

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the
Cared For Children and Care Leavers Committee
held on Tuesday, 2nd September, 2025 in The Capesthorne Room,
Town Hall, Macclesfield, SK10 1EA

PRESENT

Councillor L Crane (Chair)

Councillors S Adams, S Bennett-Wake, C Bulman, R Fletcher, E Gilman,
G Hayes, B Posnett, B Puddicombe and L Wardlaw

Officers in attendance

Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director Children's Services
Tracy Stephens, Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care
Laura Rogerson, Head of Service Inclusion
Alison Sollom, Interim Head of Cared for Children and Care Leavers
Samantha Derbyshire, Head of Provider Services
Shawn Hanks, Head of Safeguarding and Quality
Rachel Kenyon, Safeguarding Quality Assurance Manager
Annie Britton, Participation Lead
Katie Mills, Head of Quality and Safety Improvement, Cheshire and
Merseyside ICB
Rachel Graves, Democratic Services Officer

9 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors M Beanland, D Clark, S Holland and J Saunders. Councillors S Adams, C Bulman and L Wardlaw attended as substitutes.

10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

11 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2025 be approved as a correct record.

12 UPDATE FROM THE SHADOW CARED FOR CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS COMMITTEE

The Committee received an update on behalf of the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Shadow Committee.

The presentation provided an overview of the participation in the Children's Services improvement plan. Key points included:

- Redevelopment of the Independence Packs with the packs being theme around travel, finance, and health. This was to help young people develop the skills they needed rather than what was required in a bronze, silver, and gold package. Evidence could be submitted in various formats. The new Independence Packs would be launched in January 2026.
- A new initiative of Pen Picture Profiles was being developed to help professionals better understand care-experienced young people.
- National Care Leaver Month would take place in November 2025
- Star Celebration Day would take place in November.
- November was also Children's Rights Month with a focus on safe spaces for children and young people and 'article 31' of the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child.

The Committee supported the new independence pack themes and the idea of the pen picture profiles to help understanding between young people and corporate parents. It was recognised that elected members needed to better understand their roles as corporate parents.

Reference was made to protected characteristics status for care experience. It was stated that there was an ongoing consultation with young people about adopting care experience as a protected characteristic and that there were mixed views as some valued privacy with others saw the benefit in access to support. It was noted that other local authorities had adopted this status, and any potential policy would impact on housing, employment, and commissioning services.

13 UPDATE FROM THE CORPORATE PARENTING EXECUTIVE BOARD

The Committee received an update on the work of the Corporate Parenting Executive Board.

The report provided details on the workstreams and performance updates on the virtual school and corporate parenting scorecard.

The Committee commented on the following: -

- the SDQ data and that there was a discrepancy between reported data and actual practice. In response it was stated that work was underway to align data and practice.
- emphasis should be on embedding improvements long term rather than short term fixes.
- staff volunteering days could be used to support care leavers moving into new homes.
- Inconsistency in the local offer e.g. buses passes were only until age 21 whilst council tax exemption was until age 25.
- importance of tenancy readiness training and in response it was stated that training was not limited to short session and that

preparations for independence started early and were tailored to individual needs.

- the need for ongoing quality assurance of residential and supported accommodation providers. It was reported that there was multi-agency oversight including Ofsted reports, independent reviews, and social worker visits.

14 CARED FOR CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVER QUARTER 1 SCORECARD

Consideration was given to the Quarter 1 Scorecard which covered the period April to June 2025.

A correction to the Scorecard was reported that NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) figures for 16–18-year-olds should read 25 and not 51 as stated in the report.

The key highlights from the Scorecard were:

- the reduction in the number of children entering care.
- the increased use of Special Guardianship Order which showed the success of placing children with extended family.
- fewer children were experiencing placement movement.
- the introduction of a revised Permanence Panel, involving multiple services to ensure better decision making.

The Committee commented on the on the following matters:

- placement stability and if fewer moves equated to greater stability for children.
- support for NEETs and if there was follow up for non-participating youths.
- placement out of the Borough and asked if a breakdown by duration and distance could be provided.
- use of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and should be used at entry and midpoint to track wellbeing.
- the Kings Trust and if any cared for children were put forward for this Trust.
- who was responsible for the planning and licensing of care homes and were informed that planning applications were handled by the planning department and that licensing as the responsibility of the provider and Ofsted.

15 INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT

Consideration was given to the annual report of the Independent Reviewing Officers which highlighted performance, challenges, and improvements over the reporting year.

Key highlights of the report were: -

- the case load of the Independent Review Officers peaked at 100 during the year, with the recommended case load being 50 to 70.
- 76% of reviews were completed on time, which had since improved to over 90%.
- the timeliness of review minutes was poor and efforts were ongoing to ensure that reviews were properly documented and shared promptly.
- only 48% of children had attended their reviews during the reporting year but the rate was improving.
- a new electronic portal was being developed to help with consultation with partner agencies.
- concerns raised by children included the frequent changes in social workers, lack of progression in care plans and the feeling that decisions were made about them rather than with them.

The Committee asked about the use of AI, and it was explained that this was being explored for recording minutes, but care had to be taken to preserve personal and sensitive aspects of these.

The Committee noted that face to face reviews were being reintroduced now that caseloads had become manageable and were the preferred option. The attendance figures would be benchmarked against neighbouring and regional councils.

16 CARED FOR SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY UPDATE

The Committee received an update on the progress made against the Sufficiency Strategy, which aimed to ensure there were enough suitable placements and support services for children in care and care leavers.

Progress to date included

- the Council joining the Foster4 regional collaboration which had given the council access to a wider pool of potential foster carers.
- the opening of two in-house children's homes which had helped reduce the reliance on out-of-borough placements.
- expansion of the supported accommodation with the provision of additional beds and emergency beds
- a focus in Post 18 support to provide housing and a move adult services
- the launch of a Court Team to help streamline legal casework and improve timescales for achieving adoption and Special Guardianship Orders
- a redesign of commissioning with a new director joining in September 2025

The Committee commented on the use of kinship care, and the creation of the new court team. Concerns were raised about drift and delays in the fostering and adoption process.

17 ENGAGEMENT WITH FRONT LINE SERVICES FROM COUNCILLORS

Consideration was given to the report on the frontline visits undertaken by Councillors S Bennett-Wake, S Holland, and B Wye in July 2025.

The appendices to the reports set out findings of each councillor's visits, including the strengths identified in relation to quality of practice and identified areas for development.

The report set out the response from the Head of Service Cared for Children to the frontline visit findings.

The Committee welcomed the return to face-to-face visits post COVID and recognised the depth and value of these visits. From the findings, the Committee emphasised the importance of having comfortable, safe, and private working environments and praised staff for their dedication in their work.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 4.15 pm

Councillor L Crane (Chair)