be moved to the initial banding model that was introduced from September 2023. Going forward, a decision has been made to merge the High Needs Funding Working Group with the SEN Funding Working Group (developed as part of the mitigation on 'Partnership collaboration and financial sustainability'). An initial joint workshop session was held with members from both groups on 23 May 2024 to initiate work on banding descriptors for a wider model, as part of the next phase of using banding in Cheshire East. The Chair, membership and a new Terms of Reference document are to be agreed for the newly merged group. 	
Concerns/Issues/Risks	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special school banding work has not started and there have been delays in progressing banding actions due to capacity and delayed decisions around next steps and governance – additional capacity has been put in place through the SEND Transformation Team, who will drive forward action delivery and running of the newly merged working group. Recent requests for fee increases have been received from one of our local free special schools. 	

Mitigation - Graduated Approach	
Objective/Purpose	
1. Embed a culture of inclusion across the whole of Cheshire East to share good practice, create a coherent education system and enable every child and young person to access the provision they need	In progress
2. Build on the newly enhanced SEND Toolkit and embed the graduated approach across all schools and settings	In progress
3. Improve quality and efficacy of SEN support plans to ensure children and young people are effectively supported to achieve improved outcomes through supporting as early as possible and preventing escalation of need	Not on track

4. Upskill schools/setting and partners with strategies and interventions to identify children and young people's needs and how to effectively support them	Not on track
5. Revision of advice template for Educational Psychologists by EPs and other services to ensure the clear objectives of ordinarily available inclusive provision and quality first teaching are separate to the additional advice being given, thereby ensuring it is clearer for plan writers and parents to see the advice being provided	In progress
6. Develop a specialist outreach programme to improve access to early intervention	In progress
7. Monitor effectiveness of recently developed early years arrangements to ensure they remain effective around early identification and support	In progress
Progress Update June 2024	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated and re-named Cheshire East Toolkit for Inclusion published on Cheshire East Local Offer for SEND at: Toolkit for inclusion (cheshireeast.gov.uk) A Graduated Approach and SEN Support Task and Finish Group, and an Outreach and Training Offer Task and Finish Group have been established to drive forward actions in these areas. Educational Psychologist template has been revised, and we are now working on ensuring it is consistently embedded across the service. A specialist outreach programme pilot has been launched; next steps will focus on targeting support of the outreach programme and evaluating its impact. Ongoing monitoring of early years arrangements is taking place via the early years forum evaluation reference group. 	
Concerns/Issues/Risks	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delays to various actions within this mitigation – bringing in additional capacity through the SEND Transformation Team, and clarifying roles within this team, should help to drive this work forward. 	

Mitigation - Review of Cheshire East Specialist Provision and Capital Programme

Objective/Purpose

1. Review existing local specialist provision (including special schools, resource provision and SEN units) and their current designations, in order to understand current use, identify potential improvements and gaps, and assess whether children are being placed in the correct placement types to meet their needs	In progress
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2. Assess opportunities to secure placements in local, in-borough provision for more of our children and young people with SEND	Not on track
3. Expand, further develop and grow our own local specialist provision to ensure children and young people's needs can be met within their local community	In progress
4. Provide further support to address the placements imbalance resulting from the shortfall of SEN places across the borough through the use of creative commissioning and developing and implementing supporting policies	In progress
Progress Update June 2024	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review visits have been taking place within all existing resource provisions and enhanced mainstream provisions from 10 June 2024. A paper was taken and approved by Children and Families Committee on 3 June 2024 which included the additional funding of £16.574m and detailed the new schemes included within the Safety Valve Capital Bid. Initial meetings have been held between local authority officers and local colleges to consider our local offer for post-16, with plans to establish a task and finish group to work on this area (ties with mitigation to 'Rebalance the Profile of Plans'). 	
Concerns/Issues/Risks	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overdue action to review data around primary area of need and develop a process within annual reviews whereby primary need is updated to reflect the current position due to capacity – this should be mitigated through establishment of SEND Transformation Team. Work to secure local placements for children has not progressed as quickly as planned - bringing in additional capacity through the SEND Transformation Team, and clarifying roles within this team, will help to resolve this. 	

Mitigation - Transition	
Objective/Purpose	
1. Re-design and enhance the transition process and develop clear expectations regarding transition to ensure that children, young people and families are supported and confident at key transition points (from early years through to adulthood) to reduce escalation of need	In progress
2. Develop resources, information and support for children, young people and families to ensure knowledge and build confidence regarding transition phases of education and provision/pathways	Not started

3. Co-produce and deliver a two-year tailored training programme for all schools and settings to ensure understanding of the transition process and the offer in the next phase of education	Not started
Progress Update June 2024	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Transition Team Manager and 2 Transition Advisors are in post. This Transition Team has been working to review the existing transition process, complete research to gain knowledge and understanding of best practice examples and to re-design and enhance the transition process at the three main transition points. 	
Concerns/Issues/Risks	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The relevant workstream has asked the Transition Team to present the findings from their research and their resulting work around best practice examples etc. to ensure this action within the first objective can be signed off as complete, before work progresses on re-designing and piloting new transition processes. 	

Mitigation - Alternative Provision and EOTAS	
Objective/Purpose	
1. Ensure a strengthened alternative provision offer is in place in Cheshire East that better supports children and young people to make timely progress and reintegration to mainstream education, as appropriate, through a review of existing alternative provision arrangements, including the PRU, and exploration and development of alternative models	In Progress
2. Ensure clear and robust systems are in place to agree, track, monitor and review children and young people educated other than at school, to support successful progress towards their individual outcomes and progression into settings, as appropriate	In Progress
3. Review existing in-house services and their future role in a strengthened and more connected offer to support children and young people to achieve improved outcomes	In Progress
Progress Update June 2024	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work has been done to look at the journey of pupils who have been permanently excluded (including the impact between needs assessment request outcomes and exclusions, and costs to schools for alternative provision against exclusions) and to draft a service level agreement. An EOTAS (Educated Other Than At School) Working Group was established in early 2024 and has continued to meet to progress actions to improve EOTAS processes and practice. Data cleansing work is 	

underway, along with work on a review process for all existing EOTAS cases.

- Service review for Medical Needs Team in progress and due to be launched September 2024. Service review for Sensory Inclusion Service also in progress.

Concerns/Issues/Risks

- Data cleansing has been required around permanent exclusions within case management systems.
- Further investigation needed on apparent link between needs assessment request outcomes and exclusion levels.
- Some EOTAS actions have been delayed due to capacity within both education and legal services. Education Head of Service is raising with legal colleagues.
- There is a risk around the service review for the Medical Needs Team and the financial timescale for agreement of proportionate AWPU (Age Weighted Pupil Unit) contribution for the service.

Mitigation - Partnership collaboration and financial sustainability

Objective/Purpose

1. Improve joint SEND financial oversight, ownership and related working relationship between Schools' Forum and Cheshire East Council regarding SEND and high needs block financial management	In progress
2. Seek to secure collaboration and financial commitment from partner agencies where appropriate, ensuring health partners make adequate contributions to provision as appropriate	Not started
3. Seek to secure appropriate resources for additional support and interventions for schools through schools block disapplication submission	Completed (year 1)

Progress Update June 2024

- A Schools' Forum subgroup focused on high needs financial management and oversight (SEN Funding Working Group) has continued to meet, with a focus on notional SEN and high needs expenditure overview. The group presented a proposal to change the notional SEN for 2025-2026 in Mainstream Schools to the Schools Forum on 20 June 2024.
- Going forward, a decision has been made to merge the SEN Funding Working Group with the High Needs Funding Working Group (see mitigation on 'banding'). An initial joint workshop session was held with members from both groups on 23 May 2024 to initiate work on banding descriptors. The Chair, membership and a new Terms of Reference document are to be agreed for the newly merged group.

- Schools block disapplication process completed with successful outcome – 0.5% transfer from Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) schools block to high needs block was approved by Secretary of State, and £1.4m has now been moved to the high needs block.

Concerns/Issues/Risks

- Need to ensure all members of the newly merged funding working group commit to being 'active' members that actively attend and contribute to the work of the group.

Mitigation - Commissioning

Objective/Purpose

1. Strengthen commissioning oversight arrangements through development of dedicated SEND commissioning resource, review of all commissioning contracts and arrangements and use of clear processes and procedures around SLA and contract management arrangements	In progress
2. Understand current levels of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and demand for SALT support in Cheshire East	Not on track
3. Improve access to and delivery of SALT services by jointly reviewing current arrangements and identifying areas for improvement, followed by development of a redesigned model for SALT delivery	In progress
4. Consistent and robust system in place for managing fee increase requests	Not started
5. Enhance the area's purchasing power through optimised use of bulk purchasing	In progress

Progress Update June 2024

- Work has started on the development of standard contracts (with support from legal)
- Clear arrangements and project team in place for joint review of SALT services and local authority/ICB support secured via appropriate governance routes.
- Initial meetings and pilot proposals planned around testing increased use of bulk purchasing.

Concerns/Issues/Risks

- Significant work still required to implement standard contracts across settings
- Data analysis currently being conducted around speech, language and communication needs and demand for SALT support, but this is now past previously planned timescales

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Financial Impact - Budget Expenditure by Provision Type

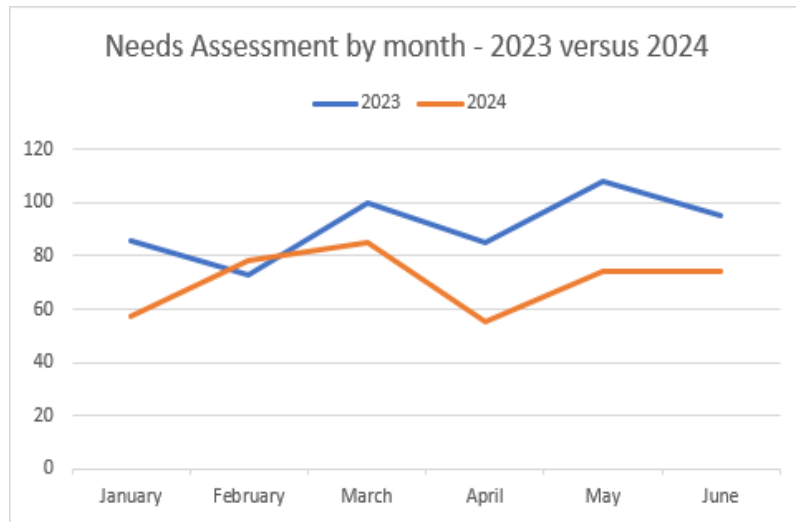
	2024-25	Forecast 2024-2025 Quarter 1	Variance 2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
Mainstream	£22,248,509	£21,697,460	(£551,049)	£21,674,838	£19,779,577	£18,709,100	£18,177,178	£16,998,986	£15,195,043
Resourced Provision or SEN Units	£3,138,000	£3,094,667	(£43,333)	£4,132,667	£5,027,000	£5,540,000	£5,985,500	£6,431,000	£6,778,500
Maintained Special Schools or Special Academies placements	£20,724,458	£23,300,495	£2,576,037	£22,515,339	£24,279,480	£25,978,182	£27,579,555	£27,901,868	£28,135,953
Non maintained special schools or independent (NMSS or independent) placements	£51,163,557	£40,906,238	(£10,257,319)	£48,555,157	£39,959,970	£30,450,382	£21,677,943	£13,339,139	£6,710,648
Hospital Schools or Alternative Provision placements	£3,579,700	£3,580,850	£1,150	£3,375,626	£3,359,124	£3,342,667	£3,326,340	£3,339,883	£3,353,504
Post 16 mainstream placements	£5,643,352	£5,344,147	£299,205	£5,983,738	£6,439,561	£6,597,801	£6,702,899	£6,702,899	£6,734,283
LA Specific spending Total Expenditure	£1,765,563	£1,765,563	£0	£1,627,285	£1,637,217	£1,647,398	£1,657,833	£1,668,529	£1,679,492
Health, Social Care, Therapy Services and Care Provision Total Expenditure	£1,892,207	£2,022,884	£130,677	£1,577,206	£1,577,205	£1,577,204	£1,577,203	£1,577,202	£1,577,201
Total Expenditure	£110,155,347	£101,712,312	(£8,443,035)	£109,441,857	£101,848,761	£93,684,495	£86,579,353	£77,959,506	£70,164,622
Deficit	£140,890,419	£121,576,722	(£19,313,697)	£188,994,589	£227,729,796	£256,471,589	£276,224,220	£285,416,464	£248,815,068

Quarter 1 expenditure forecast is currently expected to be approx. £8.4m less than originally forecast. This results in a cumulative deficit position of £121.6m, compared with the original forecast of £140.9m; a reduced deficit position of £19.3

Impact Measures

Impact Measure		Baseline Jan 2024)	Baseline as per SV DSG mgmt. plan (2023-24)	Annual Target 2024-2025	Qtr1 24/25 (June 2024)	RAG	Annual Target 2025-2026	Annual Target 2026-2027	Annual Target 2027-2028	Annual Target 2028-2029	Annual Target 2029-2030	Annual Target 2030-2031
Total no. of EHCPs recorded on the SEN2 DfE survey return		4576	4776	5164	4744		5300	5240	5197	5061	4769	4413
Cumulative % growth of total EHCPs		14%	18%	8%	-0.7%		3%	-1%	-1%	-3%	-6%	-7%
Total no. of CYP in a specialist placement	RP / SEN Unit	148	156	172	178		254	308	335	362	389	409
	Special School	817	828	922	850		1016	1116	1206	1266	1286	1306
Increased proportion of CYP in a specialist placement	RP / SEN Unit	3%	3%	3.3%	3.7%		4.7%	5.6%	6%	7%	8%	9%
	Special School	18%	17%	17.8%	17.9%		19%	21%	23%	25%	27%	30%
No. of CYP in a NMSS/ISS/SPI placement		545	757	814	621		652	507	354	239	120	53

EHCNA & EHCP Analysis

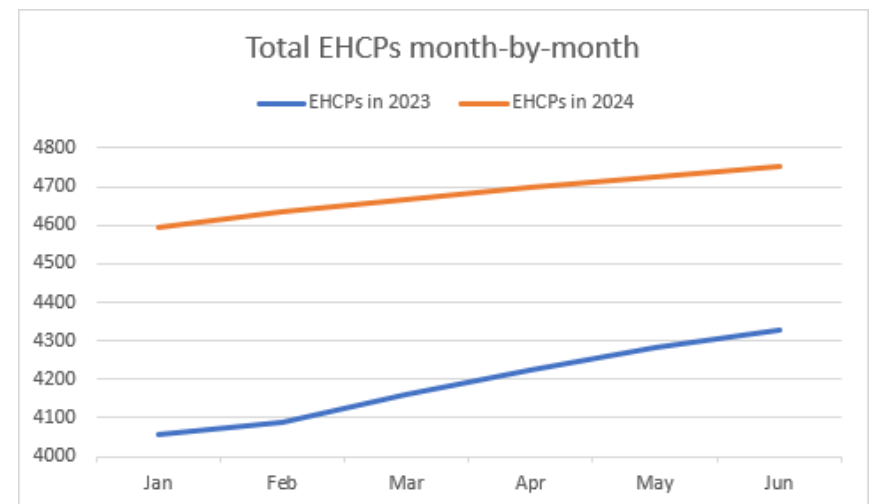
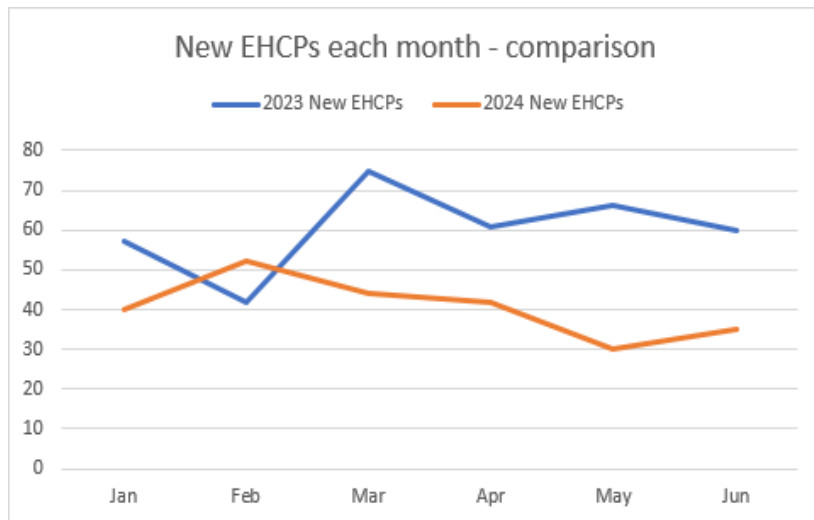


In the first six months (January to March 2024), we have **received** 423 needs assessment requests, compared to 547 in the same period in 2023, representing a 23% reduction. (top left graph)

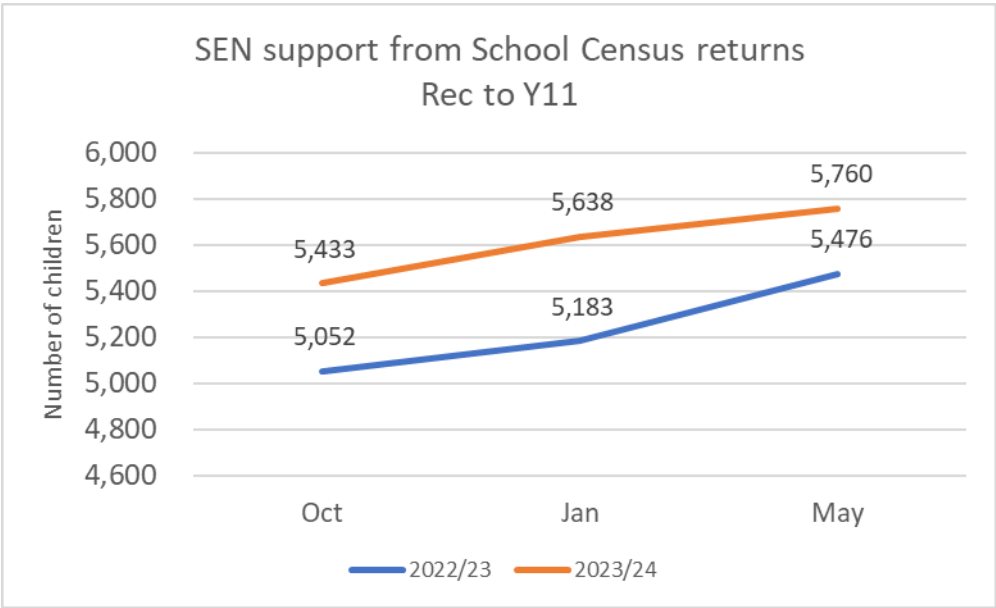
In the first six months (January to June 2024), we have **issued** 243 **new** EHCPs, compared to 361 in the same period in 2023, representing a 33% reduction. (bottom left graph)

During 2023 (January to December 2023), we issued 715 **new** EHCPs. If the trajectory outlined above continues for the remain 6 months of the calendar year, the number of new plans issued in 2024 could be approximately 500. However caution is needed as we can see from the graph that in 2024 during June there appears to be an increase in the number of plans issued. (bottom left graph)

In the first six months (January to June 2024), **total** EHCPs, have risen by 157, representing 3% increase. For the same period in 2023, the rise was 267 EHCPs, representing a 7% increase. Overall increase for the year was 13.6% (bottom right graph)



SEN Support Analysis



SEN Support as a percentage of mainstream population Reception to Year 11	Oct Census	Jan Census	May Census
2022/23	9.8%	10.0%	10.6%
2023/24	10.5%	10.8%	11.1%

From the graph and the table shown above we can see that the number and percentage of pupils with a SEN Support plan has increased in academic year 2023/24, compared with academic year 2022/23. This indicates that our children and young people are receiving the appropriate support and early intervention at the **right time** and is contributing to the reduced number of education health and care needs assessments and education health care plans.

Statistically Cheshire East has a lower percentage of pupils being supported by a SEN support plan than national averages but has a higher percentage of pupils being supported with an EHCP. The mitigations within our DSG management plan which focus on inclusive practice, such as the Inclusion Toolkit and graduated approach training for schools is beginning to embed across our educational settings.

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Children and Families Committee

16 September 2024

Paediatric Speech, Language and Communication Therapy Service

Report of: Executive Director for Children and Families

Report Reference No: CF/28/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: (All Wards);

Purpose of Report

- 1 To update the committee following the review, consultation and engagement by the council and Cheshire & Merseyside Integrated Care Board (ICB) of the paediatric speech, language, and communication therapy (SLCN) services.
- 2 To provide the committee with oversight of the proposed service model and to seek authorisation to follow a competitive tender process and award the successful provider the joint service contract from April 1st, 2025.
- 3 This service falls under the 'fair' priority of the council's Corporate Plan 2021-2025, and specifically to reduce inequalities, promote fairness and opportunity for all and support our most vulnerable residents.

Executive Summary

- 4 This paper follows on from the report on the 12th of February 2024.
- 5 The council and ICB have completed the review, consultation and engagement and service redesign, and the next steps are to conduct a full formal tender to seek best value service for its local citizens.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the new service model and authorise the procurement for a new service contract for a 5-year term with a 1 + 1 year extension period.
2. To approve the joint commissioning of the SLCN service between the council and ICB, formalised with a Section 256 Agreement.
3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Service and/or equivalent authorised officer to award the contract for the jointly commissioned Paediatric Speech Language and Communication Therapy Service.

Background

- 6 The report to committee on the 12th of February 2024, outlined the background, and the legal responsibilities (Appendix A).

Consultation and Engagement

- 7 The council and ICB have consulted and engaged with parents, carers, children, professionals, education establishments and stakeholders to provide the details that shape the future service offer.
- 8 The consultation and engagement highlighted themes from parents/carers, professionals, and education settings. Further details on the consultation and engagement can be found in Appendix B.
- 9 People told us that we need to:
 - Enhance the **early help** offer e.g., community drop-in sessions.
 - Increase **training** for schools and parents.
 - Improve and develop **digital solutions** and platforms to aid communication, intervention, training, and progress tracking & reporting. Digital is not a replacement for support but to enhance the offer.
 - **Single point of contact** & accessible guidance and information.
 - **Visibility** of the service – it needs a 'brand'.

10 The Service Model

- 11 To ensure the service is fit for the future, the offer will be a **Whole System** graduated approach with an emphasis on early help, communication, embracing digital technology to widen easy access to advice, guidance, information, and early help support. The main elements for the new model that will be included into a newly developed service specification:

- **Single Point of Access.** The service arrangement will be via a 'hub and spoke' approach with 'spokes' being outreach into in community venues, clinics, special schools with a clustered appointment approach. The hub will provide visible access to advice, guidance & information, website management, training coordination, administration of queries, referrals and assessments appointments.
- **Whole System Collaboration** coordination of the offer with partners to provide a clear and visible service pathway.
- **Digital Transformation:** Improve the digital offer, with a visible branded website offering interactive information, advice and guidance. Digital resources for schools and parents/carers with an online assessment screening tool, mix of in-person and digital appointments. Three-way digital communication with parents, therapist and school on the child's progress, this will aid appropriate service discharge.
- **Early Help:** Increase number of drop-in groups in Family Hubs, community settings and develop an offer for the over-fives, develop pop up community sessions. Increase training for SENCOs, teaching assistants and parents and awareness communication for schools and other education settings.
- **Schools, Further Education & Pre-School Core Offer:** Design a core offer for schools that include digital enhancement, training and upskill staff within settings.
- **Specialist/Complex School Offer:** The Provider will co-design the offer with professionals and representative working towards clustered appointments in identified education establishments.
- **Traded Services & Recharging:** The provider will need to develop a traded service offer for schools and other education establishments. Where there are no reciprocal arrangements, the provider will recharge the appropriate Health Trust or Local Authority for children placed by other Authorities placing children in Cheshire East schools requiring speech and language therapy.
- **Out of Borough Children:** The provider will need to seek suitable arrangements with other agencies to cover children who are placed within a school under 20 miles of Cheshire East boundaries.
- **Visibility:** The service will co-design with parents, children and stakeholders a **brand** that is recognisable to citizens in Cheshire East.

12 **Joint Commissioning Arrangements**

- 13 The council and ICB have reviewed the practicalities of a jointly procured contract. There are benefits for both organisations in having one service contract, reducing the pressure on internal commissioning resources by streamlining the contract and performance monitoring from

the current situation of four separate service contracts to one. The main benefit for children will be a streamlined and consistent offer from clinic to community.

- 14 The council will be leading on the procurement and subsequent contract management. This arrangement will be supported using a Section 256 Agreement, that allows our health partner transfer funds to the council for this service on an annual basis.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 15 The paper dated the 12th of February 2024 outlined the statutory obligations to provide SLCN services.
- 16 There are three options available to the council, this report would recommend option 3, to gain the most effective and efficient service offer for children and young people. The outlined option appraisal is set out below.

	Option	Impact	Risk
1.	Do nothing	The council will be at risk of non-compliance with its legal obligations. Future service demand/needs for children may not be met.	Increased costs due to certainty of additional Tribunal cases. Reputational damage at a national level. Increased costs for spot provision of service/s.
2.	The council procure the service without its health partner.	Lacks and opportunity to reduce overheads costs by only having one provider.	Would not realise the saving benefits, more barriers for children accessing the service. Reduced opportunities to ensure the service is fit for the future to meet growing demands and changing needs of the patients.
3.	The council and ICB jointly procure the future service	The council and ICB would meet all legal obligations. There are natural resource and budget savings. The economy of scale will attract more providers to increase competitive tendering. Critically it will provide better access and a	Partnership can have a financial or reputational risk where there could be provider failure. The partnership may have future financial pressures that may require reduction to the service budget.

		seamless service for children and young people.	Changes to legislation can impact on changes to the service delivery.
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Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 17 The council have a statutory duty to provide SLCN services for a child/ren where this is required in their EHCP and outlined in Section F. This duty is set out within the Children's and Families Act 2014 Part 3 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (DfE, 2015a).
- 18 The procurement will be undertaken in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Public Contract Regulations 2015, Health and Care Act, 2022, Health Care Services (The Provider Selection Regime) Regulations 2023 and Cheshire East Council's and the C&M Integrated Care Board's Finance & Contract Procedure Rules.
- 19 The Section 256 Agreement will be agreed and authorised before the contract award to prevent delays to award the contract, mobilisation and subsequent contact start date.
- 20 The contract will be for a 5-year period with an option to extend for a 1 plus 1-year period.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 21 There is a VEAT/WARN to cover the financial years of 23/24 and 24/25, with a requirement that a recommissioning exercise will have a mobilised service for April 2025. The proposal can be funded from within existing budgets and funded by the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).
- 22 The current budgets for 2025/26 are as follows:
 - The Council: £850,000 per annum.
 - The ICB: £1,417,062 per annum.
- 23 The budget for the Council contribution for the new contract in 2025/26 is £850k pa, this is in line with the DSG management plan.

Risk Management

- 24 The Section 256 Agreement will ensure that the joint arrangements address financial and reputational implications for the council.

Access to Information	
Contact Office r:	<p>Martyn Baggaley, Head of Integrated Commissioning, Children, Families & Adults with Complex Needs, Adults, Health & Integration.</p> <p>Martyn.Baggaley@cheshireeast.gov.uk</p> <p>Liz Smith, Senior Project Manager (Commissioning)</p> <p>Liz.smith@cheshireeast.gov.uk</p>
Appendices:	<p>Appendix A – C&F Committee Decision Report 12th February 2024.</p> <p>Appendix B – Consultation and Engagement Update Report 2024.</p>
Background Papers:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Children and Families Act 2014, Part 3: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/part/3/enacted Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (DfE, 2015a). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398815/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf Health and Care Act 2022. Health and Care Act 2022 (legislation.gov.uk) Health Care Services (Provider Selection Regime) Regulations 2023. The Health Care Services (Provider Selection Regime) Regulations 2023 (legislation.gov.uk) Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2021 - 2025. SEND Strategy 2021 -2025 (cheshireeast.gov.uk) SEND Sufficiency Statement for children and young people with an education, health, care plan (EHCP) 2023-2026. SEND Sufficiency Statement for children and young people with an education, health, care plan (EHCP) (cheshireeast.gov.uk) ‘Bercow: 10 years on’ (2018). published a report on the state of provision for Children’s Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) in England.

	<p>https://www.bercow10yearson.com/findings/</p> <p>8. Equity for all: Children Speech and Language Therapy Services in Scotland (2022). 2022 Equity for All Final for Publication.pdf (bettercommunication.org.uk)</p> <p>9. The Balanced System; Understand the Need and Measuring the Impact. Northwest Network (2024). Slide 1 (bettercommunication.org.uk)</p> <p>10. Best start in speech, language and communication: Guidance to support local commissioners and service leads (2020). Best start in speech, language and communication: Guidance to support local commissioners and service leads (publishing.service.gov.uk)</p>

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Children and Families Committee

DATE: 12 February 2024

Paediatric Speech, Language and Communication Therapy Service

Report of: Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director of Children's Services

Report Reference No: CF/20/23-24

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report outlines the council and integrated care board's (ICB) approach and the current service pressures for paediatric speech, language, and communication therapy (SLCN) services, and the initial stages taken to review the service.
- 2 The report provides details on the planned recommission activity and co-production with the public and stakeholders to shape the future service offer.
- 3 This service falls under the 'fair' priority of the council's Corporate Plan 2021-2025, and specifically to reduce inequalities, promote fairness and opportunity for all and support our most vulnerable residents.

Executive Summary

- 4 The council and the ICB have a statutory duty to ensure children and young people between the ages of 0 to 25 years, have the appropriate services to meet their education, health and care plan (EHCP) needs. This includes therapies such as speech, language, and communication support.
- 5 This paper outlines the journey so far, the service pressures and emerging new demands arising from the planned expansion of local authority maintained special school provision, to ensure the authority can meet the needs of children and young people with special educational needs (SEND) in a financially sustainable way. It aims to provide the detail on the planned recommissioning activity that will ensure that children, young people and their families/carers are at the heart of the service redesign.
- 6 The council and ICB has initiated a review of the SCLN services and in the initial stages recognised a need to ensure there is a suitable pathway for children requiring support, and how the partners intend to address this need.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee are asked to:

1. Approve a co-produced service redesign following from a service review, and engagement process for paediatric speech, language and communication.
2. Approve the review of a jointly commissioned service (Section 256/75 Agreement) between the council and the Integrated Care Board for the provision of for paediatric speech, language and communication, as the first stage in a wider programme of jointly coordinated activity to meet the eligible needs of children with SEND, including broader paediatric therapeutic support.

Background

- 7 The council and ICB have a statutory duty to provide SLCN services for a child where this is required in the Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in Section F or Section G for health, this duty is set out within the Children's and Families Act 2014 Part 3 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (DfE, 2015a).
- 8 The council has agreements with Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (MCHFT) and East Cheshire Hospital NHS Trust (ECT) to provide SLCN services for children who have this requirement as part of their EHCP. The agreement is based on the current community service contracts held by the ICB, as there is a need to ensure that the clinical assessment can be followed on by therapy within the child's education setting.
- 9 Speech, language and communication therapy supports children and young people who have difficulties with communication, or with eating, drinking and swallowing. The therapy works in partnership with key people (parents, carers, teachers, pre-schools, occupational therapist, physiotherapists, health and social care) in the child's environment to support their communication development.
- 10 The service providers in Cheshire East deliver SLCN where there is an identified need (EHC Plans), within schools (maintained), children's centres, community settings, health clinics and sometimes within the child's home. The speech and language therapy service offers support for the following needs:
 - Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC)
 - Cleft Lip & palate
 - Autistic Spectrum (ASC)
 - Early language and communication
 - Feeding and swallowing
 - Hearing Impairment
 - School aged language

- Selective mutism
- Speech sound
- Stammering
- Voice

- 11 The increased level of demand for SLCN felt by Cheshire East as the numbers of children on EHCPs has risen is replicated across every other area in England, and this has presented challenges around the recruitment and retention of speech and language therapists.
- 12 Nationally all local authorities have seen a rise in EHCPs, however with a rise of 18% in Cheshire East, this is the 9th largest increase across all 152 local authorities. The increase in demand could be to several factors, from better identification and/or parental/professional challenge.

Table 1: EHCP Growth across Cheshire East and Compared to England, Northwest and Statistical Neighbour (SN) Average:

2023		
	EHCPs	Year-on-year rise
England	517,206	9%
North West	71,970	12%
Cheshire East	4,029	18%
SNs	4,795	11%

- 13 The number of EHCPs in Cheshire East has increased significantly over the last four years rising from 2,087 in early 2018 to 4,029, (as of January 2024), which is over a 90% increase.

Table 2: EHCP Annual Growth 2017 to 2022

Year	No of ECHPs	Increase
2022	4029	617
2021	3412	478
2020	2934	464

2019	2470	383
2018	2087	308

**New data for 2023 will be published in March 2024.*

- 14 The proportion with SLCN provision named in Section F of the education, health and care plan (Education) has increased alongside the demand for EHCPs. The council's collates data about the number of EHCP's on an annual basis this is called the SEN2 census data. In January 2023, it was reported that 26.5% (1113 children and young people) who required an EHCP, was for SLCN in 2022.
- 15 Table 3 below, highlights that SLCN is the number one requirement for children with a special education need. Based on the number of children requiring SLCN as part of their EHCP at over 26%, with an increase of over 20%+ for EHCPs annually, this could see an additional 100 to 150 children requiring a service for SLCN each year.
- 16 Cheshire East has two dedicated special education needs schools, Springfield Special School (Crewe) and Park Lane (Macclesfield). The pupil numbers within Springfield Special School and Park Lane Special School have increased over the past 6/7 years. The council has invested into a special school expansion, which will provide a further 120 special school places over the next 2 years at Springfield Crewe and Springfield new annex in Wilmslow.

Table 4: Pupil Numbers at both Springfield Special School and Park Lane Special School:

Spring Field Special School, Crewe	Park Lane Special School, Macclesfield
2016 - 129	2017 - 84
2021 - 186	2021 - 93
2023 - 210	2023 - 130

- 17 The caseload held by Speech and Language Therapists across both providers is currently at the recommended maximum and/or slightly above (Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists). National case load per WTE is currently at around 102 patients, this is subject to the complexity of the case. Caseloads are defined by several factors including the following:
- Legal requirements
 - Contractual obligations
 - Presence and level of clinical risks
 - Timing
 - Predicted outcomes in current context
- 18 Both ECT and MCHFT are reporting a caseload of 2500 children as a combined total for ICB and council. The service providers MCHFT and ECT

have highlighted a continuing trajectory of new demand outstripping the discharge of pupils from the SLCN service. SLCN continues to be a service in demand and commands a high level of importance and scrutiny across schools and parents, and the Cheshire East SEND Partnership. The council's SLCN active caseloads as of November 2023 are as follows:

South – 487 - reported that they have no child waiting over 18 weeks

North – 516 - reported that they have no child waiting over 18 weeks

Total – 1003

No of children discharged - 141

- 19 An initial review of the current service has identified several areas of that require further investigation:

- **Recruitment and Retention.** There has been challenges in the borough in terms of attracting and recruiting Speech and Language Therapist. However, MCHFT have addressed part of this issue with the recruitment of Speech and Language Therapy Assistants to support the work within schools. This is under the supervision of a Speech and Language Therapist and was discussed with the Parent Carers Board, who agreed that this was an acceptable arrangement.
- **Demand Management.** Parents have concerns about the waiting times for initial assessment, this is under review with the council and ICB. There has been year on year uplifts (growth) to the budgets to support the service. The growth of EHCP has increased the needs/demands. A performance management process will be launched in January to obtain quantifiable, measurable data which will track demand. We also need to focus on supporting children on the waiting list for triage and assessment to 'wait well', signposting to good quality information and accessible lower-level support wherever possible.
- **Spot purchasing.** There is additional spot purchasing around education (Part F, EHCP) placements; some of these are due to Tribunal rulings, out of area school placements and some are for complex requirements not covered by the two contracted providers.
- **Out of Area Placements.** The commissioned service only covers the service within the Cheshire East locality. There are some reciprocal arrangements with Staffordshire, but due to demands for SLCN in other areas some NHS Trusts are unable to commit to these arrangements.
- **Cheshire East Chatters (Talking Walk In).** This is an early help service, located within Cheshire East Family Hubs and data (April to November 2023) shows that 223 families have accessed the service of which 66% needs were met, 11% were referred to the SLCN service, 22% referred to Other. The service has seen in 8 months a 53%

increase in demand. With the current pressures on SLCN service and the demand for EHCP's, the ability to meet needs earlier will reduce demand at a later stage.

- **Historical arrangements.** There was an agreement that the council would only provide SLCN services to maintained mainstream/special schools. Any non-maintained, academies and independent special schools would be funded directly from the Department of Education and therefore should contract their own SLCN services. These require further oversight to understand the impact on children, schools and the council, and the issues around provision within Independent Special Schools.
- **Commissioned Providers.** Due to the former NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) recommissioning of its community Services contract in 2015/16, the council had to split its provision to a North and South service, subsequently we now have two providers. This is causing a disparity in the offer, and an increase in the management and overhead costs. However, with the ICB merged across the whole of East Cheshire this is giving us the opportunity to work towards having one contract, potentially as a wider partnership.
- **Special Education Schools Expansion.** The council has invested into the expansion of its special education schools' provision. The expansion of Springfield school Crewe will provide an additional 50 school places. The Springfield annex at Dean Row (Wilmslow) will increase the capacity with 70 additional places. Overall providing 120 special school places within the borough. There is a planned 2-year phasing of pupils into these provisions.
- **Benchmarking.** Commissioners are seeking further data and information from comparators councils. Initially, it has been identified that Cheshire East allocates circa £934 of its budget per young person with an identified SCLN in their EHCP (see paragraph 33 for a full budget breakdown). Staffordshire have shared budget and demand information that demonstrates a lower cost base. Spending £139k on direct support and an additional £200k for a specialist beacon school serving three of its eight districts. Whilst the model in Staffordshire is quite different to that of Cheshire Eats as a comparison, if Staffordshire's beacon school was to be replicated to serve the whole county this could result in an allocated budget of circa £408 for each young person in Staffordshire with an identified SLCN in their EHCP. We also have data from Cheshire West and Chester which would indicate they too source this support at a lower cost than Cheshire East (c£800 per young person, data subject to verification)

20 There will be several stages to the review and recommissioning of the service but will be in the following format:

Stage 1: Immediate Needs

Stage 2: Understanding, Reviewing and Engagement

Stage 3: Service Development/Coproduction and service redesign

Stage 4: Recommissioning

Stage 5: Contract Award/Mobilisation

Stage 6: Service Launch

Consultation and Engagement

- 21 Consultation, engagement is a continual process for commissioning as it provides the intelligence that inform the strategy, policy, quality assurance and performance of all our services.
- 22 Cheshire East parents, children, and families alongside professionals will be engaged with as part of the service improvement and redesign. It is intended that the new service model will be co-produced with parents/children and families, professionals, and key stakeholder e.g., schools, health visitors, school nurses.
- 23 Initial conversations have taken place with several groups; further engagement is planned with the following boards/groups:
 - Parent Carers Forum
 - Learning Disability Health Sub Group
 - SEND Board
 - Child Health Hub network
 - Short Break Coffee Mornings
 - Cheshire East Carers Forum
 - Family Hub Steering Group
 - VCFS Groups for families and children with SEND
 - Jigsaw
- 24 Engagement being initiated in December 2023 to parent carers, partner agencies, families and professionals that will shape future of the SLCN service. The proposed engagement will include:
 - Publication online survey and questionnaire for parents, carers and families to receive comments.
 - An online survey and questionnaire with schools/education partners, professional to receive comments.
 - Virtual and in-person workshops with carers, children, young people, families and professionals from December 2023 to March 2024. These will be advertised via social media, the council

website and with current existing routes for example, Carers Forum, Parent Carers Forum.

- Communication to all contracted and other providers on the Commissioning Intentions.
- Virtual online Market Place events for providers, advertised by the Chest Procurement Portal for wider markets to attend.
- All relevant stakeholders will be notified including partners, members, and town/parish councils.
- Briefings to networks such as the SEND Board, Parent Carers Board of the development and results.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 25 This service falls under the 'fair' priority of the council's Corporate Plan 2021-2025, and specifically to reduce inequalities, promote fairness and opportunity for all and support our most vulnerable residents. Therefore, to meet our obligations to Children's and Families Act 2014 Part 3 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (DfE, 2015a) the current service offer for SLCN for children and young people needs to be redesigned to meet current and emerging needs, and at a financially sustainable cost to both the Local Authority and Integrated Care Board.
- 26 The council and ICB are reviewing the practicalities of a jointly procured contract. Any partnership would be formalised using a Section 256/75 Agreement and should realise natural efficiencies through the reduction of contract on-costs and management overheads.

Other Options Considered

- 27 There are three options available to the council, this report would recommend option 2, to gain the most effective and efficient service offer for children and young people. The outlined option appraisal is set out below:

	Option	Impact	Risk
1.	Do nothing	The council will be at risk of non-compliance with its legal obligations. Future service demand/needs for children may not be met.	Increased costs due to certainty of additional Tribunal cases. Reputational damage at a national level. Increased costs for spot provision of service/s.

			Failure to comply to the council FCPR's and Public Contract Rules 2015.
2.	The council and ICB agree to review and consider jointly procuring the future service	The council and ICB would meet all legal obligations. Will realise natural savings (one contract – less overheads/management fees). May attract more providers to increase competitive tendering. Seamless service for children and young people.	The review may decide that a partnership may not be suitable. Partnership can have a financial or reputational risk. ICB want a phased approach between 2024 and 2026 to include broader community paediatric services within scope in 2025.
3.	The council procure the service without its health partner.	Would continue to offer a similar service with the issues of clinic needs and community, is not a future proof approach. An opportunity to reduce the service to one provider, so will provide some efficiencies and savings.	Would not realise the saving benefits. Would be more barriers for children accessing the service. Reduces the opportunities to ensure the service is fit for the future and can meet the growing demands and changing needs of the patients.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 28 The council have a statutory duty to provide SLCN services for a child/ren where this is required in their EHCP and outlined in Section F. This duty is set out within the Children's and Families Act 2014 Part 3 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (DfE, 2015a).
- 29 The outcome of consultation and market engagement will feed into the redesign and recommissioning of this service.
- 30 Once the recommissioning and procurement of services has been approved, the procurement should be undertaken in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and Cheshire East Council's and the Integrated Care Board's Contract Procedure Rules.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 31 There is a VEAT/WARN to cover the financial years of 23/24 and 24/25, with a requirement that a recommissioning exercise will have a mobilised service

for April 2025. The proposal can be funded from within existing budgets and funded by the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

32 The expected costs for 23/24 are as follows:

- NHS Central Cheshire Integrated Care Partnership Therapy Service (MCHFT) (Mid Cheshire NHS Trust)
£489,388 (includes NHS pay deal increase)
 - NHS East Cheshire Trust Therapy Service (ECT)
£550,524 (includes NHS pay deal increase)
- Total - £1,039,912.00

Policy

The SLCN service will contribute towards the vision of the Corporate Plan 2021-2025 to be an open, fair, and green council and help to deliver the priority to be a council which empowers and cares about people.

This recommissioning activity has no impact on current policies both nationally and locally.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 33 Our joint SEND strategy sets out what we want to achieve as a partnership for children and young people with SEND in Cheshire East, and the key actions that we will carry out to achieve our priorities is our commitment to children and young people with additional needs and ensures they have appropriate support to aspire to achieve in line with peers.
- 34 An Equality Impact Assessment has been started and will be updated as part of the review, engagement and consultation process.

Human Resources

- 35 There is no direct impact on any employees within Cheshire East Council.
- 36 Employees for the two providers are on NHS terms and conditions of employment and will be eligible for TUPE. During the tender all applicants will be provided with a full list of the eligible employees.

Risk Management

- 37 There is a potential risk that the governance timeline will not meet key deadlines and slow the commissioning process down. Early progression and decision making will mitigate this risk.

- 38 A Section 256/75 Agreement with the ICB will mitigate any financial and reputational implications for the council. The council and ICB will be responsible for the oversight of the future service contract.

Rural Communities

- 39 There are no direct implications to the offer within rural communities the intention is to co-produce the future service offer and we will seek to include citizens who use or need SLCN that live in rural communities.
- 40 There is an opportunity to align this service pathway with our health partners to achieve a seamless service and improve access for children and young people with SLCN having improved access.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 41 The service will be developed with children, young people and their families/carers with a focus on those with and/or requiring Education, Health and Care Plans.
- 42 Developing the multi-agency support, safeguarding approach will be part of the service development and shape the future offer.
- 43 A key development is to align this service within education, health and community settings. This will improve the identification of children with SLCN at the earliest opportunity.

Public Health

- 44 The service has a positive impact on the health and wellbeing for children with SLCN. The early identification and improved access will improve longer term outcomes.

Climate Change

- 45 The recommissioning of the service will include expectations around Social Value, this includes social, economic and environmental impacts.
- 46 The service provider will need to demonstrate their impact on the environment throughout the life of the contract. This will be included as part of the service specification and monitored by quarterly performance measures.
- 47 Targets around recycling, energy consumption, carbon reduction with the use of electric vehicles, employing people within the community it serves virtually on a place-based locality will be measured.

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Appendices:	None for this report
Background Papers:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children and Families Act 2014, Part 3: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/part/3/enacted 2. Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (DfE, 2015a). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398815/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf



Cheshire and Merseyside



Speech, Language and Communication Joint Commission Consultation & Engagement

Background

This report gives details on the engagement and consultation carried out with key stakeholders for a speech and language service review.

Engagement and coproduction is a key part of service change, being the centre of quality improvement and delivering high quality patient focused care. The initial engagement carried out as detailed in this report is only the beginning of the co-production journey and following this, stakeholders will continue to be involved in the process to ensure true co-production.

Another model which we have worked with in this engagement process is the Lundy Model of Youth Participation which emphasises a child's right to participation and decision making. This model highlights the importance of a feedback process and to ensure that this is continued to be followed up.

Local context

Cheshire East Council and the ICB have a statutory duty to ensure children and young people between the ages of 0 to 25 years, have the appropriate services to meet their education, health and care plan (EHCP) needs. This includes therapies such as speech, language, and communication support.

Due to the service pressures and emerging new demands arising from the planned expansion of local authority maintained special school provision, the local authority and ICB are planning a joint recommission that will ensure that children, young people and their families/carers are at the heart of the service redesign.

As part of the joint commission, consultation and engagement is a critical and continual process for commissioning as it provides the intelligence that inform the strategy, policy, quality assurance and performance of all our services. Cheshire East parents, children, and families alongside professionals have been and will continue to be engaged with as part of the service improvement and redesign. It is intended that the new service model will be co-produced with parents/children and families, professionals, and key stakeholder e.g., schools, health visitors, school nurses.

Process

To inform the process of engagement with target audiences, initial scoping was done linking with neighbouring places, West Cheshire and Staffordshire, who had recently been through service reviews. Scoping supported in forming the questions for the surveys in Cheshire East. Key factors were considered such as survey length and questions style to be suitable for the key audiences; children and young people, professionals, teachers, and parents/carers.

With support from Cheshire East Council the surveys were produced and shared with contacts and networks from the council, NHS and third sector organisations.

To support with promotion and collection of feedback, a number of user groups were attended including, the Parent Carer Forum, Jigsaw Youth Group, Little Stars Parent and Child Groups and a Parent/Carer group at Ruby's Fund. These user experiences gave the depth to support the survey results.

Results - Surveys (Open 1st December 2023 – 24th January 2024)

Professionals

A total of 30 professionals completed the survey. Some key figures of demographics are included below:

- 19 from East Cheshire Trust, 9 from CCICP and 2 from the 0-19 Health Visiting service. This means a higher proportion of respondents worked in the north locality of Cheshire East.
- 20 respondents were Speech and Language Therapists, with the other 10 being a mix of health visiting team, school nurses and practitioners.
- 2 respondents represented special schools

Key themes identified in the survey from professionals:

- 22 people agreed that they fully utilise their skills in their role with the main theme for those who don't agree being understaffing and long waiting lists.
- Strong sense of how technology and digital systems could be used more to support with appointments in all areas; in delivery of appointments, use of apps, email communication, text messages and digital training.
- A positive response on how Speech and Language therapy services offer a high degree of flexibility for families and focus on building the relationships, in particularly the support that is offered to the more vulnerable families and children.
- Staffing and capacity in the teams is a running theme for improvement throughout the survey. This would improve the current offer, with more appointments and a high degree of flexibility to offer additional time for the more complex or vulnerable children.
- Appetite for more training to be provided for parents and settings at a universal level to support whilst families are waiting to access the service, with increased signposting to key resources.

- A strong desire for more community and clinic space to be available to improve the service offer.
- Additional training in schools would be beneficial both to support children but also in what the Speech and Language service offers and clarity in referrals.
- To look at single cluster admin support and digitalised administrative process (reducing admin for the professionals).
- Therapists are overall happy with the effective and caring service they run, not ignoring the waiting lists and the impact that this does have on their role. Respondents have commented on how capacity has impacted their opportunity for CPD.

Schools

A total of 18 respondents completed the surveys from schools, key figures and demographics are below:

- 10 respondents are from the South locality (covered by CCICP) and 8 from the North locality (covered by East Cheshire Trust) of Cheshire East.
- 9 people are in the role of SENCOs, 4 Head Teachers, noting that there was 1 teacher and 1 TA who completed the survey.
- Majority of participants worked with primary school age, 2 people working with the ages 11-18

Key themes identified in the survey from Schools:

- An emphasis on how digital platforms can improve the service, e.g., online SCLN Support Hub and SALT apps, appointment systems.
- Feedback is generally positive of the relationship with therapists and the service they offer but due to capacity of therapists there is often lack of availability of therapists to support and less regular visits.
- Opportunities to build the communication with therapists around updates after follow-ups with children and informing of future appointments would be beneficial.
- Positive feedback about Cheshire East Chatters and the training that has been provided by Speech and Language therapists.
- Those children on EHCP plans get better and more regular support but there is room for improvement in the offer to other children.
- Out of the 16 that answered, 6 people have identified that they don't feel that the school has the suitable training to meet the needs of the child – there is a theme throughout the survey that additional training at all levels would improve the offer.
- Out of the 16 that answered, over 50% would consider buying in additional support, with 3 schools already purchased.

Parent Care Surveys

A total of 7 people completed the parent and carers survey which is lower than anticipated. Key demographics of respondents are below:

- 6 of the participants were from the north patch of Cheshire East, under Cheshire East Trust. The other person is under the services provided by CCICP.
- 3 people are currently on a waiting list, 3 accessing and one person not yet referred.
- There is an equal split between primary school and secondary school age.

Some of the key themes identified in the survey from parents and carers with as follows:

- Communication is one of the main problems between providers, schools and families, and is a consistent theme through the survey. Respondents reported difficulties getting in contact with the service.
- On the whole parents and carers reported a positive response to the venues.
- Therapists were seen positively – professional, friendly and supportive.
- There has been mixed feedback on face to face and virtual appointments, understanding the benefits but the difficulties technology can sometimes raise.
- Improvements suggested is for better communication and involvement with parents.
- All respondents reported having no support or resources whilst waiting for their initial appointment.

Results – Face to Face engagement

Little Stars

Little Stars is a group is for children with additional needs and their parents. There are activities provided to support the child's development in a fun and relaxing group.

Little Stars Oakenclough

At this group 5 families were in attendance, 4 of which had accessed speech and language therapy services in Cheshire East North, under East Cheshire NHS Trust. One key theme of feedback was around the wait time with 3 out of 4 parents reporting that they had waited for around a year for the initial appointment. 2 of these children had SEND needs.

Another key theme identified was around the lack of support and communication during wait times, with suggested exercises given with the initial referral letter but then not receiving any communication until the appointment almost a year later.

All these children were attending a group at the Family Hub but non had accessed the 'Talking Walk In' group at the Family Hubs where SALT professionals are available to support.

Little Stars Monks Coppenhall

The Little Stars group at Monks Coppenhall in Crewe was a busy session with the practitioners reporting that there are considerations to host additional sessions.

9 families were in attendance with 6 accessing speech and language services in Mid Cheshire under CCICP.

The feedback given around waiting times ranged from 2 months - 6 months and general feedback was quite positive on initial contact with the service. Overall parents/carers have been happy with the service they have received, support given, and the relationship with the therapist.

Jigsaw Youth Group Macclesfield

The Jigsaw Group is a SEND Youth Forum that any child or young person with additional needs can attend from the age of 13. Children and young people have the opportunity to have their say and make positive changes about services that affect their lives, make new friends and take part in fun activities including life skills.

Around 6 children attended this group, 3 of which had accessed speech and language services. Feedback regarding the service was overall positive, reporting that they enjoyed sessions with their therapist and that their language had improved. One of the key take away messages from this session was the preference to have their speech and language sessions in school rather than a healthcare setting.

One of the suggestions of improvement was that they would have appreciated more sessions more regularly to help progress quicker, or longer sessions.

Rubys Fund

Ruby's Fund run a number of sessions aimed at parents/carers and children with SEND aged 0-18. These run throughout the week, ranging from drop in session, social sessions and short breaks. Attending the 'SEND cuppa in the café', there were a number of parents in attendance, 2 of which had used speech and language services in Cheshire East.

Both parents engaged with had children who were non-verbal, one who used services through CCICP and one through East Cheshire Trust. Both reported positive experiences overall with short waiting times to access the services. Areas of suggested improvement were communication, reporting that communication as is often quite delayed following sessions. The appointments for both children were every 2/3months which parents reported they ideally would like more often. None of the parents reported use of digital or virtual technology. Both parents has had consistency in therapists and had built relationships.

Springfield Special School

Springfield School caters for children and young people between the age of 4 – 19 with severe learning difficulties and complex needs. Working with the speech and language therapists based at Springfield School, 6 children with complex needs were engaged with using communication methods including communication cards and

communication books. The children were aged between 6 – 14 years old and were overall very positive about their experiences of speech and language therapy. Children used communication cards to place under pictures of a happy, not sure and sad face to describe how they feel about different elements. All children showed happy feelings when going to the speech and language therapy room and majority of activities used in the session. There was some uncertainty around the use of communication methods at home which can support feedback received around communication and engagement from parents and carers.

Speaking with the speech and language therapists who work with the children at Springfield School, improvements identified were around training and engagement with parents. The therapists said that home visits and support to parents would benefit the children, but capacity means that this doesn't happen. The SLC therapists do have access to digital software through Springfield school which does support communicating and sending information to both teachers and parents. Therapists also provide some training to teachers but agreed that this isn't enough and feel that they would benefit from additional training. Another gap identified were inconsistencies between CCICP and ECT SALT services which has been identified when working with the Springfield School in Wilmslow.

Final steps

As previously mentioned, it is important that true co-production is carried out as part of the joint commission and therefore key partners will continue to be involved in the process. Continuous feedback on progress made will be important.

Following the feedback received from the surveys and groups attended, a number of targeted focus groups will be set up for a deeper dive into some of the key themes. All feedback and information will feed into development of service specification for the future recommission.

In development of the service specification, further workshops have taken place with council and ICB to ensure feedback from all stakeholder has been sought and taken into consideration. This has been concluded with three further events to review the following themes:

- SLCN Early Help Offer
- SLCN Schools and Special School Expansion Offer
- SLCN The offer for children out of the area, not in education or elected home educated.

OPEN

Children and Families Committee

16 September 2024

Childcare Expansion Capital Grant and Wraparound Childcare Revenue Grant Policies

Report of: Director of Children's Services

Report Reference No: CF/23/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: All Wards

Purpose of Report

- 1 To request approval of:
 - (a) Childcare Expansion Capital Grant Policy, June 2024.
 - (b) Wraparound Childcare Revenue Grant Policy, June 2024.
- 2 To request approval to provide delegated authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to use funds from funding allocations received from the Department for Education (DfE) as referred to below ("the Funding Allocations") in accordance with the relevant guidance and proposed funding policies.
- 3 This is supporting the council's Corporate Plan objectives as follows:

An open and enabling organisation	Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making.
A council which empowers and cares about people	Support all children to have the best start in life. Ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to

	achieve their full potential.
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Executive Summary

- 4 This report sets out the details of two specific funding allocations from the Department for Education (DfE) and the proposed policies for allocating the funding to childcare providers in Cheshire East.
- 5 The report requests approval to delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to use the funds in accordance with the relevant guidance and proposed funding policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the Childcare Expansion Capital Grant Policy set out in Appendix 1.
2. Approve the Wraparound Childcare Revenue Grant Policy set out in Appendix 2.
3. Provides delegated authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to use the grants in accordance with relevant guidance.
4. That the committee delegates authority to the Head of Service for Early Years, Family Help and Prevention to enter into contracts with grant recipients in accordance with the proposed funding policies.

Background

- 6 The council received two funding allocations to support the creation of childcare:
 - (a) The childcare expansion capital grant funding is provided to local authorities to support the provision of new places to support the expansion of:
 - (i) 30-hours entitlement places for children aged 9-months to 3-year-olds
 - (ii) wraparound provision for primary school aged children.
 - (b) The national wraparound childcare programme provides grant funding (revenue) to local authorities in England to help make

sure that there is sufficient breakfast and after-school clubs in their area for primary school aged children.

7 Cheshire East funding allocations:

- (a) Childcare Expansion (capital) £748,977
- (b) Wraparound childcare (revenue) £875,914

8 A proportion of the wraparound funding may be used for local authority capacity. The median average expected by the DfE is 11%. Cheshire East expected capacity costs are 11% and will be met by the grant as follows:

	Total
Total funding allocation	£875,914.57
Total expected capacity costs	£97,083.00
Programme Spend	£778,831.57

Childcare expansion capital grant

- 9 The grant is intended to support capital projects that will increase the physical capacity of early years and wraparound provision in local areas where demand is likely to exceed existing supply.
- 10 The funding can be used to provide new places in a range of provider types, where these are offering the 30-hours early years entitlement and/or providing wraparound provision for primary-aged children.
- 11 Calculation of the funding allocation was split 80% towards early years entitlement projects and 20% towards wraparound provision.
- 12 This grant funding is not intended for routine maintenance or refurbishment of premises, capital works to maintain and improve the condition of the school estate, childcare providers not providing Early Years entitlements or wraparound care. The funding is provided for capital purposes only and cannot be used for revenue expenditure of any kind.
- 13 The supply and demand for the early education entitlements has been mapped and the capital funding policy in appendix 1 developed to support the creation of new places in areas of undersupply.
- 14 Applications for funding will be invited in autumn term subject to committee approval of the policy.

National wraparound childcare programme

- 15 The national wraparound childcare programme is part of the childcare reforms announced at the 2023 Spring Budget. The government's ambition is that by 2026, all parents and carers of primary school-aged children who need it will be able to access term time childcare in their local area from 8am-6pm, so that parents can access employment and improve labour market participation.
- 16 To support this ambition, the government will provide start-up funding over two academic years to support local authorities and providers in England to introduce or expand childcare provision on either side of the school day, which parents of primary school-aged children will be able to pay to access.
- 17 Local authorities are responsible for delivering on the primary objective of the wraparound programme in their local area. That is, to increase parent/carer access to the labour market by increasing the number of wraparound childcare places for primary-aged children available and taken up between 8am and 6pm (or equivalent, depending on local labour market patterns).
- 18 The programme funding aims to remove barriers to setting up new provision or expanding current provision, including removing the financial risk of setting up new provision when demand is not guaranteed. It is based on a 'pump prime' model, whereby government funds are provided to spur growth.
- 19 Schools are central to the delivery of the programme as they operate at the heart of the community, understand the needs of local families, and are usually the first port of call for parents for wraparound childcare. Wraparound provision should be set up around the needs of schools, given that it takes place directly before or after school hours, and should recognise the circumstances of each school.
- 20 The supply and demand of wraparound childcare has been mapped and the revenue funding policy in appendix 2 developed to support the creation of new places in areas of undersupply.
- 21 Applications for funding will be invited in autumn term subject to committee approval of the policy.
- 22 The application processes will be repeated until the places are created and funding fully committed.

Consultation and Engagement

- 23 Detailed analyses of childcare places has been conducted by both the council and the DfE since autumn 2023 to determine the areas of need.

Grant applications from areas with an identified shortfall in provision will be prioritised.

- 24 The priorities for grant funding proposed by the council were subject to the DfE approval. A delivery plan was submitted to the DfE on 14 June 2024 and approval is anticipated during August 2024.
- 25 Trade Union / Staff consultation is not applicable.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 26 The council has a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient early years entitlement places and wraparound places, and to utilise the Childcare Expansion and Wraparound Childcare funding allocations to grant fund childcare providers to create and deliver provision.

Other Options Considered

- 27 The council has followed the prescribed processes to arrive at the recommendations being presented to Children and Families Committee. A range of factors were considered when prioritising the funding. In any event, areas of under supply must be targeted for financial support.
- 28 Options appraisal:

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	Insufficient 30-hours entitlement places for children aged 9-months to 3-year-olds, and insufficient wraparound provision for primary school aged children	Fail to meet statutory duties, Childcare Act 2006: Section 6 – Duty to secure sufficient childcare for working parents Section 7 – Duty to secure early years provision free of charge Fail to improve the well-being of children and families.
Adopt the policies set out in appendix 1 and 2	Increase the availability of 30-hours entitlement places for children aged 9-months to 3-year-olds,	Sustainability of provision once the grant support ends. Risk mitigated by business plans and

	and wraparound provision for primary school aged children. Improve the well-being of children and families.	forecasts required as part of application process.
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Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 29 The Funding Allocations assist with the Authority's delivery of its duty to secure sufficient childcare under Sections 6 and 7 of the Childcare Act 2006.
- 30 The Grant Policies as referred to in Appendix 1 and 2 have been drafted in accordance with the principles set out in the Corporate Grant Policy with guidance from legal.
- 31 In order to comply with the Subsidy Control Act Rules, each applicant will be required to complete a Subsidy Contract Test Form which provides questions to the applicant to confirm whether any of their proposed activities to be funded by way of a grant represents a subsidy. However, it is not anticipated that any applicant's proposed activities would give rise to the award of a subsidy due to the nature of the Policies under Appendix 1 and 2.
- 32 The successful applicant will also be required to comply with audit requirements and keep evidence of eligible expenditure and works or activities which are grant funded.
- 33 Successful applicants will be awarded a Grant under the terms of a Contract between the Council and the Recipient.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 34 The Cheshire East allocations of the Childcare Expansion Capital grant and the Wraparound Childcare Revenue grant are new sources of funding 2024/25. The grants specifically relate to the provision of childcare following the introduction of new requirements for wraparound care and care of 9 month to 3 year olds. Both grants will need to be spent within the terms and conditions of the grant.

- 35 Organisations receiving grants from the Council to expand capacity will also have to follow these terms and conditions. Failure to do so could result in the organisation being asked to repay the grant monies to the Council.
- 36 Organisations receiving capital grants are expected to have the early year places created for a minimum of five years. Cheshire East Council will recover funding on a reduced percentage basis dependent on the number of years the places were available.

Policy

- 37 The council is supporting the priorities in the Corporate Plan:

An open and enabling organisation	Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making.
A council which empowers and cares about people	Support all children to have the best start in life. Ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 38 The nine protected characteristics are not impacted negatively by the policies. The policies positively support children aged 9 months to the end of primary school, children with SEND, and parents return to work at the end of maternity.
- 39 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and published:

https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/council_information/equality-and-diversity/equality_analysis.aspx

Human Resources

- 40 The policies will be implemented within the current resources.

Risk Management

- 41 Grant funding allocations to childcare providers will be subject to a contract prepared by Legal Services. The contract will require the recipient to complete regular monitoring reports.
- 42 Regular monitoring reports will be required by the DfE throughout the projects.

Rural Communities

- 43 The policies will apply equally to all areas of the borough.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 44 The policies have implications for all children aged 9 months to the end of primary school. Additional priority may be applied to projects supporting children with SEND.

Public Health

- 45 There are no direct implications for public health.

Climate Change

- 46 There are no direct implications.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Danielle Holdcroft, danielle.holdcroft@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1- Childcare Expansion Capital Grant Policy, June 2024. Appendix 2 - Wraparound Childcare Revenue Grant Policy, June 2024.
Background Papers:	Childcare expansion capital grant funding - GOV.UK https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childcare-expansion-capital-grant-funding Wraparound childcare: guidance for local authorities - GOV.UK

	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wraparound-childcare-guidance-for-local-authorities
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POLICY FOR THE
CHILDCARE EXPANSION
CAPITAL GRANT

31 July 2024



*Working for a **brighter future** together*

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. Cheshire East Council has a statutory duty to ensure there is sufficient childcare available to support the needs of parents accessing work and training.
- 1.2. Increased support from the government for children to access childcare increases the demand for early education entitlement and wraparound places:
 - funding 15 hours a week of free childcare for all 3- and 4-year-olds – an increase from 12.5 hours
 - funding 30 hours a week of free childcare for 3- and 4-year-olds in households where both parents work – an increase from 15 hours
 - funding 15 hours a week of free childcare for all disadvantaged 2-year-olds – for 40% of all 2 year olds
 - from April 2024, working parents of two-year-olds will be able to access 15 hours of free childcare. From September 2024, 15 hours of free childcare will be extended down to the age of nine months for working parents. From September 2025, working parents of children aged nine months and upwards will be entitled to 30 hours free childcare per week right up to their child starting school.
 - Wraparound childcare provision directly before and after the school day during school term time for school age children
 - legislating for tax free childcare which will save working families with children under age 12 up to £2,000 per child per year.
- 1.3. Over 80% of the free entitlement in Cheshire East is delivered by the private / voluntary / independent sector, and less than 20% in schools. These sectors are responsive to change but their opportunities to expand are often limited by access to capital. The government recognises this and makes capital available to support the expansion of childcare in line with the increased government support for parents.
- 1.4. The Department for Education (DfE) has made capital available to support the expanded early education entitlements and wraparound childcare for primary school aged children. The total Childcare Capital Expansion Funding capital allocation for Cheshire East is £748,977, calculated on 80% to expand the early education entitlements (£599,182) and 20% to expand wraparound childcare (£149,795).
- 1.5. The capital funding assists the Council in meeting statutory duties and support the following corporate objectives:
 - Support all children to have the best start in life
 - Increase the opportunities for children, young adults and adults with additional needs
 - Ensure all children to have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential
 - Thriving urban and rural economies with opportunities for all.
- 1.6. Capital may be awarded to childcare providers to extend existing or create new provision. The key criteria for funding being the creation of additional capacity in areas of need. The capital can not be used to improve the quality of existing provision.

2. Legal and Budgetary Framework

- 2.1. The budget is £748,977 and made up wholly by the funding allocation from the DfE, with £599,182 allocated to expand the early education entitlements and £149,795 allocated to expand wraparound childcare.
- 2.2. All grant decisions will be made based on the set of principles, set out in this Policy, and within the agreed budget approved by Council. The budget for the grants is managed carefully and flexibly to ensure that the Council has money available throughout 2024/25 and potentially into 2025/26 to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, childcare places are created as the need arises. As far as possible the Council tries to ensure that no one is disadvantaged due to the time of year they apply.
- 2.3. Given the fixed budget and the Council's aim to benefit as many organisations as possible, the Council cannot guarantee to fund the maximum amount applied for; therefore, organisations must ensure that they have procedures in place to cover the balance of funding required. The Council will not pay a grant unless the organisation can demonstrate that the balance of the funding is available.

3. Application Process

- 3.1. The Childcare Expansion Capital Grant scheme operates within set criteria, agreed by the Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration and relevant Council Officers in line with the Council's Corporate Outcomes.
- 3.2. Applications must be made on the Council's official application form and accompanied by at least two written quotations on contractors' letter headed paper for each item of the Works and any other information that the Council considers necessary to consider an application for funding.
- 3.3. All applications must be approved as set out in section 9.
- 3.4. The Childcare Development Manager may request further information to assess whether the Applicant meets the eligibility and criteria requirements.
- 3.5. Applications will be considered in line with the funding available and once the budget has been committed in a financial year, no further applications will be considered.
- 3.6. Where an application for funding is refused, the Council will provide a written statement of the reasons for refusal, and details of any appeals procedure.
- 3.7. The funding for this policy will be available over a number of application opportunities until the budget is exhausted. In the case of all applications all the terms and conditions of the funding have been met by the Applicant.

4. How to apply

- 4.1. Applications for funding must be made using the Council's application form and associated guidance notes that are available on the Council's website.
- 4.2. The application form must be completed in full. Incomplete application forms will not be considered and will be returned to the applicant, which could cause a delay or deferral to the application. A copy of the organisation's up-to-date signed Governing Document and Safeguarding Policies must be sent with the application form. If this is not received the application will be deferred to the next round of evaluation and may result in the application being declined. Supporting documentation (listed on the application form) may also be requested prior to the application being fully considered. Failure to supply all required documentation will result in the application being treated as incomplete.

- 4.3. The closing dates for receipt and acceptance of complete applications are published on the Cheshire East council website and the CHEST <https://www.the-chest.org.uk/> at the time when applications are invited. Applications are not invited at any other times.
- 4.4. Applications will be accepted and reviewed according to the timescales stated in section 9 of this document.
- 4.5. Grants cannot be paid retrospectively therefore any work commenced prior to acceptance of the grant offer will not be eligible for funding.
- 4.6. All successful applicants will be required to complete a post grant monitoring report as per section 12 of this document.
- 4.7. What can be funded**
- 4.8. Capital schemes to create additional early education entitlement and/or wraparound childcare places in Cheshire East in areas of need identified in the latest childcare sufficiency assessments conducted by the council. Schemes must create additional places (no minimum number of places) subject to the requirements set out in 4.18.
- 4.9. Wraparound childcare provision funded from this grant must be available directly before and after the school day, from 8am to 6pm (or equivalent, if data shows that local demand is for different hours) during school term time for primary school-age children. It may be run on a school site or at another setting. It should not require parents to pick their children up from school and drop them off at another location.
- 4.10. Examples of early years projects that can be funded:
- Projects that increase the number of places to enable and/or increase access to childcare places for eligible children;
 - Projects that adapt, re-model or improve existing childcare provision and expand the number of places to make them suitable for a wider range of needs;
 - Central capital works required to enable delivery of additional early education entitlement places.
- 4.11. These could be achieved through:
- Expansion of existing childcare provision, including expanding existing provision to a different or additional site;
 - Remodelling of existing provision to create additional capacity;
 - Creation of new childcare places, whether via the creation of new settings, or expanding provision in existing providers;
- 4.12. Examples of appropriate wraparound projects that can be funded:
- Projects that enable the creation of new wraparound places and increase access to wraparound places where suitability of space may be a concern, particularly for children with SEND;
 - Projects that adapt, remodel and improve to create additional wraparound provision to make them suitable for a wider range of needs;
 - Purchasing fixed assets required to deliver wraparound provision.
- 4.13. These could be achieved through:
- Building modifications to enable use of space outside main school/setting operating hours, e.g., secure external access, outside lighting to enable outdoor space to be used year-round;
 - Building modifications to adapt space for use to deliver inclusive wraparound childcare;
 - Improvements to storage;

- New physical assets such as minibus purchase (to support a hub model of wraparound provision), play equipment (including outdoor play equipment), or tables and chairs. To be considered capital expenditure the asset must bring an economic benefit, and able to be depreciated, over more than one financial year.

4.14. What cannot be funded

- i) Work which has already taken place before acceptance of the grant offer;
- ii) The funding should not be used to subsidise the fee charged for places. Any places created through the programme should be paid for by parents.
- iii) The programme grant funding should not be used to contribute to the running cost of existing wraparound childcare places
- iv) Revenue costs
- v) Vehicle purchase unless used for the delivery of wraparound childcare;
- vi) Loan against loss or debt;
- vii) Paying someone to write your application or applications to other grant funders;
- viii) Land purchase;
- ix) Items that are purchased on behalf of another organisation.
- x) contributions in kind
- xi) depreciation, repayment or impairment of assets already owned
- xii) interest payments or service charge payments for finance leases
- xiii) gifts
- xiv) entertaining (entertaining for this purpose means anything that would be a taxable benefit to the person being entertained, according to current UK tax regulations)
- xv) statutory fines, criminal fines or penalties.

4.15. Who can apply

4.16. To qualify for a grant organisations must meet the criteria listed below:

- i) Schools, private, voluntary, and independent sector childcare providers, including childminders, operating within the Cheshire East area and registered with the appropriate regulatory body;
- ii) Provide value for money - the applicant may only request funding for resources that are essential to the completion of the project and must provide comparative quotes;
- iii) If a voluntary sector organisation, have a management committee with an up-to-date Governing Document which must be signed by at least two members of the committee who are unrelated to each other;
- iv) Have appropriate safeguarding policies relevant to their organisation, which must include a requirement that staff / volunteers are cleared with the Disclosure and Barring Service where appropriate;
- v) Have a bank or building society account in the name of the organisation applying with at least two signatories unless a childminder where one signatory would be applicable;
- vi) Complete the current application form in full, providing all required information;
- vii) Meet the requirements of the Subsidy Control Act 2022.

4.17. Priorities for Funding

4.18. Priority will be given to organisations and projects that:

- i) Create additional early education entitlement and/or wraparound childcare places in areas of need identified in the childcare sufficiency assessments or any other supplementary assessments conducted by the council
- ii) Are easily reached by children and families accessing the service in the area of under supply.. Projects in close proximity to families requiring childcare attracts a higher score. This does not preclude applications to create provision outside the area of need that serves the area of need.
- iii) Have attained a Good or Outstanding Ofsted grade at last inspection. Applications may be considered from applicants who have attained a Requires Improvement grade at last inspection.
- iv) Have the lowest level of grant funding per childcare place created. Priority will be given to applicants who create places for the lowest level of grant funding.
- v) Request the lowest proportion of the budget available
- vi) Have a high level of applicant investment
- vii) Create a high number of new childcare places
- viii) Demonstrate how the project will meet the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (specific SEND questions on the application form).

4.19. Each application is awarded a score out of 10 for the following areas. Each area carries a weighting in order to determine the total score.

	Weighting	Maximum weighted score available
Sufficiency (need for provision in the area attracts the highest score)	30	300
Accessibility (closest proximity to families requiring childcare attracts highest score)	3	30
Ofsted grade at last inspection (Outstanding attracts highest score)	5	50
Cost per place created (grant requested ÷ places created. Lowest cost per place attracts the highest score).	4	40
Proportion of budget (lowest proportion of budget attracted the highest score to avoid the budget being allocated to a narrow geographic area).	2	20
Level of applicant investment (highest proportion of applicant investment attracts the highest score).	3	30
Number of new places created (high score for high number of places created).	30	300
Proportion of places created that specifically meet the needs of children with SEND (highest proportion attracts	3	30

highest score)		
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- 4.20. The highest scoring applications will be funded subject to achieving a minimum score that is determine by the budget available.
- 4.21. There is a limited amount of funding available. The funding is intended to create more childcare places over time, provide one-off funding for projects and to support new initiatives.
- 4.22. In the unfortunate event that a project receives funding to create early years places and subsequently closes Cheshire East Council will recover funding on a reduced percentage basis as indicated in the following table:

Time period	Percentage clawback
Year 1	80%
Year 2	60%
Year 3	40%
Year 4	20%
Year 5 onwards	0%

5. Carrying out and completion of the works

- 5.1. Works must be carried out by a contractor whose quotation was accepted as part of the application for funding. Any request to change contractor must be made in writing. Consent will not be unreasonably withheld by the Council.
- 5.2. The Works must be started within 3 months and completed within 6 months of the date of approval. Requests for additional time to start or complete the Works must be made in writing before the end of the relevant period. Consent will not be unreasonably withheld by the Council.
- 5.3. In the event of unforeseen work or an increase in costs arising during the course of the Works, the amount of the funding may be increased at the discretion of the Council. The minimum amount of such "Additional Funding" that will be considered is £100.
- 5.4. Funding payments will only be made where:
- The Works have been completed in accordance with any statutory requirements and / or the Council's specification, and to the reasonable satisfaction of the Council, and
 - The Council's standard payment request form has been completed, and
 - Upon receipt of a valid invoice or receipt for the Works. An invoice or receipt will not be considered valid where it is not in the name of the Applicant.
- 5.5. Requests for interim payments will be considered. The value of the interim payments will not exceed the value of the Works completed and will not exceed 90% of the total value of the Works that have been approved.
- 5.6. Where requests for Additional Funding are received the Council will only approve Additional Funding where the additional sum requested combined with the original funding do not exceed the maximum permitted funding.
- 5.7. In the event of a dispute between the Applicant and the contractor about the satisfactory completion of the Works the Council reserves the right to pay the assistance to the Applicant or the contractor if the Works have been carried out to the satisfaction of the Council.

6. General works conditions

- 6.1. The following conditions will apply to all Works applications:
- The property must be situated in Cheshire East;
 - Eligible costs that can be included in the application for funding are:

OFFICIAL

- a) Reasonable cost of Works
- b) Any VAT on the reasonable cost of Works
- c) Eligible fees
- iii. Eligible Fees that may be included as part of the application for funding are:
 - a) Specialist, technical and / or structural reports that are required by the Council.
 - b) Building Control fees for Works.
 - c) Legal fees and disbursements incurred as a result of setting up any agreements.
 - d) Valuations fees.
 - e) Financial advice.
- iv. A fee in accordance with the Council's Fees and Charges schedule will be included as part of the loan for technical and professional services provided by the Council to facilitate the application process.
- v. Works that have been started or completed prior to an application for assistance will not be considered.
- vi. Further applications for funding for Works to the same property will not be considered under this Policy and subsequent versions of this policy for a period of 5 years from the certified date of completion.

7. Disabled adaptations and equipment conditions for send applications

- 7.1. The following conditions will apply to all SEND applications in relation to disabled children for adaptations and equipment:
- i. The Works must be necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the disabled person. In doing so the Council will consult with any relevant agencies
 - ii. The Council will assess whether the proposed Works are reasonable and practicable
 - iii. It must be reasonable and practicable to carry out the Works having regard to the age and condition of the property.

8. GENERAL CONDITIONS

- 8.1. In delivering the activity or project funded by the capital grant, the organisation must not unlawfully discriminate, directly or indirectly against any of the nine protected characteristics which are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 8.2. All successful grants will be subject to a Grant Agreement, signed by the childcare provider and Council.
- 8.3. Grants are valid for a period set out in the contract and will be paid in advance of completion of the project. A report and invoices or receipts must be forwarded to the Council on completion of the project in accordance with the contract. Unspent grant must be returned to the Council;
- 8.4. If the project involves work on land or a building, including refurbishment, the applicant must own the freehold of the land or building, or hold a lease and landlord approval that cannot be brought to an end by the landlord for at least 5 years;
- 8.5. The Council may ask for confirmation that planning permission is not required, or that it is required and has been granted. If planning permission is required, planning permission must be approved before the grant is paid;
- 8.6. The following conditions will apply to all grant funding for Vehicles:
- i. The vehicle must be purchased from/adapted by a garage.
 - ii. The Council will determine whether the make and model of the vehicle is suitable for the proposed purpose.
 - iii. The Applicant must have a vehicle inspection carried out (either by the AA or by the Council).

- iv. Where a vehicle is to be adapted for a disabled child, the Council reserves the right to inspect the vehicle both prior to and following the works being carried out in any event.
 - v. The cost of any associated check/s can be added to the grant funding provided.
 - vi. An invoice or receipt will not be considered valid where it is in the name of the Applicant of a member of the Applicant's family.
 - vii. If the vehicle for which the grant funding is being requested will be an additional vehicle (i.e. the Applicant already owns at least one car) then the Council will consider the Applicant's need for that additional vehicle in accordance with the criteria set out in Paragraph 3.
 - viii. Further applications for funding to purchase and/or adapt a vehicle will not be considered under this Policy and subsequent versions of this policy for a period of 5 years from the date of payment of funding under any previous application.
- 8.7. Organisations must be able to participate in a monitoring process and provide monitoring information to evidence how the grant money has been spent and adherence to the conditions of the grant. This must include receipts or invoices and a written report of the project, plus photographs, on completion;
- 8.8. Organisations must acknowledge the support of Cheshire East Council in press releases, publicity and advertising etc.;
- 8.9. The organisation will allow Cheshire East Council to use details of the grant award, together with any relevant photographs supplied, in newsletters and on the Council's website;
- 8.10. Expenditure must not be incurred on the project prior to the grant decision being given. In these circumstances the Council will withdraw the grant offer/rescind the grant decision;
- 8.11. Organisations must notify the Council of any changes in circumstances which affect their financial position throughout the period in which the grant monies are being used;
- 8.12. The grant must only be used for the purposes specifically stated in the application form, should it be spent in any other way, without written approval from the Council, the organisation may be asked to return some or all of the monies paid;
- 8.13. If the project is cancelled or only partially achieved, or if the organisation is wound up, some or all of the grant may be recovered by the Council;
- 8.14. The Council reserves the right to impose further Conditions (Special Conditions), depending on the circumstances of each application.
- 8.15. All conditions under which the grant has been awarded, including any Special Conditions, must be met. Failure to do so could result in the organisation being asked to repay the grant monies to the Council.
- 8.16. Organisations must enter into a recognised consultancy Contract(s) with reputable consultant(s) which Contract(s) provides for a 12-year limitation period should legal action need to be taken in respect of the Contract(s) and requires that any sub-Contract that the consultant enters into be on the same basis.
- 8.17. Organisations must enter into a recognised works or construction Contract (such as JCT or NEC or similar) with a reputable contractor which Contract(s) provides for a 12-year limitation period should legal action need to be taken in respect of the Contract(s) and requires that any sub-Contract that the consultant enters into be on the same basis; and
- 8.18. Keep the Council fully informed of any actual or potential disputes that arise with any parties.
- 8.19. Organisations must in their contract requirements for the contractor to main insurances adequate to cover risks under the building contract (including all construction risks, professional indemnity, and public liability insurance), and for prompt payment of invoices in the supply chain.
- 8.20. Organisations to ensure that the delivery of the Funded Activities does not put the Council in breach of the UK's international obligations in respect of subsidies and maintain appropriate records of compliance with any relevant subsidy control regime.

9. Decision making process

- 9.1. The grant applications will initially be assessed by the Childcare Development Manager and Childcare Development Lead, in consultation with officers from other council departments as appropriate, against a scoring criteria based on the priorities outlined in 3.20.

- 9.2. Having assessed all applications a Recommendations Report is prepared for consideration and approval by
- Amounts up to and including £50,000 (where grant is within approved grant policy and fully funded) – Head of Service Early Years, Family Help & Prevention
 - Amounts between £50,000 and £100,000 (where grant is within approved grant policy and fully funded) the Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration with the Chair of the Children and Families Committee and Chair of Finance Sub-Committee.
- 9.3. Organisations will be notified to inform them of whether they have been recommended for approval or not within 12 weeks after the closing date for each round of applications.
- 9.4. Offer acceptance forms and Grant Agreements should be returned before the date stated in the offer letter date and via the email address provided. Payments will be made once a signed form is received.
- 9.5. Complaints about any aspect of the grant process will be dealt with under the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure. A copy of the Council's Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions Policy is available from the Council's website.
https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/customer-services/complaints_and_feedback/complaints_and_feedback.aspx

10. Payments

- 10.1. Payment will be made in the following way:
- For amounts up to £10,000 – as a lump sum.
 - For amounts over £10,000 up to £15,000 – in two stages, as agreed at the approval stage (usually at the beginning and end of the work being done);
 - For amounts over £15,000 – in three stages, as agreed at the approval stage (usually at the beginning, middle and end of the work being done).
- 10.2. Payments for works upon property will normally be reimbursed once a valid receipt of payment has been provided.
- 10.3. Payments for vehicles (including adaptations to vehicles) will normally be reimbursed once a valid receipt of payment has been provided.

11. Repayment of funding

- 11.1. In the event that the Council requires repayment of the funding in accordance with the conditions set out paragraph 8, the Council may at its discretion waive any demand for repayment of funding once it has considered:
- i. The extent to which the Applicant would suffer financial hardship were they to be required to repay all or any of the funding;
 - ii. In the event of the disposal of a property, whether the disposal itself or the waiver of demand for repayment will facilitate the Applicant's continued ability to provide care;
 - iii. Whether the disposal is made for reasons connected with the physical or mental health or wellbeing of the children in placement.
- 11.2. Requests for repayment waived must be made in writing to the Childcare Development Manager whose decision is subject to the Appeals process set out below.
- 11.3. In considering a request to waive repayment the Council may at its absolute discretion offer the Applicant the option to convert the loan into a monthly repayment loan or a deferred repayment loan on terms to be set by the Childcare Development Manager as an alternative to immediate repayment.

12. MONITORING AND RECORD KEEPING

- 12.1. Following a successful application and in order to ensure that monies are used in an appropriate manner, as set out in this Policy and the funding contract, a monitoring report will be required following project completion. This report shall include, but shall not be limited to, how many people benefitted from the project, how the grant money was used and what difference the project made to local people.
- 12.2. Invoices, receipts and photographs must be made available to the Council on request.

- 12.3. Invoices or receipts dated prior to the date of the funding contract will not be accepted or reimbursed.
- 12.4. The Council reserves the right to monitor the use of the grant and ask for evidence to support an application.
- 12.5. The organisation must allow reasonable access to premises/accounts upon request from the Council.
- 12.6. Organisations must retain records relating to the grant for an appropriate period (to be confirmed in the Grant Agreement).
- 12.7. If organisations do not supply satisfactory monitoring reports and supporting information in full and within the set time scale, they may be asked to repay the grant funding to the Council. Failure to comply with the conditions of this grant may be taken into account when considering any further applications for grant funding made by the same organisation in the future.

13. Appeals

- 13.1. All applications for funding will be considered against the published criteria. If the application does not meet the criteria, the Council will inform the Applicant in writing of the reason why they are being refused funding.
- 13.2. Where an Applicant is refused funding and they wish to appeal against the decision, they should appeal in writing to the Council within 28 days of the date of refusal.
- 13.3. It is recognised that there may be situations where the refusal of funding would disproportionately disadvantage an Applicant. In these circumstances, the Council may waive or alter some or all of the eligibility criteria, minimum or maximum amounts, or conditions of funding based on the individual circumstances, and approve the application for funding. All cases will be considered on an individual basis in a fair and transparent way through the Appeals process.
- 13.4. All appeals will be considered by the Head of Service.
- 13.5. The decision of the Head of Service, will be final in respect of that individual case and will not be binding upon future applications made by that or any other applicant.

14. Publication of this Policy

- 14.1. All current childcare providers and schools in Cheshire East will be made aware of the existence of this policy via the Cheshire East Council website, the Early Years Bulletin and Schools Bulletin. Individual copies of the policy will be made available on request.

15. Questions and Guidance

- 15.1. Contact for further information: earlyyearsandchildcareteam@cheshireeast.gov.uk
- 15.2. Website: <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/livewell/care-and-support-for-children/early-years-and-childcare/info-for-providers/business-information-for-childcare-providers/national-wraparound-childcare-programme/national-wraparound-childcare-programme.aspx>

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POLICY FOR THE
WRAPAROUND CHILDCARE
REVENUE GRANT

31 July 2024



*Working for a **brighter future** together*

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. Cheshire East Council has a statutory duty to ensure there is sufficient childcare available to support the needs of parents accessing work and training.
- 1.2. The government announced funding for the national wraparound programme in the Spring Budget in March 2023. The government's ambition is that by 2026, all parents and carers of primary school-aged children who need it will be able to access term time childcare in their local area from 8am-6pm, so that parents can access employment and improve labour market participation.
- 1.3. To support this ambition, the government announced that it will provide start-up funding over two academic years to support local authorities and providers in England to introduce or expand childcare provision on either side of the school day, which parents of primary school-aged children will be able to pay to access.
- 1.4. There is funding for local authorities to build their internal capacity ('local authority capacity funding'), but the majority of the funding will be for local authorities to work with providers to set up new provision or expand existing provision ('programme funding').
- 1.5. The funding assists the Council in meeting statutory duties and support the following corporate objectives:
 - Support all children to have the best start in life
 - Increase the opportunities for children, young adults and adults with additional needs
 - Ensure all children to have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential
 - Thriving urban and rural economies with opportunities for all.
- 1.6. Funding may be awarded to childcare providers to extend existing or create new provision. The key criteria for funding being the creation of additional capacity in areas of need. The funding cannot be used to improve the quality of existing provision.

2. LEGAL AND BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK

- 2.1. The budget is £875,914 and made up wholly by the funding allocation from the DfE, with £97,083 allocated to local authority capacity and £778,831 allocated to programme funding (grants).
- 2.2. All grant decisions will be made based on the set of principles, set out in this Policy, and within the agreed budget approved by Council. The budget for the grants is managed carefully and flexibly to ensure that the Council has money available throughout 2024/25 and 2025/26. As far as possible the Council tries to ensure that no one is disadvantaged due to the time of year they apply.
- 2.3. Given the fixed budget and the Council's aim to benefit as many organisations as possible, the Council cannot guarantee to fund the maximum amount applied for; therefore organisations must ensure that they have procedures in place to cover the balance of funding required. The Council will not pay a grant unless the organisation can demonstrate that the balance of the funding is available.

3. APPLICATION PROCESS

- 3.1. The Wraparound Childcare Revenue Grant scheme operates within set criteria, agreed by the Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration and relevant Council Officers in line with the Council's Corporate Outcomes.
- 3.2. Applications must be made on the Council's official application form and be accompanied by any other information that the Council considers necessary to consider an application for funding.
- 3.3. All applications must be approved as set out in section 6.
- 3.4. The Childcare Development Manager may request further information to assess whether the Applicant meets the eligibility and criteria requirements.
- 3.5. Applications will be considered in line with the funding available and once the budget has been committed in a financial year, no further applications will be considered.
- 3.6. Where an application for funding is refused, the Council will provide a written statement of the reasons for refusal, and details of any appeals procedure.
- 3.7. The funding for this policy will be available over a number of application opportunities until the budget is exhausted. In the case of all applications all the terms and conditions of the funding have been met by the Applicant.

4. How to apply

- 4.1. Applications for funding must be made using the Council's application form and associated guidance notes that are available on the Council's website.
- 4.2. The application form must be completed in full. Incomplete application forms will not be considered and will be returned to the applicant, which could cause a delay or deferral to the application. A copy of the organisation's up-to-date signed Governing Document and Safeguarding Policies must be sent with the application form. If this is not received the application will be deferred to the next round of evaluation and may result in the application being declined. Supporting documentation (listed on the application form) may also be requested prior to the application being fully considered. Failure to supply all required documentation will result in the application being treated as incomplete.
- 4.3. The closing dates for receipt and acceptance of complete applications are published on the Cheshire East council website and the CHEST <https://www.the-chest.org.uk/> at the time when applications are invited. Applications are not invited at any other times.
- 4.4. Applications will be accepted and reviewed according to the timescales stated in section 6 of this document.
- 4.5. All successful applicants will be required to complete a post grant monitoring report as per section 9 of this Policy.

4.6. What can be funded

- 4.7. Schemes to create wraparound childcare places for primary school aged children in Cheshire East in areas of need identified in the latest childcare sufficiency assessments conducted by the council. Schemes must create additional places (no minimum number of places) subject to the requirements set out in 4.14.
- 4.8. Childcare provision funded from this grant must meet the definition of wraparound childcare, i.e., be available directly before and after the school day, from 8am to 6pm (or equivalent, if data shows that local demand is for different hours) during school term time for primary school-age children. It may be run on a school site or at another setting. It should not require parents to pick their children up from school and drop them off at another location.

4.9. The funding is tapered over the programme, with the highest level of funding available in the financial year (FY) 2024-25. The funding is designed to reduce each term until the funding ends in March 2026. This reflects the expectation that programme funding is used to fund set up and running costs of new and expanded wraparound places from September 2024 and that, as take-up of provision increases, and therefore income from parental payments increases, the level of grant funding needed to contribute to running costs to ensure sustainability reduces.

4.10. Programme funding can be used to cover revenue costs only, for example salaries, rent, utilities, consumables, training and resources, to contribute to running costs whilst demand builds, to reduce the financial risk to providers of offering additional places before demand is guaranteed.

4.11. What cannot be funded

- i) The funding should not be used to subsidise the fee charged for places. Any places created through the programme should be paid for by parents.
- ii) The programme grant funding should not be used to contribute to the running cost of existing wraparound childcare places
- iii) Capital expenditure;
- iv) Vehicle purchase;
- v) Loan against loss or debt;
- vi) Paying someone to write your application or applications to other grant funders;
- vii) Land purchase;
- viii) Items that are purchased on behalf of another organisation.
- ix) contributions in kind
- x) payments for activities of a political or exclusively religious nature
- xi) depreciation, repayment or impairment of assets already owned
- xii) the purchasing or improvement of assets
- xiii) equipment or supplies which have an expected shelf life of more than one year where either the purchase price is in excess of £500 or is a group of lower value items where the combined value is in excess of £500.
- xiv) interest payments or service charge payments for finance leases
- xv) gifts
- xvi) entertaining (entertaining for this purpose means anything that would be a taxable benefit to the person being entertained, according to current UK tax regulations)
- xvii) statutory fines, criminal fines or penalties.

4.12. Who can apply

4.13. To qualify for a grant organisations must meet the criteria listed below:

- i) Schools, private, voluntary and independent sector childcare providers, including childminders, operating within the Cheshire East area and registered with the appropriate regulatory body;
- ii) Provide value for money - the applicant may only request funding for expenditure that is essential to the completion of the project;
- iii) If a voluntary sector organisation, have a management committee with an up-to-date Governing Document which must be signed by at least two members of the committee who are unrelated to each other;
- iv) Have appropriate safeguarding policies relevant to their organisation, which must include a requirement that staff / volunteers are cleared with the Disclosure and Barring Service where appropriate;
- v) Have a bank or building society account in the name of the organisation applying with at least two signatories unless a childminder where one signatory would be applicable;
- vi) Complete the current application form in full, providing all required information;

vii) Meet the requirements of the Subsidy Control Act 2022.

4.14. Priorities for Funding

4.15. Priority will be given to organisations and projects that:

- i) Create additional wraparound childcare places in areas of need identified in the childcare sufficiency assessments or any other supplementary assessments conducted by the council
- ii) Are easily reached by children and families accessing the service in the area of under supply. Projects in - close proximity to families requiring childcare attracts a higher score. This does not preclude applications to create provision outside the area of need that serves the area of need.
- iii) Have attained a Good or Outstanding Ofsted grade at last inspection. Applications may be considered from applicants who have attained a Requires Improvement grade at last inspection.
- iv) Have the lowest level of grant funding per childcare place created. Priority will be given to applicants who create places for the lowest level of grant funding.
- v) Request the lowest proportion of the budget available
- vi) Have a high level of applicant investment
- vii) Create a high number of new childcare places
- i) Demonstrate how the project will meet the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (specific SEND questions on the application form).

4.16. Each application is awarded a score out of 10 for the following areas. Each area carries a weighting in order to determine the total score.

	Weighting	Maximum weighted score available
Sufficiency (need for provision in the area attracts the highest score)	30	300
Accessibility (closest proximity to families requiring childcare attracts highest score)	3	30
Ofsted grade at last inspection (Outstanding attracts highest score)	5	50
Cost per place created (grant requested ÷ places created. Lowest cost per place attracts the highest score).	4	40
Proportion of budget (lowest proportion of budget attracted the highest score to avoid the budget being allocated to a narrow geographic area).	2	20
Level of applicant investment (highest proportion of applicant investment attracts the highest score).	3	30

Number of new places created (high score for high number of places created).	30	300
Proportion of places created that specifically meet the needs of children with SEND (highest proportion attracts highest score)	3	30

- 4.17. The highest scoring applications will be funded subject to achieving a minimum score that is determine by the budget available.
- 4.18. There is a limited amount of funding available. The funding is intended to create more childcare places over time, provide one-off funding for projects and to support new initiatives.

5. GENERAL CONDITIONS

- 5.1. In delivering the activity funded by the grant, the organisation must not unlawfully discriminate, directly or indirectly against any of the nine protected characteristics which are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 5.2. All successful grants will be subject to a Grant Agreement, signed by the childcare provider and Council;
- 5.3. Grants are valid for a period set out in the contract and will be paid in advance of completion of the project. A report and invoices or receipts must be forwarded to the Council on completion of the project in accordance with the contract. Unspent grant must be returned to the Council;
- 5.4. Organisations must be able to participate in a monitoring process and provide monitoring information to evidence how the grant money has been spent and adherence to the conditions of the grant. This must include receipts or invoices and a written report of the project, plus photographs, on completion;
- 5.5. Organisations must acknowledge the support of Cheshire East Council in press releases, publicity and advertising etc.;
- 5.6. The organisation will allow Cheshire East Council to use details of the grant award, together with any relevant photographs supplied, in newsletters and on the Council's website;
- 5.7. Organisations must notify the Council of any changes in circumstances which affect their financial position throughout the period in which the grant monies are being used;
- 5.8. The grant must only be used for the purposes specifically stated in the application form, should it be spent in any other way, without written approval from the Council, the organisation may be asked to return some or all of the monies paid;
- 5.9. If the project is cancelled or only partially achieved, or if the organisation is wound up, some or all of the grant may be recovered by the Council;
- 5.10. The Council reserves the right to impose further Conditions (Special Conditions), depending on the circumstances of each application.
- 5.11. All conditions under which the grant has been awarded, including any Special Conditions, must be met. Failure to do so could result in the organisation being asked to repay the grant monies to the Council.
- 5.12. Keep the Council fully informed of any actual or potential disputes that arise with any parties.
- 5.13. Organisations to ensure that the delivery of the Funded Activities does not put the Council in breach of the UK's international obligations in respect of subsidies and maintain appropriate records of compliance with any relevant subsidy control regime.

6. DECISION MAKING PROCESS

- 6.1. The grant applications will initially be assessed by the Childcare Development Manager and Childcare Development Lead, in consultation with officers from other council departments as appropriate, against a scoring criteria based on the priorities outlined in 4.14.
- 6.2. Having assessed all applications a Recommendations Report is prepared for consideration and approval by:
 - Amounts up to and including £50,000 (where grant is within approved grant policy and fully funded) – Head of Service Early Years, Family Help & Prevention
 - Amounts between £50,000 and £100,000 (where grant is within approved grant policy and fully funded) the Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration with the Chair of the Children and Families Committee and Chair of Finance Sub-Committee.
- 6.3. Organisations will be notified to inform them of whether they have been recommended for approval or not within 12 weeks after the closing date for each round of applications.
- 6.4. Offer acceptance forms and Grant Agreements should be returned before the date stated in the offer letter date and via the email address provided. Payments will be made once a signed form is received.
- 6.5. Complaints about any aspect of the grant process will be dealt with under the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure. A copy of the Council's Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions Policy is available from the Council's website.
https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/customer-services/complaints_and_feedback/complaints_and_feedback.aspx

7. Payments

- 7.1. Payment will be made in the following way:
 - For amounts up to £10,000 – as a lump sum.
 - For amounts over £10,000 up to £15,000 – in two stages, as agreed at the approval stage (usually at the beginning and end of the work being done);
 - For amounts over £15,000 – in three stages, as agreed at the approval stage (usually at the beginning, middle and end of the work being done).

8. Repayment of funding

- 8.1. In the event that the Council requires repayment of the funding in accordance with the conditions set out paragraph 8, the Council may at its discretion waive any demand for repayment of funding once it has considered:
 - i. The extent to which the Applicant would suffer financial hardship were they to be required to repay all or any of the funding;
 - ii. In the event of the disposal of a property, whether the disposal itself or the waiver of demand for repayment will facilitate the Applicant's continued ability to provide care;
 - iii. Whether the disposal is made for reasons connected with the physical or mental health or wellbeing of the children in placement.
- 8.2. Requests for repayment waived must be made in writing to the Childcare Development Manager whose decision is subject to the Appeals process set out below.
- 8.3. In considering a request to waive repayment the Council may at its absolute discretion offer the Applicant the option to convert the loan into a monthly repayment loan or a deferred repayment loan on terms to be set by the Childcare Development Manager as an alternative to immediate repayment.

9. MONITORING AND RECORD KEEPING

- 9.1. Following a successful application and in order to ensure that monies are used in an appropriate manner, as set out in this Policy and the funding contract, a monitoring report will be required following project completion. This report shall include, but shall not be limited to, how many people benefitted from the project, how the grant money was used and what difference the project made to local people.

- 9.2. Invoices, receipts and photographs must be made available to the Council on request.
- 9.3. The Council reserves the right to monitor the use of the grant and ask for evidence to support an application.
- 9.4. The organisation must allow reasonable access to premises/accounts upon request from the Council.
- 9.5. Organisations must retain records relating to the grant for an appropriate period (to be confirmed in the Grant Agreement).
- 9.6. If organisations do not supply satisfactory monitoring reports and supporting information in full and within the set time scale they may be asked to repay the grant funding to the Council. Failure to comply with the conditions of this grant may be taken into account when considering any further applications for grant funding made by the same organisation in the future.

10. Appeals

- 10.1. All applications for funding will be considered against the published criteria. If the application does not meet the criteria, the Council will inform the Applicant in writing of the reason why they are being refused funding.
- 10.2. Where an Applicant is refused funding and they wish to appeal against the decision, they should appeal in writing to the Council within 28 days of the date of refusal.
- 10.3. It is recognised that there may be situations where the refusal of funding would disproportionately disadvantage an Applicant. In these circumstances, the Council may waive or alter some or all of the eligibility criteria, minimum or maximum amounts, or conditions of funding based on the individual circumstances, and approve the application for funding. All cases will be considered on an individual basis in a fair and transparent way through the Appeals process.
- 10.4. All appeals will be considered by the Head of Service.
- 10.5. The decision of the Head of Service, will be final in respect of that individual case and will not be binding upon future applications made by that or any other applicant.

11. Publication of this Policy

- 11.1. All current childcare providers and schools in Cheshire East will be made aware of the existence of this policy via the Cheshire East Council website, the Early Years Bulletin and Schools Bulletin. Individual copies of the policy will be made available on request.

12. QUESTIONS AND GUIDANCE

- 12.1. Contact for further information: earlyyearsandchildcareteam@cheshireeast.gov.uk
- 12.2. Website: <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/livewell/care-and-support-for-children/early-years-and-childcare/info-for-providers/business-information-for-childcare-providers/national-wraparound-childcare-programme/national-wraparound-childcare-programme.aspx>

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OPEN

Children and Families Committee

16 September 2024

Consultation on Admissions Arrangements for 2026-27

**Report of: Claire Williamson – Director of Education, Strong Start
and Integration**

Report Reference No: CF/29/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of Report

- 1 To seek approval of the Committee to consult on the Co-ordinated Scheme and Admissions Arrangements to comply with the statutory duty.
- 2 To share with the Committee the draft Co-ordinated Scheme and Admissions Arrangements that are to go for consultation

Executive Summary

- 3 Cheshire East has statutory duties relating to school admissions under the School Admissions Code.
- 4 Cheshire East has a role in co-ordinating school applications. This is set out in the Co-ordinated Scheme. It currently co-ordinates mainstream applications for all schools except Crewe Engineering and Design UTC and Cheshire Studio School.
- 5 Cheshire East is the Admissions Authority for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools within the borough. This means that it is responsible for decisions relating to admissions to these schools. The Admissions Arrangements set out the policy for admissions including the oversubscription criteria. Other schools, for example, Academies are responsible for their own admissions decisions and policies.

- 6 Consultation must take place at least every seven years to comply with the School Admissions Code.
- 7 Some minor changes have been made to improve accessibility and use plain English where possible and avoid duplication. Although these documents provide the legal basis for admissions there is other support available for parents through clear information on the Cheshire East website, parent information booklets (referred to as the composite prospectus) and the opportunity to seek telephone advice.
- 8 The Admissions Arrangements and Co-ordinated Scheme were previously combined into one document. The draft documents proposed separate them to assist in making clearer for parents, schools and other stakeholders to access.
- 9 There are no changes proposed relating to the order of oversubscription criteria. Under the School Admissions Code paragraph 1.8 these must be "*reasonable, clear, objective, procedurally fair, and comply with all relevant legislation, including equalities legislation.*" There has been little feedback from parents, schools, members, M.P.s, Independent Appeal Panels and other stakeholders to suggest that the current criteria should be changed and are not meeting the needs of residents and other applicants. Cheshire East has a consistent record of reaching a high level of meeting parental preference, so most parents are successful in being offered a place at their first preference school.
- 10 Every school has a published admission number. There is no requirement to consult where this is to be increased. There are some schools where it is proposed to be increased these are highlighted in the document in appendix 3. There are no reductions planned for any schools where Cheshire East is the Admissions Authority.
- 11 Shared responsibility - More detail has been added in about how Cheshire East deals with applications where parents have shared responsibility for a child and how the address to be used for admissions purposes is determined. This reflects comments in recent years from the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) around the fairness of basing a decision on which parent is the recipient of child benefit. The proposed Admissions Arrangements highlight different evidence that may be considered, and that the decision will be made by a Panel of Officers. It reiterates that the local authority cannot get involved in parental disputes and parents are strongly encouraged to reach agreement about their child's school application.

- 12 Summer born children – Children who are born between 1 April and 31 August are considered to be “summer born” children under the School Admissions Code. Parents have the right to send their child to school a year later but it is for the Admissions Authority to make a decision over which year group a child should be admitted to. The Department for Education guidance for parents and admissions authorities was updated in April 2023. Further detail has been added in to assist parents in understanding how to make a request and what to consider.
- 13 Admission of children outside their normal age group – more detail has been added in to assist parents in understanding how to make a request and what to consider.
- 14 Admission Arrangements for Wilmslow High School Sixth Form are also for consultation. No significant changes are proposed. There are changes for Shared responsibility which mirror the changes in the main Admission Arrangements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve for the Draft Co-ordinated Scheme and Admissions Arrangements to be put for consultation in line with the School Admissions Code in Autumn 2024.

Background

- 15 The last consultation took place for the Co-ordinated Scheme and Admissions Arrangements for 2019-20 so must be consulted on even if no significant changes.

Consultation and Engagement

- 16 To comply with the School Admissions Code consultation in the Autumn would take place at set out in paragraph 1.45-48 of the School Admissions Code.

1.45 When changes are proposed to admission arrangements, all admission authorities must consult on their admission arrangements (including any supplementary information form) that will apply for admission applications the following school year. Where the admission arrangements have not changed from the previous year there is no requirement to consult, subject to the

requirement that admission authorities must consult on their admission arrangements at least once every 7 years, even if there have been no changes during that period.

1.46 Consultation must last for a minimum of 6 weeks and must take place between 1 October and 31 January in the determination year.

1.47 Admission authorities must consult with:

- a) parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen;*
- b) other persons in the relevant area who in the opinion of the admission authority have an interest in the proposed admissions;*
- c) all other admission authorities within the relevant area (except that primary schools need not consult secondary schools); d) whichever of the governing body and the local authority is not the admission authority;*
- e) any adjoining neighbouring local authorities where the admission authority is the local authority; and*
- f) in the case of schools designated with a religious character, the body or person representing the religion or religious denomination.*

1.48 For the duration of the consultation period, the admission authority must publish a copy of their full proposed admission arrangements (including the proposed PAN) on the school's website or its own website (in the case of a local authority) together with details of where comments may be sent and the areas on which comments are not sought. Admission authorities must also send, upon request, a copy of the proposed admission arrangements to any of the persons or bodies listed above inviting comment. Failure to consult effectively may be grounds for subsequent complaints and appeals.

- 17 Consultation is likely to be through specific targeted questions but there will be an opportunity for consultees to provide feedback on any issue relevant to the Co-ordinated Scheme or Admissions Arrangements. Responses will be reviewed and analysed, and the proposed final Co-ordinated Scheme and Admissions Arrangements will be considered by the Children and Families Committee in early 2025.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 18 To comply with the School Admissions Code

Other Options Considered

19

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	This would put the local authority in breach of its duties under the School Admissions Code	High

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 20 Both the Admission Arrangements and Co-ordinated Scheme have been reviewed and approved by Legal.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 21 There are no direct financial implications of this decision.

Policy

- 22 The Local Authority has a statutory duty to co-ordinate school admissions and this links in with the corporate plan aim of *A council which empowers and cares about people* and the priority to *ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve to their full potential.*

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 23 An Equality Impact Assessment will be completed following the consultation if any equality implications are identified.

Human Resources

- 24 There are no increased human resource implications for the Council.

Risk Management

- 25 The Local Authority is required to consult on its Co-ordinated Scheme and Admissions Arrangements at least every 7 years so if it does not consult then it would not be complying with the statutory duty under the School Admissions Code.

Rural Communities

- 26 There are no direct implications for rural communities, but the oversubscription criteria gives priority to children living in catchment and closest to the school to assist in parents securing a place at their local school.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 27 Children with an Education and Health Care Plan and Cared for and Previously cared for children are given high priority within the oversubscription criteria as required by the School Admissions Code.

Public Health

- 28 There are no direct implications for public health, however providing sufficient places in their local community could improve a child's social and emotional wellbeing.

Climate Change

- 29 By providing local school places the distances which some children may have to travel to attend school should be reduced thus reduce congestion on the roads and therefore reduce emissions, improving the air quality and making a better environment to live in.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Jo Bowkett, Team Manager – Admissions and Transport joanne.bowkett@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 - Cheshire East Admissions Arrangements 2026-27 for consultation Appendix 2 - Cheshire East Co-ordinated Scheme 2026-27 for consultation Appendix 3 - Cheshire East Sixth Form Admissions Arrangements 2026-27 for consultation
Background Papers:	School Admissions Code, 2021



Together we will make Cheshire East a great place to be young

Local Authority Admissions Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools from September 2026

1 September 2025



Contents

Contents	2
1 LOCAL AUTHORITY ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS - COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED SCHOOLS.....	3
2 PUBLISHED ADMISSION NUMBERS (PANs)	3
3 EDUCATION, HEALTH and CARE PLANS	3
4 OVERSUBSCRIPTION CRITERIA.....	4
5 PARENTS WITH SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR A CHILD	6
6 CHILDREN OF MULTIPLE BIRTHS	6
7 MOVING HOUSE	7
8 WAITING LISTS	7
9 LATE APPLICATIONS – NORMAL ADMISSION ROUND ONLY	7
10 ACCEPTING AND DECLINING PLACES.....	8
11 RIGHT OF APPEAL.....	8
12 REPEAT APPLICATIONS.....	8
13 DEFERRED ENTRY AND PART-TIME ATTENDANCE IN RECEPTION YEAR	8
14 DELAYED ENTRY FOR SUMMER BORN CHILDREN	9
15 ADMISSION OF CHILDREN OUT OF THEIR NORMAL AGE GROUP	10
16 KEY DATES.....	11
Appendix 1 – Feeder/Partner Primary Schools.....	12
Appendix 2 - Cheshire East’s process for requesting Admission of Children Out of their Normal Age group, in line with statutory guidance provided by the DfE:	13
Appendix 3 – Published Admissions Numbers (PANs) for 2026 Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools.....	15

1 LOCAL AUTHORITY ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS - COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED SCHOOLS.

- 1.1 These admission arrangements apply to Cheshire East **community and voluntary controlled schools** from the school year 2026-27. Cheshire East Council (the Local Authority) is the admission authority for these schools and is responsible for offering places at these schools.
- 1.2 Applications for the normal admission round (i.e. into reception at 4+ and secondary transfer at 11+) and 'in year' (i.e. into any year group outside the normal admission round) shall be considered in accordance with the arrangements set out below and the provisions set out in the Local Authority's agreed Coordination Scheme, [School admissions policies \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/school-admissions-policies).

2 PUBLISHED ADMISSION NUMBERS (PANs)

- 2.1 The Local Authority has agreed published admission numbers (PANs) for its community and voluntary controlled schools. This is the number of children that will normally be admitted into the relevant age group (e.g., reception and year 7 in September). The admission number is set based on the number of pupils the school can accommodate and therefore usually, PANs will continue to be applied i.e., to all subsequent year groups in addition to the relevant age group. Admission numbers for 2026 and subsequent years, subject to any review, are set out in **Appendix 3**.
- 2.2 The Local Authority may agree (through consultation with the governing body) admission over PAN where to do so would not result in prejudice to the provision of efficient education or efficient use of resources at the school. The Local Authority will not be able to agree admission over the published admission number where to do so would result in a breach of infant class size legislation, which requires that infant classes (those classes where the majority of children will reach the age of 5, 6, or 7) contain no more than 30 pupils with a single qualified teacher.

3 EDUCATION, HEALTH and CARE PLANS

- 3.1 All children whose Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan names the school must be admitted.

An Education, Health and Care plan is a plan made by the local authority under Section 37 of the Children and Families Act 2014 specifying the special education provision required for that child.

4 OVERSUBSCRIPTION CRITERIA

4.1 Where more applications are received than there are places available, after children with Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans, priority for admission will be based on the Local Authority's published oversubscription criteria as follows:

1) **'Cared for Children' and Children who were 'Previously Cared for'.**

- A 'cared for child' is a child who is in the care of a local authority or provided with accommodation by that local authority (as defined in section 22 of the Children Act 1989).
- Children previously 'cared for' are children who were 'cared for' as defined above, but immediately after being 'cared for' became subject to an adoption, child arrangements order (formerly residence order), or special guardianship order. A child arrangements order is an order settling the arrangements to be made as to the person with whom the child is to live under section 8 of the Children Act 1989 amended by Children and Families Act 2014. Section 14A of the Children Act 1989 defines a 'special guardianship order' as an order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's special guardian (or special guardians). This includes children who appear to (in the view of Cheshire East) have been in state care outside of England and ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted.

2) **Siblings** – pupils with brothers or sisters, step-brothers or step-sisters, foster brother or sisters, half-brothers or half-sisters, adopted brothers or adopted sisters living together as part of one household (for the majority of the school week) already attending the preferred school (in years *Reception* through to *Year 10*) and expected to continue at the school in the following school year (i.e., at the time of admission).

3) **Children resident within the designated catchment area of the school.** Children will be classed within this criterion if they and their parent(s) are resident within the area served by the school.

4) **Children attending a school nominated as a feeder primary school for admissions purposes** (Applies to Secondary Schools only). See appendix 1.

5) **Pupils living nearest to the school** measured using the National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG) which measures straight line distances in miles from the school's co-ordinate point to the place of the child's residence co-ordinate point.

Where a school cannot accommodate all pupils qualifying under one of the criteria stated above, the next criterion will be applied to determine priority for admission. For example, if a school cannot accommodate all *children resident within the catchment area (criterion 3)*, the priority will be in the order of:

- Resident in the catchment area (criterion 3) attending a feeder school (4) and living nearest to the school (5)
- Resident in the catchment area (criterion 3) not attending a feeder school (4) and living nearest to the school (5)

All applicants within each criterion will be put into a distance order with priority being given to those that live nearest to the school, as stated in criterion 5. Where there are a limited number of places, and the Local Authority cannot differentiate between the applications using the distance criterion (criterion 5) a random allocation tie-breaker will be applied. This may be required, for example, where applicants reside in the same block of flats.

Notes:

Previously Cared for Children

For previously looked after (also known as Cared for) children (criterion 1) we may request relevant documentation such as the adoption order or special guardianship order and written correspondence from the local authority that last looked after the child confirming that he or she was looked after immediately prior to that order being made.

Residency

The Local Authority will accept applications from families resident in the United Kingdom, and from outside the United Kingdom. For the normal admissions round applications will be considered on where the child is residing on the date published for receipt of supporting documentation. In-year applications will be processed on where the child is resident at the time of the application.

Children will be considered within criterion (3) if they and their parent(s) are resident on the date published for the receipt of supporting documentation (section 16 Key Dates). Supporting information may be requested to verify the place of residence. To ensure a fair process, checks may be undertaken with other Council Services including Council Tax records and Electoral Roll.

The only exception to this is for children of UK service personnel (UK Armed Forces) where a Unit postal address or quartering area address will be accepted in advance of a move into the area, subject to official written confirmation of the address and relocation date. Preferences for the catchment area school for the confirmed address will be considered under criterion (3) unless a higher criterion is applicable.

Feeder Primary Schools

Children eligible for priority due to their attendance at a named feeder primary school (criterion 4) will only remain eligible for this priority whilst on roll at the primary school. If the child leaves the school, including transferring to high school, this priority within the oversubscription criteria will no longer apply.

Definition of a 'Parent'

In this policy and in education law, the definition of a 'parent' includes a natural or adoptive parent of the child (regardless of whether the child lives with them, has contact with them, or they have parental responsibility for the child). It also includes a person who is not a natural or adoptive parent of the child, but who has care of and/or parental responsibility for the child.

5 PARENTS WITH SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR A CHILD

- 5.1 Only one application can be made for each child. Parents that share responsibility should agree between them who will apply.

Where parents have shared responsibility for a child the place of residency will be determined as the address where the child lives for the majority of the week (e.g., where the child wakes up between Monday to Friday). The Local Authority may request full details to be submitted in writing to enable the Local Authority to determine which address will be used for the purpose of admission. A panel of officers will consider the information provided.

Examples of other evidence and information that may be considered:

- Details of how the child splits their time between the two addresses.
- Court orders or other legal documents.
- Where Child Benefit is claimed.
- Where the child is registered for GP purposes.
- The address the current nursery/pre-school or Primary school have on their records.

Where both parents have parental responsibility, the local authority is unable to resolve or take sides in disputes. Instead, parents are required to resolve matters between themselves, and, where this is not possible, seek a resolution through the courts.

6 CHILDREN OF MULTIPLE BIRTHS

- 6.1 For children of multiple births, exceptionally it may be necessary to offer places over the published admission number to ensure that siblings (i.e., twins, triplets, or children from other multiple births) can attend the same school. This is in accordance with the School Admission (Infant Class Size) Regulations 2012 where additional children may only be admitted under limited exceptional circumstances. These children will remain an 'excepted pupil' for the time they are in an infant class or until the class numbers fall back to the current infant class size limit.

7 MOVING HOUSE

- 7.1 Parents must inform the Local Authority immediately of a change of address, even if details of a future change of residency were on the application. The Local Authority will require evidence to show that the place of residency has changed as follows:
- A letter from the solicitor confirming the completion date.
 - A signed rental agreement showing the start of the tenancy (in accordance with the arrangements set out in the Local Authority's Coordination Scheme)
- 7.2 The Local Authority may request further information including copies of utility bills. Other information may be required, such as evidence of disposal of previous property. Information will be verified by officers using Council Tax records. Proof that the child now resides at the new property may be required.
- 7.3 For applications made as part of the normal admission round, (e.g., reception and year 7 in September) information and supporting evidence must be received by the dates stated in these arrangements. Satisfactory confirmation of residency at the property will result in the application being considered on the new address. Proof of residency received after the published dates will not be used to process the application but will be used to send the decision letter/e-mail on the published offer date.

8 WAITING LISTS

- 8.1 Waiting lists for the normal admission round will be held until the 31 December. They will be held in line with the published oversubscription criteria and not on a 'first come, first served' basis. Placing a child's name on a waiting list does not affect the right of appeal. Waiting lists for oversubscribed schools will include those children whose parents have requested in writing (including e-mail) that they be placed on the waiting list, along with new applicants and those for whom an appeal has been received. Vacancies will be re-allocated to children held on the school's waiting list in line with the dates published (Appendix 1).

9 LATE APPLICATIONS – NORMAL ADMISSION ROUND ONLY

- 9.1 Applications, changes of preference and supporting documentation received after the dates specified will be considered late. Late applications will be considered after all on-time applications unless the Local Authority considers that there are good reasons for the application being late, which must be stated at the time of application. Reasons such as exceptional medical reasons preventing an earlier application, or a late house move into the area will be considered and supporting documentation must be provided. Where supporting documentation has been received by the dates specified and the Local Authority has accepted reasons stated for the late application, the application will be considered as if it had been received on-time. Late applications may be disadvantaged.

10 ACCEPTING AND DECLINING PLACES

- 10.1 All parents will be required to **accept or decline** the school place offered by the published date as stated in Appendix 1. The Local Authority reserves the right to withdraw places not accepted by this date. If the Local Authority does not receive a response by the date specified in that first correspondence, a reminder letter or email will be sent with a second opportunity to respond, giving a deadline of a further 5 days. This will include notification that if no response is received to that reminder, the school place will be withdrawn.

11 RIGHT OF APPEAL

- 11.1 Parents who are not offered a place for their child at a preference school have a right of appeal to an independent appeals panel. Parents can appeal for each school for which admission has been refused, by the dates published. For appeals against decisions on preferences for community and voluntary controlled schools, forms are available on the Local Authority's website. Paper forms can be requested. Outside the normal admissions process, completed forms should be returned to the Local Authority within 20 school days from the date of notification that the application for admission was unsuccessful.

12 REPEAT APPLICATIONS

- 12.1 Repeat applications will not usually be considered within the same school year unless the circumstances for the parent or school have changed significantly since the original application was made. Full details must be provided to the Local Authority for consideration.

13 DEFERRED ENTRY AND PART-TIME ATTENDANCE IN RECEPTION YEAR

- 13.1 All children are entitled to a full-time place in Reception in the September following their fourth birthday.

Where a place has been offered:

- a) the child's parents can defer the date their child is admitted to the school until later in the school year but not beyond the point at which they reach compulsory school age and not beyond the beginning of the final term of the school year for which it was made; and
 - b) where the parents wish, children may attend part-time until later in the school year but not beyond the point at which they reach compulsory school age.
- Where parents are considering either of these alternative starting dates, parents are advised to contact the school to discuss.

- 13.2 Parents may decide that their child will not start school until they reach compulsory school age, which is known as 'deferred entry'.

- 13.3 Where parents choose to defer entry until later in the school year, we will hold their place in Reception for a maximum of two terms (until the end of the Spring Term). Places cannot be deferred beyond this point.
- 13.4 Parents may decide that their child will attend school part-time until they reach compulsory school age.
- 13.5 Where parents want to defer their child's entry and/or choose for them to attend school part-time, they should apply for a place in the normal way and, once they have accepted the offer of a place contact the school to discuss.

14 DELAYED ENTRY FOR SUMMER BORN CHILDREN

- 14.1 Children born between 1 April and 31 August are considered “summer born” children under the School Admissions Code and do not reach compulsory school age until 31 August on / following their fifth birthday.
- 14.2 Parents may decide to send their summer born child to school a year later than usual. The child would be admitted into their normal age group (Year 1) unless agreed otherwise. Parents should consider that their child will have missed Reception Year there may not be a place available in Year 1.
- 14.3 Parents may request their child is admitted one year later than usual, outside their normal age group, to Reception. The procedure for making these requests is set out in appendix 2.
- 14.4 Parents are strongly encouraged to make their requests in a timely manner, ideally well ahead of any application deadlines, so that they can obtain a decision in principle which will enable them to make informed decisions on school preferences when they apply for admission. Requests will be dealt as set out in appendix 2.

If the choice is made to delay entry until the following September (A year below the normal age group) the following should be considered:

- Any secondary school the child moves to will not be obliged to continue to educate them outside of their normal year group.
- If the child does remain out of their normal year group in secondary school, they will reach statutory school leaving age before they have completed their secondary education.

Parents are advised to read the Department for Education Guidance for parents:
[Summer born children starting school: advice for parents](#)

15 ADMISSION OF CHILDREN OUT OF THEIR NORMAL AGE GROUP

- 15.1 Parents have a right to request that their child is admitted to a year group other than their normal year group at a school. This may be to a year group below or above, and there may be any number of reasons for making this request. Parents do not have a right to decide that their child will be admitted outside their normal age group.
- 15.2 Parents should make their requests to the local authority in writing.
- 15.3 Requests for admission outside normal age group are not applications for admission, which must still be made in the usual way. Parents are strongly encouraged to make their requests in a timely manner, ideally well ahead of any application deadlines, so that they can obtain a decision in principle which will enable them to make informed decisions on school preferences when they subsequently apply for admission. A separate request must be made to the Local Authority for each school being considered.
- 15.4 A Panel of Officers will consider whether to agree the request in principle, or refuse the request as set out in appendix 2.

16 KEY DATES

Process	Secondary Transfers	Primary Admissions
Application process starts	1 September 2025	1 September 2025
Closing date for applications	31 October 2025*	15 January 2026*
Preferences forwarded to other LAs	14 November 2025	5 February 2026
Preferences forwarded to Academies, Free, VA and Foundation Schools	21 November 2025	13 February 2026
Deadline for receipt of supporting documentation	5 December 2025	16 February 2026
Academies and Free Schools, VA and Foundation Schools to respond	12 December 2025	6 March 2026
Provisional allocations of places at Cheshire East schools sent to other LAs for their residents	Around 16 January 2026	Around 13 March 2026
Responses to other LAs on potential offers of places in their schools for Cheshire East residents (so far as possible)	23 January 2026	20 March 2026
Allocations to be finalised	6 February 2026	27 March 2026
Offers released	2 March 2026**	16 April 2026**
Deadline for accepting or declining places	16 March 2026	30 April 2026
Waiting lists prepared, late applications processed and vacancies allocated. Waiting lists will be held in criteria order. Parents offered places on this basis will be required to accept or decline the place offered within 10 school days.	After 16 March 2026	After 30 April 2026
Appeals Application Deadlines	30 March 2026	15 May 2026
Appeal Hearings	By 15 June 2026	By 17 July 2026
Appeal Hearings – late Applications	Within 40 school days of deadline where possible, or 30 school days of appeal being lodged	
Appeal Applications – ‘In Year’ Admissions	Within 20 school days from the date of notification that the application for admission was unsuccessful.	
Appeal Hearings – ‘In Year’ Applications	Within 30 school days of appeal being lodged	Within 30 school days of appeal being lodged
Please note: Deadline for Admission Authorities to publish Appeal Timetables on their website		28 February of relevant year

* National closing date for applications

** In accordance with the School Admissions Code 2021, offers must be made on National Offer Day (1 March for secondary transfer, and 16 April for primary admissions **or the next working day**).

Appendix 1 – Feeder/Partner Primary Schools

Ruskin Community High School	Wilmslow High School
Edleston Primary School Gainsborough Primary and Nursery School Pebble Brook Primary School	Alderley Edge Community Primary School Ashdene Primary School Gorsey Bank Primary School Handforth Grange Primary School Lacey Green Primary Academy Lindow Community Primary School Nether Alderley Primary Academy St Anne's Fulshaw C of E Primary School Styal Primary School The Wilmslow Academy

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Appendix 2 - Cheshire East's process for requesting Admission of Children Out of their Normal Age group, in line with statutory guidance provided by the DfE:

1. **Parent** contact headteachers of preferred school(s) to discuss a potential request. Parents are advised to share information about their child and the reasons for the potential request to assist the Headteacher in providing a professional view.
2. **Parent** requests admission outside normal age group to the local authority including evidence to support their request.
3. **The Local Authority** will make a decision based on the circumstances of each case and in the best interests of the child concerned, taking into account the parents' views, information about the child's academic, social and emotional development, the child's medical history and the views of their medical professionals, whether they have previously been educated or attended nursery out of their normal age group, and whether they may naturally have fallen into a lower age group, if it were not for being born prematurely. We will consider the views of the Headteacher of the School and, where provided, the Headteacher of any current or previous school. This is not an exhaustive list, and parents may put forward any matters for the Panel to consider.
4. **The Local Authority** will notify parent(s) of the outcome of their request formally in writing, explaining its reasons in sufficient detail for parents to understand why it came to that decision. Where the request is agreed in principle, this letter should accompany the application for admission subsequently made for a place at the school.
5. Agreement to admissions outside normal age group does not guarantee a place at the preferred school. Applications will be considered in line with the oversubscription criteria within these Admissions Arrangements. Parents have a statutory right to appeal against the refusal of a place at a school for which they have applied. This right does not apply if they are offered a place at the school, but it is not in their preferred age group. Parents do not have a right of appeal against a refusal of a request for admission outside normal age group.

For summer born children:

If the request is approved

- Local authority notifies parent.
- parent withdraws application for reception place for chronological year group, if an application has already been made.
- parent can then apply for reception places the following year.

If the request is rejected - admissions authority notifies parent and provides reasons for rejection.

- parent decides whether to accept reception place for chronological year group if one has been offered, or delay child's start until following September and apply for a Year 1 place that year.
- parent rejects offer of reception place if offered in their chronological year group - child does not attend school for the year and parent must apply for a Year 1 place.
- parent accepts reception place if one has been offered for the chronological year group - child starts school in reception in their correct cohort.

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Appendix 3 – Published Admissions Numbers (PANs) for 2026 Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools

Primary Schools	School Status	PAN 2025	Capacity Indicative Admission Number	PAN Change for 2026
Alderley Edge Community Primary School	Community	30	29	
Ashdene Primary School	Community	60	60	
Beechwood Primary School and Nursery	Community	45	52	60
Bickerton Holy Trinity CE Primary School	Voluntary Controlled	20	20	
Bollington Cross CE Primary School	Voluntary Controlled	25	25	
Brierley Primary School	Community	30	30	
Buglawton Primary School	Community	30	29	
Chelford CE Primary School	Voluntary Controlled	13	12	
*Cledford Primary School	Community	60	60	
Dean Valley Community Primary School	Community	30	30	
Edleston Primary School	Community	30	30	
Elworth CE Primary School	Voluntary Controlled	60	60	
*Gainsborough Primary & Nursery School	Community	60	60	
Goostrey Community Primary School	Community	30	29	
Havannah Primary School	Community	30	30	
High Legh Primary School	Community	30	30	
Hurdsfield Community Primary School	Community	25	25	
Lindow Community Primary School	Community	30	30	
*Lower Park School	Community	40	40	
Mablins Lane Community Primary School	Community	90	90	
Middlewich Primary School	Community	60	60	
Mobberley CE Primary School	Voluntary Controlled	30	30	
Rainow Primary School	Community	28	25	
Rode Heath Primary School	Community	30	30	
Scholar Green Primary School	Community	30	30	
Sound and District Primary School	Community	19	19	21
St Anne's Fulshaw, CE Primary School	Voluntary Controlled	19	19	
Styal Primary School	Community	17	17	
The Dingle Primary School	Community	60	60	
Vernon Primary School	Community	50	52	55
Vine Tree Primary School	Community	30	30	
Weaver Primary School	Community	30	30	
Wrenbury Primary School	Community	20	20	

Secondary Schools	School Status	PAN 2025	Capacity Indicative Admission Number	PAN Change for 2026
Ruskin Community High School	Community	140	133	
Wilmslow High School	Community	360	360	

NOTE* This indicates schools that have Applied to the Department for Education to convert to Academy Status. If the schools have not converted to Academy status by 28 February 2025, then arrangements determined by the Local Authority shall continue to apply.

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Together we will make Cheshire East a great place to be young

Local Authority Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme from September 2026

1 September 2025



Contents

1. BACKGROUND.....	3
2. NORMAL ADMISSION ROUND – GENERAL INFORMATION.....	3
3. NORMAL ADMISSION ROUND APPLICATION PROCESS.....	6
4. CHANGING PREFERENCES IN THE NORMAL ADMISSION ROUND	8
5. PROCESSING APPLICATIONS FOR THE NORMAL ADMISSION ROUND	8
6. NOTIFYING PARENTS OF DECISIONS	9
7. LATE APPLICATIONS	9
8. MOVING HOUSE	10
9. ACCEPTING AND DECLINING PLACES	10
10. WAITING LISTS.....	10
11. ADMISSIONS APPEALS	11
12. 'IN YEAR' ADMISSIONS - APPLICATION PROCESS	11
13. PROCESSING APPLICATIONS	13
14. WAITING LISTS.....	14
15. 'IN YEAR' APPEALS.....	14
16. KEY DATES.....	15
17. GLOSSARY	16

LOCAL AUTHORITY COORDINATED ADMISSIONS SCHEME 2026-27

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This scheme applies for admission for school year starting September 2026.
- 1.2 The scheme meets the requirements for co-ordinating admission arrangements under The School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012, made under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (SSFA/98), for the area of Cheshire East Council (the Local Authority).
- 1.3 This coordinated scheme applies to all publicly funded schools in Cheshire East and to preferences expressed by Cheshire East parents, including applications for schools in other Local Authorities. This scheme does not apply to applications for special schools, independent schools, University and Technical Colleges or Studio Schools.
- 1.4 Parents making applications as part of the normal admission round for publicly funded schools in other authorities with a different age of transfer (i.e. middle and upper schools) are included within these arrangements.
- 1.5 The Local Authority will accept applications from families resident in the United Kingdom, and from outside the United Kingdom. For the normal admissions round applications will be considered on where the child is residing on the date published for receipt of supporting documentation. In-year applications will be processed on where the child is resident at the time of the application.
- 1.6 For families of UK service personnel (UK Armed Forces) where a Unit postal address or quartering area address will be accepted in advance of a move into the area, subject to official written confirmation of the address and relocation date. This is in accordance with the School Admissions Code (2021, paragraph 2.21).
- 1.7 In most cases, children arriving from overseas have the right to attend schools in England. It is the responsibility of parents to check that their children have a right, under their visa entry conditions, to study at a school.
Parents of overseas nationals entering the UK, who wish to apply for a state-funded school place, should check that they have a right of abode or that the conditions of their immigration status otherwise permit them to access a state-funded school.

2. NORMAL ADMISSION ROUND – GENERAL INFORMATION

- 2.1 Section 86 of the SSFA/98 provides that local authorities must make arrangements for parents to express a preference as to the school they wish their child to be educated at. In this policy and in education law, the definition of a 'parent' includes a natural or adoptive parent of the child (regardless of whether the child lives with them, has contact with them, or they have parental responsibility for the child). It also includes a person who is not a natural or adoptive parent of the child, but who has care of and/or parental responsibility for the child.

- 2.2 All parents of pupils **resident** in the area administered by Cheshire East Council will be required to make their application on the common application form available from this Local Authority (as the 'home' authority). Applications for places sent directly by parents to individual maintained schools cannot be accepted and parents will be advised to contact their 'home' authority. Parents seeking places at independent (i.e. fee paying) schools must apply direct to the school.
- 2.3 For community and voluntary controlled schools, in its role as the admission authority, Cheshire East Council is responsible for determining who can be allocated a place in accordance with its published admission arrangements.
- 2.4 For academies, free, voluntary aided, foundation and trust schools, decisions on applications will normally be made by the governing board. The exception to this will be where the governing board has made arrangements for another body to consider the application and to determine by reference to the school's admission criteria if a place can be allocated.
- 2.5 For applications for schools outside Cheshire East, the relevant local authority will be responsible for coordinating decisions on applications through liaison, where relevant, with admission authorities in its area.
- 2.6 The Local Authority will collate all admission arrangements in its composite prospectus and publish on the Local Authority's website. A hard copy of the agreed admissions arrangements will be available on request from the Admission Authority of the relevant school(s).
- 2.7 All preferences made in accordance with the Local Authority's arrangements will be met except where this would prejudice the provision of efficient education or the efficient use of resources e.g., normally where the year group in question is full. The duty to comply with parental preference is, however, removed for a period of two years where the child has been permanently excluded from two or more schools from the date on which the latest exclusion took place.
- 2.8 If the pupil is a Cheshire East resident and Cheshire East Council is not able to offer any of the preferences stated on the application form a place will normally be allocated at the nearest Cheshire East school with a vacancy using the National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG) which measures straight line distances in miles from the school's coordinate point to the place of the child's residence coordinate point. This will include allocating vacancies at academies, free, voluntary aided, foundation and trust schools in liaison and agreement with the governing boards of these schools.
- 2.9 Where a preference has been received for a child resident in another local authority and a place cannot be offered, Cheshire East Council will not allocate an alternative place.
- 2.10 Written offers will be made by Cheshire East Council to residents in its area, in its role as the home authority, on behalf of the admissions authority for the school allocated as follows:

Admissions authority	Category of school
Cheshire East Council	All community and voluntary controlled schools in Cheshire East
Maintaining Local Authority	All non-Cheshire East community and voluntary controlled schools.
Governing Board of the school	Academies, free, voluntary aided, foundation and trust schools

- 2.11 In the normal admissions round, offers of primary and secondary places must be sent by the home local authority and schools must not contact parents about the outcome of their applications until after these offers have been received. Admission authorities must not provide any guarantees to applicants of the outcome of their application prior to the formal notification of any offers of a place in a suitable school by the home local authority. Schools must not notify parents that a place has become available but must inform their maintaining local authority in order that an offer can be made by the home authority.
- 2.12 A governing board, in its role as the admission authority for a school, **must** comply with the following procedures:
- a) Determine or make arrangements for another body (including the maintaining local authority) to determine by reference to the school's admissions criteria the order of priority in which each application for the school is ranked;
 - b) To notify their maintaining local authority of their determination or arrange for the body appointed by them to notify the Local Authority on their behalf.
- 2.13 Parents will be informed in writing of their legal right of appeal against any decision not to offer them a place at a school stated as a preference on their application form. Further information on the appeals process will be available on the Local Authority's website and by contacting the Local Authority or relevant admission authority.
- 2.14 Parents can appeal in respect of each school for which admission has been refused. All appeals should be sent to the admission authority for the school for which admission has been refused.
- 2.15 Waiting lists, where held, will be in criteria order and not on a 'first come, first served' basis. Placing a child's name on a waiting list does not affect the right of appeal. Waiting lists will be held for all schools until the 31 December in the normal year of admission. Waiting list arrangements implemented after 31 December will be determined by individual admission authorities. For community and voluntary controlled schools, waiting lists will be closed at this point.

- 2.16 Repeat applications will not usually be considered within the same school year unless the child's or the school's circumstances have changed significantly since the original application was made. Full details of the change of circumstances must be provided for consideration by the Local Authority.

3. NORMAL ADMISSION ROUND APPLICATION PROCESS

- 3.1 Children reach compulsory school age at the beginning of the term following their 5th birthday. Under the Local Authority's policy, children may start school in the reception class in the September following their 4th birthday. For transfer to secondary, children will usually transfer at the beginning of the autumn term following their eleventh birthday.

- 3.2 Parents can request that the date their child is admitted to the primary school is deferred until later in the school year or until the child reaches compulsory school age in that school year. Applications for deferred admissions must be made by the published closing date. Parents will not however, be able to defer admission beyond the academic year for which the original application was accepted or beyond the beginning of the term after the child's fifth birthday.

- 3.3 There is no statutory barrier to children being admitted outside their normal year group. Paragraph 2.17 of the School Admissions Code (2021) enables a parent to request that their child is admitted outside of their normal age group, providing flexibility for children whose parents do not feel they are ready to begin school before they reach compulsory school age.

Admission authorities are responsible for making the decision on which year group a child should be admitted to but are required to make that decision based on the circumstances of the case. If parents are requesting delayed admission until the following year, an application must be submitted in accordance with the dates published for that application round (e.g., if requesting delayed entry until September 2026, an application must be made from September 2026).

Children born from 1st April to 31st August are "summer born children" and reach compulsory school age in the September following their fifth birthday. Parents of these children may request admission to the reception class in the September after their fifth birthday. Parents should follow the relevant admission authority's policy in relation to educating children out of their normal year group. Parents are advised to read the Department for Education Guidance for parents.

- 3.4 Requests can be made for early or late transfer to secondary school. Parents considering such a request must in the first instance speak to the headteacher of the child's primary school and preferred high school(s).
- 3.5 The application process will commence on **1 September** in the year preceding the admission year.
- 3.6 The common application form will invite parents to express 3 school preferences ranked in order of priority. Parents may give reasons for their preferences and may provide any additional documents in support of their preference(s).
- 3.7 The child's place of residence will be the address of the parent with whom the child is permanently resident on the date published for the receipt of supporting

documentation. Supporting information may be requested to verify the place of residence. To ensure a fair process, administrative checks may be undertaken, which will include verifying addresses against Council Tax records.

- 3.8 Where care is shared jointly, the primary carer will be taken to be the parent with whom the child lives for the majority of the week (Monday to Friday), and it is this address that will be used for admissions purposes. **If it is not possible to determine which parent is the primary carer, the Local Authority will determine residence based on where the child is registered for purposes of child benefit or (where no benefit is claimed) where the child is registered for GP purposes.** Full details must be submitted in writing to enable the Local Authority to determine which address will be used and A panel of officers will consider the information provided. Local authorities can only make one offer per child (School Admissions Code, 2021 paragraph 2.12 (a)), therefore, where parents are unable to reach an agreement and more than one application is submitted, the Local Authority will process the application of the parent who is the primary carer.
- 3.9 Parents should submit the completed application form to this Local Authority by the statutory closing dates.
- 3.10 Parents are asked to provide details of any siblings attending the preferred school at the time of application and who will be attending at the time of admission, details of the current school attended and the length of time resident at the address provided.
- 3.11 If a parent expresses a preference for a school designated as having a religious character (faith school) they will be asked to state the religious denomination of their child on their application form. Parents will be advised to contact the school as they may also be required to complete a Supplementary Information Form (SIF). Forms will be available from the school. SIF's will request information in addition to that provided on the common application form. Such request must be made in accordance with paragraphs 2.4 of the School Admissions Code (2021). Examples of additional information that can lawfully be requested include membership of, or relationship with the church, or a reference from a priest or other religious minister as proof of religious commitment.
- 3.12 All preferences will be considered on the basis of the **equal preference model** for allocating places, in accordance with legal requirements. This means that in the first instance, all preferences will be considered against the relevant published oversubscription criteria **only**, i.e. without reference to the preference ranking. Thereafter, where a pupil can potentially be allocated more than one school place stated on the application form, the **single offer**, determined by the home local authority, will be for the school ranked highest by the parents.
- 3.13 Preference ranking will not be shared with admission authorities in accordance with paragraph 2.7 of the School Admissions Code 2021 as this cannot lawfully be used when applying oversubscription criteria.
- 3.14 Where a school receives a supplementary information form, this Local Authority will not consider it to be a valid application unless the parent has also listed the school on their home LA's Application Form, Supplementary information forms should be returned direct to the school concerned.

- 3.15 When a parent has submitted their application on the common application form but has not also submitted a supplementary information form (where relevant), the admission authority must nevertheless consider the application in accordance with legal requirements. Where a SIF has been received the admission authority must be proactive in ensuring that there is an application, in order for the preference to be considered. In circumstances, where a SIF has not been completed the application will be assessed on the basis of the information submitted to the governing board on the home local authority's common application form.
- 3.16 For secondary transfer only, the Local Authority will have records for all children resident within its area who attend Cheshire East primary schools. In order to make sure where possible that all resident pupils are included in the co-ordinated admissions process, this Local Authority will also request data from neighbouring authorities.
- 3.17 The Local Authority's composite prospectus will be available on its website no later than 12 September. Hard copies will be available on request from the Local Authority.
- 3.18 The composite prospectus will include information on the application process including key dates, a copy of the common application form, details of Cheshire East schools and allocation data relating to applications for the previous year.

4. CHANGING PREFERENCES IN THE NORMAL ADMISSION ROUND

- 4.1 After the closing date for applications, the Local Authority will not accept a change of preference unless it is satisfied that there is a genuine reason for doing so, such as a recent house move. Full details must be provided to the Local Authority for consideration and by the published deadline for receipt of supporting information.
- 4.2 Any parent wishing to change a preference after the closing date for applications without a genuine reason for doing so in the opinion of the Local Authority will be advised that the application will be treated as a late application.
- 4.3 For a recent house move, evidence such as a letter from the solicitor confirming the completion date or a signed rental agreement* showing the start of the tenancy will be required. Further confirmation may also be required including evidence of disposal of previous property and recent utility bills to confirm the actual place of residency. *A signed rental agreement must cover the date published as the deadline for receipt of supporting information.
- 4.4 A panel of officers will consider information presented in support of the late change of preference. The parent will be notified of the decision.

5. PROCESSING APPLICATIONS FOR THE NORMAL ADMISSION ROUND

The following actions will be implemented in accordance with the dates published.

- 5.2 Cheshire East Council will exchange applications for schools in the areas of other English local authorities and will provide details of applications to its own admissions authority schools for consideration.

- 5.3 Cheshire East own admission authority schools will provide the Local Authority with details of pupils in criteria order under its admissions criteria.
- 5.4 Cheshire East Council will inform other local authorities of offers to be made to pupils resident within their boundaries and request details of offers they will be making to Cheshire East residents.
- 5.5 Places will normally only be offered up to the published admission number (PAN), which applies to the normal year of entry. A child cannot be refused admission to the normal year of entry on the grounds of prejudice to the provision of efficient education and efficient use of resources unless the PAN has been reached. For admission to year groups other than the normal point of entry, it is expected that the admission number will continue to be applied. However, if circumstances have changed since the year of entry, a place may be refused even if the admission number has not been reached.
- 5.6 Admission authorities that intend to admit above the PAN where it is considered that further admission/s would not have a detrimental effect on the school, should notify the Local Authority at an early stage to enable the local authority to deliver its coordination responsibilities effectively.

6. NOTIFYING PARENTS OF DECISIONS

- 6.1 Cheshire East Council will send the parents of pupils who reside in Cheshire East written confirmation of the decision on the application. This will include offers for places in Cheshire East schools and schools in other local authorities. Where online applications have been received, the parent making the online application can log on to their online account on the published date to view the school place offered and will also receive their offer by e-mail. Offers confirmed by letter will be sent out on the published offer day by second class post.

7. LATE APPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Applications received after the closing date will be recorded as 'late' and considered after all on-time applications unless the Local Authority confirms that the reasons presented in support of the late submission justify the application being considered alongside on-time applications. Reasons can include exceptional medical reasons preventing an earlier application or late move into the area. Reasons must be presented at the time of application and supporting documentation **must** be provided, which must be received by the dates specified.
- 7.2 For a recent house move, evidence such as a letter from the solicitor confirming the completion date or a signed rental agreement* showing the start of the tenancy will be required. Further confirmation may be required including evidence of disposal of previous property and recent utility bills to confirm the actual place of residency.
*Evidence must cover the dates published as the deadline for receipt of supporting information.

- 7.3 Where medical reasons prevented an earlier application, a letter of confirmation from a medical practitioner will usually be required.
- 7.4 Late applications received after the published deadline for the receipt of supporting information are likely to be classed as late and processed after all on-time applications unless there is an exceptional reason for the late submission, for example, a child that has recently come into local authority care where a previous application had not been made.
- 7.5 Late applications will be processed at the time waiting lists are prepared and in accordance with the dates published.

8. MOVING HOUSE

- 8.1 Parents must inform the Local Authority immediately of a change of address, even if details of a future change of residency were included on the application form. The Local Authority will require supporting evidence to show that the place of residency has changed. This should include a letter from the solicitor confirming the completion date or a signed rental agreement showing the start date of the tenancy. Any rental agreement must include residency on the date published as the deadline for receipt of supporting information. Further information may be requested to confirm residency, for example, recent utility bills or evidence of disposal of previous property. Proof that the child now resides at the new property may be required.
- 8.2 Proof of residency received after the deadline for the receipt of supporting information will not be used to assign a higher criterion for admission but will be used to send the decision on the published offer date.

9. ACCEPTING AND DECLINING PLACES

- 9.1 Parents will be required to **accept or decline** the school place offered by the dates published in part two of these arrangements. The Local Authority reserves the right to withdraw places not accepted by this date. If the Local Authority does not receive a response by the date specified in that first correspondence, a reminder letter or email will be sent with a second opportunity to respond, giving a deadline of a further 5 days. This will include notification that if no response is received to that reminder, the school place will be withdrawn.
- 9.2 For late applications notified after the offer date parents will be required to accept the place offered within **10 working days** of the date of the offer.

10. WAITING LISTS

- 10.1 Waiting lists for oversubscribed schools will consist of those children whose parents have requested in writing (including e-mail) that they be placed on the waiting list, along with late applicants and those for whom an appeal application has been received. Waiting lists will be held in criteria order and not on a first come first served basis.

- 10.2 Vacancies will be re-allocated to children on the school's waiting list in line with the dates published in these arrangements.
- 10.3 After the start of the school term in September, all admission authorities will hold up-to-date information on waiting lists until the 31 December. After this date the Local Authority will no longer hold waiting lists for schools for which it is the admission authority. Other admission authorities that have published that they will continue to hold waiting lists after this date will be responsible for maintaining their waiting lists in accordance with their own published admission arrangements.

11. ADMISSIONS APPEALS

- 11.1 The application decision letter/e-mail will explain the parent's right of appeal and how appeals may be made. Applications for appeal should be received by the dates published.
- 11.2 Parents can appeal for each school for which admission has been refused.
- 11.3 Appeals against decisions notified after the published offer day will be heard within 40 days of the published appeals deadline where possible, or if received too late, within 30 school days of the appeal being lodged.
- 11.4 Appeals for late applications should be received within 20 school days from the date of notification that the application was unsuccessful.
- 11.5 All appeal applications should be sent to the admission authority for the school for which admission has been refused.

12. 'IN YEAR' ADMISSIONS - APPLICATION PROCESS

- 12.1 'In year' applications are those made during the school year into any year group other than the normal point of entry (i.e. normal admission round). This will include applications from parents of children moving into Cheshire East from another local authority's area, moving within Cheshire East, or seeking to transfer to an alternative school for other reasons. Where schools have chosen not to participate in the Local Authority Co-ordinated Scheme this will be published on the Cheshire East website,
- 12.2 Parents seeking Cheshire East school places 'in year' will be required to complete the Cheshire East Council 'in year' application form. Forms are available on the Council's website and in hard copy on request, applications can be made over the telephone on 0300 123 5012.
- 12.3 Parents will be advised to contact their preferred school to progress their application.
- 12.4 Parents will be invited to provide information in support of their application. Application details will be shared with the relevant schools/admission authorities if in the area of Cheshire East Council.

- 12.5 Parents will be asked to provide details, where applicable, of any siblings attending the preferred school at the time of application and who will be attending at the time of admission, details of the current school attended and the length of time resident at the address provided.
- 12.6 Personal data including that of sensitive nature (including special category information) provided for the purpose of school admissions will be held in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations and its principles. Details of which are published on the Council's website under "[Data Protection](#)". In order that applications can be processed in accordance with parents' wishes, personal information may be shared within the Local Authority, with other relevant local authorities and with relevant schools. Relevant local authorities include the home local authority (where resident) and local authorities where the schools named on the application form are located; relevant schools include the schools listed as preferences and the current or most recent school. Full details of the way your data is stored and used can be found in the Council's Privacy Notice, which can also be found on our [website](#).
- 12.7 To ensure that a place is offered at a suitable school as quickly as possible, some applications will be processed in accordance with the Local Authority's Fair Access Protocol. The operation of Fair Access Protocols is outside the arrangements of co-ordination and is triggered when a parent of an eligible child has not secured a school place under in-year admission procedures. Parents will receive full information before this procedure is implemented. The Local Authority's Fair Access Protocol: agreed in partnership with the headteachers of both primary and secondary schools, will not affect the parent's right to express preferences for schools of their choice or to challenge unsuccessful applications through the appeals process. Permanently excluded pupils ready to be admitted into a new school will be offered admission under the Fair Access Protocol. Information about the process is published on the Council's website.
- 12.8 If a parent expresses a preference for a school designated as having a religious character (faith school) they will be asked to state the religious denomination of their child on their application form. Parents may be required by the school to complete a supplementary information form. Forms will be available from the school. Supplementary information forms (SIFs) will request information in addition to that provided on the common application form. Such request must be made in accordance with paragraphs 2.4 of the School Admissions Code (2021). Examples of additional information that can lawfully be requested include membership of, or relationship with the church, or a reference from a priest or other religious minister as proof of religious commitment.
- 12.9 The Local Authority will publish on its website information on vacancies in Cheshire East publicly funded schools.
- 12.10 Parents seeking a transfer to an alternative school for reasons other than a house move will be strongly advised to discuss the proposed transfer with the current school before submitting an application.
- 12.11 The Local Authority will maintain up-to-date records of applications and their outcomes through liaison with schools.
- 12.12 Parents can apply online, by telephone or by hard copy application form.

- 12.13 Parents making applications for schools in other local authorities' areas will be advised to contact the relevant local/admission authority for advice about their own application process.
- 12.14 Applications will not normally be accepted more than 6 school weeks prior to the intended date of admission. An exception to this is where an application is made during the summer term, for admission at the beginning of the following September. In this case, applications will be accepted up to 8 school weeks prior to intended date of admission.

13. PROCESSING APPLICATIONS

All applications should be processed within no more than 10 school days from the receipt of application. Different timescales will apply to applications processed in accordance with the Local Authority's Fair Access Protocol.

- 13.2 Where there are spaces in the relevant year group a place will normally be offered to the parent.
- 13.3 If the year group in question is full, a decision to refuse admission will be made by the admission authority.
- 13.4 Where a school is oversubscribed, the admission authority will rank the applications in accordance with their published oversubscription criteria.
- 13.5 Decisions will be confirmed in writing to the parent by the admission authority and the letter/e-mail will include information about the legal right of appeal and a start date, where relevant.
- 13.6 Where a preference has been unsuccessful, written correspondence will confirm the decision on the application and will advise the parent to contact the Local Authority for advice about alternative schools with vacancies.
- 13.7 Written correspondence confirming offers will advise the parent to contact the school to accept or decline the school place within no more than 10 school days from the offer date.
- 13.8 Where a school feels that further admissions can be agreed on the basis that to do so will not result in a breach of infant class size legislation or will not prejudice the provision of efficient education or efficient use of resources, the application must be referred to the admission authority for a decision.
- 13.9 Decisions on applications will be notified to the Local Authority to enable the Local Authority to keep up-to-date records.
- 13.10 Successful applicants will normally be expected to take up their offer of a school place within 10 school days from the offer date.
- 13.11 Repeat applications will not be considered within the same school year, unless the parent's or the school's circumstances have changed significantly since the original application was made. Full details of the change of circumstances must be provided on the application form for consideration.

14. WAITING LISTS

- 14.1 Waiting lists will not be held for community or voluntary controlled schools other than in accordance with legal requirements, which require that they are held up until the 31 December for the normal year of admission (i.e. reception and year 7 admissions). Where waiting lists are held by other admission authorities, children will be added to waiting lists in criteria order and not on a first come first served basis.
- 14.2 For 'in year' waiting lists only, children who are subject of a direction by a local authority to admit, are part of a managed transfer from a closing school or who are allocated to a school in accordance with the Local Authority's Fair Access Protocol will take precedence over those on the waiting list.

15. 'IN YEAR' APPEALS

Appeals should be submitted within 20 school days from the date of notification that the application was unsuccessful.

16. KEY DATES

Process	Secondary Transfers	Primary Admissions
Application process starts	1 September 2025	1 September 2025
Closing date for applications	31 October 2025*	15 January 2026*
Preferences forwarded to other LAs	14 November 2025	5 February 2026
Preferences forwarded to Academies, Free, VA and Foundation Schools	21 November 2025	13 February 2026
Deadline for receipt of supporting documentation	5 December 2025	16 February 2026
Academies and Free Schools, VA and Foundation Schools to respond	12 December 2025	6 March 2026
Provisional allocations of places at Cheshire East schools sent to other LAs for their residents	Around 16 January 2026	Around 13 March 2026
Responses to other LAs on potential offers of places in their schools for Cheshire East residents (so far as possible)	23 January 2026	20 March 2026
Allocations to be finalised	6 February 2026	27 March 2026
Offers released	2 March 2026**	16 April 2026**
Deadline for accepting or declining places	16 March 2026	30 April 2026
Waiting lists prepared, late applications processed and vacancies allocated. Waiting lists will be held in criteria order. Parents offered places on this basis will be required to accept or decline the place offered within 10 school days.	After 16 March 2026	After 30 April 2026
Appeals Application Deadlines	30 March 2026	15 May 2026
Appeal Hearings	By 15 June 2026	By 17 July 2026
Appeal Hearings – late Applications	Within 40 school days of deadline where possible, or 30 school days of appeal being lodged	
Appeal Applications – ‘In Year’ Admissions	Within 20 school days from the date of notification that the application for admission was unsuccessful.	
Appeal Hearings – ‘In Year’ Applications	Within 30 school days of appeal being lodged	Within 30 school days of appeal being lodged
Please note: Deadline for Admission Authorities to publish Appeal Timetables on their website		28 February of relevant year

* National closing date for applications

** In accordance with the School Admissions Code 2021, offers must be made on National Offer Day (1 March for secondary transfer, and 16 April for primary admissions **or the next working day**).

17. GLOSSARY

Admission Authority

The body responsible for setting and applying a school's admission arrangements. For community or voluntary controlled schools, this body is the local authority unless it has agreed to delegate responsibility to the governing body. For foundation or voluntary aided schools, this body is the governing body of the school. For Academies, this body is the Academy Trust.

Admission Arrangements

The overall procedure, practices and oversubscription criteria used in deciding the allocation of school places.

Admission Number (or Published Admission Number – (PAN))

The number of school places that the admission authority must offer in each relevant age group of a school for which it is the admission authority. Admission numbers are part of a school's admission arrangements.

Catchment Area

A geographical area, from which children may be afforded priority for admission to a particular school. A catchment area is part of a school's admission arrangements and must therefore be consulted upon, determined, and published in the same way as other admission arrangements.

Common Application Form

The form parents complete, listing their preferred choices of schools, and then submit to local authorities when applying for a school place for their child as part of the local co-ordination scheme, during the normal admissions round. Parents must be allowed to express a preference for a minimum of three schools on the relevant common application form as determined by their local authority. Local authorities may allow parents to express a higher number of preferences if they wish.

In-Year Admission

An application is an in-year application if it is for the admission of a child to a relevant age group and it is submitted on or after the first day of the first school term of the admission year; or it is for the admission of a child to an age group other than a relevant age group.

Home Local Authority

A child's home local authority is the local authority in whose area the child resides.

National Offer Day

The day each year on which local authorities are required to send the offer of a school place to all parents in their area. Secondary National Offer Day is 1 March (or the next working day). Primary National Offer Day is 16 April (or the next working day).

Normal Admissions Round

The period during which parents are invited to express three preferences for a place at any state-funded school, in rank order on the common application form provided by their home local authority. The deadlines for parental applications of 31 October (for secondary places) and 15 January (for primary places) and offers made to parents on National Offer Day.





Together we will make Cheshire East a great place to be young

Local Authority Sixth Form Admissions Arrangements
for
Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools from
September 2026

1 September 2025



Contents

Contents.....	1
1. SIXTH FORM ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS	2
2. PUBLISHED ADMISSION NUMBERS – EXTERNAL CANDIDATES ONLY	2
3. OVERSUBSCRIPTION CRITERIA	3
4. PARENTS WITH SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR A CHILD	4
5. SIXTH FORM ADMISSION APPEALS	5
6. ACADEMIC ENTRY CRITERIA	6
Appendix 1 – Published Admissions Numbers (PANs) for 2026 Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools	7



1. SIXTH FORM ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS

- 1.1 The following admission arrangements apply to entry to the Sixth Form of Wilmslow High School only.

Pupils already on roll in the school's own year 11 are not admitted to a school's Sixth Form because they are already on the school roll. They move up to the 6th form from year 11. They can therefore only be refused progression to the sixth form if they fail to meet the academic criteria for progression/entry. Admissions law requires that the same academic criteria must be applied to all pupils, whether they are internal pupils seeking progression/entry or external applicants seeking admission. Schools have the choice of admitting pupils into year 12 or operating a sixth form primarily for pupils already on roll in the school. Wilmslow High School have opted to admit pupils to their sixth forms from other schools.

- 1.2 Applications for admission to the Sixth Form of a Cheshire East school are dealt with by the school in accordance with the published admissions arrangements and not by Cheshire East Council. The schools will not interview pupils or their families for entry to year 12, although meetings may be held to provide advice on options and entry requirements for particular courses.
- 1.3 If a course cannot be run due to low student take-up, the school may withdraw the course. This will not influence a decision to agree admission to the sixth form and alternative courses will be offered.

2. PUBLISHED ADMISSION NUMBERS – EXTERNAL CANDIDATES ONLY

- 2.1 This number relates to the admission of **external candidates only**. The admission numbers included in the table are based on an estimate of the minimum number of external candidates likely to be admitted, although it would be acceptable to exceed this if demand for available courses can be met.

School	September 2024
Wilmslow High School	50

Additional places may be offered to external candidates if the number of children transferring from the school's own year 11 is lower than planned.



3. OVERSUBSCRIPTION CRITERIA

3.1 In the event that the number of eligible applicants exceeds the number of places available, the oversubscription criteria to be applied are:

1) Eligible 'cared for children' and children who were previously 'cared for'.

- A 'cared for child' is a child who is in the care of a local authority or provided with accommodation by that local authority (as defined in section 22 of the Children Act 1989).
- Children 'previously cared for' are children who were 'cared for' as defined above, but immediately after being 'cared for' became subject to an adoption, child arrangements order (formerly residence order), or special guardianship order. A child arrangements order is as an order settling the arrangements to be made as to the person with whom the child is to live under section 8 of the Children Act 1989 amended by Children and Families Act 2014. Section 14A of the Children Act 1989 defines a 'special guardianship order' as an order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's special guardian (or special guardians).

2) Eligible pupils resident within the designated catchment area of the school. Pupils will be classed within this criterion if they and their parents are resident within the area served by the school. (Refer to previous exception regarding Children of UK Service personnel and Crown Servants returning from abroad).

3) Eligible pupils living nearest to the school measured using the National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG) which measures straight line distances in miles from the school's coordinate point to the place of residence's coordinate point.

Notes:

3.2 An 'eligible' pupil is a pupil who has met the academic entry requirements.

3.3 All children whose Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan names the school must be admitted. An Education, Health and Care plan is a plan made by the local authority under Section 37 of the Children and Families Act 2014 specifying the special education provision required for that child.

3.4 The Local Authority will accept applications from families resident in and outside the United Kingdom. All applications will be processed based on where the child



is residing at the time of the application and in accordance with published arrangements. The only exception to this is for families of service personnel with a confirmed posting to the Cheshire East area, or crown servants returning from overseas to live in the Cheshire East area. This is in accordance with the School Admissions Code 2021, paragraph 2.21. In most cases, children arriving from overseas have the right to attend schools in England. It is the responsibility of parents to check that their children have a right, under their visa entry conditions, to study at a school. Parents of overseas nationals entering the UK, who wish to apply for a state-funded school place, should check that they have a right of abode or that the conditions of their immigration status otherwise permit them to access a state-funded school.

- 3.5 Distance criterion will be applied as a tie breaker if the number of pupils applying under criterion (2) exceeds the number of available places. To differentiate between two equal distance measurements, a random allocation tie-breaker will be applied. This will be administered under independent supervision, in accordance with the requirements of the School Admissions Code 2021 at paragraph 1.35.
- 3.6 In the case of previously looked after children (criterion i) a copy of the adoption order, child arrangement order or special guardianship order may be requested and a written correspondence from the local authority that last looked after the child confirming that the pupil was looked after immediately prior to that order being made.
- 3.7 For children of UK service personnel (UK Armed Forces) a Unit postal address or quartering area address will be accepted in advance of removal into the area, subject to official written confirmation of the address and relocation date. Preferences for the catchment area school for the confirmed address will be considered under criterion 2 unless a higher criterion is applicable.

4. PARENTS WITH SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR A CHILD

- 4.1 Only one application can be made for each child. Parents that share responsibility should agree between them who will apply.
- 4.2 Where parents have shared responsibility for a child the place of residency will be determined as the address where the child lives for the majority of the week (e.g., where the child wakes up between Monday to Friday). The Local Authority may request full details to be submitted in writing to enable the Local Authority to



determine which address will be used for the purpose of admission. A panel of officers will consider the information provided.

Examples of other evidence and information that may be considered:

- Details of how the child splits their time between the two addresses.
- Court orders or other legal documents.
- Where Child Benefit is claimed.
- Where the child is registered for GP purposes.
- The address the current nursery/pre-school or Primary school have on their records.

4.3 Where both parents have parental responsibility, the local authority is unable to resolve or take sides in disputes. Instead, parents are required to resolve matters between themselves, and, where this is not possible, seek a resolution through the courts.

5. SIXTH FORM ADMISSION APPEALS

5.1 Any applicant refused a place in Year 12 is entitled to make an appeal to an independent appeal panel, whether the child is already attending the school or is an external candidate.

5.2 Parents or children* refused admission to a sixth form in a Cheshire East community or voluntary controlled school will be advised to contact the Local Authority for an appeal application form and details on the appeals process.

*The Education and Skills Act 2008 made changes to the law relating to admissions and appeals placing a duty on local authorities to make arrangements:

- a) for children to express a preference as to the school at which they wish to receive sixth-form education (i.e. secondary education suitable to the requirements of pupils who are over compulsory school age); and
- b) for children who are above compulsory school age or will be above compulsory school age by the time they start to receive education at the school, to express a preference as to the school at which they wish to receive education other than school sixth-form education.

5.3 Regulations give a corresponding right of appeal to a child who expresses a preference for a school place. This right is in addition to the rights of parents to express a preference as to the school at which they wish their child to receive education.



6. ACADEMIC ENTRY CRITERIA

6.1 Wilmslow High School

Entry to the Sixth Form requires students to have gained good qualifications in a range of subjects. Please contact the school direct for information.

6.2 **A final decision on admission to the Sixth Form cannot take place until the student's Year 11 results are known.** Sixth Form offers will be conditional upon gaining the minimum academic entry criteria. This will be set out in the offer. Individual entry requirements can be obtained direct from the school.

6.3 Courses are reviewed annually to take into account any changes in education legislation, availability of courses and required attainment levels and therefore, students and parents are advised to consider the information published by the school.



Appendix 1 – Published Admissions Numbers (PANs) for 2026 Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools

Sixth Form	School Status	PAN 2026	Capacity Indicative Admission Number	PAN Change for 2026
Wilmslow High School	Community	50	N/A	



OPEN

Children and Families Committee

16 September 2024

Revised 0-25 SEND Partnership Governance Structure and Strategy

**Report of: Claire Williamson - Director of Education, Strong Start
and Integration**

Report Reference No: CF/30/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: All Wards

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report seeks approval from committee for revised governance arrangements for the Cheshire East 0-25 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Partnership, which aim to ensure improvement actions undertaken through the partnership are completed effectively and at pace, and support the achievement of best outcomes for children and young people with SEND within a financially sustainable framework (in line with achieving a balanced budget by 2031).
- 2 Committee are asked to note the proposals to develop a new single SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Strategy and Improvement Plan 2025-27 (which will incorporate mitigations identified in the Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan during this time period).

Executive Summary

- 3 The current Cheshire East Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2021 – 2025 was last refreshed in April 2023. Due to the timescale of our current strategy, and major national and local changes relating to SEND and wider people services that have occurred since this date (including a clear focus on managing our Dedicated Schools Grant), plans are now required around the development of a new strategy and a refresh of the partnership governance structure that will oversee and drive the delivery of local SEND improvement actions. This report seeks agreement on proposed governance arrangements

and outlines plans for a new, single SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy and Improvement Plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the revised Cheshire East 0-25 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Partnership Governance structure
2. Note the new and/or revised terms of reference for the following boards, groups and panels:
 - Terms of Reference for SEND Task and Finish Groups
 - Terms of Reference for the SEND Transformation Action Group
 - Terms of Reference for the 0-25 SEND and AP Partnership Board
 - Terms of Reference for the SEND Executive Oversight Panel
3. Note the proposals for developing the SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Strategy and Improvement Plan 2025-27

Background

- 4 The Cheshire East 0-25 SEND Partnership is a multi-agency partnership arrangement which leads and drives developments around support, processes and provision for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) aged 0-25 years in Cheshire East.
- 5 The current *Cheshire East Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2021 – 2025* was co-produced with a wide range of key stakeholders and sets out how the 0-25 SEND partnership will drive developments to our services so that we support children and young people with SEND to achieve the best possible outcomes. Originally prepared as The SEND strategy 2021 – 2024 and approved in November 2021, the document was refreshed in April 2023 to reflect significant changes within the national and local landscape for SEND.
- 6 Since the April 2023 strategy refresh, there have been further major national and local changes relating to SEND and wider people services, including:
 - (a) Work to address increasing financial pressure on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)
 - We are continuing to ensure that improvement actions identified through the DBV programme and Safety Valve preparations, and all mitigations listed within the DSG Management Plan

2024/25 to 2030/31, remain active and will be captured in the proposed single SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan for use going forward.

- (b) Completing our self-evaluation and identifying areas for development
 - As part of our ongoing standard evaluation activity, alongside inspection preparation activities, colleagues across the SEND Partnership regularly update our SEND self-evaluation to ensure that it reflects recent improvements and feedback. SEND improvement actions from a previous iteration of our self-evaluation were captured through a drafted improvement plan presented to the SEND Executive Leadership Board. We need to ensure that a new SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan addresses the areas for development identified in our most recent self-evaluation, along with any actions that may still be needed from the previously drafted SEND Improvement Plan.
- (c) ILACS inspection and Improvement Plan
 - An Ofsted inspection in February and March 2024 gave Cheshire East's children's services an overall grading of inadequate. A comprehensive Children's Services Improvement Plan has been agreed which clearly sets out the actions that will be taken to address the inspection findings and improve our offer for children and young people. To aid consistency and joint working, we will aim to align the content and format of a new SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan, and monitoring activity, with this document.
- (d) National improvement work
 - activity has been taking place nationally to develop and pilot the recommendations set out in the DfE's SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan published in March 2023. It is not yet known if or how the July 2024 change in national government will affect the implementation of this plan.

Consultation and Engagement

- 7 As a partnership we have signed up to TOGETHER in Cheshire East as our shared definition of co-production as it is inclusive to all. It is important that our new strategy and improvement plan is co-produced with our key stakeholders, including the voice of children and young people and their parents/carers. To support this, we are planning to hold workshop sessions with stakeholder groups during the 2024/2025 Autumn Term.

- 8 The proposed governance arrangements support co-production of improvements and joint, multi-agency working between stakeholders at all levels.
- 9 We also plan to produce and maintain a communications plan detailing how and when progress updates on the improvement work undertaken by the 0-25 SEND Partnership will be shared with different stakeholder groups.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 10 Following the recent period of feedback and reflection arising from close work with Department for Education (DfE) Advisors, a proposed new governance structure has been developed for the Cheshire East 0-25 SEND Partnership which is shown in **Appendix 1**. The proposed new and/or revised Terms of Reference for the constituent groups of the governance structure are provided in **Appendices 2 – 5**. Note that membership of each group is still pending final agreement between partners and may be subject to further changes.
- 11 This new structure aims to ensure that improvements are completed effectively and at pace, and that there is continual evaluation of the impact of improvements on children and young people's experiences and outcomes, and financial sustainability. Key points of note include:
 - (a) A refreshed **SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan** is proposed to bring together all SEND and AP improvement actions into one single plan (which will incorporate all mitigations identified in the DSG Management Plan for the time period of the strategy).
 - (b) The new **SEND Executive Oversight Panel** will be chaired by the council's Chief Executive. It will include executive directors across education, health and care, along with elected members, and will provide executive level leadership and oversight of the progress, outcomes and financial impact of the work carried out by the 0-25 SEND Partnership.
 - (c) Membership of the **0-25 SEND and AP (Alternative Provision) Partnership Board** is being refreshed and streamlined to ensure key multi-agency partners are represented at a senior level and to reduce duplication of membership at different levels. Members of this board will provide senior level guidance, scrutiny, financial monitoring and direction to monitor progress of the SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan.
 - (d) A new **SEND Transformation Action Group** will appoint and assign improvement actions to dedicated Task and Finish Groups, and hold delivery leads of these groups accountable for completion of actions in line with agreed timescales.

- (e) Temporary **Task and Finish groups** will each have an appointed delivery lead and will remain active only as long as is required to complete their assigned improvement actions. Once these actions have been completed, the group will close, and the delivery lead will be assigned new actions to complete with a new task and finish group.
- 12 Implementation of the new structure will start from the new 2024/2025 academic year. We are currently finalising appropriate membership and meeting dates for each level (pending sign-off being granted).
- 13 The new single SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan will incorporate all mitigations identified in the DSG Management Plan that are required over the next 3 years (noting that the DSG Management Plan is a 7 year plan) and will clearly pull together and outline in a single document all of the improvement work to be carried out by the SEND Partnership over the next 3 years. In doing so, we will remove any confusion regarding multiple SEND improvement action plans and positively focus our resources in order to achieve successful improvements at pace.
- 14 We are currently aiming to co-produce a complete draft of the new SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan by January 2025. The completed draft document will be shared with Children and Families Committee for approval. Improvement work will still continue during the development of our new strategy and improvement plan. The development proposals are outlined in **Appendix 6**.
- 15 This improvement work is a fundamental change programme that will affect the whole system and will require all partners to work as one and ensure co-production with parents is at the heart of our plan. We know that we must do this for financial sustainability, but most importantly because our children and young people deserve to have the right education and support, in the right provision, at the right time, in order to support them to prepare for adulthood and to achieve successful outcomes.

Other Options Considered

16 The table below sets out the issues:

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	<p>Required mitigations are not delivered and DSG deficit position increases</p> <p>Children and young people with SEND have poorer experiences and outcomes</p> <p>Negative impact on Ofsted inspection rating, leading to reputational damage and increased monitoring</p>	Numerous strategies and plans are not aligned and priorities are unclear and/or conflicted

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 17 Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014 ('the Act') sets out the legal duties on the Local area partnership (the local authority, health partners, settings, schools and colleges) to identify and meet the needs of children and young people aged 0-25 with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The Act together with associated regulations are underpinned by statutory guidance - Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years - Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities.
- 18 'Local area partnership' refers to those in education, health and care who are responsible for the strategic planning, commissioning, management, delivery, and evaluation of arrangements for children and young people with SEND who live in a local area.
- 19 Ofsted and the CQC carry out joint inspections of local areas at the request of the Secretary of State for Education under section 20(1) (a) of the Children Act 2004.
- 20 Inspectors assess the extent to which the local area partners are complying with relevant legal duties relating to arrangements for children and young people with SEND. Relevant legal duties may include duties under the Children and Families Act 2014, the Equality

Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998. The relevant guidance is Area SEND inspections; framework and handbook (updated 5 April 2024).

- 21 Under the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the council has a statutory duty to use resources efficiently and effectively against priorities and to achieve a balanced budget. Section 28 (budget monitoring: general) of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Council to review its calculations from time to time during the year and to take such action, if any, as it considers necessary to deal with any deterioration in its financial position.
- 22 The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is paid to the Council by the Secretary of State under section 14 of the Education Act 2002 (power of Secretary of State to give financial assistance for purposes related to education or children etc.). The purposes of the financial assistance are set out at s14(2) of the Education Act 2002. The grant is paid as a ring fenced specific grant and it must be used to support the schools budget as defined in the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2024 which cover the financial year 2024-2025. Local authorities are responsible for determining the split of the grant between central expenditure and the individual schools budget (ISB) in conjunction with local schools forums. Local authorities are responsible for allocating the ISB to individual schools in accordance with the local schools' funding formula.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 23 There are no financial implications or changes required to the Council's MTFS as a result of the recommendations in this report.
- 24 However the boards, partnerships, strategies and governance arrangements proposed in this report will support the delivery of the DSG management plan and its associated financial implications.
- 25 The DSG management plan 2024/25 to 2030/31 forecasts an unmitigated cumulative DSG deficit of £1.2 billion by the end of 2023/31, reducing to £285 million if the plan is implemented successfully.

Policy

- 26 Local authorities are under a duty to ensure sufficiency of school places in their area (section 14 of the Education Act 1996).
- 27 The SEND Code of Practice (January 2015) provides statutory guidance on duties, policies and procedures relating to Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014 and associated regulations and applies to England. The Code of Practice is statutory guidance for many

members of the Cheshire East 0-25 SEND Partnership, including the local authority, the health ICB and trusts, and educational settings.

28 The statutory duties include:

- the need to undertake a needs assessment where a child may have additional needs
- to issue an education, health and care plan within 20 weeks where assessment provides evidence this is required to meet the assessed needs
- the local authority must then secure an appropriate school place and must consult with parental preference

29 In March to July 2022, the DfE ran a consultation on their green paper on the future on SEND services entitled: “*SEND Review: Right Support, Right Place, Right Time*”. The Cheshire East 0-25 SEND Partnership response was in support of the proposals and in promptly making those legal requirements which would support the council (and partners) in delivery of the necessary changes.

30 Following the green paper consultation, in March 2023 DfE published their SEND and alternative provision improvement plan which sets out their plans to change the SEND and alternative provision system in England. The partnership will ensure we keep up to date with the [DfE roadmap and change programme](#) as this is progressed nationally, along with monitoring for any impact on this work arising from the July 2024 change in national government.

31

An open and enabling organisation	A council which empowers and cares about people	A thriving and sustainable place
	<p>Support all children to have the best start in life.</p> <p>Increase opportunities for all children and young adults with additional needs.</p> <p>Ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential</p>	

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 32 The *SEND Code of Practice* looks to ensure the assessed additional needs of children with special educational needs are provided for, to enable them to reach agreed outcomes.
- 33 Our new *Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Strategy and Improvement Plan* will set out what we want to achieve as a partnership for children and young people with SEND in Cheshire East, and the key actions that we will carry out to achieve our priorities is our commitment to children and young people with additional needs and ensures they have appropriate support to aspire to achieve in line with peers.

Human Resources

- 34 There is no impact on human resources.

Risk Management

- 35 Our partnership approach to risk is to operate in a culture of creativity and innovation, in which risks are identified, understood and pro-actively managed, rather than avoided. We recognise that risks are inherent within innovation and are sometimes unavoidable. We aim to adopt a structured and coherent approach to identifying, assessing and managing risk to ensure an appropriate level of control in place, without stifling developments. We seek to adopt recognised best practice in the identification and evaluation of risks and opportunities, and to ensure that these are managed to acceptable levels in a proportionate and cost effective way.
- 36 Risk and issue registers will be maintained throughout the implementation of the strategy and improvement plan to capture the details of any arising risks and issues, along with all agreed mitigations. All risks are scored using a “4 x 4” scoring methodology, measuring impact and likelihood of the unmitigated and mitigated risk. All risks are identified as either threats (a possible future event or action which could adversely affect our ability to achieve our objectives) or opportunities (an uncertain event or action that could enhance our ability to achieve our objectives) and a decision made on the type of response that is required (avoid, reduce, accept, transfer, exploit etc.). Risk owners and actioners will also be identified and recorded.
- 37 The Terms of Reference document for each group articulates a clear escalation process to ensure risks are proactively considered and managed and escalated where needed, e.g., risks that score highest will be escalated throughout the governance structure and reviewed by

the SEND Executive Oversight group, while lower-level risks will be considered and managed by the SEND Transformation Action Group.

Rural Communities

- 38 There are no direct implications for rural communities.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 39 The council has approved its Children's Vision which contains a priority around children with additional needs.
- 40 The existing SEND Partnership Strategy 2021-2024 sets out the Partnership vision for meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND. This strategy was refreshed to include the DBV opportunities and mitigations within the DSG Management Plan in 2023. This report seeks approval to produce an updated SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan.
- 41 Our co-produced vision states that we want all our children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities to be HAPI:
- Happy and healthy
 - Achieving their potential
 - Part of their communities
 - Independent as possible, making choices about their future

Public Health

- 42 Health and Wellbeing Boards have a duty to produce a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for their area. The "Statutory Guidance on Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies" published by the Department of Health in March 2013 outlines the required scope of JSNAs; to identify health and social care needs that can be met or affected by the local authority (Cheshire East Council) in collaboration with the NHS. Work is currently being undertaken on a refreshed SEND JSNA for Cheshire East, and we will ensure a new SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan aligns with the findings in this document.
- 43 One element of the vision contained in the existing SEND Strategy is to ensure our children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities are happy and healthy. There are a range of priorities within the strategy that focus on mental health and wellbeing and effective access to health services.

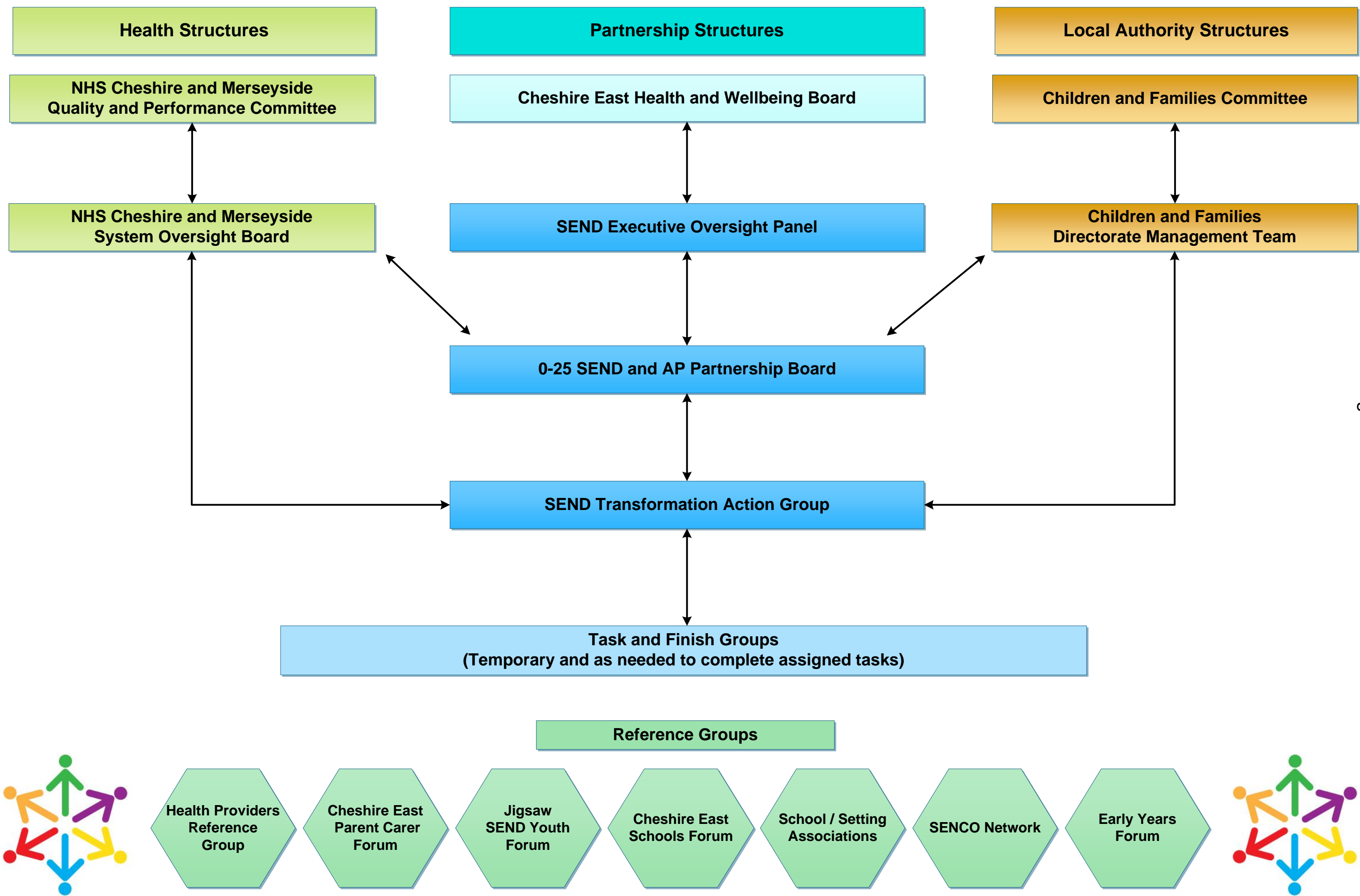
Climate Change

- 44 Many Cheshire East pupils with SEND are educated out of borough at high costs and with long travel journeys. Improvements around sufficiency of educational placements will aim to reduce travel for our pupils and increase the number of pupils that are able to access education within their local community.
- 45 Where possible when considering new initiatives or developments:
- (a) systems that save on energy consumption will be considered, particularly for electricity.
 - (b) any internal works required to update buildings to make them fit for purpose will include a comprehensive review of the impact on climate factors.
 - (c) any significant changes that may take place will require full compliance with the latest building regulations relating to such factors as insulation/heat loss and energy efficiencies. Such factors will be key considerations as each scheme is developed through to full handover.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	<p>Claire Williamson</p> <p>Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration</p> <p>Claire.williamson@cheshireeast.gov.uk</p>
Appendices:	<p>There are 6 appendices to this report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appendix 1. 0-25 SEND Partnership Governance - August 2024 DRAFT • Appendix 2. SEND Partnership T+F Groups Terms of Reference - August 2024 DRAFT • Appendix 3. SEND Transformation Action Group Terms of Reference - August 2024 DRAFT • Appendix 4. 0-25 SEND Partnership Board Terms of Reference - August 2024 DRAFT • Appendix 5. SEND Executive Oversight Panel Terms of Reference - August 2024 DRAFT

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appendix 6. Proposed Plan for Developing our new SEND Strategy - Sept 2024
Background Papers:	<p>Update on the progress of the key areas of the Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan 2024/25 to 2030/31 CEC Briefing Report Template (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</p> <p>Revised Dedicated Schools grant Management Plan 2024/25 to 2030/31 C&F Committee 29 April 24 CEC Report Template (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</p> <p>Appendix 1 - Safety Valve DSG Management Plan.pdf (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</p> <p>DSG Management Plan 2022-23 – C&F Committee September 2022 - Decision report template (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</p> <p>15 DSG Management Pan 2023-2024 – C&F Committee September 2023 CEC Report Template (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</p> <p>Delivering Better Value Update C&F Committee March 2023 - Decision report template (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</p> <p>SEND & AP Green Paper - SEND and alternative provision improvement plan - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p> <p>Children and Families Committee 18 September 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEND Strategy 2. SEND Strategy.pdf (cheshireeast.gov.uk) SEND Sufficiency Statement CEC Report Template (cheshireeast.gov.uk) Capital Programme CEC Report Template (cheshireeast.gov.uk) <p>This link provides information on Safety Valve agreements with other local authorities - Dedicated schools grant: very high deficit intervention - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p>

Cheshire East 0-25 SEND Partnership Governance



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TERMS OF REFERENCE

Cheshire East 0-25 SEND Partnership

Task and Finish Groups

Purpose

The SEND Partnership Task and Finish groups are temporary, cross-functional groups that are created for the purpose of completing specific assigned improvement actions from the SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan (which will incorporate all mitigations identified in the DSG Management Plan). Using dedicated, focused resources to complete specified actions in this manner will ensure improvements are made at pace and completed improvements are fit for purpose.

Key objectives of each Task and Finish Group

The specific objectives of each Task and Finish Group are to:

- Undertake and complete improvement actions assigned by the SEND Transformation Action group in line with agreed timescales, costs and quality standards
- Ensure completed actions and action products have clear evidence of completion and means of tracking impact that can be presented for scrutiny and sign off by the SEND Transformation Action group
- Consider any communication or consultation activity and/or any additional senior decision making (beyond the Transformation Action Group) that is required to either complete assigned improvement actions, or to share completed action products, as needed
- Undertake clear risk management around delivery of their assigned improvement actions, including:
 - Capturing all arising risks and issues and proposing actions to mitigate them where possible
 - Ensuring delays, issues or areas of risk for their assigned improvement actions are properly escalated to the SEND Transformation Action Group, where required
- Track their progress and prepare regular updates on progress against their assigned improvement actions, and their impact, for presentation to the SEND Transformation Action Group
- Liaise with reference groups and enabler groups (such as the SEND Inspection Preparation Group and Systems Improvement Group) as needed in order to complete assigned improvement actions or share completed signed off action products



Membership

Task and Finish Group Chair:

Assigned delivery lead for specific task and finish area
(as appointed by the SEND Transformation Action Group)

The delivery lead will bring together cross-functional colleagues from across stakeholder groups as required to complete assigned actions. This may include colleagues of various positions from within the local authority, the integrated care board, health providers, educational settings and parent carer forum representatives, and will depend on the specific perspectives, skills and/or experience required to complete the assigned actions. As meetings may involve workshop-style sessions dedicated to specific tasks or actions, membership may not be static and may vary between sessions.

Role of individual members

Role of the delivery lead:

- The delivery lead will liaise closely with the responsible Head of Service or Director for their assigned actions to gain support, share updates and to raise any risks or issues that may impact upon their work.
- Ensure input and expertise is sought from relevant stakeholder groups as required to successfully complete assigned actions.
- Ensure the work of the task and finish group remains focused on completing the actions assigned by the Transformation Action Group and does not become subject to 'scope creep'.
- Maintain the list of tasks required to ensure assigned actions are completed successfully by the task and finish group.

Role of all individual members:

- Take a full and active part in the work of the group, including attending all group meetings (where invited) and undertaking work on tasks assigned by the group.
- Contribute proactively to the priorities of the group to ensure successful delivery of group objectives.
- Act as a 'champion', representing the disability, SEN and complex health needs agenda and joint commissioning priorities within their parent organisation or representative forum.
- Ensure communication and engagement in their own organisations/groups and that relevant issues from their organisations/groups are fed back appropriately.
- Ensure communication and engagement across partners/stakeholders and work in cooperation with each other.

Accountability

- Progress will be reported on a monthly basis to the SEND Transformation Action Group, who are in turn accountable to the 0-25 SEND and AP Partnership Board.



- The governance arrangements for any decision or recommendations will depend upon the nature of the issue and the resources concerned. Whilst all improvement actions will be scrutinised and signed off by the SEND Transformation Action group, it is accepted that some key decisions will also need to be approved via relevant partner organisation's / organisations' decision-making processes. The group will make recommendations for key decisions to be considered and approved through decision-making routes as needed.

Administration of meetings

Delivery leads should make arrangements to cover any administration of meetings, which should be kept to a minimum and restricted to those tasks required to complete actions and track decision making and risks or issues. Requests for support on specific administration tasks can be raised to the Transformation Action Group for consideration but cannot be guaranteed.

Notice of meetings

Assigned delivery leads will aim to give attendees at least five working days notice for any meetings wherever possible.

Frequency of meetings

SEND Task and Finish Groups will meet as required. Some or all meetings may utilise a workshop-type format to undertake specific tasks/actions.

If urgent decisions are required, communication will be sent via email.

Review schedule

These terms of reference will be reviewed annually (or more frequently, if required).

Document last reviewed: August 2024

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

Cheshire East 0-25 SEND Partnership

SEND Transformation Action Group

Purpose

The SEND Transformation Action Group provides oversight, support and scrutiny of the operational delivery of improvement actions listed within the SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan (which will incorporate all mitigations identified in the DSG Management Plan). The group will ensure effective monitoring processes are in place to evaluate the progress and impact of SEND strategic improvement actions. This support and scrutiny will ensure improvements are made at pace, and there is continual evaluation of the impact of improvements on children and young people's experiences and outcomes.

Key objectives of the board

The specific objectives of the Cheshire East SEND Transformation Action Group are to:

- Appoint and assign improvement actions to dedicated Task and Finish Groups, and hold delivery leads of these groups accountable for completion of actions in line with agreed timescales
- Provide sign off for completed actions and action products, and ensure completed actions have clear evidence of completion and means of tracking impact
- Undertake clear risk management around delivery of the SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan, including:
 - Sharing any risks or issues that have arisen within their work area
 - Capturing all arising risks and issues (highlighted by group members or action delivery leads) and agreeing actions to mitigate them where possible
 - Empowering and supporting action delivery leads by helping to unblock risks or issues through problem solving, releasing resources or providing challenge (internally or externally) where needed
 - Ensuring delays, issues or areas of risk to improvement actions or SEND outcomes are properly escalated to the 0-25 SEND Partnership Board, where required
- Monitor the impact of actions against SEND performance through oversight of key performance indicators



- Prepare regular updates on progress against improvement actions, and their impact, for presentation to higher governance levels (including Children and Families Committee)
- Liaise with enabler groups (such as the SEND Inspection Preparation Group and Systems Improvement Group) to ensure that newly identified transformation or improvement actions are appropriately captured and allocated

Membership

SEND Transformation Action Group Chair:

Keith Martin - Strategic Transformation Lead for SEND, Cheshire East Council

Name	Role	Organisation and Sector
Sally Ashworth	Interim Head of Service: Education Participation and Pupil Support	Cheshire East Council – Education Participation and Pupil Support
Heather Baron	Head of Service: Early Help, Prevention and Domestic Abuse	Cheshire East Council – Family Help and Children's Social Care
Alexandria Brightmore	Principal Educational Psychologist	Cheshire East Council – Education Psychology Service
Bev Harding	Business Intelligence Manager - People	Cheshire East Council – Business Intelligence
Louise Hill	Locality Manager: Learning Disability	Cheshire East Council – Adult Social Care
Danielle Holdcroft	Head of Service: Early Years, Family Help and Prevention	Cheshire East Council – Early Years
Louisa Joyce	Designated Social Care Officer	Cheshire East Council – Family Help and Children's Social Care
Keith Martin	Strategic Transformation Lead for SEND	Cheshire East Council – SEND
Stephen Pepper	Interim Head of Service: Children in Need and Child Protection	Cheshire East Council – Family Help and Children's Social Care
Laura Rogerson	Head of Service: Inclusion	Cheshire East Council – Inclusion (SEND and Virtual School)
Penny Teale	Designated Clinical Officer	NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB
Jo Williams	Programme Lead for Mental Health and Neurodiversity	NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB
<i>Vacant</i>	SEND Transformation Lead	Cheshire East Council – SEND
<i>Vacant</i>	SEND Programme Lead	Cheshire East Council – Children's Development and Partnerships



Name	Role	Organisation and Sector
<i>Vacant</i>	Head of Service: Education	Cheshire East Council - Education
<i>Vacant</i>	Head of Service: Children's Commissioning	Cheshire East Council – Children's Commissioning

Role of individual members

- Liaise closely with action delivery leads for their assigned responsible work areas as a means of support and communication to ensure action delivery leads are aware of anything that may impact upon their work.
- Act as a 'champion', representing the disability, SEN and complex health needs agenda and joint commissioning priorities within their parent organisation or representative forum.
- Ensure communication and engagement in their own organisations/groups and that relevant issues from their organisations/groups are fed back appropriately.
- Ensure communication and engagement across partners/stakeholders and work in cooperation with each other.
- Contribute proactively to the priorities of the group to ensure successful delivery of group objectives.
- Take a full and active part in the work of the group, including attending all group meetings and undertaking work on tasks assigned by the group.
- Provide support in order to hold each other to account for ensuring action to address performance and appropriate joint investment in resources.

Accountability

- Progress will be reported to the 0-25 SEND Partnership Board, who are in turn accountable to the SEND Executive Oversight Panel.
- The governance arrangements for any decision or recommendations will depend upon the nature of the issue and the resources concerned. It is accepted that key decisions will need to be approved via relevant partner organisation's / organisations' decision-making processes. The group will make recommendations for key decisions to be considered and approved through decision-making routes as needed.

Administration of meetings

Administrative support will be provided to the board by project assistance from within Cheshire East Council.

Quoracy

A meeting will take place and be considered quorate when at least 50% of group members are present.



Notice of meetings

Meetings will be scheduled in advance with dates for meetings for a full academic year being circulated to members at once, where possible.

Agendas and associated meeting papers will be circulated to members not less than five working days ahead of each meeting.

Frequency of meetings

The SEND Transformation Action Group will meet on a monthly basis.

Additional meetings will be arranged if required.

If urgent decisions are required, communication will be sent via email.

Review schedule

These terms of reference will be reviewed annually (or more frequently, if required).

Document last reviewed: August 2024



TERMS OF REFERENCE

Cheshire East 0-25 SEND Partnership

0-25 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Partnership Board

Purpose

The 0-25 SEND and AP Partnership Board is in place to provide oversight, support and challenge to the progress, outcomes and impact of the work carried out by the SEND Transformation Action Group (and associated task and finish groups), in line with the locally agreed SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan (which will incorporate all mitigations identified in the DSG Management Plan).

Key objectives of the board

The specific objectives of the Cheshire East 0-25 SEND and AP Partnership Board are to:

- Be accountable for effective local SEND and AP arrangements and provision to deliver the best outcomes for children and young people within a financially sustainable framework
- Oversee local implementation of [HM Government SEND and AP Improvement Plan \(2023\)](#)
- Regularly self-evaluate the local SEND and AP arrangements to ensure children and young people's experiences are positive and they achieve their agreed outcomes
- Co-produce and co-deliver the local SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan and refresh it regularly to address the outcomes of self-evaluation
- Oversee and facilitate successful delivery of the SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan objectives, through oversight of the work and performance of the SEND Transformation Action Group (and associated task and finish groups)
- Ensure an integrated education, health and care response to children's needs which delivers improved outcomes for children, young people and their families
- Review performance and financial indicators across education, health and care and provide challenge to responsible bodies
- Provide senior level guidance, scrutiny, financial monitoring and direction to monitor progress of the SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan and the linked Designated Schools Grant (DSG) Management Plan 2024/25 to 2030/31
- Ensure that any issues or areas of risk are escalated to the SEND Executive Oversight Panel



Membership

0-25 SEND and AP Partnership Board Chair:

Claire Williamson, Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration, Cheshire East Council

0-25 SEND and AP Partnership Board Vice-Chair:

Josette Niyokindi, Associate Director Quality and Safety, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB

Name	Role	Organisation and Sector
Claire Williamson	Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration	Cheshire East Council – Strong Start, Family Help and Integration
Keith Martin	Strategic Transformation Lead for SEND	Cheshire East Council – SEND
Laura Rogerson	Head of Service: Inclusion	Cheshire East Council – Inclusion (SEND and Virtual School)
Danielle Holdcroft	Head of Service: Early Years, Family Help and Prevention	Cheshire East Council – Early Years
Alexandria Brightmore	Principal Educational Psychologist	Cheshire East Council – Educational Psychology Service
Martyn Baggaley	Head of Integrated Commissioning, Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	Cheshire East Council / NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB – Commissioning
Annie Britton	Participation Lead	Cheshire East Council – Education Participation and Pupil Support
Keith Evans	Head of Service: Mental Health and Learning Disability	Cheshire East Council – Adult Social Care
Andrea Stone	Interim Director of Family Help And Children's Social Care	Cheshire East Council – Family Help and Children's Social Care
Susie Roberts	Consultant in Public Health	Cheshire East Council – Public Health
Liz Dunne	Speech and Language Therapy Team Manager	Health – East Cheshire NHS Trust
Jo Gillman	0-19 Health and Wellbeing Service Lead	Health – Wirral Community Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust
Penny Millington	Clinical Lead/Operational Lead Neurological Services Cheshire	Health – Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (CWP)



Name	Role	Organisation and Sector
Jo Shippey	Paediatric Matron – Lead for Paediatricians and Special School Nursing	Health – East Cheshire NHS Trust
Mat Southall	Community Operational Manager - Paediatrics	Health – Central Cheshire Integrated Care Partnership (CCICP)
Josette Niyokindi	Associate Director Quality and Safety	Health – NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB
Chris Jaydeokar	CEPCF Co-Chair	Parent Carers – Cheshire East Parent Carer Forum
Kayla Sellors	CEPCF Co-Chair	Parent Carers – Cheshire East Parent Carer Forum
TBC	TBC	Early years settings rep
Gemma Bailey	Headteacher	Education settings – Oakfield Lodge School
TBC	eCAPH Chair	Education settings – East Cheshire Association of Primary Heads (eCAPH)
TBC	CEASH Chair	Education settings – Cheshire East Association of Secondary Heads (CEASH)
TBC	eCASS / CEASS Chair	Education settings – special schools
TBC	Cheshire East Schools Forum Chair	Cheshire East Schools Forum
TBC	TBC	Post-16 setting rep
Cllr Carol Bulman	Councillor and Chair of Children and Families Committee	Cheshire East Council – Elected Members
Cllr Jos Saunders	Councillor	Cheshire East Council – Elected Members
TBC	Senior Communications Officer	Cheshire East Council – Communications

Role of individual members

- Act as a 'champion', representing the disability, SEN and complex health needs agenda and joint commissioning priorities within their parent organisation or representative forum.
- Ensure communication and engagement in their own organisations/groups and that relevant issues from their organisations/groups are fed back appropriately.



- Ensure communication and engagement across partners/stakeholders and work in cooperation with each other.
- Contribute proactively to priorities of the board and deliver the outcomes.
- Take a full and active part in the work of the board, attend meetings of the board and undertake work on tasks assigned by the board.
- Provide support in order to hold each other to account for ensuring action to address performance and appropriate joint investment in resources.

Accountability

- Progress will be reported to the SEND Executive Oversight Panel, who are in turn accountable to the Cheshire East Health and Wellbeing Board and the Children and Families Committee.
- The governance arrangements for any decision or recommendations will depend upon the nature of the issue and the resources concerned. It is accepted that key decisions will need to be approved via relevant partner organisation's / organisations' decision-making processes. The group will make recommendations for key decisions to be considered and approved through decision-making routes as needed.

Administration of meetings

Administrative support will be provided to the board by a Business Administrator from Cheshire East Council.

Quoracy

A meeting will take place and be considered quorate when at least 50% of board members are present.

Notice of meetings

Meetings will be scheduled in advance with dates for meetings for a full academic year being circulated to members at once, where possible.

Agendas and associated meeting papers will be circulated to members not less than five working days ahead of each meeting.

Frequency of meetings

The 0-25 SEND and AP Partnership Board will meet on a bi-monthly basis.

Additional meetings will be arranged if required.

If urgent decisions are required, communication will be sent via email.

Review schedule

These terms of reference will be reviewed annually (or more frequently, if required).

Document last reviewed: August 2024



TERMS OF REFERENCE

Cheshire East 0-25 SEND Partnership

SEND Executive Oversight Panel

Purpose

The SEND Executive Oversight Panel provides executive level leadership and oversight of the progress, outcomes and financial impact of the work carried out by the 0-25 SEND Partnership. The panel will provide support, challenge and scrutiny as appropriate to the SEND Partnership with regard to any risks or issues in achieving agreed improvements and delivery of the SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan (which will incorporate all mitigations identified in the DSG Management Plan). The panel will ensure effective monitoring processes are in place to evaluate the impact of improvement actions and mitigations listed within the plan. This scrutiny will ensure improvements are made at pace, and there is continual evaluation of the impact of improvements on children and young people's experiences and outcomes.

Key objectives of the panel

The specific objectives of the SEND Executive Oversight Panel are to:

- Provide executive level guidance, scrutiny and direction to the 0-25 SEND Partnership, ensuring that the work of the partnership remains effective and results in improved experiences for children and young people with SEND and their families.
- Provide executive level guidance, scrutiny, financial monitoring and direction to monitor progress of the SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan and the linked Designated Schools Grant (DSG) Management Plan 2024/25 to 2030/31.
- Provide executive level oversight of all aspects of the work of the 0-25 SEND Partnership. This includes oversight of progress to complete SEND improvement and impact actions to agreed timescales and quality standards, and oversight of resulting outcomes and SEND performance (as demonstrated through agreed indicators/measures).
- Provide appropriate and sufficient challenge to each other and partners where progress or performance has, or is likely to, deviate from agreed improvement and SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan milestones and targets.
- Ensure that risks and issues are managed as required and as effectively as possible.
- Agree appropriate actions to be taken for escalated SEND improvement risks and issues from the 0-25 SEND and AP Partnership Board and provide suitable support to overcome any obstructions to progress or performance as required.



- Ensure that appropriate resources are allocated and deployed, as required, to enable the timely delivery of agreed improvements in line with agreed SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan milestones and targets.
- Have a specific focus on overseeing and scrutinising any required submissions for, or progress against, Department for Education (DfE) interventions for high needs financial sustainability.

Membership

SEND Executive Oversight Panel Chair:

Rob Polkinghorne

Chief Executive – Cheshire East Council

Name	Role	Organisation and Sector
Cllr Michael Beanland	Chair of Audit and Governance Committee	Cheshire East Council – Elected Members
Cllr Carol Bulman	Chair of the Children and Families Committee	Cheshire East Council – Elected Members
Helen Charlesworth-May	Executive Director of Adults, Health and Integration	Cheshire East Council – Adults, Health and Integration
Cllr Nick Mannion	Leader of Council	Cheshire East Council – Elected Members
Cllr Ken Edwards	Vice Chair of Audit and Governance Committee	Cheshire East Council – Elected Member
Michael Moore	Head of Communications and Media	Cheshire East Council – Communications
Josette Niyokindi	Associate Director of Quality and Safety Improvement	NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB
Rob Polkinghorne	Chief Executive	Cheshire East Council
Andrea Stone	Interim Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	Cheshire East Council – Children and Families
Adele Taylor	Director of Finance and Customer Service – Section 151 Officer	Cheshire East Council – Finance and Customer Service
Mark Wilkinson	Place Director – Cheshire East	NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB
Claire Williamson	Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration	Cheshire East Council – Children and Families
<i>Vacant</i>	Executive Director of Children's Services	Cheshire East Council – Children and Families

Other members, such as wider directors or provider executives, will be invited to meetings to present information when required.



Role of individual members

- To provide leadership oversight and scrutiny of the outcomes of the SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan, with a focus on the experiences of, and outcomes for, our children and young people with SEND and their families.
- Act as a 'champion', representing the SEND and complex health needs agenda and joint commissioning priorities within their service area, parent organisation and/or any representative forums.
- Ensure appropriate resources are deployed in their own organisation/service areas to deliver the statutory requirements and the best outcomes.
- Ensure communication to their own organisations/service areas and that relevant issues from their organisations/service areas are raised and discussed as required.
- Ensure communication across partners/stakeholders, and work in cooperation with each other to ensure the panel fulfils its purpose and stated objectives.
- Take a full and active part in the work of the panel, attend meetings of the panel and undertake work on tasks assigned by the panel.
- Make suggestions and add impetus to drive forward SEND improvements in line with the SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan.
- Provide challenge and support in order to hold each other and partners to account for ensuring appropriate action is taken to address performance and that there is appropriate joint investment in resources.

Accountability

The 0-25 SEND Partnership and the SEND Executive Oversight Panel, is ultimately accountable to the Cheshire East Health and Wellbeing Board and the Children and Families Committee. A SEND update will be provided to the Health and Wellbeing Board annually for scrutiny. Regular progress reports will be shared from the SEND Partnership with the council's Corporate Leadership Team and Children and Families Committee. The activity of the SEND Partnership and the SEND Executive Oversight Panel will also be reported into the Place Health and Care board.

Administration of meetings

Administrative support will be provided to the panel.

Quoracy

A meeting will take place and be considered quorate when:

- at least 50% of panel members are present, and
- both the local authority and integrated care board have at least one representative present (either virtually or in-person)



Notice of meetings

Meetings will be scheduled in advance with dates for meetings for a full academic year being circulated to members at once, where possible.

Agendas and associated meeting papers will be circulated to members seven days ahead of each meeting.

Frequency of meetings

The SEND Executive Oversight Panel will meet on a quarterly basis.

Additional meetings will be arranged if required.

Review schedule

These terms of reference will be reviewed annually (or more frequently, if required).

Document last reviewed: August 2024



Proposals to develop the SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan 2025-27

(September 2024)

Purpose of Report

This report seeks endorsement on the proposed process and timeline for developing the new Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Strategy and Improvement Plan 2025-27.

Background

The current *Cheshire East Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2021 – 2025* was co-produced with a wide range of key stakeholders and sets out how, as a local 0-25 SEND partnership, we will drive developments to our services so that we support children and young people with SEND to achieve the best possible outcomes. Originally prepared as *The SEND strategy 2021 – 2024* and approved in November 2021, the document was refreshed in April 2023 to reflect significant changes within the national and local landscape for SEND. Following the review and refresh of the SEND strategy, 5 priority areas were identified as our focus for action over the next 12/18 months and 5 workstreams were established to drive forward these action areas.

Since the April 2023 strategy refresh, there have been further major national and local changes relating to SEND and wider people services, including:

- **Work to address increasing financial pressure on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)** - the council took part in the Department for Education's (DfE) Delivering Better Value programme (DBV) during 2022/23. However, despite our engagement, the opportunities identified within the DBV programme combined with the mitigations in the DSG management plan at that time were not sufficient to address the recurring in-year overspends and deficit position. Later in 2023, Cheshire East Council were invited to take part in the DfE's Safety Valve intervention programme. Council colleagues worked with a DfE advisor to build on the work and priority areas identified through the DBV programme; additional improvement actions were identified and the DSG management plan was fundamentally rewritten. Council colleagues submitted the revised DSG management plan to DfE in January 2024 along with 9 Project Initiation Documents (PIDs; which outlined improvement objectives and actions) and a capital bid. Whilst Ministers decided they were unable to enter into an agreement with Cheshire East at that time, the DfE recognise that the forecasted DSG deficit poses a substantial risk to Cheshire East and they therefore proposed to work with us, alongside colleagues from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), with the aim of finding an appropriate solution. In the meantime, their ask is for Cheshire East to continue to develop and implement the previously submitted plans to aid a more sustainable high needs system. We therefore need to ensure that improvement actions identified through this work are captured in a single SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan going forward.
- **Completing our self-evaluation and identifying areas for development** – As part of our ongoing standard evaluation activity, alongside inspection preparation activities, colleagues across the SEND Partnership regularly update our SEND self-evaluation to ensure that it reflects recent improvements and feedback. SEND improvement actions from a previous iteration of our self-evaluation were captured through a drafted



improvement plan presented to the SEND Executive Leadership Board. We need to ensure that our new SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan address the areas for development identified in our most recent self-evaluation, along with any actions that may still be needed from the previously drafted SEND Improvement Plan.

- **ILACS inspection and Improvement Plan** – An Ofsted inspection in February and March 2024 gave Cheshire East's children's services an overall grading of inadequate. A comprehensive *Children's Services Improvement Plan* has been agreed which clearly sets out the actions that will be taken to address the inspection findings and improve our offer for children and young people. To aid consistency and joint working, we will aim to align the content and format of our SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan, and monitoring activity, with this document.
- **National improvement work** - activity has been taking place nationally to develop and pilot the recommendations set out in the DfE's *SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan* published in March 2023. It is not yet known if or how the July 2024 change in national government will affect the implementation of this plan.

Our aim is to review all of the above work and produce a single **SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan** that clearly pulls together and outlines in a single document all of the improvement work to be carried out by the SEND Partnership over the next 3 years.

Our required improvement work is a fundamental change programme that will affect the whole system and will require all partners to work as one. We know that we must do this for financial sustainability, but most importantly because our children and young people deserve to have the right education and support, in the right provision, at the right time, in order to support them to prepare for adulthood and to achieve successful outcomes.

Area SEND Inspection

We are currently on high alert for an area SEND inspection in Cheshire East. The main purpose of the inspection is for Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to:

- evaluate the effectiveness of the local area partnership's arrangements for children and young people with SEND
- where appropriate, recommend what the local area partnership should do to improve the arrangements

Inspectors will review **how effectively we work together as a partnership** in our local area of Cheshire East to improve the **experiences** and **outcomes** of children and young people with SEND.

Our 'local area partnership' includes everyone in **education, health and care** involved in the strategic planning, commissioning, management, delivery and evaluation of arrangements for children and young people with SEND in Cheshire East.

Previously, Ofsted and CQC carried out a joint local area SEND inspection of Cheshire East in March 2018. This inspection identified two areas of significant weakness in Cheshire East (the timeliness, process and quality of EHC plans; and the lack of an effective autism pathway and unreasonable waiting times), and the local area was required to produce and submit a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) to Ofsted which set out the actions to address the significant areas of weakness. In May 2021, Ofsted and CQC carried out a SEND re-visit and judged that, as a local area, Cheshire East had made sufficient progress in addressing the two areas of significant weaknesses identified at our 2018 inspection.

Current Areas for Development

We are currently finalising the latest update of our SEND and AP self-evaluation, but several key areas of development have already been identified through our existing self-evaluation



and the thorough work undertaken with the Department for Education for both the Delivering Better Value scheme and as preparation for our Safety Valve submission. Current areas for development identified in our new strategy and improvement plan are therefore likely to include:

- Strengthening the **SEN support offer** available in mainstream schools to reduce escalation of children and young people's needs and manage demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)
- Strengthening the quality and effectiveness of **transitions** and **annual reviews** of EHCPs and ensure they support celebrating success where needs have been met and outcomes achieved
- Increase the **number of children accessing their education within the borough** through expanding local specialist provision appropriately in order to meet the needs of children and young people within the authority
- Strengthen **decision-making, oversight and contracting for placements** to ensure value for money and successful outcomes for children and young people
- Secure **collaboration and financial commitment from partner agencies as part of co-commissioning arrangements**, particularly for improving the outcomes of children and young people with complex needs, and ensuring partners contribute accordingly.
- Improving the **quality and consistency of our commissioned services**, including health services, such as local autism pathways and speech and language therapy.

Developing our strategy TOGETHER

As a partnership we have signed up to TOGETHER in Cheshire East (see below) as our shared definition of co-production as it is inclusive to all. It is important that our new strategy and improvement plan is co-produced again with our key stakeholders, including the voice of children and young people and their parents. To support this, we are planning to hold workshop sessions with stakeholder groups during the 2024/2025 Autumn Term.

TOGETHER in Cheshire East

TOGETHER is our shared definition of coproduction in Cheshire East because it is inclusive to all.

Teamwork when designing, delivering and evaluating individual support and services

Open-minded ideas and discussions

Genuine communication for all parties involved

Equal partners help to shape and improve support for all

Trust each other to make the right decisions

Honest

Engage and empower children, young people, adults and families

Respect for everyone's views and opinions

Working TOGETHER as equal partners towards a common goal for all of our children, young people, adults living in Cheshire East.

Our TOGETHER Values and Commitment

We will...	We won't...
• Listen to your views	• Use jargon or acronyms
• Communicate honestly	• Give too much information
• Trust each other	• Rush meetings
• Be person centred	• Take too long to complete our actions
• Adapt to people's needs	• Be judgemental
• Respect and value all opinions	
• Do what we say we will	

Here is some further information about our four key principles of TOGETHER going forward, and who is involved in delivering that.

Co-Involvement

We will involve and engage with you from the very start to make you aware of changes to services and policy. Your needs will be identified and views are welcomed at every stage.

Co-Design

We will work closely with you to plan and design your individual support, services, and policy making sure that children, young people, adults and families are at the centre of those services.

Co-Delivery

We will plan and deliver services together ensuring your voice is heard and acted on at every stage.

Co-Evaluation

We offer opportunities for feedback so that we can improve your experience.



New strategy and improvement plan development and timeline

The steps in developing the new SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan are set out below. Whilst we had previously planned to launch a new SEND strategy in September 2025, we feel a new strategy and single improvement plan is required sooner due to the significant local and national SEND development outlined in the '[Background](#)' section. It is planned that the new strategy and improvement plan will be launched in January 2025.

What we need to do	How we need to do it
Establish where we are now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review progress against our previous strategy and identify any areas that still need development. • Review progress against improvement activities identified through DBV and Safety Valve and identify areas that still need further development. • Review progress against development actions previously identified within the SEF (and SEND improvement plan) and assess where improvement work is still required. • Update our self-evaluation (SEF) with the latest information on our strengths and areas for development. • Compare our current performance against where we were and our neighbouring areas/those with similar geography and populations, along with where we need to be (as outlined in our most recent DSG management plan). • Review recent feedback on the current position from key stakeholders, including staff across education, health and care, parents/carers and young people. • Consider external findings from inspection, monitoring and peer review, including DfE support.
Identify what's important / urgent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have the maximum impact, we will need to decide which areas for development we feel are most important / urgent so that we can effectively target our resources.
Agree what we want to achieve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once we have agreed our areas of priority, we will need to outline what we want to improve/change in relation to these, i.e. what will be different in three – four years if our strategy is successful? We will use this to agree how we will measure the success of our strategy and build these success measures into our quality assurance and performance management arrangements.
Agree how to achieve our priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify resources, i.e. what staffing, provision and resources we have to achieve our strategy. • Agree what actions we will take, who will lead these and by what timescale.
Finalise and launch the strategy and improvement plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the strategy is presented at key partnerships and forums. • Publish the strategy on the website.
Check our strategy and improvement plan is working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to ensure that the strategy and improvement plan are meeting the planned outcomes through quality assurance and performance management arrangements.

Children and Families Committee

16 September 2024

Report to Committee on the recently submitted Schools Capacity return (SCAP)

Report of: Claire Williamson, Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration

Report Reference No: CF/26/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: All Wards

Purpose of Report

1. This paper reports on the outcome of the 2024 primary and secondary mainstream forecasts which will be submitted to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). The forecasts will ultimately inform the amount of Basic Need grant awarded to the authority for the 2027/2028 academic year. Notification of any award is usually received around April / May of the following year.

Executive Summary

2. Each year local authorities have a statutory duty to submit information relating to individual schools and planning areas. This return is called the SCAP (**S**chools **CAP**acity) return and is submitted to the ESFA between June and July, closing date for 2024 submission was Friday 26 July.
3. The SCAP return consists of 6 different pieces of data with the main emphasis on the pupil forecasts, 5 years for primary (2024 to 2028), 7 years for secondary schools (2024 to 2030). The forecasts submitted will determine the amount of Basic Need monies that the authority receives from the ESFA to provide any additional pupil places required and which are not covered by section 106 monies received from developers.
4. Due to the lead in time needed to facilitate school expansions, the Basic Need allocations are always notified in advance. The allocations for the 2026/2027 Basic Need Allocation have not yet been released by the ESFA; the most

recent Allocation was for 2025/2026 year, which was £2,442,238.00 and was following the 2022 SCAP return.

5. In addition to mainstream forecasts, the Authority is required to submit forecasts for Special Education Needs pupils in both Special Schools and Resource Provision. The forecasting periods are the same, 5 years for primary and 7 years for secondary.
6. This report summarises the mainstream primary and secondary outcomes.
7. For Special Education Needs pupils in both Special Schools and Resource Provision, please see in 'Background Papers' the Revised Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan 2024/24 to 2030/31 which was approved by Children and Families committee on the 29 April 2024.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

8. Note that the SCAP return was completed and submitted prior to the deadline of 26 July 2024 and acknowledge the information provided.

Background

9. Local authorities are required to plan for pupil places by Planning Areas that have been agreed with the DfE. Cheshire East has 29 planning areas for primary and 12 planning areas for secondary. Generally, these planning areas are centred around main towns but due to the geographical nature of Cheshire East some of the rural primary schools form a planning area of their own. i.e. Disley, Kettleshulme, Wincle and Bosley.
10. As mentioned the SCAP return consists of 6 different pieces of data: -
 - Published Admission Numbers (PAN) – This is reported by school and is the number of children usually admitted to each year group.
 - Schools Net Capacity – This is reported by school and is a calculation of the total number of children that a school can reasonably be expected to accommodate.
 - Planned Places – This is reported by school and is any local plans to add or remove places from a schools Net Capacity over the next 3 academic years.

- Pupil Forecasts – This is reported by planning area but split into 2 sections the pupil forecasts and Section 106 contributions from developers: -
 - i. Pupil Forecasts are prepared in two parts. First part is referred to as the Basic Need and these figures are calculated using a variety of data including, birth rates, GP Data, average pupil intakes, transfer rates for secondary schools and migration of pupils between neighbouring authorities. The second part is referred to as 'With Housing' and these figures include the additional pupils anticipated from new housing developments. New developments are only included in the forecasts once planning permission has been granted and any section 106 agreement has been signed. The anticipated additional pupils are added to the basic need element to produce the final anticipated numbers on roll for each school which are then reported to the ESFA by planning area.
 - ii. The SCAP return also requires the authority to separate out the number of pupils that have been included in the forecasts but have been funded by section 106 contributions even though those contributions may not have been received yet.
 - Commentary – A written report on the planning areas, detailing any current projects or any future plans which impact on the availability of places overall. This can include school expansions, new free schools, reduction in schools' capacity or school closures.
 - Forecast Methodology - A written statement detailing the forecasting model and data used to produce the forecasts.
11. It should be noted that pupil forecasting required on the SCAP submission relates to all primary and secondary schools regardless of status, including the Studio School at Knutsford Academy and Crewe UTC. Although two sets of forecasts are produced, Basic Need and With Housing, it is the with housing figures that are submitted to the ESFA.
 12. Summary of the anticipated position for the primary planning areas over the next 5 years is included in appendix 1. This summary shows that of

the 29 planning areas 4 are indicating a shortfall in places either immediately or within the next 5 years. Sandbach planning area shows the highest shortfall but expansions at Sandbach Primary Academy and Wheelock Primary are already underway and will provide an additional 210 places, which will remove any anticipated shortfall. Both expansions are anticipated to be completed by April 2025. It should be noted that whilst a planning area may not indicate an overall shortfall there could be an individual school within the area with a shortfall, but the shortfall is offset by neighbouring schools having surplus places.

13. The summary provided in appendix 1 also identifies areas with large number of surplus pupil places, this includes Macclesfield and Crewe. This could be due to the falling live birth rate or migration to other parts of the council boundary. Further analysis is currently being undertaken.
14. Summary of the anticipated position for the secondary planning areas for years 7 to 11 only, is included in appendix 2. This summary shows a number of planning areas indicating a shortfall within the next seven years. Shavington planning area is showing the largest shortfall, but this is being addressed with expansion that is currently under way which will provide an additional 150 places.
15. It should also be noted that the large surplus places shown at Crewe and Knutsford are in part due to surplus places within the UTC and Cheshire Studio School. For instance, the UTC has a capacity of 400 for years 9-11 but only has 183 on roll and Cheshire Studio School has a capacity of 150 for years 9-11 but only has 54 on roll.
16. Appendix 3 summarises the anticipated position for the secondary planning areas for years 7 to 13. Although the shortfalls appear higher than the overall totals for years 7 to 11, the 150 additional places being provided will still have some impact to reduce these numbers. A small number of schools do tend to admit more into their sixth form than the official net capacity figures allow for but because pupils utilise the same spaces as the other year groups this doesn't seem to impact greatly on their capacity. Again, the large surplus of places shown at Crewe and Knutsford are in part due to surplus places within the UTC and Cheshire Studio School. For instance, the UTC has a capacity of 800 for years 9 - 13 but only has 256 on roll and Cheshire Studio School has a capacity of 300 for years 9 to 13 but only has 120 on roll.

17. Apart from being a statutory requirement to submit forecast information to the EFSA the forecasts inform the 5-year forward plan for pupil place planning purposes. The 5-year plan, as detailed in appendix 4 shows the expansions that are underway including when they are due to complete, and potential future need for places.
18. The SCAP Submission portal, COLLECT, opened to local authorities on Thursday 6 June 2024 and deadline for submission was Friday 26 July 2024. After the closing date, the ESFA review all the data submitted and will come back to the authority with any queries. Once the ESFA are satisfied that all the information is correct the Executive Director of Children's Services will be asked to sign off a form to attest to the accuracy of the final SCAP data submitted by the local authority, this is usually late November.

Reasons for Recommendations

19. Submission of the annual SCAP return is a statutory duty required of the Local Authority.

Other Options Considered

20. No other options available. The SCAP return is a mandatory duty based on very specific data sets that are submitted in a form laid down by the DfE.
21. The option to do nothing and not increase mainstream and special school provisions across the borough would result in a failure to meet our statutory duties as a commissioner of school places and incur increasing costs for out to borough SEN places.

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing and not increase mainstream and special school provisions across the borough	This would result in a failure to meet our statutory duties as a commissioner of school places	High

Consultation and Engagement

22. The SCAP return is based on data produced annually by the School Organisation and Capital Strategy Team and no consultation on the outcomes is necessary.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

23. The Local Authority as the Strategic Commissioner for school places has a statutory duty (under section 14 of the Education Act 1996) to ensure that there are sufficient school places to meet the demands of its residents in the area. The DFE have issued guidance for Local Authorities in May 2024 School capacity (SCAP) Survey 2024 as to how the SCAP return should be submitted.
24. The requirement to submit the SCAP return by the deadline of 26 July is mandatory. Failure to submit by the deadline will risk the Authority's entitlement to Basic Need Allocation. SCAP is a statutory collection under the Information as to Provision of Education (England) Regulations 2016.
25. The information contained within the SCAP return should form part of the overall picture from a suite of reports that include the SEN provision and should align with Children and Families capital programme.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

26. Combined Basic Need Allocation and Section 106 contributions from developers may be insufficient to provide the additional places to ensure sufficient places for pupils' resident in Cheshire East.
27. If there is any shortfall in funding an assessment would need to be made regarding the scope of the scheme, if additional funding is needed would have to be found within the existing capital programme and any necessary approvals would be required by Children and Families committee.
28. If further funding is required and there is no existing budget available, then schemes would need to be prioritised and decisions made by committee as to which schemes can be removed/delayed within the Children & Families capital programme and/or the wider capital programme to allow certain schemes to proceed.

Policy

29. Local Authorities are under a duty to ensure sufficiency of school places in their area (section 14 of the Education Act 1996). Submission of the mandatory SCAP return by the given deadline will support the Council in meeting its duty to provide sufficient school places.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

30. An Equality Impact Assessment is not necessary as pupil forecasting is a statistics exercise used to assess the provision of sufficient school places across the borough regardless of pupil characteristics.

Human Resources

31. There are no increased human resource implications for the Council.

Risk Management

32. The requirement to submit the SCAP return by the deadline of 26 July is mandatory. Failure to submit by the deadline will risk the Authority's entitlement to Basic Need Allocation, and in consequence, its ability to meet this statutory duty.

Rural Communities

33. There are no direct implications for rural communities although providing sufficient places in rural schools will ensure that pupils can stay in their local community.

Children and Young People / Cared for Children

34. Providing sufficient school places for all children and young people resident in our area is a statutory duty.

Public Health

35. There are no direct implications for public health, however providing sufficient places in their local community could improve a child's social and emotional wellbeing.
36. By providing local school places the distances which some children may have to travel to attend school should be reduced thus reduce congestion on the roads and therefore reduce emissions, improving the air quality and making a better environment to live in.

Climate Change

37. Forecasting future pupil numbers helps ensure that sufficient pupil places are available in the correct places across the borough to meet demand. Providing adequate places means that more pupils can attend their local school and reduce the need to travel.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Joanne Prophet, School Organisation and Capital Manager joanne.prophet@cheshireeast.gov.uk Mobile 07890 321801
Appendices:	Appendix 1 - 2024 Primary Shortfall/ Surplus by Planning Area Appendix 2 – 2024 Secondary Shortfall/Surplus for years 7-11 by Planning Area Appendix 3 – 2024 Secondary Shortfall/ Surplus for years 7-13 by Planning Area Appendix 4 – 5-Year Plan
Background Papers:	Report to Children and Families Committee, Monday 29 April 2024 87. Revised Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan 2024/25 to 2030/31 following the Department of Education Safety Valve Intervention Programme https://moderngov.cheshireeast.gov.uk/ecminutes/documents/s116728/DSG%20Report.pdf

2024 PRIMARY FORECASTS BASIC

NEED HOUSING

Planning Area	NET CAP	FORECASTS					SHORTFALL / SURPLUS					Comments
		2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	
Adlington	105	86	83	85	86	82	19	22	20	19	23	
Alsager	1575	1,463	1,457	1,461	1,457	1,450	112	118	114	118	125	
Bollington	567	523	515	501	482	481	44	52	66	85	86	
Bosley St Mary's	56	47	43	45	44	44	9	13	11	12	12	
Congleton Central	1260	1,095	1,080	1,065	1,071	1,052	165	180	195	189	208	
Congleton East	420	413	413	418	419	418	7	7	2	1	2	
Congleton West	1043	966	968	985	975	967	77	75	58	68	76	
Crewe North	3832	3,342	3,358	3,309	3,342	3,336	490	474	523	490	496	
Crewe South	2205	2,021	1,976	1,938	1,893	1,843	184	229	267	312	362	
Disley	315	270	271	264	253	253	45	44	51	62	62	
Haslington	720	670	691	692	683	691	50	29	28	37	29	increased capacity at The Dingle now included
Holmes Chapel	1244	1,214	1,214	1,208	1,200	1,193	30	30	36	44	51	
Kettleshulme	63	57	52	42	36	32	6	11	21	27	31	
Knutsford Rural	315	215	215	207	198	201	100	100	108	117	114	
Knutsford Village	1365	1,204	1,186	1,167	1,159	1,144	161	179	198	206	221	
Macclesfield North	2458	1,980	1,945	1,914	1,876	1,859	478	513	544	582	599	
Macclesfield Rural	497	488	486	486	488	490	9	11	11	9	7	
Macclesfield South	2200	1,875	1,853	1,841	1,809	1,803	325	347	359	391	397	
Middlewich	1157	924	904	876	856	848	233	253	281	301	309	
Nantwich Rural North	560	504	487	492	498	492	56	73	68	62	68	
Nantwich Rural South	601	508	493	479	471	468	93	108	122	130	133	
Nantwich Town	1858	1,784	1,774	1,760	1,744	1,744	74	84	98	114	114	New school Kingsley Fields due to open 2026
Poynton Village	1186	1,142	1,137	1,130	1,118	1,119	44	49	56	68	67	
Sandbach	1680	1,671	1,697	1,718	1,714	1,719	9	-17	-38	-34	-39	proposed expansion of Wheelock and Sandbach Primary will provide 210 places.
Scholar Green & Woodcock's Well	315	296	295	290	282	276	19	20	25	33	39	
Shavington	1735	1,613	1,603	1,581	1,542	1,526	122	132	154	193	209	New school Basford East currently delayed time scales to be confirmed
Wilmslow North	1484	1,413	1,391	1,384	1,368	1,360	71	93	100	116	124	
Wilmslow South	1490	1,369	1,351	1,340	1,307	1,306	121	139	150	183	184	
Windle	52	66	65	66	64	61	-14	-13	-14	-12	-9	Due to admissions over PAN
TOTAL	32358	29,218	28,999	28,742	28,435	28,261	3,140	3,359	3,616	3,923	4,097	

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DRAFT PRIMARY 2024 FORECASTS - INCLUDING HOUSING		FORECASTS					SHORTFALL / SURPLUS					Comments
PlanningArea	NET CAP	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	
Adlington	105	86	83	85	86	82	19	22	20	19	23	
Alsager	1575	1,470	1471	1484	1486	1479	105	104	91	89	96	
Bollington	567	523	517	504	486	485	44	50	63	81	82	
Bosley St Mary's	56	47	43	45	44	44	9	13	11	12	12	
Congleton Central	1260	1,111	1111	1108	1119	1106	149	149	152	141	154	
Congleton East	420	422	429	435	433	429	-2	-9	-15	-13	-9	Buglawton and Havannah both 1FE schools, 1 Housing development which is contributing to the shortfall shown. However, both schools cater for local children and admit a number from outside their catchments.
Congleton West	1043	991	1004	1029	1024	1015	52	39	14	19	28	
Crewe North	3832	3,374	3426	3413	3481	3500	458	406	419	351	332	
Crewe South	2205	2,027	1982	1943	1897	1846	178	223	262	308	359	
Disley	315	270	271	264	253	253	45	44	51	62	62	
Haslington	720	677	710	719	712	722	43	10	1	8	-2	Increased capacity at The Dingle now included. Shortfall due to continued housing and admission of pupils from outside their catchment. Area will be monitored
Holmes Chapel	1244	1,220	1223	1221	1213	1204	24	21	23	31	40	
Kettleshulme	63	57	52	42	36	32	6	11	21	27	31	
Knutsford Rural	315	216	217	210	201	203	99	98	105	114	112	
Knutsford Village	1365	1,218	1210	1208	1214	1207	147	155	157	151	158	
Macclesfield North	2458	2,002	1988	1967	1940	1925	456	470	491	518	533	
Macclesfield Rural	497	488	486	486	488	490	9	11	11	9	7	
Macclesfield South	2200	1,892	1880	1902	1899	1916	308	320	298	301	284	
Middlewich	1157	924	905	882	869	864	233	252	275	288	293	
Nantwich Rural North	560	508	497	502	508	501	52	63	58	52	59	
Nantwich Rural South	601	511	500	490	482	478	90	101	111	119	123	
Nantwich Town	1858	1,819	1838	1827	1809	1806	39	20	31	49	52	New school Kingsley Fields delayed. Date for opening TBC. But need to closely monitor the area
Poynton Village	1186	1,156	1160	1156	1144	1143	30	26	30	42	43	Reviewing possible options
Sandbach	1680	1,696	1733	1765	1771	1781	-16	-53	-85	-91	-101	Expansion of Wheelock and Sandbach Primary will provide 210 places.
Scholar Green & Woodcock's Well	315	296	296	293	286	279	19	19	22	29	36	
Shavington	1735	1,643	1661	1665	1634	1619	92	74	70	101	116	New school Basford East currently delayed time scales to be confirmed
Wilmslow North	1484	1,430	1419	1417	1403	1398	54	65	67	81	86	
Wilmslow South	1490	1,372	1358	1349	1316	1313	118	132	141	174	177	
Wincle	52	66	65	66	64	61	-14	-13	-14	-12	-9	Due to previous admissions over PAN. School do cater for their local children and admit a higher number from outside their catchment.
TOTAL	32358	29,511	29,531	29,475	29,298	29,184	2,847	2,827	2,883	3,060	3,174	

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DRAFT 2024 FORECASTS BASIC NEED		DRAFT Forecast NOR (Year 7 to Year 11 Only) INCLUDES UTC and STUDIO SCHOOL							Shortfall or Surplus Places							
Planning Area	Net Capacity (year 7-11)	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	
Alsager	1,405	1,311	1,325	1,325	1,338	1,342	1,348	1,331	94	80	80	67	63	57	74	
Congleton	2,200	1,981	2,017	2,021	1,980	1,969	2,006	1,971	219	183	179	220	231	194	229	expansions complete
Crewe	3,538	2,887	2,905	2,922	2,939	2,949	3,002	3,015	651	634	616	599	589	536	523	Includes University Technical Colleges with a capacity of 400 for year groups 10 and 11
Holmes Chapel	1,200	1,161	1,155	1,157	1,147	1,141	1,139	1,143	39	45	43	53	59	61	57	expansion complete
Knutsford	1,450	1,141	1,129	1,131	1,116	1,109	1,083	1,067	309	321	319	334	341	367	383	Includes Cheshire Studio School with a capacity of 150 for year groups 10 and 11
Macclesfield	4,103	4,075	4,045	4,015	4,017	3,903	3,796	3,729	28	58	88	86	200	307	374	Phase 1 Tytherington expansion included (Phase 2 is for infrastructure) These figures are based on Macc Academy having a PAN of 120 and capacity of
Middlewich	700	699	700	701	707	705	729	736	1	0	-1	-7	-5	-29	-36	Shortfall due to Glebe Green which has only just started construction, plus the school admits significant number of pupils from outside CE. The new children from housing need to displace the other LA pupils before expansion works are considered.
Nantwich	2,386	2,267	2,273	2,272	2,230	2,187	2,166	2,156	119	113	114	156	199	220	230	
Poynton	1,230	1,233	1,228	1,219	1,223	1,205	1,187	1,171	-3	2	11	7	25	43	59	Number of pupils from outside LA need to be considered. Area to be monitored
Sandbach	2,400	2,367	2,361	2,330	2,326	2,302	2,335	2,319	33	39	70	74	98	65	81	Expansions complete. But area needs to be monitored
Shavington	850	911	924	932	957	949	935	929	-61	-74	-82	-107	-99	-85	-79	expansion for 150 additional places underway, but this will still need to be monitored. Also Basford East housing delayed due to developer going into administration. This will in theory reduce the shortfall for a period of time.
Wilmslow	1,800	1,758	1,769	1,746	1,759	1,741	1,715	1,663	42	31	54	41	59	85	137	expansion complete, No further expansion possible on this site. New all through school planned for approx 2029/2030
TOTAL's	23,262	21,791	21,831	21,772	21,739	21,503	21,442	21,230	1,471	1,431	1,490	1,523	1,759	1,820	2,032	

Notes

Crewe includes the UTC years 10 and 11

Knutsford includes the Studio School years 10 and 11

Middlewich - expansion under discussion but need to take account of site restriction and CWAC admissions.

Macclesfield - expansion at Tytherington is part completed but further expansions work expected. Capacity used has been confirmed with SCAP team.

Sandbach - Both schools have been " capped "at 240 intakes for year 7.

Congleton , Holmes Chapel and Wilmslow = remain in shortfall as last years. But expansions underway

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2024 FORECASTS INCLUDING HOUSING		Forecast NOR (Year 7 to Year 11 Only) INCLUDES UTC and STUDIO SCHOOL							Shortfall or Surplus Places							
Planning Area	Net Capacity (year 7-11)	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	
Alsager	1,405	1,316	1,337	1,346	1,368	1,379	1,392	1,382	89	68	59	37	26	13	23	
Congleton	2,200	2,025	2,101	2,134	2,114	2,122	2,165	2,130	175	99	66	86	78	35	70	expansions complete
Crewe	3,538	2,919	2,976	3,039	3,107	3,159	3,254	3,294	619	563	499	431	379	284	244	Includes University Technical Colleges with a capacity of 400 for year groups 10 and 11
Holmes Chapel	1,200	1,166	1,165	1,172	1,161	1,154	1,151	1,154	34	35	28	39	46	49	46	expansion complete
Knutsford	1,450	1,151	1,152	1,178	1,183	1,189	1,166	1,150	299	298	272	267	261	284	300	Includes Cheshire Studio School with a capacity of 150 for year groups 10 and 11
Macclesfield	4,123	4,108	4,114	4,145	4,202	4,132	4,059	4,011	15	9	-22	-79	-9	64	112	Phase 1 Tytherington expansion included (Phase 2 is for infrastructure) These figures are based on Macc Academy having a PAN of 120 and capacity of
Middlewich	700	701	716	733	755	770	805	810	-1	-16	-33	-55	-70	-105	-110	Shortfall due to Glebe Green which has only just started construction, plus the school admits significant number of pupils from outside CE. The new children from housing need to displace the other LA pupils before expansion works are considered.
Nantwich	2,386	2,300	2,344	2,354	2,320	2,285	2,273	2,269	86	42	32	66	101	113	117	
Poynton	1,230	1,244	1,249	1,245	1,254	1,236	1,218	1,200	-14	-19	-15	-24	-6	12	30	Number of pupils from outside LA need to be considered. Area to be monitored
Sandbach	2,400	2,391	2,394	2,377	2,384	2,371	2,411	2,403	9	6	23	16	29	-11	-3	Expansions complete. But area needs to be monitored
Shavington	850	934	978	1,020	1,075	1,089	1,090	1,082	-84	-128	-170	-225	-239	-240	-232	expansion for 150 additional places underway, but this will still need to be monitored. Also Basford East housing delayed due to developer going into administration. This will in theory reduce the shortfall for a period of time.
Wilmslow	1,800	1,775	1,801	1,787	1,806	1,796	1,830	1,795	25	-1	13	-6	4	-30	5	expansion complete, No further expansion possible on this site. New all through school planned for approx 2029/2030
TOTAL's	23,282	22,030	22,327	22,531	22,729	22,682	22,815	22,680	1,252	955	751	553	600	467	602	

Notes

Crewe includes the UTC years 10 and 11

Knutsford includes the Studio School years 10 and 11

Middlewich -need to take account of site restriction and CWAC admissions.

Macclesfield - expansion at Tytherington is part completed but further expansions work expected.

Sandbach - Both schools have been " capped "at 240 intakes for year 7.

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SECONDARY 2024 FORECASTS - INCLUDING HOUSING	Forecast (Year 7 to Year 13)						
School	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
All Hallows Catholic College	1251	1240	1214	1196	1167	1129	1098
Alsager School	1560	1615	1630	1657	1677	1691	1685
Brine Leas School	1430	1434	1443	1435	1432	1404	1393
Congleton High School	1265	1314	1330	1351	1376	1398	1382
Crewe UTC	279	280	285	280	280	280	280
Eaton Bank Academy	1145	1189	1227	1235	1254	1252	1231
Holmes Chapel Comprehensive School	1334	1355	1359	1356	1352	1347	1344
Knutsford Academy	1259	1296	1326	1334	1351	1340	1326
Cheshire Studio School	130	138	140	158	158	157	156
Malbank School and Sixth Form College	1316	1369	1391	1393	1369	1368	1368
Middlewich High School	701	716	733	755	770	805	810
Poynton High School	1534	1564	1579	1593	1579	1565	1541
Ruskin Community High School	710	713	713	714	711	707	691
Sandbach High School and Sixth Form C	1407	1401	1416	1416	1416	1430	1428
Sandbach School	1499	1527	1511	1516	1501	1507	1501
Shavington Academy	934	978	1020	1075	1089	1090	1082
Sir William Stanier Community School	740	792	892	968	1050	1208	1255
St Thomas More Catholic High School,	655	647	635	630	626	598	572
The Fallibroome Academy	1558	1566	1563	1558	1525	1491	1453
The Macclesfield Academy	664	686	740	809	820	843	858
The Oaks Academy	620	640	614	611	588	599	592
Tytherington School	1450	1470	1475	1497	1491	1472	1447
Wilmslow High School	2246	2285	2285	2310	2297	2342	2327
TOTAL's	25,686	26,213	26,520	26,846	26,879	27,021	26,818

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Planning Area	Expansion Schemes previous 5 year period only.	PRIORITY AREAS BASED ON APPROVED HOUSING - 5 year forecasting period for primary, 7 years for secondary (additional places are in line with pupil places/need not net capacity.)																PRIMARY	SECONDARY
		2024		2025		2026		2027		2028		2029		2030					
		Pri	Sec	Pri	Sec	Pri	Sec	Pri	Sec	Pri	Sec	Pri	Sec	Pri	Sec				
																		COMMENTS	COMMENTS
Adlington																	No housing in the area, no need identified. Any shortfall shown is due to admissions over PAN		
Alsager	Expansion Scheme at Alsager High School completed in2019, this provided 150 additional places. Expansion scheme at Cranberry Primary Academy, this provided an additional 105 places.																Following expansion of Cranberry no immediate further need identified	Following expansion of Alsager school no further immediate need shown but area being monitored due to ongoing housing also school admits pupils from neighbouring LA's	
Bollington																	No housing in the area, no need identified.		
Bosley St Mary's																	No housing in the area, no need identified.		
Congleton Central	Expansion schemes at Congleton High and Eaton Bank completed in September 2023. This provided 150 additional places at each school																Proposed new school on Gwantswood (potential 175) but more a consideration on when the new school is needed based on housing and surplus in neighbouring schools. Not showing any immediate need.	Currently no immediate need for places is showing - will continue to monitor due to ongoing housing.	
Congleton East	Small project at buglawton is now complete to formalise the capacity of the school at 219.																There is a small need of up to 15 places but these may be accommodated by the surplus in Congleton West/Congleton Central planning areas.		
Congleton West	Project at Black Firs is now complete to formalise the capacity of the school at 315.					105											Increase in shortfall showing at Black Firs school over the next 5 years. Further expansions may be required, we will continue to monitor the situation.		
Crewe North																	Due to previous expansions no further need identified	No need identified. St William Stanier (1975) have reduced PAN but could increase again if needed.	
Crewe South																	No need identified		
Disley																	Any shortfall shown for this planning area is due to admissions over PAN. Does this mean we are short of places?		
Haslington	Expansion scheme at The Dingle primary school, completed in 2024. This provided 70 additional places																Expansion at The Dingle completed, will continue to monitor numbers in this area		
Holmes Chapel	Expansion scheme at Holmes Chapel comprehensive completed in 2023. This provided an additional 150 places. Expansion scheme at Chelford Primary was completed in 2019, this provided an additional classroom allowing their PAN to increase from 9 to 13.																Small shortfall shown at Hermitage primary school, shortfall is not enough to require expansion. Capacity at other local schools. We are closely monitoring the situation in this planning area	Scheme at Holmes Chapel comprehensive school complete. We will continue to monitor future forecasts.	
Kettleshulme																	No housing in the area, no need identified. Any shortfall shown is due to admissions over PAN which will decrease as the larger years move through		
Knutsford Rural																	No need identified		
Knutsford Village																	No overall need identified, although Egerton is over subscribed there are places available in other schools within the planning area. Further expansions may be required in the future, we will continue to monitor the situation.	No need identified	
Macclesfield North	In 2019 there was investment at Hurdfield Primary School to remodel their ICT area to create an additional teaching space for year 6 pupils.																No need identified		
Macclesfield Rural																	No need identified		
Macclesfield South	Phase 1 expansion scheme at Tytherington High school completed Sept 2022, this provided 150 additional places.									150							No immediate need indicated but there is a New school proposed for SMDA site. Currently the SMDA development has not progressed	Phase 1 of expansion at Tytherington to provide 150 additional places (6 extra classrooms) completed for Sep 2022. Phase 2 for further works regarding school infrastructure such as Dining facilities etc is proposed. Further expansions in this planning area may be required, ongoing discussions with schools but need to review housing impact and in particular SMDA site if/when it progresses.	
Middlewich																	No need identified	Shortfall shown relates to housing development which is not yet under construction. Also the school admits a number of pupils from neighbouring Local Authorities. We will continue to closely monitor the situation but site constraints limit the development of the site.	
Nantwich Rural North																	No need identified		
Nantwich Rural South	In 2019 there was investment at Sound and District Primary School to create an additional teaching space for KS2 pupils.																No need identified		
Nantwich Town	Expansion Scheme at Malbank School completed in2020, this provided 150 additional places. Expansion scheme at Brine Lees School, this provided an additional 50 places.							210									Free School Presumption for a new school on Wingley Field has been delayed from September 2024 and we are waiting further details regarding the opening date. It is planned that admissions to the school will be on a phased basis with the school opening with a reception class of 30 pupils	Expansions at Brine Lees and Malbank now completed. No further immediate need indicated in terms of actual additional places, although there is a requirement for further works at Brine Lees regarding school infrastructure such as WC's and Dining facilities.	
Poynton																	No immediate need identified, but due to housing in the area, we will continue to monitor the situation. Vernon Primary is increasing PAN, this will provide an additional 35 places.	No need identified and all housing to date already taken into account.	
Sandbach	Expansion scheme at St Johns CE primary completed in 2020, to provide an additional 35 places which brought the PAN up to 30. Expansion scheme at Elworth CE completed Sep 21 to provide an additional 105 places. Expansions to provide 150 places at each secondary schools completed 2020/2021.	105 (Wheelock) 105 (Sandbach)															Expansion schemes currently progressing at Wheelock Primary and Sandbach Primary to provide an additional 105 places at each school. Expected to be finished by Easter 2025.	Small shortfall shown by 2028. Any further expansions will be very dependent on housing and impact on neighbouring schools.	
Scholar Green & Woodcocks Well																	No need identified		
Shavington			150			210											Free School Presumption for new school for Baxford has been delayed from Sep 2023, at this stage we do not have a confirmed date when we can progress with the new school. Current forecasts indicate a shortfall in pupil places from 2026/27. However, degree of shortfall is dependent on approval of South Cheshire Growth Village.	Expansion of 150 additional places underway should be available for 2024. Further expansion may be required but dependent on housing and impact of neighbouring schools. But there is also the issue of access to Shavington from some of the housing developments. Discussions taking place with school to progress this.	
Wilmslow North	Expansion scheme at Wilmslow High School complete - this provided an additional 300 places.									315	600						Sandforth Garden Village (HGV) outline planning permission approved. We are proposing to provide an all through school on HGV for pupils aged 4 to 16, this will include 210 primary places. Also possibility of 0.5 FE expansion at neighbouring schools, this will provide a further 105 primary places.	Expansion of Wilmslow High completed, this has provided 300 additional places. HGV outline planning permission approved but no reserved matters received so may have to review fine scales for the proposed all through school. Proposed all through school would provide approx. 600 secondary age places	
Wilmslow South																	Talks previously taken place regarding the pupils from the Alderley Park development, this included a possible expansion at further Alderley Primary for an additional 105 places, but based on current projections this level of expansion is not needed. Possible additional classroom and toilets may be required which would increase the capacity to 150 places.		
Wincle																	No housing in the area, no need identified.		
Total:		0	150	0	0	315	0	210	0	315	750	0	0	0	0				
Data Source - 2024 Forecasts																Total Places	1740		
EXPANSIONS ALREADY AGREED AND UNDERWAY																			
EXPANSIONS IN DISCUSSION/PROPOSED BUDGET INCLUDED IN MTF5																			
Figures Shown in Red will be dependent on housing at the time and any need identified by future forecasts.																			

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Children and Families Committee Work Programme 2024-25

Report Reference	Children & Families Committee	Title	Purpose of Report	Lead Officer	Consultation	Equality Impact Assessment	Corporate Plan Priority	Part of Budget and Policy Framework	Exempt Item	Is the report for decision or scrutiny?
CF/08/24-25	11/11/24	Second Financial Review of 2024/25 (Children & Families Committee)	To note and comment on the Second Financial Review and Performance position of 2024/25, including progress on policy proposals and material variances from the MTFS and (if necessary) approve Supplementary Estimates and Virements.	Director of Finance and Customer Services	No	No	Open	Yes	No	Decision/Scrutiny
CF/13/24-25	11/11/24	Medium Term Financial Strategy Consultation 2025/26 - 2028/29 (Children & Families Committee)	To provide feedback in relation to the committee's financial responsibilities as identified within the Constitution and linked to the budget alignment approved by the Finance Sub-Committee in March 2024. Responses to the consultation would be reported to the Corporate Policy Committee to support that Committee in making recommendations to Council on changes to the	Director of Finance and Customer Services	No	No	Open	Yes	No	Decision/Scrutiny

Children and Families Committee Work Programme 2024-25

Report Reference	Children & Families Committee	Title	Purpose of Report	Lead Officer	Consultation	Equality Impact Assessment	Corporate Plan Priority	Part of Budget and Policy Framework	Exempt Item	Is the report for decision or scrutiny?
			current financial strategy.							
CF/21/24-25	11/11/24	Children's Centre re-modelling into the Family Hub Model	To seek committee approval on the future outreach delivery model for family hubs and repurposing of seven children's centre buildings to meet the MTFS savings, whilst continuing to deliver the services in a more flexible way following consultation.	Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration	Yes	Yes	Open/Fair/Green	Yes	No	Decision
CF/27/24-25	11/11/24	Proposed change in age range at St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Middlewich	To approve the proposed changes of age range at St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Middlewich, from 4 - 11 to 3 - 11 from January 2025.	Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration	Yes	Yes	Open	No	No	Decision
CF/28/24-25	11/11/24	Academisation of St Johns, Sandbach (Directive Order)	Provide necessary assurances to enable the Committee to consider their support for the transfer (as this is	Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration	No	Yes	Open	No	TBC	Decision

Children and Families Committee Work Programme 2024-25

Report Reference	Children & Families Committee	Title	Purpose of Report	Lead Officer	Consultation	Equality Impact Assessment	Corporate Plan Priority	Part of Budget and Policy Framework	Exempt Item	Is the report for decision or scrutiny?
			a Directive Order).							
CF/29/24-25	11/11/24	Academisation of Lower Park Primary School	Provide necessary assurances to enable the Committee to consider their support for the conversion.	Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration	No	Yes	Open	No	TBC	Decision
CF/31/24-25	11/11/24	ILACS Improvement Plan Progress	To update committee on progress against the improvement plan to address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) in February and March 2024, and to ensure committee can scrutinise impact on outcomes for children and young people.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	N/A	No	Fair	No	No	Scrutiny
CF/32/24-25	11/11/24	Proposed expansion of Springfield School onto a satellite site in Middlewich, and Proposed expansion of Springfield Wilmslow.	To report on the outcomes of a public consultation as to whether Springfield School, Crewe should be expanded onto a satellite site in Middlewich. To report the outcomes of a	Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration	Yes	Yes	Open	Yes	No	Decision

Children and Families Committee Work Programme 2024-25

Report Reference	Children & Families Committee	Title	Purpose of Report	Lead Officer	Consultation	Equality Impact Assessment	Corporate Plan Priority	Part of Budget and Policy Framework	Exempt Item	Is the report for decision or scrutiny?
			public consultation as to whether Springfield Wilmslow campus should expand by 20 places for 4-16 year olds							
CF/33/24-25	11/11/24	Additional sites for Alternative Provision and approval of funding in the capital programme	To provide committee with an update regarding additional sites for potential Alternative Provision and making funding available to support these proposals	Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration	No	No	Open	TBC	No	Decision
CF/34/24-25	11/11/24	Reprofiled DSG management plan 2024/25 to 2030/31	To provide a reprofiled DSG management plan to take account of the reduced growth of EHCP seen in 2023 (January 2024 DfE SEN2 Survey Return). Potential requirement to resubmit the plan to the DfE Safety Valve Programme	Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration	No	No	Fair	No	No	Decision/Scrutiny
CF/09/24-25	13/01/25	Third Financial Review of 2024/25 (Children & Families Committee)	To note and comment on the Third Financial Review and Performance position of 2024/25, including	Director of Finance and Customer Services	No	No	Open	Yes	No	Decision/Scrutiny

Children and Families Committee Work Programme 2024-25

Report Reference	Children & Families Committee	Title	Purpose of Report	Lead Officer	Consultation	Equality Impact Assessment	Corporate Plan Priority	Part of Budget and Policy Framework	Exempt Item	Is the report for decision or scrutiny?
			progress on policy proposals and material variances from the MTFS and (if necessary) approve Supplementary Estimates and Virements.							
CF/40/24-25	13/01/25	Update on the progress of the key areas of the Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan 2024/25 to 2030/31	To provide up-to-date information on the progress of the mitigations detailed within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) management plan	Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration	No	No	Fair	No	No	Scrutiny
CF/15/24-25	13/01/25	Medium Term Financial Strategy Consultation 2025/26 - 2028/29 Provisional Settlement Update (Children & Families Committee)	To provide feedback in relation to their financial responsibilities as identified within the Constitution and linked to the budget alignment approved by the Finance Sub-Committee in March 2024. Responses to the consultation would be reported to the Corporate Policy Committee to support that Committee in making recommendations to Council on	Director of Finance and Customer Services	No	No	Open	Yes	No	Decision/Scrutiny

Children and Families Committee Work Programme 2024-25

Report Reference	Children & Families Committee	Title	Purpose of Report	Lead Officer	Consultation	Equality Impact Assessment	Corporate Plan Priority	Part of Budget and Policy Framework	Exempt Item	Is the report for decision or scrutiny?
			changes to the current financial strategy.							
CF/35/24-25	13/01/25	ILACS Improvement Plan Progress	To update committee on progress against the improvement plan to address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) in February and March 2024, and to ensure committee can scrutinise impact on outcomes for children and young people.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	N/A	No	Fair	No	No	Scrutiny
CF/20/24-25	10/02/25	Schools Funding Formula and Early Years Funding Formula 2025/26	To provide committee with an update on the Dedicated School Grant (DSG) for 2024/25. To request approval for the allocation of each sub block making up the DSG. To request approval of the schools funding formula and early years funding formula following	Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration	Yes	No	Open	No	No	Decision

Children and Families Committee Work Programme 2024-25

Report Reference	Children & Families Committee	Title	Purpose of Report	Lead Officer	Consultation	Equality Impact Assessment	Corporate Plan Priority	Part of Budget and Policy Framework	Exempt Item	Is the report for decision or scrutiny?
			recommendations from the Schools Forum. To request approval to provide delegated authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to use the funds in accordance with the relevant guidance and proposed funding formula methods.							
CF/36/24-25	10/02/25	Determination of the Admissions Arrangements for 2026-27	To determine the School Admissions Arrangements for 2026-27 following consultation	Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration	No	Yes	Open	No	Yes	Decision
CF/37/24-25	10/02/25	ILACS Improvement Plan Progress	To update committee on progress against the improvement plan to address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) in February and March 2024, and to ensure committee can scrutinise impact on outcomes for children and young people.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	N/A	No	Fair	No	No	Scrutiny

Children and Families Committee Work Programme 2024-25

Report Reference	Children & Families Committee	Title	Purpose of Report	Lead Officer	Consultation	Equality Impact Assessment	Corporate Plan Priority	Part of Budget and Policy Framework	Exempt Item	Is the report for decision or scrutiny?
CF/16/24-25	07/04/25	Service Budgets 2025/26 (Children & Families Committee)	To set out the allocation of approved budgets for 2025/26 for services under the Committee's remit, as determined by Finance Sub Committee	Director of Finance and Customer Services	No	No	Open	Yes	No	Scrutiny
CF/38/24-25	07/04/25	ILACS Improvement Plan Progress	To update committee on progress against the improvement plan to address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) in February and March 2024, and to ensure committee can scrutinise impact on outcomes for children and young people.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	N/A	No	Fair	No	No	Scrutiny
CF/42/24-25	07/04/25	Update on the progress of the key areas of the Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan 2024/25 to 2030/31	To provide up-to-date information on the progress of the mitigations detailed within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) management plan	Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration	No	No	Fair	No	No	Scrutiny

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cared For Children and Care Leaver Committee**

held on Tuesday, 5th December, 2023 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor C Bulman (Chair)
Councillor J Saunders (Vice-Chair)

Councillors L Anderson, M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, C Bulman, D Clark,
G Hayes, S Holland, B Posnett, J Saunders and B Puddicombe

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director Children's Services
Kerry Birtles, Director of Children's Social Care
Annemarie Parker, Head of Service: Cared for Children and Care Leavers
Angela Murney, Participation Worker - Youth Support Service
Josie Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer

ALSO PRESENT

Jenny Foulkes, Service Manager – The Children's Society
Nicola Booth, Operations Manager – Adoption Counts
Kristen Roberts, Operations Manager – Adoption Counts (joined remotely via Teams)

15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Gilman.

16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

17 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

18 UPDATE FROM THE SHADOW COMMITTEE (VERBAL UPDATE)

The committee received a presentation with an update from the shadow committee, My Voice, and feedback from the children and young people. Since the last committee meeting, there had been lots of conversations

with the shadow committee around education as a theme. Young people talked about their experiences and lots of them had felt positive about staying in the same school where possible; however it was recognised that, for some, it did mean extended travel time which could have an impact. Regarding the Virtual School, it was noted that not all had had 1:1 support from a learning mentor but those that did found it positive. Language within schools was also raised as an important topic and there was an opportunity to educate further on this subject.

The committee thanked the officers for the work involved.

19 ADOPTION COUNTS ANNUAL REPORT 1 APRIL 2022 - 31 MARCH 2023

The committee received the Adoption Service Annual Report 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023.

A number of queries were raised, including:

- Only 27% of stage 1 assessments were being completed within the target timescale, therefore how could interest be sustained
- A request for an update on the commissioning of the adoption psychology service
- What the impact was when a paediatrician was not in attendance as adoption panel meetings
- What progress was being made with delays in court proceedings

In response, the committee were advised that the adoption service were conscious of the delays in stage 1 timescales and that this was due to statutory checks being undertaken. A number of conversations had taken place with partner agencies and the current systems in place at Adoption Counts were being looked at to establish whether anything could be done differently.

The adoption psychology service was commissioned each year, with it currently being commissioned until March 2024. Consideration was being given to whether there would be funding available for it to continue after this.

A lack of a paediatrician attending the adoption panel consistently was something that continued to be escalated by the panel, however assurances were given that this was not detrimental to the panel being able to make decisions as up-to-date health information still had to be provided in writing.

There were improvements in court proceedings, both locally in Cheshire East and regionally. As a region, the average length of time for care proceedings was now under 50 weeks. Cheshire East had a strength in

reducing the number of hearings per case meaning quicker decisions could be made but there was still more work to be done.

A request was made for the Adoption Service Annual Report to be brought to committee as early as possible. Officers would take this request away and suggested that it may be possible to bring a mid-year update, for example a presentation with updates and highlights.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

20 CHESHIRE EAST ADVOCACY AND INDEPENDENT VISITOR SERVICE – THE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY ANNUAL REPORT

The committee received the Cheshire East Advocacy and Independent Visitor Service Annual Report for October 2022 to September 2023.

It was noted that the current commission was due to end in late 2024 and it was queried whether there was an update on where this was up to in the commissioning cycle. The committee were advised that there was a statutory requirement to provide an advocacy service and that due diligence was being done to ensure an advocacy service would continue to be provided.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

21 CARED FOR CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS SCORECARD Q2 2023-24

The committee received the Cared for Children and Care Leavers scorecard for quarter 2 of 2023-24.

Recruitment of social workers and dental checks for children and young people continued to be areas of concern for members. Social worker recruitment was improving with some agency workers applying for permanent roles. Dentistry remained a priority for improvement.

Reference was made to work streams which members had previously had the opportunity to be involved in directly. It was noted that members were not currently allocated to specific work streams and it was queried whether this could be started again. Officers agreed that it would be good for members to be involved and suggested that the new year would be a good opportunity to put out invitations for areas of interest.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

The meeting commenced at 14.00 and concluded at 15.50

Councillor C Bulman (Chair)