



# Children and Families Scrutiny Committee

## Agenda

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**Date:** Tuesday, 27th July, 2010  
**Time:** 10.30 am  
**Venue:** Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields, Middlewich Road,  
Sandbach CW11 1HZ

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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.

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

1. **Apologies for Absence**

2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting** (Pages 1 - 8)

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2010.

3. **Declaration of Interest/Party Whip**

To provide an opportunity for Members and Officers to declare any personal and/or prejudicial interests and for members to declare the existence of a party whip in relation to any item on the agenda.

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For any apologies or requests for further information, or to give notice of a question to be asked by a member of the public

**Contact:** Denise French

**Tel:** 01270 686464

**E-Mail:** [denise.french@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:denise.french@cheshireeast.gov.uk)

4. **Public Speaking Time/Open Session**

A total period of 15 minutes is allocated for members of the public to make a statement(s) on any matter that falls within the remit of the Committee.

Individual members of the public may speak for up to 5 minutes, but the Chairman will decide how the period of time allocated for public speaking will be apportioned, where there are a number of speakers.

Note: In order for officers to undertake any background research, it would be helpful if members of the public notified the Scrutiny officer listed at the foot of the agenda, at least one working day before the meeting with brief details of the matter to be covered.

5. **Admissions Regulations**

To receive a presentation from Lorraine Butcher

6. **Adoption** (Pages 9 - 26)

To give consideration to a report on the adoption service

7. **Early Years Funding Reform - Briefing on the National Formula**

To receive a presentation by Lorraine Butcher

8. **Informal Meetings**

To consider the use of informal meetings at mid points in the calendar

9. **Forward Plan - Extracts** (Pages 27 - 30)

To note the current Forward Plan, identify any new items and to determine whether any further examination of new issues is appropriate

10. **Work Programme Update** (Pages 31 - 40)

To give consideration to the work programme

11. **Consultations from Cabinet**

To note any consultations referred to the Committee from Cabinet and to determine whether any further action is appropriate.

**CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Scrutiny Committee**  
held on Tuesday, 29th June, 2010 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,  
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

**PRESENT**

Councillor R Westwood (Chairman)  
Councillor D Neilson (Vice Chairman)

Councillors D Beckford, D Flude, J Goddard, T Jackson, A Kolker, W Livesley,  
M Parsons, A Ranfield and M Simon

**Apologies**

Councillors A Barratt and G Merry and Gill Kelly

102 **ALSO PRESENT**

Councillor H Gaddum – Children and Families Portfolio Holder  
Councillor R Bailey – Cabinet Support Member

103 **OFFICERS PRESENT**

Lorraine Butcher - Head of Services for Children and Families  
Mark Bayley -Quality Assurance Manager  
Fintan Bradley - Services Manager Improvement & Achievement  
Andy Kent – Partnership Lead - Schools  
Mark Nedderman – Senior Scrutiny Officer

104 **CO-OPTED MEMBERS**

Ged Roper

105 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2010 be approved  
as a correct record.

106 **DECLARATION OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP**

Councillor D Flude declared a Personal interest on the grounds that she was a  
Director of EIPC Ltd.

107 **PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION**

There were no members of the public present who wished to address the  
Committee.

108 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Chairman referred Members to item 97 in the minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2010 which contained the proposed Work Programme for 2010/2011. The Chairman informed the Committee that the expected date for the final report in respect of the review of Family Support Services should be December 2010 and not October as stated in the minutes.

Lorraine Butcher Head of Childrens and Family Services suggested that the Committee may benefit from a separate briefing on the Council's admissions policy in the future.

RESOLVED – That subject to the date in respect of the final report in on the Family Support Services Review being changed from October 2010 to December 2010, and to an item being added to brief the Committee on school admissions regulations at its next meeting on 27 July, the work programme be approved.

109      **CONSULTATION      ON      SCHOOL      RE-ORGANISATION  
PROPOSALS IN MACCLESFIELD**

Lorraine Butcher Head of Service Children and Families reported on the consultation on the future of Macclesfield High School.

Lorraine outlined the context of the current consultation which emanated from the closure of Ryles Park High School on 31 August 2004. This was followed by an unsuccessful pathfinder bid to build a new school.

In February 2004, the Macclesfield Secondary Schools Re-organisation Members Panel agreed to consult on the re-design and modernisation of existing buildings on either the Henbury High or Park Lane site. The creation of a 6 form entry school at Park Lane became the County Council's preferred option and in September 2007, Macclesfield High School opened on the Park lane site involving approximately £28m, including funding from the NWDA.

The new school then continued to produce declining standards , for instance:

- 2007 – 5A\*-C GCSE including English and Maths = 35%
- 2009 – 5A\*-C GCSE including English and Maths = 32%

In August 2009, the Chair of Governors sought support from the Council regarding the future of the school.

Ofsted issued a notice to improve following an inspection.

All of these issues were against a backdrop of surplus school places in Macclesfield, and it was predicted that the projected secondary roll across Macclesfield of 3900 by 2015 could be accommodated in 3 school and that Macclesfield High School would have a surplus of 28% by this date.

Lorraine also pointed to the demographics within Macclesfield which pointed to the fact that Macclesfield High currently had and was likely to

continue to have the highest intake of pupils living within the most deprived areas in Macclesfield. Advice was currently being taken on the possibility of reviewing admission arrangements.

There were 8 options for consideration :

- A No change: Macclesfield High continues in its current form
- B Establish a Macclesfield Academy involving Macclesfield High School with another local high school
- C Establish a single Trust working across the schools in Macclesfield(with the closure of Macclesfield High)
- D Create a 3-19 school which integrates a local primary school on the Macclesfield High School site
- E Re-launch Macclesfield High School as a specialist vocational/technical school
- F Close Macclesfield High School and redistribute pupils across the remaining secondary schools
- G Use the Macclesfield High School site for post 16 provision for the whole town
- H Current Macclesfield Schools each lose one form entry to Macclesfield High School .

The Council had recently met with all Heads of schools in macclesfield and the principal of Macclesfield college and although this group distilled the 8 original options into 3, the favoured option was option E.

The Council believed however that the decision on formal consultation should be deferred but that informal consultations should take place up to Friday 8 October 2010. This would allow all options to be explored in greater depth.

In between time, it was also suggested that advice be sought from Cheshire East admissions Forum on admission arrangements in Macclesfield, and that further discussions take place with David Rutley MP in light of new information from the Government.

RESOLVED – That consideration of this matter be deferred to a special meeting of this Committee on a date to be determined to consider a full and comprehensive report on all the issues surrounding the future of Macclesfield High School.

110      **CHANGING POLICY LANDSCAPE IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

Andy Kent, Partnership Lead – Schools, outlined the key changes in Education as announced by the new coalition government to date.

The key Changes were:

- The revised primary curriculum will not go ahead and schools are to continue with the current curriculum – but the additional INSET day for primaries in 2020/11 is maintained
- A new national curriculum will be published
- Development of the new Diplomas in science, humanities and languages, due to be introduced from September 2011, will cease immediately
- State schools will be able to offer the iGCSE (International General Certificate of Secondary Education)
- The General teaching Council, Contact Point, and British Educational Communications and Technology Agency and Qualification and Curriculum Development Agency to be scrapped
- Budgets for the Training and Development Agency and National College to be cut.
- The introduction of the Vetting and Barring scheme and the need to register with the Independent Safeguarding Authority has been halted until a review has been undertaken
- Contactpoint database discontinued.
- The Children, Schools and families Act, which received royal assent prior to the election omitted the proposed:
  - Pupil/Parent guarantees, home/school agreements and parent satisfaction surveys;
  - PSHE and Sex and relationship education becoming compulsory
  - Enhanced role of school improvement partners
  - licence to teach.

The Government had also announced plans for an Academies Bill and an Education and Children Bill in the Autumn.

The Academies Bill was currently at the committee stage in the House of Lords, but there were expected to be significant amendments.

The Bill would allow all schools to apply for academy status with no requirement to consult stakeholders. These would be new forms of academy.

There were significant impacts in the way that academies would operate, including the right to set individual terms and greater flexibility around the length of school day and working year. In addition, Academies would be required to set pay and conditions including moving outside the school teachers pay and conditions document and national pay scales.

Academies would also need to provide or commission services currently provided centrally, but it was not clear whether and at what cost Local Authority Services would be available for academies to purchase. Governance arrangements for new academies were also unclear.

The Education and children Bill would:

- Give greater curriculum freedoms/slimmer national curriculum
- Reading test at the end of year 1
- Additional powers to 'improve behaviour'
- Reformation of Ofsted

- Pupil premium

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received

(b) That the Head of Service Children and Families be requested to produce a briefing sheet for all Members of the Committee based upon the presentation given at the meeting, particularly to provide an overview of the budgetary situation as it relates to Cheshire East.

**111 PRESENTATION ON ADOPTION, PRIOR TO A FORTHCOMING INSPECTION OF THE SERVICE BY OFSTED**

This matter was withdrawn from the agenda.

**112 PERFORMANCE - OUTTURN**

The Committee considered a report of the Quality Assurance Manager, Children and Family Services providing an update on the reporting of performance across Children and Family Services.

Significant work had been undertaken within Children & Families Extended Leadership Team to evaluate performance following the Quarter 4 period and to establish performance targets for 2010-11. The establishment of the exception reports for High Risk indicators had continued and was now being integrated into Service planning procedures.

The report had been submitted to Scrutiny at a time of considerable change at a national level in terms of education policy and the role and function of national agencies. Recent announcements had already influenced performance reporting, in particular with the demise of the Comprehensive Area Assessment process.

There was positive progress to report since the presentation of the report card at the end of Quarter 3. These included:

- 16 National Indicators (20%) now had data added for Quarter 4 which was not available earlier in the year.
- There had been a reduction in the number of High Risk Indicators from 13 to 11 with an increased rigour in the interrogation of data for other NI's. This had resulted in clear actions being taken to address areas of concern within other High Risk Indicators which as yet had not necessarily resulted in a measurable improvement over a sustained period.
- The report card now included named service teams/managers who would have direct accountability for identified National Indicators.

The report card now included a comparison of performance against the Audit Commission ratings which enabled the Council to compare Cheshire East performance against the national picture.

The Quality Assurance Manager circulated a supplementary sheet detailing recent National changes to the performance reporting structure for Children's and Families including the cessation of the process to report on a quarterly basis an Ofsted profile which summarised the performance of all schools and services assessed by Ofsted. Also the 'Tell us' Survey had also ceased as part of national changes.

The paper also explained the current position in connection with the 2009/2010 outturn and outlined proposals to link performance with service planning. In addition the paper provided information on progress with the 13 high risk indicators reported upon in quarter 3.

RESOLVED – (a) That the performance report as shown within Appendix A outlining the latest position of performance reporting at Quarter 4 be noted.

(b) That the planning process as outlined in Appendix B in order to address potential areas of underperformance be endorsed.

(c) That the Quality Assurance Manager be requested to submit a report on the full outturn picture for Children and Families to the September meeting of this Committee.

113 **CORPORATE PLAN**

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Human Resources enclosing for comment the draft Corporate Plan which was due to be considered by Cabinet on 19 July prior to making a recommendation to Council regarding its formal adoption on 22 July 2010.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and cabinet be informed that this Committee has no comments to make on the draft Corporate Strategy .

114 **FORWARD PLAN - EXTRACTS**

The Committee considered the forward plan as it related to Children and Family Services.

RESOLVED – That the forward plan be noted.

115 **CONSULTATIONS FROM CABINET**

There were no consultations from Cabinet.

116 **START TIME OF MEETINGS**

The Committee considered the possibility of moving to afternoon meetings to avoid potential clashes with Corporate Management Team meetings.

RESOLVED – That meetings of this committee remain with 10.30 am start times.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 12.40 pm

Councillor R Westwood (Chairman)

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## **Report for Scrutiny Committee**

### **Adoption**

#### **What is adoption?**

Adoption is a way of providing a new family for children who cannot be brought up by their own parents.

It is a legal procedure in which all the parental responsibility is transferred to the adopters.

Once an adoption order has been granted it cannot be reversed except in extremely rare circumstances.

An adopted child loses all legal ties with their first mother and father (the 'birth parents') and becomes a full member of the new family, usually taking the family's name.

#### **Legislative framework**

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 received Royal Assent in November 2002 and modernised the whole existing legal framework for domestic and inter-country adoption. It also introduced a new legal order, Special Guardianship, which offers legal permanence for children for whom adoption is not suitable.

The 2002 Act was fully implemented on 30 December 2005.

The Children and Adoption Act 2006 gives courts wider powers to deal with issues around contact and those relating to inter-country adoption.

#### **What is the difference between adoption and fostering?**

Foster carers share the responsibility with a local authority and the child's parents.

Fostering is usually a temporary arrangement, though sometimes foster care may be the plan until the child grows up. This long term or 'permanent' fostering cannot provide the same legal security as adoption for either the child or the foster family but it may be the right plan for some children.

#### **Who are the children who need adopting?**

There are around 4,000 children across the UK needing adoption every year. These children are from a great variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Many of these children are of school age and over half of them are in groups of brothers and sisters who need to be placed together.

### **Who can adopt?**

- You have to be over 21, happy to make space in your life and home for a child, patient, flexible and energetic, and determined to make a real difference to a child's life, for a lifetime.
- Some people think about adoption but never look into it further – possibly because they are over 40 and think they will be ruled out, but they are wrong, there is no upper age limit. Agencies are looking for adopters who have the physical and mental energy to care for demanding children, and whose lifestyle suggests they will still have that energy when the child is a teenager, or young adult. Older children are among those children who wait the longest so adoption agencies are keen to hear from people who can give a permanent and loving home to an older child.
- A record of offences will need to be carefully looked in to but, apart from some offences against children, will not necessarily rule someone out.
- Everyone has to have a medical examination and health issues will need to be explored.
- People from all ethnic origins and religions can adopt. Ideally, a new family should meet all a child's emotional, identity, health and development needs. In BAAF's view, practice experience indicates that children do best when brought up in a family that reflects their ethnic and racial identity as closely as possible. In part, this is informed by reports from black and minority ethnic adopted adults who grew up with families who did not match their ethnic and racial identity, describing difficulties in belonging to any community outside of their immediate family. What this means in practice is that vigorous efforts are made to find a family that reflects the child's individual identity. Given the profile of prospective adopters, this is not always achievable. In these instances, social workers will have to make a decision about when to consider alternative families in order to minimise delay for the child. Children would then be placed with families that best match most of their needs, even if this means they are of a different ethnic group.
- Disabled people are not excluded and sometimes experience of disability will be positively welcomed.
- A single person, or one partner in an unmarried couple – heterosexual, lesbian or gay – can adopt. Since 30 December 2005 unmarried couples in England and Wales can apply to adopt jointly.

### **How do people apply to adopt?**

They will need to go through an adoption agency. Some agencies are voluntary organisations. Most are part of the local authority children's services. People are not limited to their own immediate locality but most agencies work roughly within 50 mile radius of their office. Although it is only possible to follow through an application with one agency, several can be contacted at this early stage.

### **How do people get approved to adopt?**

It usually takes at least six months for social workers from an adoption agency to get to know prospective adopters, assess them and help prepare them of the task ahead.

All potential applicants attend pre-approval training sessions as part of their approval process.

Confidential enquiries will be made of the local social services or social work department and the police.

Applicants will be examined by their GP and will be asked to provide personal references from at least two friends and one family member.

The agency's independent adoption panel will consider a report on the application and recommend whether or not applicants should be approved as adopters who will be given the opportunity to meet the panel.

### **What if you don't get approved to adopt?**

In England and Wales, if any agency is planning not to approve the prospective adopters, the applicants can make representations to the agency asking them to review their determination. In England, as an alternative, applicants can request that an independent body (Independent Review Mechanism) undertake this review and make a recommendation to the agency.

### **How are approved adopters matched with a child?**

After prospective adopters are approved, their agency will try and match them with a child. They can also enquire about children being profiled in *Be My Parent* and other family-finding publications, like *Adoption Today*.

In England and Wales, agencies also refer prospective adopters to the Adoption Register for England and Wales which links waiting children with waiting approved adopters.

The proposed match will be presented to an adoption panel who will recommend whether to proceed with the placement.

### **What happens when the child moves in?**

The child will move to live with their new parent/s after a planned period of introductions, which lasts a few weeks or a month or two, depending on the child's needs.

Social workers will remain involved to support the new family and the child at least until an adoption order is made.

### **How adoption is made legal?**

There are certain minimum periods for which the child must live with the adopters before an adoption order can be made, or, in England and Wales, before an application can be made to the court.

A birth mother cannot give consent to adoption until her child is at least six weeks old. If their birth parents do not agree, there is a process for the agreement to be independently witnessed.

If birth parents do not agree to adoption, there are circumstances in which the court can override their wishes. Again the detailed process will depend on which country is involved. In many cases the question of consent will be considered by the court before the child is placed for adoption.

### **Should children be told that they are adopted?**

Yes, children should be raised knowing they were adopted. Adoptive parents should give appropriate information to the child from the time the child is little as they grow up.

### **Do birth parents and other relatives have any contact with their child after adoption?**

It is common for there to be an exchange of written information, perhaps once or twice a year, via the adoption agency.

There will be unique arrangements for each individual child which may mean direct contact for some children with various members of their birth family, including grandparents and brothers and sisters who may be placed elsewhere. Sometimes there will also be contact with birth parents – if this is best for the child.

### **Do adopted children want to trace their birth parents?**

Most adopted children are curious about their origins, but this doesn't mean that they don't love their adoptive parents.

Since 1975 adopted people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have had the right to see their original birth certificate when they reach the age of 18 (in Scotland the age is 16 and this right had existed since legal adoption was first introduced).

Some people are satisfied with the fuller knowledge and understanding gained in this way, while others want to try and trace their birth parents or other family members.

### **What about adoption by step-parents?**

Sometimes step-parents want to adopt the children from the previous relationship of their new partner. If this happens, the child's legal links with their absent parent and wider family will be broken. Alternative ways of settling the child's situation may be better for some children.

It is the policy of Cheshire East Council that adoption be considered for every child where rehabilitation, or a family and friends placement has been ruled out. Adoption should be seen as a positive option for children where a permanent family is sought. It must still be considered even where it is in the child's best interests to have contact with their birth family.

Planning is crucial if adoption plans are to be achieved with minimal drift for children in care and Cheshire East Council monitors each child who has adoption as their care plan in order to reduce delay. Where an adoption plan is agreed, Cheshire East aims for an adoption order to be made within two years of a child becoming looked after. The child has to be at the centre of any adoption plan and their welfare is paramount.

### **Guidance, Regulations and Standards**

The Statutory guidance issued under the **Adoption and Children Act 2002** outlines the duties and responsibilities of everyone involved in the adoption process, in particular local authorities and adoption agencies.

Adoption agencies are regulated by the **Adoption Agency Regulations 2005**, issued under the **Care Standards Act 2000**, they apply to all local authorities in England as well as voluntary adoption agencies in England and Wales.

**The National Minimum Standards** for Adoption Agencies, effective from 2003 and amended in 2005, are issued under the **Care Standards Act 2000**, they apply to all Local Authorities in England as well as voluntary adoption agencies in England and Wales.

Although not enforceable in themselves, they are used by the registration authorities, i.e. OFSTED, when registering and inspecting adoption agencies to determine whether they meet their obligations under the regulations.

For example, Standard 4 requires that **“there is a formal, thorough and comprehensive assessment, preparation and approval process”** and outlines the expectations under this standard.

## **Adoption Panel**

The Adoption Panel is a key element in the planning for a child's progress to adoption. The adoption panel's role is to quality assure the social work in children's cases where adoption is being considered and ensure that a balanced and fair consideration is made. In Cheshire East the panel adds considerable value to the quality of decision making and contributes to a consistent consideration of cases across the authority.

The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 require the adoption agency to ensure that it's membership reflects a balance of attributes and experience which will allow it to carry out it's work efficiently and sensitively.

In Cheshire East, the Adoption panel comprises:-

- **Chair:** who should have such experience, knowledge and skills in adoption work as the agency consider appropriate to enable him/her to command the respect of other Adoption Panel members and chair the adoption panel's meetings effectively. The Chair is appointed by the Head of Children's Services in conjunction with the Principal Manager, Looked After Children. **Sue Ferguson** was the Independent Chair of Cheshire County Council's Adoption Panel from 2003 and joined the Cheshire East Panel in April 2009. Sue is an Independent Social Care Consultant with extensive knowledge and professional experience of social work practice and Children's Services.
- **Medical Adviser: (Dr Rimi Bhatia)** a full member of panel but who also advises the panel on medical issues. The Medical Adviser is appointed by one of the Primary Care Trusts serving the authority
- **Social Workers (2): (Janet Burton and John Metcalfe)** both of whom have at least three years post qualifying experience in child care social work, including direct experience in adoption work. This may involve working with adopters or with a child being placed for adoption.
- **Elected Member (1): (Councillor Andrew Kolker)** nominated by Chair of Governance Committee. Members can give insight into strategic issues facing the agency and bring a useful perspective as the elected member is a member of the corporate parenting group or has a responsibility for children's services.
- **Independent Members (3):** who are not employers or relatives of employers of Cheshire East Council or elected members. At least two should, where reasonably practicable, have personal

experience of adoption e.g. adopted adults (who must be at least 18 years of age), adoptive parents, or relatives of an adopted person. Cheshire East adopters may not be independent members of panel until twelve months after making the adoption order. The independent members are recruited by the Agency Adviser. **Sharon Berry** brings to the panel the perspective of the adopted adult; she is also a foster carer. **Thelma Rees** brings a lengthy experience of working as a Nurse for Looked After Children and has a wide knowledge of child care law. **Marjorie Bevan** brings to the panel the perspective of the birth parent.

- **Additional members (2):** this could be anyone with particular expertise e.g. educational psychologist, CAMHS professional etc, or additional independent members with knowledge or skills in adoption. **Adrian Bradley** has past experience as a County Councillor and extensive experience as a panel member. **Liz Turner** brings expertise from an education perspective and is an adoptive parent.

It is desirable that panel members should:-

- Have experience of working with children and families or other experience which equips them to understand the needs of children and parents
- Demonstrate an understanding of the sensitivity of adoption in the life of children and their families.

In addition to the Panel members, the Panel is assisted by the:-

- **Panel Administrator (Joanne Appleton)**, who attends all the meetings, arranges the agenda and takes minutes.
- **The Agency Adviser (Heather Maguinness)**, who can offer advice re Cheshire East Council policy and procedure and take up issues with the agency when necessary.
- **The Legal Adviser (Martyn Brooks / Caroline Crosby)**, who is a qualified Solicitor and can give legal advice in all aspects of child care and adoption legislation

The recruitment and induction of panel members is the responsibility of the Agency Adviser.

### **Panel Responsibilities**

The Adoption Panel will make **recommendations** on the following:-

- Whether a child should be placed for adoption

- Whether a prospective adopter (domestic or inter-country) is suitable to adopt, or if already approved, whether that are no longer suitable to adopt
- Whether a child should be placed with a particular adoptive parent or parents

The Adoption Panel may give **advice** to the agency on:-

- Whether a Placement Order should be applied for
- The number of children the prospective adopter may be suitable to adopt, their age range, sex, likely needs and background.
- Plans for contact
- Arrangements for sharing of parental responsibility
- Support arrangements

### **Quality Assurance**

- The Adoption Panel receives quarterly information about the business activity of the adoption service
- The Panel contributes to the development of practice by receiving and discussing draft policy and procedure
- Feedback from the panel on issues of practice in the agency is given to the Agency Adviser who is able to take this up formally and informally within the agency

### **The Agency Decision**

The Adoption Panel makes the **recommendations** which are then taken into consideration by the Agency Decision Maker before reaching the **decision**. The Agency Decision Maker in Cheshire East is the County Manager for Children.

Draft minutes are prepared by the Panel Administrator as soon as practicable after the meeting is finished. These are finalised with the Chair and mailed to the ADM within 48 hours. The decisions will be taken within seven working days of the Adoption Panel recommendation.

### **Adoption Panel Activity 2009 – 2010 Children**

**Number of SHOULD BE PLACED FOR ADOPTION decisions** 18

**Of those children, number who are to be placed with consent** 2

**Number of children where a change of plan has been made from adoption to an alternative plan** 2

**Number of MATCHING decisions between child and adopter** 18

**Number of adopters approved** 10

The Cheshire County Council split into East / West impacted on this figure as a number of families already in the Cheshire process were located in the Cheshire West area and moved to West during the preparation / assessment process.

### **Children adopted and children waiting**

Where it has been agreed that a child should be placed for adoption, the Cheshire East Adoption Service aims to secure a suitable permanent family for that child without unnecessary delay and to support adoptive families in providing a placement for life.

From 2006 – 2007, the Government has requested that the numbers of Adoption Orders and Special Guardianship Orders are counted together. Special Guardianship is an alternative way for children to have a permanent family which was introduced by the Adoption & Children Act at the end of 2005.

### **Number of Cheshire East children looked after by Cheshire East Council who are adopted or made subject to a Special Guardianship Order during the year**

#### **1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010**

Adoption:	16 children
SGO:	<u>5</u> children
Total:	21

The number of children adopted in the whole of Cheshire County Council 2008/9 was 15, so this is a significant increase. The increase looks set to continue as 7 adoption orders were made between April – June 2010 and it is projected that at least 18 children will be adopted by the end of March 2011.

### **Number of Cheshire East children currently waiting for a placement (end of June 2010):**

15 children.

**Gender, Age and Ethnicity of children who are waiting**

	Out of the children who are waiting	
	Girls	Boys
<b>Total</b>	8	7
<b>Under 5 years old</b>	6	6
<b>5 years &amp; over</b>	2	1
<b>White British</b>	6	7
<b>Other Ethnicity</b>	2	0

- One girl – White British/Black British Caribbean
- One girl – White British/Asian

**Sibling Groups**

	Number in Group		
	Two	Three	Four
<b>Siblings in placement or matched</b>	2	1	0
<b>Siblings waiting for a family where we have authorisation to place</b>	1	1	0

Current information on our early warning system suggests that this number will continue to increase over the coming year. This is a national issue as well as a local one and is related to changes in practice in the aftermath of the death of 'Baby Peter' as well as changes in court procedures for the implementation of the public law outline.

**Cheshire East Council therefore needs to recruit at least 20 new adoptive families in the year 2010/11.**

**Family finding**

When family finding is requested for a child, a family finding worker is appointed by the adoption team who works closely with the child's social worker, in order to find the right adoptive family. The family finder will chair regular meetings of all those concerned with the child. The details of each child, together with a specific list of each of their needs are the basis for the

short listing and matching process. The details of each child and their brothers and sisters are collated in a profile or brochure. This has been found to be a very successful way of presenting the information, and where the child is old enough they can draw pictures which are included as well. The profile is circulated within the adoption team and to adopters in Cheshire East. Adoptive applicants are prioritised carefully in order to target families most suitable for Cheshire East children.

Social workers for adopters will send details of their families to the family finding worker wherever they are approved for the right type of child, (for example sibling group, single child, appropriate race and heritage). A short list of all the families that can on paper meet the child's specific matching criteria will be drawn up at a family finding meeting.

Where there are no Cheshire East Council families available who meet the criteria, a decision may be made to circulate the details of the child more widely ;-

- As Cheshire East Council is part of the North West Adoption 22 group of adoption agencies, details will be registered with Adoption 22
- Advertising may take place , eg in "Be my parent" or a local newspaper
- Details of the child may be featured at an adoption exchange day
- The child's details may be entered on the National Adoption Register

A shortlist of families will be taken forward for matching. Occasionally only one family will be taken forward. For example where the family concerned is already caring for the child, e.g. a foster carer, or where there is strong evidence to suggest a match can be agreed and to circulate more widely could cause detrimental delay.

### **Matching**

Matching in Cheshire East is informed by all the available information on each child and each family.

- Information on the child and their birth family
- Information on the prospective adoptive family
- Medical information on both the child and the prospective adopters
- Supplementary information on the child where available e.g. school report or psychological assessment.

Matching meetings are chaired by a Team Manager. Other participants include:

- Child's social worker
- Social worker to each family
- Family support worker who knows the child
- Foster carer if appropriate

The meeting will consider the specified needs of each child, in relation to each family.

Where more than one family can meet all of these needs, a judgement will be made as to which match is the best for the child in the view of all members of the meeting,

Minutes of each meeting, the decision reached and the reason for the decision, are clearly recorded and are included in the papers that go to the Adoption Panel.

Following agreement to the match at panel, a period of carefully planned introductions takes place at the child's pace before the child is placed within the family. The adoption application is made to the court when everyone is confident that the time is right for the child.

### **Post-Adoption Support**

Children being placed with adopters have many complex needs and it is imperative that we offer continued skilled support to adoptive families. Families may need intervention at different times over many years.

It is essential that the Adoption Service in Cheshire East continues to provide this service if we are to prevent further breakdowns and young people re-entering the care system. We work in partnership with adopters and other agencies to ensure that families feel supported and able to ask for assistance at any point.

The number of requests for adoption support is monitored and is increasing. We also monitor how many of these receive an adoption support service provided by Cheshire East Council or our partner agencies.

### **Support for adopters, children and young people**

Adoptive families receiving a service may be referred to another agency such as CAMHS, or referred within our own agency to the Multi Professional Support Teams. Some families have been invited to attend training and support courses run by Cheshire East Council.

We also provide:-

- Links with Education services for advice on education issues
- Regular support groups
- "Coffee and Cake" events for adopters and their children
- Social events for the whole family
- Links with Health and Psychological services
- Training and workshops
- Co-ordination of and support with letterbox and direct contact and annual reviews of contact arrangements
- Life Story focus groups quarterly and workshops four times a year

- Support to children and families during direct work.

Current letterbox exchange cases: 120  
Direct contact arrangements: 12

New initiatives in life story work have been explored and shared with panel members, social workers and neighbouring authorities to further enhance and develop different and innovative ways to approach life story work.

### **Support for birth relatives**

Independent support services are provided via a contract with Adoption Matters, for any birth parent of a Cheshire East child.

### **Support for adopted adults or adult birth relatives of an adopted person**

An intermediary service is provided by Cheshire East Adoption Team for those adopted adults who feel they need to know more about their origins.

This work may include counselling, access to a written adoption record and / or an intermediary service where contact is made between an adopted adult and a birth relative.

### **Number of referrals April 2009 / March 2010 for an intermediary service:-**

43 for adopted adults  
13 for birth relatives

### **Partner Adoptions**

The number of enquiries for a partner adoption service (previously in the year 2009 – 2010 was: 25

This work involves giving information and counselling where appropriate and writing a report for the court and attending court once the application for an adoption order has been made.

## **CHALLENGES AND OBJECTIVES**

- The service has developed an action plan based on an analysis and audit of our current services in order to ensure compliance with Adoption Regulations and National Minimum Standards, in preparation for inspection by OFSTED.

## **Family Finding and Recruitment**

- The Cheshire Council split to East and West has had implications for matching Cheshire East children with families from within the Cheshire East area. This is because as a relatively small authority we are finding that many of our children and families have links and networks across the area which would make it difficult to place children for adoption, particularly in Macclesfield and Crewe. This has resulted in an increasing number of adoptive placements being purchased via Adoption 22 in the first instance and the National Adoption Register. In addition to the cost implications, more staff time is being spent in travelling outside the council area to areas such as London, Southern England and Wales.
- This is within a regional and national context of an increase in children being adopted and a shortage of adoptive families.
- We are seeking to address this through our recruitment strategy and by networking to explore the possibilities of collaborative working with other local authorities. We Aim to identify opportunities for increased efficiency and sustainability through joint working and explore potential partnerships where appropriate.

## **Reorganisation and Staffing**

- Within the context of reorganisation the Adoption Team remains understaffed. Despite best attempts to recruit to permanent posts and fill vacancies temporarily via agency staff, the team has remained under numbers with a total of 5 Social Work vacancies, 1 Higher Learning Teaching Assistant, 2 Family Support vacancies and 1 part time Unit Coordinator(see structure attached). However, commitment of the staff within the service has meant that services have been maintained to a high standard.
- With a full complement of staff, the Adoption Team will be able to further improve the effectiveness and quality of recruitment, assessment, training, approval and post-adoption support to increase the supply and range of adoption placements for Cheshire East children.

## **Practice Development**

- The Adoption Service is working towards improving towards improving and developing links with social workers in Cared for Children's Teams under the new structure. Our aim is to assist in workforce development to improve the quality of adoption work in Cheshire East Council. This will be via input to training and mentoring child care social workers and family support workers.

**Adoption Support**

Our aim is to improve placement stability by developing our Adoption and Special Guardianship support services in order to reduce the number of adoption placement breakdowns. Recruitment to the Adoption Support Team in the new structure is essential to maintaining and developing this service.

The service is working to achieve the council target in adoption: that 7% of children who are in the care of Cheshire East are adopted (or made subject to Special Guardianship Orders) in 2010 – 2011.

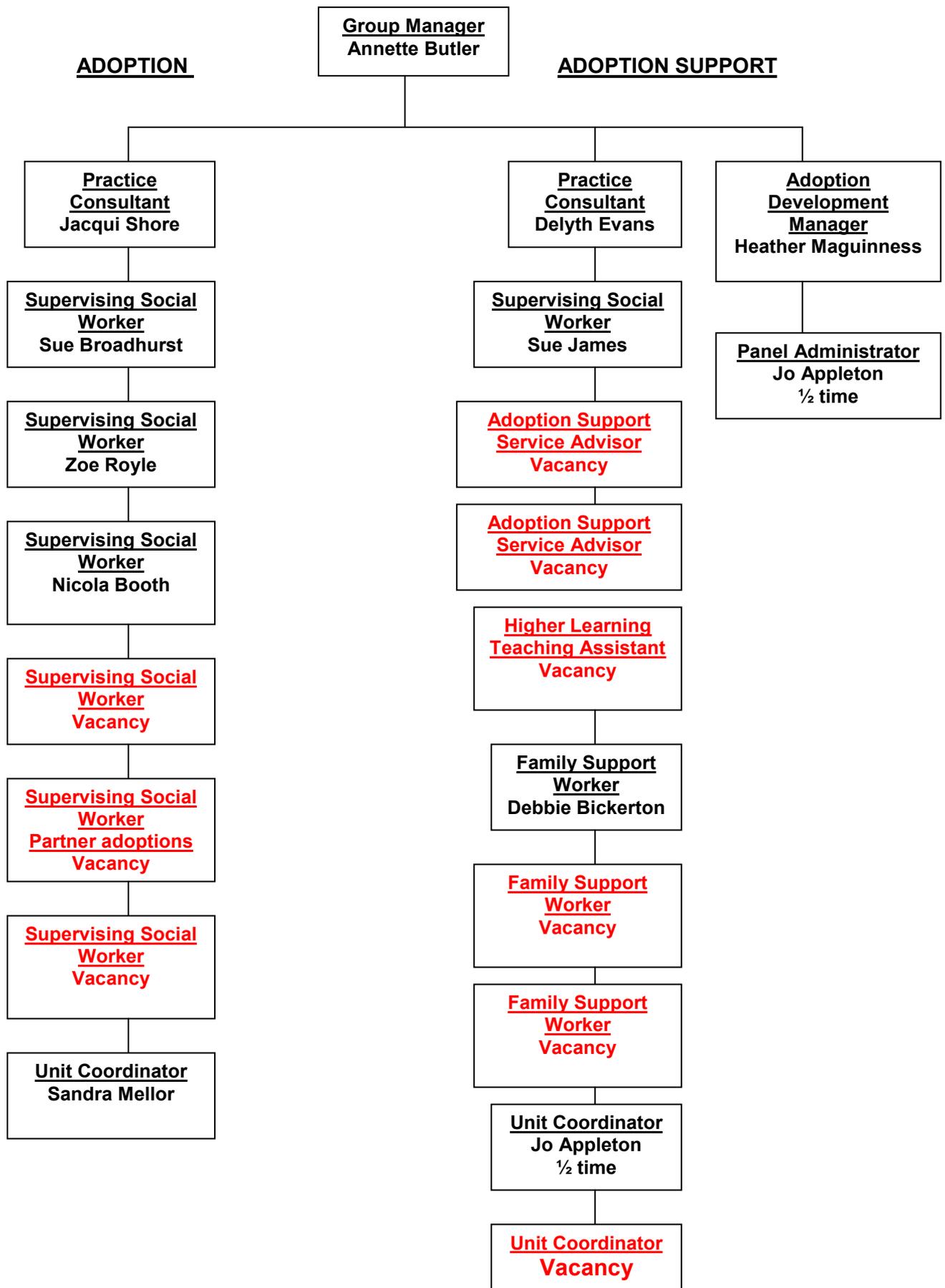
Signed.....  
**(Adoption Development Manager)**

Signed.....  
**(Group Manager, Adoption)**

**July 2010**

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**PROPOSED ADOPTION SERVICE STRUCTURE CHART**



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## **CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

### **REPORT TO: CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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**Date of Meeting:** 27 July 2010  
**Report of:** Borough Solicitor  
**Subject/Title:** Forward Plan

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#### **1.0 Report Summary**

1.1 To consider the current Forward Plan in relation to the remit of this Committee.

#### **2.0 Recommendations**

2.1 That the Committee note the Forward Plan, identify any new items and determine whether any further examination of new issues is appropriate.

#### **3.0 Reasons for Recommendations**

3.1 The Forward Plan can be a useful tool for Scrutiny to assist with identifying future items for consideration.

#### **4.0 Wards Affected**

4.1 All

#### **5.0 Local Ward Members**

5.1 Not applicable.

#### **6.0 Policy Implications including - Climate change - Health**

6.1 Not known at this stage.

#### **7.0 Financial Implications 2010/11**

Not known at this stage.

#### **8.0 Legal Implications (**

9.1 None.

#### **9.0 Risk Management**

91 There are no identifiable risks.

## **10.0 Background and Options**

10.1 Relevant extracts from the Forward Plan that relate to the area of Children and Family services are attached for the Committee to note, consider any new items and decide whether any further examination of new issues is appropriate.

## **11.0 Overview of Year One and Term One Issues**

11.1 It is good practice for Scrutiny to regularly consider the Forward Plan in so far as it relates to the Committee's remit.

## **12.0 Access to Information**

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

Name: Mark Medderman  
Designation: Senior Scrutiny Officer  
Tel No: 01270 686459  
Email: [mark.nedderman@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:mark.nedderman@cheshireeast.gov.uk)

Forward Plan 1 August 2010 to 30 November 2010

<b>Key Decision</b>	<b>Decisions to be Taken</b>	<b>Decision Maker</b>	<b>Expected Date of Decision</b>	<b>Proposed Consultation</b>	<b>How to make representation to the decision made</b>
CE09/10-37 Review of Children's Homes Provision	To decide how children's homes placements will be provided to ensure good outcomes for cared for children in Cheshire East.	Cabinet	16 Aug 2010	Children and Families Scrutiny Committee and the Children in Care Council.	John Weeks, Strategic Director People

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## **CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

### **REPORT TO: CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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**Date of Meeting:** 27 July 2010  
**Report of:** Borough Solicitor  
**Subject/Title:** Work Programme update

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#### **1.0 Report Summary**

- 1.1 To review items in the 2009/2010 Work Programme, to consider new items listed in the schedule attached, together with any other items suggested by Committee Members.

#### **2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the work programme be received and noted.

#### **3.0 Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1 It is good practice to agree and review the Work Programme to enable effective management of the Committee's business.

#### **4.0 Wards Affected**

- 4.1 All

#### **5.0 Local Ward Members**

- 5.1 Not applicable.

#### **6.0 Policy Implications including - Climate change - Health**

- 6.1 Not known at this stage.

#### **7.0 Financial Implications for Transition Costs**

- 7.1 None identified at the moment.

#### **8.0 Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)**

- 8.1 None.

#### **9.0 Risk Management**

9.1 There are no identifiable risks.

## **10.0 Background and Options**

10.1 The Committee approved its work programme at its meeting held on 1 June 2010 and revised it slightly at its previous meeting held on 29 June 2010. By the time the Committee meets, the work programme will have been shared with colleagues in cabinet at an informal briefing meeting held on 19 July 2010, and any changes suggested by Cabinet Members will be reported to this meeting.

10.4 The schedule attached, has been updated in line with the Committees recommendations on 29 June. Following this meeting the document will be updated so that all the appropriate targets will be included within the schedule.

10.5 In reviewing the work programme, Members must have regard to the general criteria which should be applied to all potential items when considering whether any Scrutiny activity is appropriate. Matters should be assessed against the following criteria:

- Does the issue fall within a corporate priority
- Is the issue of key interest to the public
- Does the matter relate to a poor or declining performing service for which there is no obvious explanation
- Is there a pattern of budgetary overspends
- Is it a matter raised by external audit management letters and or audit reports?
- Is there a high level of dissatisfaction with the service

10.6 If during the assessment process any of the following emerge, then the topic should be rejected:

- The topic is already being addressed elsewhere
- The matter is subjudice
- Scrutiny cannot add value or is unlikely to be able to conclude an investigation within the specified timescale

10.7

**11.0 Access to Information**

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

Name: Mark Nedderman  
Designation: Senior Scrutiny Officer  
Tel No: 01270 686459  
Email: [mark.nedderman@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:mark.nedderman@cheshireeast.gov.uk)

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### Children and Families Work Programme July 2010

Issue	Description / Comment	Suggested by	Portfolio Holder	Corporate Priority	Current Position(R,A,G)	Date
Safeguarding and Redesign of Children's Services	Committee to be kept updated on the current position with the redesign - Challenges and Opportunities, emerging work programme, update on redesign of integrated service delivery - and given the opportunity to comment	Committee	H Gaddum	Separate Safeguarding from Redesign of Children's Services, but keep as a standard item on agendas to receive regular updates	Committee receives regular updates	On-going
Performance reporting	(key exceptions – red/amber and explanations/commentary) to include adoption rates, staffing information and profile of children in Cheshire East	Committee	H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	Continue with a 3 monthly basis of reporting but if any red flags are identified, a full explanation of the background be given at every meeting	Every quarter
Corporate Parenting	Training event	Committee	H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	<b>Completed, but as there are new Members, this training session be repeated and offered again to all Members of the Committee.</b>	TBA
Inspections	Committee to be informed of the outcome of any relevant inspections	Head of Children	H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	Regular reports from Members who have undertaken Regulation	TBA

Children's Services Performance rating	Report on Performance rating				33 visits  <b>Also, regular agenda item to update the Committee on progress on post-inspection action plan.</b>	6 Monthly
Youth Offending Inspection	YOS Action plan to be considered at a future meeting					
Fostering Inspection	Report on the outcome from inspection					
Review of Residential Provision	Task/Finish Group set up and underway	Head of Children and Families/Portfolio Holder	H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	Review nearing completion – see covering report for update.	Final Report expected July 2010
Family Support Services	Task/Finish Group set up	Head of Children and Families/Portfolio Holder	H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East attainment	3 meetings held, next meeting on 1 June 2010	Final report expected December 2010
School Admissions Policy	Formerly TLC. Review completed	Head of Children and Families	H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	Committee to be consulted when policies called for in the report prepared by this Committee are developed.	As appropriate
Education Attainment	Headlines submitted when available and detailed analysis to follow	Committee	H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	Set up Task and Finish Group to review the work of the multi agency improvement and achievement group	To be set up after completion of Family Support Group

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Early Years Funding Reform	Consultation	Cabinet	H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	Arrange a briefing by the Children's directorate on the national formula and the pathfinder status of Cheshire East.	July 2010
Post 16 Transfer of Funding to Local authorities		Head Of Children	H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	No further action recommended at the moment. Put on reserved list for possible action	On hold
Children's centres	Investigation into the role and purpose of Childrens Centres	Committee	H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	Included in the scope of task and finish Group on Family Support Services	
Transport for Young People	Access arrangements for young people in education and/or employment.	Committee	H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	Arrangements be made for a presentation at a future meeting and provisional Task and Finish Group be set up in the Autumn	TBA
Draft Children's plan/ children's trust	Presentation on current position	Committee	H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	Further training agreed at the meeting held on 18 January 2010	TBA, but ASAP

Teenage Pregnancy Reduction	Committee to be kept updated on action taken as a result of the visit by the National support team		H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	Report be submitted on the action plan.	Completed
Budget	Scrutiny Consulted on draft budget 2010/2011		H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	Committee represented on Budget Consultation Group preparing for the 2011/12 Budget. Chairman to provide regular update reports to Committee.	Ongoing
Analysis of School Performance	Connected with the Educational attainment item	Committee	P Findlow	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	To be included in School attainment (as above)	
School Status Report	New Government policies could significantly influence the status of schools and the relationship with the LEA.		H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	Presentation to future meeting on current status	TBA
IT Systems	Review of IT systems as they relate to the redesign of children's services	Committee 22 March 2010	H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	In clued a section on Children's IT systems such as PARIS as part of the briefing on Redesign of Children's Services	TBA
Foster Services	Review of adequacy	Committee 22 March 2010	H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable	Set up Task and Finish Group	To be set up after the

				people in Cheshire East		completion of the Residential provision Task and Finish Group
Connexions – Value for money	Investigation recommended in light of funding reductions in the North West	P Findlow	H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	A Full meeting be reserved to deal with Connexions, in terms of the services provided and the commissioning role of the Council	16 September 2010
Every Child matters	Re visit	Chairman	H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	Refresher training session to be arranged	TBA
NEET's –	Availability of schemes for college places entry into employment etc	Councillor Beckford	H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	Include as part of the review of connexions	TBA
School Admissions Regulations	Overview of the Regulations	Committee	H Gaddum	Supporting and Protecting our young and vulnerable people in Cheshire East	Presentation	27 July 2010

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