

Children and Families Scrutiny Committee

Agenda

Date: Tuesday, 14th February, 2012
Time: 1.30 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.

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

1. **Apologies for Absence**

2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting** (Pages 1 - 6)

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2012.

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.

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.

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: Mark Grimshaw
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5. **Cabinet response to Fostering Task and Finish Review** (Pages 7 - 58)

To consider a report of the Strategic Director of Children, Families and Adults.

6. **The future of careers advice, targeted youth support and update on Connexions.**

To consider a presentation of the Head of Service - Early Intervention & Prevention.

7. **Family Support** (Pages 59 - 64)

To consider a report of the Head of Service - Early Intervention & Prevention.

8. **School Admissions Code and Admissions Appeal Code 2012** (Pages 65 - 70)

To receive a briefing on the changes introduced in the revised School Admissions Code and the Admissions Appeal Code 2012 which came into force on 1 February 2012.

9. **Work Programme update** (Pages 71 - 84)

To give consideration to the work programme.

10. **Forward Plan - extracts** (Pages 85 - 86)

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

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, 17th January, 2012 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor A Kolker (Chairman)
Councillor K Edwards (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors L Brown, S Gardiner, P Hoyland, D Mahon, D Neilson, W Livesley, G Merry, G Wait, B Silvester and S Hogben

Apologies

Councillors M Sherratt

In Attendance

Councillors H Gaddum, R Bailey, D Flude and S Corcoran.

Officers

Chris Williams – Integrated Transport Manager
Fintan Bradley – Head of Strategy, Planning and Performance
Cath Knowles – Head of Service – Social Care
Mark Grimshaw – Scrutiny Officer

128 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2011 be approved as a correct record.

129 DECLARATION OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

With regard to Item 5: Home to School Transport, Councillors Gardiner and Mahon declared a personal interest on the virtue that they were members of the Roman Catholic Church.

130 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

Mr. McHugh, Headteacher at St. Thomas More RC High School, attended to comment on item 5: Home to School Transport. He asserted that he felt the Task and Finish Group had not fully understood a faith based education as there was no recognition in the report that faith schools were different. He stated that he didn't accept that attending a faith school was a choice, as it was more a way of life.

Mr. McHugh continued to argue that there was no compelling financial evidence in the report to justify removing the denominational subsidy as there were no

comparative costings to back up assumed savings. He welcomed the recommendation to devolve the transport budget to schools but suggested that this should be done through a pilot to test whether or not it would be successful. He also noted that schools would need help and assistance from the Council if such a scheme was to prove a success. As a final point, Mr. McHugh commended the Minority Report to the Committee.

Mr. Fagan a parent of a disabled boy who once was in receipt of services at Priors Hill, attended to comment on item 7: Disabled Respite Care. Mr. Fagan explained that he attended a meeting of the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee in the previous year about his concerns around the closure of the Langley Unit in Priors Hill. He wished to note that the alternative arrangements that had been made by the officers of the Council had been highly satisfactory and that he thanked them for this. He continued to draw attention to SEN transport which was referred to in item 5 in order to add a parental perspective. He explained that his child used to get a personal taxi but now had access to a shared mini bus which was difficult to use. He acknowledged therefore that whilst taxis were not always appropriate, the Council should be aware of going from one extreme to another.

Representatives from Ruby's Fund attended. They explained that the mission of Ruby's Fund was to open a multi-sensory studio for those with additional needs in Congleton. It was noted that the initiative had been highly successful but that they were impeded with opening the studio by the lack of a suitable premises. Congleton Business Centre had been identified as an ideal location but the fund had been disappointed to learn that it was to be sold by the Council. The Committee was asked therefore whether any help could be provided for their cause. Councillor Hilda Gaddum suggested that she met the representatives outside of the meeting to discuss the issue in more detail.

131 **HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT TASK AND FINISH REVIEW**

The Committee considered both the report of the Task and Finish Group and the Minority Report from Councillor Louise Brown. Arguments for and against each were put forward by the respective Members of the Committee and other Councillors.

The Chairman at the beginning of the item had noted that both reports would be put forward to Cabinet but suggested that the Committee should vote on which report would be endorsed. Seven Members voted in favour of the Minority Report, with five voting for the report of the Task and Finish Group. There was one abstention. As a result, it was decided that the Minority Report would be commended to Cabinet.

RESOLVED –

- a) That both the report of the Task and Finish Group and the Minority Report be put forward for consideration by Cabinet.
- b) That the Minority Report be endorsed by the Committee.

132 **ACADEMIES THE IMPACT ON CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

Fintan Bradley, Head of Strategy, Planning and Performance, attended to provide an update on the number of conversions of maintained schools within Cheshire East to Academy status. He also outlined the financial consequences of these conversions on the Council.

The Committee was asked to consider the information within the report and provide guidance on the approach to be taken in terms of the services provided to both maintained and Academy Schools at a differentiated cost.

Outlining the pattern of conversions, Fintan Bradley reported that to date, eight schools within Cheshire East had converted to Academy status (7 secondary's and 2 primaries) and one school had achieved Free School Status.

It was explained that these conversions were starting to have significant financial implications for the Council. Very simply, it was explained that local authorities received funding for central services provided to schools from two main funding streams – The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and the Formula Grant. Academies no longer were entitled to free of charge services from the local authority and were therefore compensated through the LACSEG (Local Authority Central Spend Equivalent Grant). Central Government, recognising that there was an issue of double funding with this system sought to reduce the amount paid to local authorities through the DSG and Formula Grant. The Department for Education's (DfE) view was that it was reasonable to conclude that local authorities should be able to make savings which were commensurate with the reduction in responsibilities which a transfer of schools to Academy status entails, and which was commensurate with the cost to the DfE of providing LACSEG. Fintan Bradley explained that this was an overly simplistic analysis as Cheshire East still had a number of statutory responsibilities that related to Academies e.g. SEN which would have to be funded with an eroded budget.

With this funding pressure in mind, Fintan Bradley outlined an opportunity that Cheshire East had to start trading with Academies in the market place for providing central services. Advice was sought from the Committee as to how this relationship might function. For instance it was queried whether the Council should open itself up to the risk of trading and if so, whether it should trade at margin which provided a surplus.

A number of comments were made regarding the potential of the Council providing services to Academies. All Members agreed that the Council should trade for profit in order to cover risk. It was stated that the Council should make full advantage of its extensive knowledge and experience in providing such services. It was noted that the Council would need to make sure that if they chose to go down this route that supported schools received the same level of service as Academy schools who were buying it in. Fintan Bradley, acknowledged that this would be a challenge.

A number of concerns were also expressed with regard to the changing relationship between the Council and Academy status schools. In particular a number of comments were made about the performance monitoring arrangements. Fintan Bradley acknowledged that this was a valid concern but reassured the Committee that the Council had maintained close relationships with the Academies and that work was on-going to ensure effective data sharing. It was also noted that as high achieving Academies were no longer included in the school performance data for Cheshire East, there could be the false perception from the public that our schools' performance had worsened. It was asserted that

it was vital that the service considered Public Relations initiatives around this issue to rebuff such false perceptions.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the Committee support the department in providing services to Academies at competitive market rates.
- b) That the Committee have sight of the packages being offered to Academies prior to them being put on the market and that the Committee be involved in the monitoring of their efficacy.
- c) That it be recommended to the service that they consider Public Relations initiatives with regard to the possible false perception of Cheshire East school performance decreasing as a result of the loss of high performing Academies from the data set.

133 **DISABLED RESPITE CARE**

Cath Knowles, Head of Service – Social Care, attended to provide a verbal update on disabled respite care. She explained that since the closure of the Langley Unit at Priors Hill, a number of packages had been put in place for those children and young people who had been affected. She confirmed that these had been deemed satisfactory by parents.

Cath Knowles continued to note that the Council was exploring options around providing a stand alone respite facility in Cheshire East. Additionally the Council was also looking to improve transition arrangements between children's and adult's respite services. Cath Knowles reported that this process had already been aided by the joining of the respective Directorates and that the potential for natural synergies were still being discovered. It was suggested that a report could be brought to a future meeting outlining this work.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the update be noted.
- b) That a report outlining future respite care options and the improved transition between children's and adult's respite care be brought to a subsequent meeting.
- c) That thanks be extended to Cath Knowles and her team for all their hard work in achieving a positive outcome in challenging circumstances.

134 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

Members considered the work programme. It was suggested that it was necessary for the Committee to consider the 2012/13 budget proposals prior to the budget being agreed at Council on 23 February 2012. It was agreed therefore that a special meeting be arranged for this purpose. Attention was also drawn to the possibility of some early intervention funding moving from local authority control to the police. It was suggested that this issue be added to the work programme for future consideration.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the work programme be noted
- b) That a special meeting be arranged to consider the 2012/13 budget proposals prior to the 23 February 2012.
- c) That an item regarding the transfer of an element of the early intervention budget from local authority to police control be added to the work programme.

135 **FORWARD PLAN - EXTRACTS**

The Committee gave consideration to the extracts of the forward plan which fell within the remit of the Committee. It was suggested that Admission Arrangements item be considered by the Committee prior to the Cabinet decision scheduled for 2 April 2012.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the forward plan be noted
- b) That the item regarding Admission Arrangements be considered by the Committee prior to the 2 April 2012.

136 **CONSULTATIONS FROM CABINET**

There were no consultations from Cabinet.

The meeting commenced at 1.30 pm and concluded at 4.20 pm

Councillor A Kolker (Chairman)

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December 2010 – April 2011

Overview and Scrutiny Review
Children and Families Scrutiny Committee

Fostering Services Review

For further information, please contact
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1.0 Foreword

Councillor D Flude – Chairman of the Task and Finish Group

- 1.1 Any child coming into the care system is obviously an undesirable outcome. Evidence from this and other reviews suggest the least worst result is that, where appropriate, a child be placed in a family environment – most notably in a foster placement. Considering this, this review has endeavoured to investigate whether all is being done to make sure that every Cheshire East cared for child has the opportunity to go to a Cheshire East foster placement.
- 1.2 From the onset of this review it became abundantly clear that we have some excellent staff doing some innovative work, particularly in relieving Cheshire East of some cumbersome legacy policies from Cheshire County Council which no longer are fit for purpose. However, with any service in transition there is going to be room for improvement. We hope that our recommendations can be taken on board to make these improvements, particularly around systems, processes and performance monitoring and of course, making our foster carers feel valued.
- 1.3 It must be noted that this has been a somewhat difficult review. It is a complex, multifaceted area and we only had some very short time scales for completion. With this in mind, some of the recommendations from this review suggest that further reviews 'branch off' in order to investigate important issues that this Group uncovered but did not have the time to pursue. Furthermore, I would like to draw attention to my fellow Councillors and the officers of the fostering service who often gave up their time at very short notice to make sure that this vital review was completed on time. A full list of those involved can be found in the main body of this report.
- 1.4 We commend the report to the Cabinet and request that it be given full and fair consideration.

2 Acknowledgements

- 2.1 The group members would like to thank all the witnesses who gave evidence to the review. A full list of witnesses is given in the body of the report.
- 2.2 In particular, Members would like to thank Julie Lewis for the admirable way she guided the group through the review. Without her expertise the task would have been impossible.
- 2.4 The scrutiny support was provided by Mark Grimshaw from Overview and Scrutiny. Many thanks to Mark for his help in putting together the evidence and formatting the report.

3.0 Executive Summary

- 3.1 Following previous Task and Finish groups that had focused on cared for children, it had become increasingly clear that placing a vulnerable child in a family setting was the best outcome. This review set out to discover whether this was actually the case and whether all was being done to maximise the possibility of a cared for child having that opportunity.
- 3.2 Whilst the Group are now certainly sure of the former, it became apparent that there are some areas of improvement in terms of maximising the opportunity for a cared for child to have a stable Cheshire East foster placement. This is not to say that the Group did not find any examples of excellent practice. On the contrary, every officer and carer that the Group interviewed gave the overriding impression that they were doing everything they could to provide the best service possible for our cared for children. Having said this, as with all well performing services, there is always room for improvement and the Group feel that the recommendations outlined here will assist the service in making those improvements.
- 3.3 After designing a wide-ranging and comprehensive research programme the Group's findings fell naturally into the following main themes:
- Recruitment of foster carers – including improving choice by increasing the diversity and range of placements.
 - Retention of foster carers – including support, training and payment to improve placement stability
 - Educational attainment for those in foster care
 - The health and wellbeing of children and young people in foster care
 - The successful transition of young people leaving care
 - Systems and administrative processes with the Foster Care Service.
 - Link to early intervention agenda.
- 3.4 A number of these themes do not exist in isolation from each other. Indeed, they are all part of the same issue with a number of cross-cutting and recurrent themes. For instance, an increase in the amount of foster carers recruited would result in less pressure on existing carers, reducing placement disruption and improving retention. Similarly, the work of partners in health and education plays a big part in reducing disruption and resignations.
- 3.5 On the whole, the Group would like to draw attention to the importance of improving systems and administrative processes including a robust performance monitoring programme. This was highlighted during a site visit to Stoke-on-Trent City Council in which they attributed their rapid improvements to better systems, both with internal and external bodies.
- 3.6 Similarly, it is vital that Cheshire East do more to make our foster carers feel valued – from the moment they approach the service to when they eventually retire. They need to be seen as the professionals they are and treated as such.

The full list of recommendations is below:

Recommendations

- 3.7 That all staff involved in the Fostering & Adoption service be situated on a single site, where appropriate.
- 3.8 That in line with the corporate parenting strategy, all corporate policies must consider their impact on cared for children.
- 3.9 That consideration be given to a renewed focus on recruitment and assessment of mainstream foster carers in order to ensure that Cheshire East Council meets its sufficiency requirements.
- 3.10 That Cheshire East continues to provide support and resources for the recruitment of foster carers.
- 3.11 That the process from initial expression of interest to approval by panel be given a speedy, yet achievable timescale from which clear milestones are communicated to both prospective carers and staff throughout the development of the application.
- 3.12 That prospective carers moving through the application process be paired with an experienced carer as a mentor.
- 3.13 That an investigation be carried out to assess the viability of creating a budget to enable Cheshire East to pay commercial mortgage rates for home modifications in order to allow prospective carers take on their first or additional placements.
- 3.14 That the information from placement request forms in terms of demand in particular placements be made available to the recruitment officer to inform the marketing strategy.
- 3.15 That 'disruption meetings' along the lines of the Stoke-on-Trent model be held with foster placements that have been identified as being at risk of disruption.
- 3.16 That experienced foster carers be used in delivering training sessions or work shops to make best use of their professional skills.
- 3.17 That a budget be made available for the service to either purchase a small library of publications from the Safer Foster Carer Network for the use of foster carers or to explore web-based training opportunities.
- 3.18 That training be provided for the safe handling of Children in Care.
- 3.19 That financial support be maintained for carers attending training events.
- 3.20 That support and resources for the Cared For Children's Support Team be maintained.
- 3.21 That the possibility of making links with Cheshire East Leisure Facilities under the auspices of the Corporate Parenting Strategy be investigated to provide respite breaks using the same principles of the Dreamwall project. Within this, that the possibility of reciprocal relationships with adjacent authorities be explored in terms of respite facilities – particularly for Cheshire East children placed out-of-Borough.

- 3.22 That Cheshire East formalises the on-going support that foster carers provide for themselves in partnership with appropriate fostering networks.
- 3.23 That the possibility of links being made with the family support service to assist with out-of-hours support for foster carers be investigated. In addition, that the service explore the possibility of commissioning an out-of-hours support line.
- 3.24 That the awards night be continued, currently undertaken by the Cheshire Foster Carer Association, to recognise the achievements of our Children in Care and the contributions of our foster carers.
- 3.25 That foster carers be provided with the contact details of their local Councillors.
- 3.26 That a 'starter pack' be produced for each new placement which provides the requisite information about the child/young person with a small, flexible budget.
- 3.27 That support and resources for the Virtual School be maintained including the Personal Educational Allowance, Education Support Fund and educational psychologists.
- 3.28 That a comprehensive register of the appropriateness of out-of-Borough educational settings is compiled with a rigorous quality assurance programme put in place to monitor it.
- 3.29 That the Virtual School provides training to teachers so that they provide an appropriate level of support for Cared for Children and assist in any transitional processes between settings.
- 3.30 That a Task and Finish Review be established to examine the processes, systems and staffing issues around health and Cared for Children.
- 3.31 That a new electronic recording system be purchased to ensure seamless information sharing between children's and adult's services.
- 3.32 That links are made with Registered Social Landlords to secure decent housing for care leavers, particularly in the Macclesfield area.
- 3.33 That a fit-for-purpose facility be procured so to curtail the practice of 'sofa-surfing' and to assist in the training of young people as they prepare for independence.
- 3.34 That Cheshire East pays a retainer to Foster Carers for keeping open a placement for a young person at university.
- 3.35 That strong performance monitoring systems be put in place and embedded throughout the fostering service.
- 3.36 That exit interviews be conducted on all foster carers who resign from the service and the resulting information be analysed for trends.
- 3.37 That links are made, whenever possible, with the early intervention agenda – particularly with the SureStart programme.
- 3.38 That Cheshire East's payment rates be constantly tracked against and compared to our geographical and statistical neighbours

- 3.39 That a business case be commissioned which investigates the benefit cost ratio of investing in fostering services to reduce dependency on residential placements and IFAs.
- 3.40 That a Task and Finish Review be established to examine the 16 plus service for cared for children.

4.0 **Outline of Review**

4.1 **Background**

Following a previous Task and Finish Review which looked at Residential Provision in Cheshire East, a recommendation was made that –

“All Cared for Children should be placed within a family setting wherever possible and that sufficient resources are targeted at the fostering service to ensure sufficient capacity is available”

As a result, the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee at a mid-point meeting on the 16 November 2010 agreed that a review which looked in more detail at the resources and capacity of the fostering services would be appropriate. In a time of austerity and difficult decisions, the Committee felt it imperative that the Borough’s most vulnerable are made a priority and that the services which support them are performing optimally. The Task and Finish Group, its Membership, Chairmanship and terms of reference were all agreed and ratified at the Committee meeting on 7 December 2010.

4.2 **Membership**

The Members of the Task and Finish Group were:

Councillor Dorothy Flude (Chairman)
Councillor David Neilson
Councillor Andrew Kolker
Councillor Tony Ranfield
Councillor Gillian Merry
Councillor Bill Livesley

4.3 **Terms of Reference**

- To ensure that Cheshire East has a stable fostering service
- To ensure a good match between foster carer and child.
- To create a service which is able to recognise the different levels of fostering care and one that is able to deliver a ‘bespoke’ service based fundamentally on assessed need.
- To make sure that Cheshire East is doing everything it can to recruit and retain foster carers
- To ensure that foster carers are sufficiently supported emotionally and financially.
- To ensure that all foster carers are trained with the relevant and necessary skills
- To improve links with other authorities to assist in supporting foster carers.
- To ensure that the fostering service aligns itself with the wider early intervention agenda to ensure a holistic system of care is achieved.
- To improve the value for money of current residential provision by following the principle of ‘invest to save’ by re-directing budgets towards fostering services.

5.0 **Methodology**

5.1 **Witnesses:**

Members met with the following people during the review:

- **Julie Lewis** – Principal Manager, Cared for Children
- **Judy Bell** – Group Manager, Fostering Services East, Cheshire Shared Services
- **Sue Ferguson** - Chair of Fostering Panel
- **Diane Grant** - Supervising Social Worker for Private Fostering
- **Sophie Almond** - Unit Co-ordinator, Fostering Duty Desk
- **Gail Holbrook** - Practice Consultant, Fostering Duty Desk
- **Stephen Kelly** - Recruitment Officer, Fostering & Adoption
- **Beverley Grainger** - Training Officer, Fostering & Adoption
- **Liz Lyne** - Practice Consultant, Panel Advisor
- **Phil Mellen** - Head of Virtual School
- **Berenice Astbury** - Designated Nurse for Cared for Children
- **Alison Mason** - Group Manager for Care Planning
- **Sheila Williams** - Designated Nurse for Cared for Children
- **Dawn Mack** - Sandbach Health Visitor
- **Karen Bowdler** - Accountant for Children's Services
- **James Treacy** - Independence Advisor, Young People
- **Colin Freeth** - Practice Consultant, Placement Team
- **Councillor Hilda Gaddum** – Portfolio Holder, Children and Family Services

5.2 Visits:

- Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Fostering Service – from being in special measures in 2007 to receiving an 'Outstanding report' in 2011.
- Park Foster Care (private agency)
- Children in Care Council
- Two foster homes (one experienced and one newly approved)

5.4 Timeline:

Date	Meeting / Site Visit
13/12/2010	Initial Meeting to define terms of reference
14/01/2011	Briefing session
25/01/2011	Meeting with Chair of the Fostering Panel
27/01/2011	Meeting with Fostering Duty Desk
28/01/2011	Meeting with Recruitment Officer, Training Officer and Practice Consultant, Panel Advisor
04/02/2011	Meeting with Head of Virtual School, Designated Nurse for Cared for Children and Group Manager for Cared for Planning
11/02/2011	Meeting with Designated Nurse for Cared for Children and Health Visitor for Sandbach
18/02/2011	Site Visit to Stoke-on-Trent City Council's fostering service
21/02/2011	Site Visit to Park Foster Care (Private Agency)
24/02/2011	Q&A session with the Children in Care Council
25/02/2011	Catch up session with Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services.
04/03/2011	Meeting with the accountant for Children and Family Services
14/03/2011	Meeting with Practice Consultant – Placement Team
09/03/2011	Site Visit to two foster care homes

18/03/2011	Meeting with Independence Advisor – Young People
22/03/2011	Meeting with Supervising Social Worker for Private Fostering
25/03/2011	Review of Draft Report
01/04/2011	Report to finalised for submission to Children and Families Scrutiny Committee
12/04/2011	Presented to Children and Families Scrutiny Committee

6.0 Jargon Busting¹

6.1 ‘Looked after children’ / ‘children in care’

6.1.1 The term children in care includes: all children being looked after by a local authority; those subject to a care order under section 31 of the Children Act 1989 (see below); and those looked after by a voluntary agreement with their parents under section 20 of that Act. They may be looked after by family members, foster carers or staff in a residential children’s home. Children and young people from overseas become ‘looked after’ if they have no one with parental responsibility in this country.

6.2 Children ‘at risk’ of harm

6.2.1 These are children about whom there are concerns that they are or may be at risk of suffering harm through abuse or neglect. Children considered ‘at risk’ have a Child Protection Plan which should be regularly reviewed.

6.3 ‘Children in need’

6.3.1 Children in need are a wider group of children and young people who have been assessed as needing the help of services to achieve a reasonable standard of health or development. They have a Child in Need Plan to address the difficulties identified in the assessment.

6.4 ‘Care leavers’

6.4.1 Care leavers are those who have been in public care for at least 13 weeks from the age of 14 onwards and therefore qualify for services to support them once they leave. This may be at 16 or up until 24 if they remain in full-time education.

6.5 Care Order – Section 31 Children Act 1989

6.5.1 Care Orders are made by the court if a ‘threshold of significant’ harm is reached and there is no likelihood of improvement in the standard of care provided for a young person. The local authority then shares parental responsibility with the parent(s) and can make the decisions that a parent would normally make. A Care Order expires when the young person reaches 18 (or sometimes 19) years of age, or when an Adoption Order is made and the child is permanently adopted.

6.6 Interim Care Order – Section 38 Children Act 1989

6.6.1 If the local authority is concerned that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer ‘significant harm’, they can apply to the court for an Interim Care Order, which is

¹ Taken from ‘10 Questions to ask if you’re scrutinising services for looked after children’ [LGI&D and CfPS](#)

a time-limited order renewed while care proceedings for the child continue through the courts and other authorities.

6.7 Emergency Protection Order Section 44 Children Act 1989

6.7.1 An Emergency Protection Order removes a child into accommodation provided by or on behalf of the local authority and is granted by the court if there is reasonable cause to believe that the child is likely to suffer significant immediate harm.

6.8 Children in Care Councils

6.8.1 The Care Matters White Paper and the subsequent Act required local authorities to set up a Children in Care Council to enable regular, good quality dialogue and involvement in developing and delivering services. There should also be mechanisms in place for involving young people in care in the recruitment of key staff members, such as the Director of Children's Services. The local Children in Care Council will be responsible for helping develop and monitor the implementation of the Pledge to children and young people about the care they receive.

6.9 Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs)

6.10 Fostering Panel

6.11 The membership and functions of Fostering Panels are laid down in the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The role of the panel is to scrutinise the assessments and reports presented by the fostering service provider to ensure that they are thorough, fair, and transparent and that the conclusions and recommendations are properly evidenced. The panel also has a quality assurance role to evaluate the quality of reports, and to comment on any area of the service which they consider relevant.

7.0 Review Findings

7.1 Introduction

7.2.1 Children in Care of a local authority are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. The majority of children in care are there because they have suffered abuse or neglect. At any one time around 60,000 children are looked after in England, a trend which continues to be on an upward curve with cases becoming ever more complex and resource intensive.

7.2.2 Whilst these children and young people are placed in various types of care, including residential care and specialist care placements, it is widely recognised that for many, foster care is the preferred option. As it is closest to a family environment, the outcomes for those placed in foster care can be more positive than for those in other types of care placement. Additionally, foster care placements cost substantially less than residential placements, a not inconsequential fact considering the difficult economic climate and ever increasing demand on social care resources. For these reasons, and in particular the former, the Group felt that foster care should be the preferred care option for most children, where deemed appropriate.

7.2.3 Considering this, Members partaking in the review felt that it was important to find out whether all was being done by Cheshire East to maximise its ability to meet the demand on foster placements. Realising that increasing the number, diversity and range of placements has a direct impact on reducing the dependency on residential placements and private foster agencies, we endeavoured to analyse the recruitment of foster carers and their subsequent retention. Evaluating the retention of foster carers led naturally to an interest in how they are supported, not only by the services within Cheshire East but also by partner authorities in education and health. Whilst obviously interested in how these services work for foster carers, it was also felt important to consider their impact on the children and young people themselves.

7.2.4 Prior to starting the research process and getting answers to these questions, it was deemed vital that we fully understood the situation and context in Cheshire East.

8.0 Foster Care in Cheshire East

8.1.1 In line with the national picture, the number of cared for children in Cheshire East peaked in October/November 2010 as a result of concerns following a number of national high profile and well documented child protection cases. Cheshire East has been able to stabilise the service and as a result, there has been a gradual decrease in the number of children in care, illustrated in the table below.

Month	Number	Month	Number	Month	Number	Month	Number	Month	Number
March 2009	352	September 2009	394	March 2010	440	September 2010	472	11/03/11	447
April 2009	350	October 2009	399	April 2010	437	October 2010	472		
May 2009	352	November 2009	413	May 2010	438	November 2010	453		
June 2009	362	December 2009	418	June 2010	442	December 2010	447		
July 2009	376	January 2010	432	July 2010	451	January 2011	443		
August 2009	390	February 2010	435	August 2010	456	February 2011	447		

8.1.2 These 447 children are placed in a variety of different settings, the majority of which are foster placements. The table below fully illustrates the placement type breakdown.

Placement Type	0-4	5-10	11-15	16+	Total	%
Relative/Friend	20	25	17	5	67	15
CE Foster Care	36	36	49	22	143	32
CW&C Foster Care	0	1	2	1	4	0.9
Independent Foster Care	32	32	20	13	97	22
CE Home	0	1	6	2	9	2
CW&C Home	0	0	0	0	0	0
Independent Home	0	1	11	10	22	4.9
Placed with parents	22	28	11	2	63	14
Independent living / Friends	0	0	0	7	7	1.6
NHS/health Trust	0	1	0	1	2	0.4
Residential School	0	0	5	2	7	1.6
Residential accommodation	0	0	0	4	4	0.9
Young offenders institute	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mum & Baby unit	5	0	0	0	5	1
Adoption	11	6	0	0	17	3.8
Woman's Refuge	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	126	131	121	69	447	100

8.1.3 Although not wholly within the remit of this review, attention was drawn to the relatively high number of children placed with parents (63). The Group were informed that increased attempts will be made in future practice to revoke care orders, where appropriate, in a more timely way. This will then free up further social work resources for other placement types, particularly foster care placements and help the service to reduce the number of cared for children back to pre September/October 2010 levels.

8.1.4 The following tables show Cheshire East 'Foster Carer Approvals' and 'Foster Carer Resignation and De-Registration' since April 2010.

Foster Carer Approvals – (n) denotes placement(s) created

	Respite	Family and Friends	Mainstream	Total
April 10	1(1)	1(1)	0	2(2)
May 10	0	2(3)	0	2(3)
Jun 10	0	3(4)	0	3(4)
Jul 10	0	4(6)	0	4(6)
Aug 10	0	2(5)	0	2(5)
Sept 10	0	0	3(5)	3(5)
Oct 10	0	0	0	0
Nov 10	(1)	2(2)	0	2(3)
Dec 10	2 (2)	1 (3)	1 (1)	4 (6)
Jan 11	1 (1)	1 (1)	0	2 (2)
Feb 11	0	2 (2)	0	2 (2)
Mar 11				
Total	4 (5)	18 (27)	4 (6)	26 (38)

Foster Carer Resignation and De-Registration Numbers and Reasons - (n) denotes placement(s) lost.

	Ill Health	Retirement	Personal Reasons	Change of Circumstance	Safeguarding Issues	Total
April 10	0	0	0	0	0	0
May 10	1(-3)	0	0	1(-1)	0	2(-4)
Jun 10	0	3(-10)	2(-5)	0	0	5(-15)
Jul 10	0	0	3(-4)	0	0	3(-4)
Aug 10	0	0	1(-2)	0	0	1(-2)
Sept 10	0	1(-3)	1(-1)	3(-3)	0	5(-7)
Oct 10	0	0	1(-1)	1(-2)	0	2(-3)
Nov 10			1(-4)			1(-4)
Dec 10	0	0	2 (-4)	2 (-4)	0	0
Jan 11	0	1 (-2)	2 (-5)	3 (-7)	0	1 (-2)
Feb 11	1 (-1)	2 (-5)	2 (-4)	5 (-10)	1 (-1)	2 (-5)
Mar 11						
Total	2 (-5)	10 (-15)	17(-40)	29(-60)	2 (-5)	10 (-15)

8.1.5 As can be seen there is a deficit between the number of mainstream carers being approved and the number resigning and de-registering. This can partly be explained by Cheshire County Council's legacy policy which was to concentrate on family and friends as carers rather than mainstream carers. Whilst this had been done for good reason, there is feeling that the efficacy of this should be examined, something that is discussed later in this review.

8.1.6 That is not the only reason however and as is congruent with the national picture, there is a real challenge for Cheshire East to reconcile a growing demand for placements in the face of a dwindling supply and competition.

8.1.7 The current budget for the fostering service is set out below. The fostering team's under spend can be explained by a number of staffing vacancies that have yet to be filled. Following the new restructure it is expected that this quota will be fulfilled and the service strengthened as a result. It can also be seen that in terms of fostering allowances, there has been a large overspend. This can be attributed to the fact that Cheshire East inherited a pay formula that was below the Fostering Network recommended amount and therefore had to be rectified. The budget has not yet been adjusted accordingly but it was noted that this was in the process of being evaluated.

Summary of Fostering Budget Forecast				
Centre Name	Budget for 2010-11	Projected Spend (£)	Protected Outturn (£)	Variance (£)
Fostering Team	1,889,545	1,290,117	-599,428	Under
Fostering Allowances	2,592,275	4,588,786	1,996,511	Over
Interagency Fees		86,141	86,141	Over
Fostering Service	4,481,820	5,965,044	1,483,224	Over

8.1.8 With this in mind, the table below highlights Cheshire East's current fostering allowances.

		0-4 Years		16+ years
Basic	(£125.09 x 52)	£6,504.68	(£215.74 x 52)	£11,218.48
Initial Clothing		£264.00		£538.00
Birthday		£125.09		£215.74
Holiday		£312.73		£539.35
Religious		£125.09		£215.74
		£7,331.59		£13,166.51
Disability Allowance	(£137.62 x 52)	£7,156.24	(£237.30 x 52)	£12,339.60
		£7,938.15		£13,166.51
Payment for Skills (per child)				
Band 1	(£62.44 x 52)	£10,578.47		£15,974.19
Band 2	(£93.66 x 52)	£12,201.91		£17,597.63
Band 3	(£156.10 x 52)	£15,448.79		£20,844.51
Salaried Carers	(£421 x 52)	£29,223.59		£34,619.31
Additional Costs paid: School Trips/Holidays School Uniform Ethnic, racial and cultural costs Travel, Telephone & Hospitality Rite of Passage gift - £100				

8.2 Following this brief, Members designed a wide-ranging and comprehensive research programme. After this process, the Review Group's findings fell naturally into the following main themes:

- Recruitment of foster carers – including improving choice by increasing the diversity and range of placements.
- Retention of foster carers – including support, training and payment to improve placement stability
- Educational attainment for those in foster care
- The health and wellbeing of children and young people in foster care
- The successful transition of young people leaving care
- Systems and administrative processes with the Foster Care Service.
- Link to early intervention agenda.

8.2.1 A number of these themes do not exist in isolation from each other. Indeed, they are all part of the same issue with a number of cross-cutting and recurrent themes. For instance, an increase in the amount of foster carers recruited would result in less pressure on existing carers, reducing placement disruption and improving retention. Similarly, the work of partners in health and education plays a big part in reducing disruption and resignations. For the purpose of clarity,

these issues have been put into respective themes with the main arguments outlined in the conclusion.

9.0 Themes

9.1 Recruitment of Foster Carers

9.1.2 There is a shortage of just over 10,000 foster families in the UK so Cheshire East is not alone in being unable to meet demand. This shortage means that Cheshire East is often forced to place children where there is a vacancy rather than where best meets children's needs. Mismatched foster placements are bad for children, their parents and their foster carers and are more likely to disrupt. Not having enough foster families means that children may be forced to change schools and move away from family and friends and for the Cheshire East; it means that we can be forced to place children with expensive private agencies and out of Borough families.

9.1.3 Foster carers who experience the disruption of placements also suffer. If their experiences are particularly negative, it is possible that they may leave the fostering service altogether – further exacerbating the shortage of foster families and the lack of choice of foster placements for children.

9.1.4 Nearly all of the experts that the Group spoke to argued that the larger the pool of foster families, the more likely it is that a good match can be found, in terms of location, culture, language, religion, background, lifestyle and even interests. It's about finding a foster home for a child that feels familiar to them, where they can feel comfortable whether they are there for two weeks, two months or two years.

9.1.5 With this in mind, it is important that Cheshire East reviews its current policy of focusing on recruiting carers from the child's friends and family. As previously mentioned, the Group were made aware that this had been done due to the advantages of keeping a child within their family environment. Whilst the Group would not argue against making attempts to keep a child within their family, there does need to be a step change in recruitment policy so that Cheshire East can offer fully comprehensive and wide ranging placement options. It is likely that a change in family legislation from 1 April 2011 will assist in addressing this.

9.1.6 Advertising and Marketing

9.1.7 Key to any recruitment strategy is how you market and advertise the services that you provide. This is a well versed maxim in the private sector and whilst it may seem inappropriate to be aligning the care of children with a private sector model, the Group are convinced that this is the best way forward in terms of a recruitment strategy, to get the very best outcomes for our cared for children.

9.1.8 In the site visit to Stoke-on-Trent City Council's (henceforth Stoke-on-Trent) fostering service, they outlined how they are running their fostering service recruitment strategy 'like a business' and they continued to assert that this is the only way that local authorities will be able to *manage the market*.

9.1.9 The group were heartened to find that Cheshire East had a recruitment strategy that aligned with these findings. Indeed, since 2009 when there had been no one fulfilling a recruitment role, it was discovered that a new brand identity (FACE – Fostering & Adoption Cheshire East) has been established.

9.1.10 Under this brand identity, a lot of work has been done to strengthen the recruitment process for those interested in becoming foster carers or in adopting.

For instance, a dedicated stand-alone website and dedicated fostering and adoption hotline have been purchased and a number of events have been organised and ran successfully. Additionally, it was discovered that every effort was being made to make sure that the FACE brand achieved as much coverage as possible in a number of publications and advertising spaces.

- 9.1.11 The group were made aware that all of these initiatives had combined to generate a 500% increase in enquiries in 12 months (running at 60 per month as compared to 2-10). The root of this success being to create 'triggers' for people who had been already considering fostering and adoption to contact the service.
- 9.1.12 The increase in enquiries outlined above is obviously very impressive and the Group would like to note their full support for the work being performed by the recruitment officer and the approach that has been adopted.
- 9.1.13 **Conversion Rates and timescales between initial expression of interest and final approval by panel**
- 9.1.14 The work being carried out by the recruitment team has seen a substantial increase in the number of enquiries from people interested in becoming foster carers. Whilst this is encouraging, what really is important is converting these enquiries into approved foster carers who can then provide Cheshire East with that wide pool which it so requires. The group were informed that research has shown that the optimum time for people to confirm their interest after an initial enquiry is two weeks. Noting this, the service has recently started to send a direct mail reminder if the person has not been in contact within the two weeks. It was reported that this initiative had brought in an additional 30% of interested potential carers.
- 9.1.15 The importance of keeping people involved and communicated with during the application process can be seen therefore. The Group are pleased that whilst work is being done to improve this, making foster carers feeling wanted and valued as soon as they make contact with the authority (and throughout the approval process and beyond) is absolutely vital and should be made a priority.
- 9.1.16 In the feedback provided from some newly approved foster carers, they explained how it had taken a considerable amount of time for them to be approved – over two years. It must be noted that they went through the approval process during local government reorganisation, however they anecdotally informed the group that they had friends who had recently chosen to foster with other authorities due to Cheshire East's reputation for taking a long time to approve. Whether this reputation is fair or not, and the Group feels that from other evidence collected it is probably a legacy from Cheshire County Council, improving the timescales for approval must be made a priority.
- 9.1.17 Indeed, on the whole, the process of approval appears overly complicated and drawn out and this is working to put off potential foster carers. An example of this can be seen with regard to the fostering panel process. Whilst there is some excellent work being performed by the panel, there might be the possibility of investigating whether the panel could be more flexible and more aligned to each case's progress to ensure the minimal of amount delay. In a climate where there is a significant shortage of carers, delay is something Cheshire East can ill afford. To rectify this issue, the Group suggests that lessons are learned from Stoke-on-Trent. To date Stoke-on-Trent have appointed 24 new carers since April 2010 and another 8 are scheduled for panel before the end of March 2011. They also have

a 14% conversion rate from initial enquiry to panel approval – above the national average (8%) and Cheshire East (8%).

9.1.18 The key to this success has been due to their 16-week turnaround strategy for approving foster carers from the original expression of interest. This deadline is useful on three counts. Firstly, it prevents the relationship between the social worker and the applicant becoming collusive. Secondly, it reduces the number of drop-outs and lastly, it provides an end-point from which other key dates in the process can be tracked and analysed. For instance if people are dropping out at a particular stage, this can be analysed and rectified. Further to this, having the process set out with key dates earmarked would help prospective carers to see that they are moving forward with their application and hitting milestones. As an aside, it was noted that whilst Cheshire East do not currently measure or analyse the average approval time, this is something that will be done in the new structure. Anecdotally, the Group were informed that Cheshire East's average approval timescale could be significantly longer than 16 weeks.

9.1.19 **Other methods to improve recruitment**

9.1.20 When interviewed, the Chair of the Fostering Panel suggested that one thing that would help improve recruitment would be for Cheshire East to have the ability to pay for home alterations. One of the most common reasons why carers do not proceed with their initial expression of interest is due to their lack of space at home. It would be cost effective for Cheshire East therefore, to pay the commercial mortgage rates for the modifications whilst the carer is in the employment of the authority as this would mean that we would not have to place a child in an IFA. Similarly, Cheshire East could pay for the modifications needed for a carer to look after a disabled child, negating the need for the authority to place them in an expensive and non-family orientated residential placement. This concept would also extend to existing carers who wish to take on another placement but again do not have the requisite space or wish to allow sibling group placements. This proposal mirrors similar schemes in other local authority fostering services. It should also be explored whether there is provision in the disabled facilities grant to assist with such a programme.

9.1.21 A number of people interviewed for this review felt that it would be very beneficial for carers in the approval process to be paired with an experienced foster carer who would act as a mentor. This would not only assist the new carer in their training and reduce drop-out rates, it would help experienced carers to feel like they are part of the professional service and that their skills are valued.

9.1.22 Foster Carer allowances are obviously a big issue in terms of recruitment, with some, although not all prospective carers choosing those authorities or IFAs with the most competitive rates. Indeed, from the evidence collected within this review it seems as though allowances become a bigger issue for carers once they already have children placed with them and the demands become clear. This is a complex and multi-faceted area and as a result it possibly best sits in the 'retention of carers' part of the report.

9.2 Retention of Foster Carers

9.2.1 Historically foster carers provided a safe, secure home without the expectation that they would provide therapeutic support. They are now however, increasingly expected to look after children with significant emotional and behavioural problems often arising from a lack of stimulation at birth. Indeed many children come from deprived and disadvantaged backgrounds with problems compounded by neglect, maltreatment and experience of domestic violence; challenges which they then often bring into their placements.

9.2.2 Challenging child behaviours and carers' lack of skill in dealing with them are the two most common reasons for placement disruption which can then in turn lead to the resignation of carers and poor outcomes for the child. It is imperative therefore that Cheshire East has the correct training and support systems in place to prevent this from happening.

9.2.3 Placements

9.2.4 Matching a child or young person with the correct and most appropriate foster placement is the first step in ensuring that the risk of placement disruption is reduced. If the placement is inappropriate then there is the risk that foster carers may become disillusioned with the service and that the child continues to move placements, damaging their self-esteem and ability to build familial attachments.

9.2.5 The Group found that there had been some difficulty for the service in always finding an appropriate placement, often forcing them to turn to IFAs. The most important change that can be made to improve this is to increase the depth and range of foster carers in Cheshire East, something that has been discussed in detail in the proceeding section.

9.2.6 In addition to this, there are other ways in which the placements process can be improved. The Group can see that the service has already taken significant steps to make improvements with a recent restructure creating a new placements unit. This unit will bring together three functions; payments, business support and placements, creating a much needed coherency between them. With regards to the latter, the Group learned that more robust matching procedures are being developed in which placement planning meetings would be held within three to five days of the placement being arranged. By explaining the situation to the foster carer, it is hoped that these will reduce the risk of disruption by adding clarity to the placement and its possible demands.

9.2.7 When a concern was raised over the current placement request form, it was noted that it is being re-developed, with a view to it providing all of the requisite information (age, place, gender etc.). It was suggested that attempts should be made to link the information in the request forms i.e. in terms of which placements are most required, to the marketing strategy so that the most sought after placements can be sourced and provided.

9.2.8 In terms of preventing placement disruption, the Group were made aware of Stoke-on-Trent's practice of holding disruption meetings. Following their extensive monitoring and recording processes, senior managers are made aware of possible placement disruptions by social workers and steps are made to attempt to rectify the causes.

9.2.9 Training

- 9.2.10 Whether or not a carer is newly approved or has ten years experience, the training that Cheshire East provides is vital in making sure that they are fully prepared to cope with the myriad of demands that will be placed upon them.
- 9.2.11 The Group were made aware that since the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), training for foster carers had been a shared service until April 2010. The resulting disaggregation of resources left Cheshire West and Chester with a disproportionate amount of resources. As a result, Cheshire East has almost had to 'start from scratch' to construct its own training programme.
- 9.2.12 The first step in this process was to send out a questionnaire to foster carers to ask them what training they wanted or had found useful in the past. Following from this, aspects such as times, venues and content of events had been tailored in a bespoke manner to match that of the carers needs. It is this self-imposed practice of monitoring and evaluation that left the Group feeling confident that training will always be relevant and tailored to the individual and collective needs of carers. This approach is commended and should be continued.
- 9.2.13 Even considering this, there were a few issues regarding the training process that emerged from the evidence gathering process. Indeed, in speaking to the foster carers themselves, it seems that a common theme emerged around the appropriateness of training in terms of the level that it is pitched at. This is obviously a very difficult thing to get right when a course needs to cater for a wide demographic but it was noted that for more experienced carers a more workshop based programme would be useful. It was felt that they could be involved in delivering some training themselves, making best use of their experience and skills.
- 9.2.14 Additionally, it was noted that some foster carers interviewed felt that the portfolio that they had to complete during pre-approval training was somewhat cumbersome and repetitive. The Group are aware that this is a statutory document that requires completion but it is suggested that perhaps it could be streamlined or even made available to be completed online. Furthermore, if the document is a requirement, the importance of completing it should be communicated clearly to the carers.
- 9.2.15 Attention was drawn to the possibility for providing training for the safe handling of children and young people as carers do not feel appropriately equipped to do this at the current time.
- 9.2.16 As with all local authority budgets, money for resources is sparse. However, the Group felt that it would be greatly beneficial if a budget was made available so that the service can purchase a small library of publications from the Safer Caring Foster Network for the use of foster carers. This would compliment the training support and development standards (Children's Workforce Development Council) that foster carers have to meet.
- 9.2.17 As an aside, the Group would also want to outline the importance of maintaining financial support for those foster carers attending training events. Additionally, the Group would also like to see that Cheshire East are ensuring that foster carers have access to the internet as training resources move increasingly towards this medium.

9.2.18 **Support**

9.2.19 Supervising Social Workers

9.2.20 The biggest support mechanism for a foster carer is their relationship with their supervising social worker. On the whole, the evidence suggests that Cheshire East's foster carers have a good relationship with their social worker and that they highly value the time that they get to spend with them. The Group were also informed of situations in which foster carers had found it difficult to contact their social worker and that there had been some instances in which the child's social worker had been unable to fulfil their basic statutory visits. There is also the feeling that Cheshire East has become increasingly reliant on inexperienced social workers.

9.2.21 It appears as though there has been a high 'churn' of social workers which has resulted in a lack of consistency in planning, little knowledge of individual children and instances of poor communication with foster carers.

9.2.22 The Group are very aware of the pressure that social workers have been under since the formation of Cheshire East. With reference to the budget highlighted at the beginning of this review, it can be seen that there has been a significant staffing shortage, explaining the considerable under spend. When this is rectified, it is fully expected that the service will be strengthened naturally. Further to this, it was noted that Cheshire East are moving towards the Hackney 'Reclaiming Social Work' model which is expected to achieve a number of improvements by stabilising the workforce and creating efficiencies in work flow. With these changes afoot, the Group are confident that the requisite improvements will be achieved.

9.2.23 Cared for Children's Support Team

9.2.24 Even with this in mind, the Group would like to draw attention to the importance of the Cared for Children's Support Team (formerly known as the Multi Professional Support Team). They provide invaluable support to children and foster carers where there are behavioural and emotional problems that can be very difficult for foster carers to manage. They also have a very close relationship with the CAMHS service. Without their input, many placements would break down creating more instability for Cheshire East's children. Their assessments also contribute to making well matched placements for children thereby promoting stability. It is important to note that whilst this team are not performing a statutory duty, the role they play is vital in ensuring positive outcomes for Cared for Children. On the whole, they are very cost effective and all attempts should be made to support their work in light of potential budget cuts.

9.2.25 Respite

9.2.26 Respite can be vital in giving carers a break from the rigours of looking after cared for children. One carer interviewed said that they can 'get ground down very easily' and that a period of respite can make the difference between the placement breaking down or not or even the difference between the carer resigning or staying. The Group were made aware that it was difficult for carers to get respite, another symptom of the lack of carers in Cheshire East's pool. One option that could be explored is to use an organisation such as Dreamwall which provides 'time-out' breaks for foster carers and has reduced by 95 per cent the proportion of foster carers leaving fostering. The cost equated to

£674.43 per child per year, and 182 children received the service. Using the social return on investment (SROI) method of calculating value and benefits as well as costs, there was a £1.63 return for every £1.00 invested in the project. One of the strongest elements of this programme is that they take the attitude that respite is not just for the carer but it should also be a positive experience for the child or young person. This reduces the feeling of rejection that some children in care feel when placed in respite.

9.2.27 Whilst not able to commission Dreamwall as they are based in Hampshire, there would be opportunity to investigate the possibility of links being made with Cheshire East's leisure facilities under the corporate parenting strategy to see if a similar programme could be implemented.

9.2.28 There is also certainly scope to formalise the on-going informal support that foster carers provide for themselves in terms of respite. This is a positive initiative as the children and young people often go to an environment which they are familiar with. This could be strengthened by pairing foster carers so to create further stability.

9.2.29 Out of Hours Support

9.2.30 One of the major themes to emerge from the feedback from foster carers is that they do not feel adequately supported in the hours beyond 9-5 as the emergency team in place, whilst helpful, do not have the appropriate knowledge of each individual case. The Group noted that Stoke-on-Trent had had similar feedback and as a result established a placement support team which operates from 8am to 9pm, 7 days a week. This works as a targeted resource with the extra support provided to those foster carers who are looking after children who have been identified by an earlier analysis of placement disruptions. The Group feels that lessons could be learned here. For instance, there could be an opportunity to make use of existing informal fostering care networks by further facilitating opportunities for carers to contact other carers who have had experience with a particular child. Indeed, the service might look to re-commission the out-of-hours support line from the Cheshire Foster Carer Association.

9.2.31 Payments

9.2.32 Whilst most foster carers do not enter the profession for financial remuneration, it is vital to make sure that they do not feel out-of-pocket as this can generate ill feeling. Indeed, in the feedback provided by the foster carers interviewed it wasn't so much the amount they are paid that causes issues but more the timing of the payments. It was suggested that there was little synergy between the PARIS system and the releasing of payments. When interviewing the newly established placements team, the Group were left confident that this would be rectified.

9.2.33 Whilst the amounts that Cheshire East pay foster carers did not arise as a major issue, there is certainly a need to track whether our payments are competitive with our geographical and statistical neighbours. If our payments fall significantly below these respective levels it only adds an incentive for foster carers to go to another authority. This can be particularly costly if Cheshire East has trained the respective carer.

9.2.34 Throughout this review, the argument has been made that by increasing resources to the fostering service, Cheshire East would actually save money by reducing the amount it pays out to Residential Provision placements. Indeed,

whilst it is difficult to determine an average cost per child due to the range of weekly rates the following clearly demonstrates the saving that can be made.

LAC Foster Care Weekly Cost Range (inc. IFAS): £ 516 - £1,656

LAC Residential Weekly Cost Range: £1,744 - £3,500

It is too difficult to separate out the amount we pay IFAS as compared to our own carers as each case can vary dramatically but as an approximation the amount we pay IFAs is on average 3-4 times the amount that we pay our own carers. It is suggested therefore that a robust business case is compiled which investigates the benefit cost ratio of investing into fostering resources.

9.2.35 Making Foster Carers feel Valued

9.2.36 Something that was highlighted throughout this review by a number of witnesses is the need to make foster carers feel as though they are valued by the service. Most of the recommendations in this report whilst having strong 'invest to save' arguments underpinning them will have a cost implication. Ensuring foster carers feel as though they are part of the professional service is something that bears little cost but would result in generating a large amount of goodwill. For instance, the Group feel that small gestures would go along way to show that Cheshire East fully appreciates that the value that foster carers bring to the care of our most vulnerable children.

9.2.37 Cheshire County Council used to run an annual 'Welcome to Cheshire' conference in which newly approved foster carers would come and meet experienced carers, facilitating networking opportunities. It was suggested that a similar conference could be re-established, perhaps shared across the region, in which similar network opportunities would be made available. Within such a conference, provision could be made for awarding long service or outstanding achievement awards. The Cheshire Foster Carer Association have ran a similar meeting over the last few years and links could be made with this in future.

9.2.38 Further to these events, it would also be highly beneficial to induce a change of attitude within the service so that there is as little differentiation between practitioners and foster carers as possible. Whilst it is recognised that different roles have different demands, attempts should be made not to define these differences in a hierarchical fashion.

9.2.39 Along the same lines, it was thought that a simple change that could be made would be to ensure that Councillors, in their role as corporate parents, identify the Cheshire East carers that reside in their wards or private carers that look after Cheshire East Children. They would then offer their support and act as a link to the authority.

9.2.40 Improving the experience of new carers and new placements

9.2.41 As in any walk of life, first impressions can be vital in setting a relationship off on the right foot. It is key therefore that Cheshire East does all it can to fully welcome new carers into the service and to make sure that transitions into new placements go as smoothly as possible. Attention was drawn to the way that many carers feel that they receive a child without the appropriate background information. Additionally, it was noted that foster carers are often frustrated that their budget does not allow them to purchase items such a toys for the child when they are

placed, bearing in mind that children and young people often arrive with little to no possessions. With both of these points in mind, it was suggested that a 'starter pack' could be produced for each child with the requisite information and a small auxiliary, flexible budget provided.

9.2.42 Link with Education and Health

9.2.43 As placement demands become increasingly complex, foster carers will become increasingly reliant on the support of authorities and partners beyond the remit of social care. Two of the most important of these partners are in the health and education sectors – two areas in which cared for children statistically lag behind their peers.

9.3 Educational Attainment of those in Foster Care

- 9.3.1 In 2008, 14 per cent of looked after children achieved five A*-C grades at GCSE, compared to 65.3 per cent for all children. Ensuring that looked after children have the right support to be able to participate fully in school life, and that their school career is not disrupted by constant placement moves can make a big difference. They may well have lost out on education because of the circumstances which led them entering care and need help to catch up. A high proportion of looked after children see entering care as having been good for their education, a national trend mirrored in the findings of this review.
- 9.3.2 It is important to recognise therefore that raising the attainment of Cared for Children is a central responsibility of local authorities and their partners in children's trust arrangements and a vital part of narrowing the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers. It requires local authorities to work effectively with their partners, in particular schools and health services, to support their learning and development and remove barriers to their education. As corporate parents, local authorities are under a specific duty to promote the educational achievement of looked after children.
- 9.3.3 With this in mind, the Group were highly encouraged by the work being carried out by the Virtual School and the Virtual Head and his team. After coming into existence on 1 September 2010, the Virtual School has continued to enable Cheshire East to take an overview of all of our Cared for Children and their progress. Within this, it also has a role to support and challenge schools and other agencies in how they work with our vulnerable children and young people. Important to highlight is the part the Virtual School plays in providing training, advice and support to foster carers, designated teachers and social workers, working to reduce the likelihood of placement disruption.
- 9.3.4 The Virtual School is also responsible for two funds which it uses to improve the outcomes for Cheshire East's Cared for Children. The first of these is the **Personal Educational Allowance (PEA)**. The origin of this fund is rooted in the white paper *Care Matters: Time for Change*, published in June 2007. This confirmed the Government's commitment to introduce an annual personal education allowance for all looked after children who are at risk of not reaching the national expected standards of attainment. They are intended to help local authorities support the wide range of learning needs of looked after children and give them access to additional learning and development activities. This support is tailored to their individual needs and children and young people should be actively involved in identifying barriers to their learning and in deciding what provision will help them overcome these challenges and make improved progress with their education.
- 9.3.5 Funding for personal educational allowance for Cared for Children comprises part of the local authority Area Based Grant (ABG), a non-ringfenced general grant. It is for local authorities to decide how best to use this funding to meet their duty to promote the educational achievement of looked after children. The Group would strongly suggest therefore that the Virtual Head is supported as much as possible to use this fund to improve the educational outcomes for our Cared for Children.
- 9.3.6 The Virtual School also has responsibility for the **Education Support Fund (ESF)**. This is one of the main tools of the Virtual School in our support of our Cared for Children's education. The flexibility of having finance that Cheshire East can put into schools to support Cared for Children in crisis has enabled the

authority to maintain a large number of educational placements and has led to better outcomes for our children and young people. It also allows Cheshire East to be creative by combining funding for schools where there are higher numbers of Cared for Children. For example, in a Cheshire East Primary School, where there are currently 23 Cared for Children, the authority has funded a part time, temporary Learning Mentor who works specifically with Cared for Children. The mentor meets and greets the children on the playground and ensures a smooth start to the school day whilst also supporting them in lessons and providing them with a friendly face to go to at breaks and lunchtimes. The school has seen this initiative as helpful and successful although it is too early to measure the impact on individual attainment and progress.

Case study of successful use of ESF with individual children and young people

Names of the children have been changed to ensure anonymity

Peter – Year 3 Cheshire East Primary School (8 years old)

Peter is on an Interim Care Order following his adoption placement breakdown last year on 24 January 2010. Prior to this Peter’s adoptive mother had sadly died. Peter along with his brother Joe (Year 5 – 10 years old) has had 3 placement breakdowns since this point. Peter and his brother lived with carers in an out-of-Borough area for a short while but the boys are currently living with a private agency foster carer in the North of the Borough but this placement is close to disruption also.

Peter and all his siblings have attended a Cheshire East Primary School which is close to where his adoptive family live. There have been ongoing safeguarding issues around the family because of disclosures made by various members of the sibling group and this has been a significant area of focus for Peter’s school too. For instance, Peter finds it extremely difficult to trust adults.

Peter’s scores at end of KS1

- 2c Reading
- 2c Writing
- 2b Maths

Peter has been eligible for help through the PEA and this has been mainly used for afternoon activities as he finds it difficult to remain on task throughout the whole school day. ESF has also been used to provide TA support for Peter for help with his concentration, his behaviour and his learning. Despite this additional support however, Peter remained in precarious situation. Considering this, additional ESF was requested and this is being used to provide Peter with full-time support. His current timetable is:

- mornings – literacy/numeracy with TA support
- afternoons – various supported activities (visits to farm/riding/therapeutic horticulture – plus activities with an officer from the Virtual School for Cared for Children)

Peter’s scores at end of Autumn Term

- Reading - 2b (1 part move in term)
- Writing - 2b (1 part move in term)
- Maths - 3b (3 part move in term) - excellent progress and he is very keen to improve.

Without ESF Peter would not have been able to sustain his school place and the school would not have been able to provide the level of support he needs. Furthermore, Peter would not have been able to make the academic progress he has made since the end of KS1 and perhaps most importantly Peter would have experienced even more loss and lack of consistency in his short but already tragic life.

9.3.7 As can be seen from the example above, the ESF is achieving some impressive outcomes for our Cared for Children. It is also important to note that a high percentage of Cared for Children are at risk of exclusion. The cost of permanently

excluding a child is hard to calculate but research by Fairbridge (2008) states that the average lifetime cost of crime of an excluded child is £15,527. It is also clear that the costs of pupils being educated via a Pupil Referral Unit or through out of borough educational provision is much higher than the cost of putting early support using ESF. The group would suggest therefore that ensuring that the ESF is kept as a resource will firstly improve the educational outcomes of Cared for Children and secondly that if kept it will save Cheshire East a considerable amount of money in the longer term.

- 9.3.8 During the evidence gathering process it became clear that there are other things that Cheshire East could do to improve the educational outcomes for Cared for Children beyond that of supporting the excellent work being carried out by the Virtual School.
- 9.3.9 Indeed, the Chair of the Fostering Panel drew attention to the importance of the resources that reside within the educational environment for the fostering service. In particular it was noted that the reports that the educational psychologists produce are very useful for the panel when they are reviewing a child's forward plan or when conducting a sibling assessment. The Group would suggest therefore that when resources are being allocated, due thought is given to the potential unintended consequences on placement disruption that a loss of educational psychologists or other specialists might cause.
- 9.3.10 One aspect that the Group uncovered was in respect to the educationalist settings in which we place our out of Borough children and young people. Indeed, it was made apparent that there is currently no way of knowing the quality of these placements and their value for money as we are relying on little more than word of mouth in assessing their appropriateness. As Cheshire East has a responsibility for the well being of these children and young people, it is vital that a comprehensive register of the appropriateness of these settings is compiled and that a rigorous quality assurance programme is put in place to monitor it. The newly appointed contracts officer should ensure that this is addressed.
- 9.3.11 In terms of the feedback from the young people in care, it was pleasing to note that on the whole they had a positive experience in their respective schools. Having said this, there was some feeling that they were being over-monitored by teachers and that this was singling them out in an unhelpful way. The Group recognise that it can be difficult to get the balance correct between providing appropriate support and not making the child or young person feel different. It was suggested that the Virtual School could provide some training for teachers to improve this situation.
- 9.3.12 The Group would also like to draw attention to the importance of maintaining placements nearby to the preferred education setting. This promotes placement stability and helps to reduce disruption. The new placements team will help to improve this.
- 9.3.13 If there is no way to maintain the educational setting then attempts must be made to make the transition as seamless as possible. There is a role for the designated teachers in each setting to play here with the support of the virtual school.

9.4 Health and Wellbeing of those in Foster Care

- 9.4.1 Looked after children and young people share many of the same health risks and problems as their peers, but they frequently enter care with a worse level of health due to the impact of poverty, abuse and neglect. Evidence suggests that looked after children are nearly five times more likely to have a mental health disorder than all children. Local authorities, primary care trusts (PCT) and strategic health authorities (SHA) must have regard to statutory guidance issued in November 2009 on promoting the health and well-being of Cared for Children, which requires children in care to have a personal health plan.
- 9.4.2 In reviewing the evidence in relation to health and Cared for Children, it became immediately apparent that there are a number of inherent systemic failings. Local authorities, PCTs and SHAs have a role to play in promoting the health and well-being of Cared for Children. Precisely what this role looks like for each authority is unclear and will continue to be so until the new structural changes to the NHS are consolidated. With this in mind, the Group feels that it would be germane to commission a Task and Finish Review to further consider the observations in this review when there is both more detail and clarity.
- 9.4.3 As is a recurrent theme throughout this review, issues around Cared for Children become increasingly complicated and difficult to handle when either a Cheshire East child is placed out of Borough or an out of Borough child is placed with a Cheshire East family/carer. Both the Designated Nurses for Cared for Children expressed a concern over how health information about a child often emerges in an ad hoc fashion and sometimes emerges with large gaps in their medical history. This is often a symptom of professionals being unclear as to whose responsibility it is to maintain records and then subsequently who is responsible for filing or passing them to the appropriate person when necessary. As Cared for Children often have both acute and chronic health problems this is a serious issue which could have potentially damaging consequences. It was suggested that in any new arrangement a system needs to be put in place that everyone involved in health and Cared for Children understands and complies with. As the administrative burdens are only going to increase on professionals as back office staff are reduced, it will become even more important to maintain efficiencies in work flow.
- 9.4.4 One of the key front line roles in terms of health and cared for children is that of the Designated Nurse. There are currently two Designated Nurses for Cared for Children in Cheshire East with one based in Nantwich and one based in Macclesfield. They have two administrative support staff (1FTE). Their primary role is to make sure that every cared for child has their health and development needs assessed and that their subsequent health plan is actioned. The Group were informed that both Designated Nurses are only contracted to work part-time but that to meet their work demands they often have to work up to and beyond full time hours. It was explained to the Group that there is a particular concern over the 16+ age group in terms of the relevant authorities not meeting their health needs due to under capacity. This has a number of knock on effects – particularly around teenage pregnancy. It was suggested that there is a strong need for a Designated Nurse or a youth worker for young people and care leavers. In order to improve work flow, communication and efficiencies, the Group would suggest that incorporating the Designated Nurses into the offices and if possible the management structures of the Fostering and Adoption teams would have beneficial consequences. It would be particularly useful if further liaison between the Designated Nurses and the Cared for Children Support team could be facilitated.

- 9.4.5 As a further improvement, the Designated Nurses highlighted that they would appreciate systems put in place that would enable them to self-audit and benchmark.
- 9.4.6 Whilst much of the evidence around health and Cared for Children centred on big strategic improvements which Cheshire East may or may not have the ability to implement following the public health restructures, there are also smaller but important changes that Cheshire East can make to improve the well being of Cared for Children right away.
- 9.4.7 Furthermore, in terms of their access to leisure facilities, it was noted that whilst Cheshire East provides very well in terms of discounts and passes, what is available for Cared for Children is perhaps not communicated as clearly as it could be.
- 9.4.8 As a final point, the Group would very much like to draw attention to the importance of the advocacy service that Barnardos offers to Cared for Children. They offer an excellent external point of contact and outlet for those who may wish to talk about the service they receive without talking to the person who provides it.

9.5 Successful transition for those leaving care

- 9.5.1 For many young people, leaving care can be daunting and confusing. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 sets out local authorities' responsibility to help children leaving care develop a 'pathway plan' to independence, with the help of a personal adviser and other people who have had an impact on their life. While care can end at the age of 16, it continues until age 18 if the child remains at school. Continuing assistance with education or training continues to the end of the agreed programme, even if it takes some past the age of 21.
- 9.5.2 Care leavers are still over-represented in prison populations and the unemployed, demonstrating that the experience of being in – and leaving – care still does not prepare young people well for adult life. If looked after children followed the same paths as other children into further education, training and jobs, it could save the economy £50m each year.
- 9.5.3 It is also important to remember that although in some cases Cheshire East supports young people past the age of 21, this is only in rare cases. According to the Office of National Statistics more than a third of men and a fifth of women still live at home between the age of 20 and 34. Many cite the lack of affordable housing and increasing financial pressures as reasons for this. It seems unreasonable therefore for Cheshire East in its role as corporate parent to expect its care leavers who are already comparatively disadvantaged to be able to make an unassisted transition to adulthood.
- 9.5.4 The Group were informed that there is a 16 plus Service in place which helps young people to make the transition from care to self-dependence. Making up this team is the independence advisor for young people and an administration support officer. It was explained that key to the work of this team is their ability to liaise with adult services, particularly when they are dealing with a disabled young person, in order to achieve a seamless a transition as possible. Attention was drawn to the electronic recording systems for both children's and adult's services which are incompatible at the current time. This is causing difficulties in terms of information sharing and the Group would like to suggest that a new system is considered.
- 9.5.5 In terms of securing housing, the practice of young people leaving care going to hostels has been superseded by supported lodgings of which there are 12 in Cheshire East. When the young person is older than 18 they are no longer eligible for supported lodgings and therefore they have to access accommodation from housing associations. It was explained that this is often difficult for young people, particularly in Macclesfield and also in terms of securing single person accommodation. It can be seen therefore how important it is to get the corporate parenting strategy embedded as quickly as possible in Cheshire East so that officers in Housing can attempt to start improving this situation.
- 9.5.6 Youth employment is an issue for all young people regardless of background but it is particularly an issue for those young people leaving care. At the moment Cheshire East endeavours to get care leavers onto apprenticeship schemes and there are currently 5 young people on this programme. Attempts are being made to increase these numbers. The Care leaving service also work closely with Connexions which has proven a great success. Unfortunately due to increasing number of Cared for Children and decreasing numbers of staff, this work is getting more difficult. In terms of securing an extra resource, there could be an argument for employing the aforementioned (health section) 16+ youth worker to have a role

that extends beyond just health but encompasses all elements of pastoral care, including employment and housing.

- 9.5.7 Having said this, there are also improvements that Cheshire East could make without any increase in capacity. In the feedback session with the Children in Care Council, the Group were informed how one young person had been offered a job but that they were unable to take it due to transport costs. However, Cheshire East now pay her transport costs to attend college despite it being further away and the young person having the preference to go into employment. It is suggested that more flexibility is sought in how we provide transport subsidies.
- 9.5.8 In addition to this, the session with the Children in Care Council also made the Group aware of the practice of 'sofa surfing'. This is where young people spend a night with a friend in the absence of more permanent accommodation. It was suggested that whilst this is not a desirable outcome, in the interim there could be provided a central facility to which young people can come and use a kitchen, bathroom and washing machine. Such a facility could also be used a place to 'train' young people in how to become independent as part of their pathway plan – something that was noted as being wanted by the Children in Care Council. It was explained that the current facilities at Bradshaw House and Sunnyside are not fit for purpose and that new accommodation would need to be sought.
- 9.5.9 In terms of assisting young people when they go to university, Cheshire East currently pays £90 per week for maintenance. Whilst this is obviously helpful, it is the time away from university, between terms, that can be problematic. Most young people return to the family home for what can be a considerable period and yet this option is obviously not available for young people still in care. When speaking to foster carers, it was suggested that Cheshire East could pay the carer a retainer whilst the placement becomes available as respite in the meantime. This would offer the young person some security for when they return home and reduce anxiety of another change.
- 9.5.10 Furthermore, the foster carers that were spoken to for this review, commented that they felt the service does not use them enough once the young person has left care. It was suggested that they could retain a mentoring role during a transition period.

9.6 Systems and Administrative processes within the Foster Care Service

- 9.6.1 One particular recurring theme of this review, of which there are many, is that there needs to be improvements made to the systems and administrative processes around the fostering service. Indeed, numerous examples have been cited throughout this review such as the placement team linking with marketing, resignations/disruptions being monitored so that this can be fed back to support mechanisms and a multitude of systems around health and cared for children. At the core of all of these is the practice of recording information and then subsequently sharing it in an easily accessible fashion.
- 9.6.2 It was this practice that was the key finding behind Stoke-on-Trent's recent success. Indeed, it was their development of clear and robust performance monitoring systems which allowed for trends to be tracked and provided evidence of success for Ofsted. The Group strongly believes that Cheshire East has some equally good practice which will only improve with the new structure. Therefore, it is vital that Cheshire East can demonstrate this so as to benefit from all the good work and outcomes achieved.
- 9.6.3 Beyond just getting the staff to start recording information more, Stoke-on-Trent facilitated their ability to share information in such a quick and timely way by making sure that all of their relevant staff are based in the same office, with as little hot desking as possible. This ensures that the service is flexible and is able to deal with requests quickly and with all the appropriate information. It also helps them to monitor trends and to plan strategies accordingly. The Group would strongly suggest that such a model is replicated in Cheshire East.
- 9.6.4 The point was also made during the site visit to Stoke-on-Trent, that the only way the Local Authorities can maximise their offer as opposed to IFAs is to make the most of the 'corporateness of the council'. In other words, as local authorities will always pay less than private agencies we must sell the value added by our close partnerships with other authorities such as education and health. Of course, the flip side of this is that Cheshire East must make sure that its partnerships are fully utilised to make good on this promise. The Corporate Parenting Strategy should go a long way to ensure this and the Group would like to add their support for this to be embedded as quickly as possible.
- 9.6.5 What has been mentioned above are some very general observations on how administrative systems and performance monitoring could be improved. During the evidence gathering process, the Group were also made aware of a number of specific examples which require attention.
- 9.6.6 Firstly, it was brought to our attention that there is a situation, known as private fostering in which an arrangement is made to look after a child who is under 16 years of age (under 18 if disabled) for more than 28 days, where the main carer is someone other than the child's parent, legal guardian, step- parent, sibling, grandparent, aunt or uncle.
- 9.6.7 What distinguishes a private fostering arrangement from a public care fostering arrangement is that it is not arranged by nor paid for the Local Authority. Having said this, both the child's parents and the private foster carers have a duty to notify the Children and Families Service of their intention to place the child in private foster care no less than six weeks before and no more than 13 weeks before the arrangement is intended to start (unless it is an emergency –

which case we should be informed no more than 48 hours after the child has been placed).

- 9.6.8 It was reported that it is not always the case that service is notified that the child has been placed with private foster care. This obviously cause for concern as the Authority do not know where the children are. The service is aware of this and has launched a campaign to increase awareness. To go beyond this campaign however, a system needs to be embedded in which links are made with education and health professionals who then flag up concerns over what might be a private fostering situation.
- 9.6.9 Secondly, there was a concern expressed over the lack of communication between the out-of-hours duty desk and the 9-5 duty desk which has resulted in records not being kept as accurately as they could be. Attempts should be made to have both teams working on the same system. Additionally, having all teams in the same office would improve the ability to pass on information without continually depending on systems.
- 9.6.10 Lastly, considering the extent to which Cheshire East are losing Foster Carers due to resignation, it would be germane to conduct exit interviews so that trends could be monitored and analysed with specific areas for improvement then targeted.

9.7 Link with Early intervention Agenda

- 9.7.1 Any child coming into the care of a local authority is obviously an undesirable outcome. It is proven that a child develops best in a loving family environment. Further to this, as has been mentioned throughout this report, resources are becoming scarcer and therefore spread more thinly around an ever increasing cohort of Cared for Children.
- 9.7.2 Consequently, it is vital that the fostering service makes strong and purposeful links with the early intervention agenda. The better the service can identify families at risk, the quicker it can provide support and guidance resulting in less children entering care.
- 9.7.3 For instance, aligned to the corporate parenting agenda, if some parents had better quality housing, it is unlikely that their children would ever come into care. Similarly strong links should be made with the Homestart and SureStart programmes. There are a multitude of other examples of where Cheshire East, with its myriad of skills and abilities throughout the organisation can work to keep children out of care.

10.0 Conclusions

- 10.1 The genesis of this review came from the belief that if a child must be placed under the care of the local authority, the best place for that child, in most situations, is in a family setting. Following three months of careful and extensive research that belief still holds as strong, if not more so. The Group were heartened to find in all cases, professionals who clearly had Cheshire East's children as a priority and who were doing excellent work in continually improving their practice. Indeed, the Group strongly believes that the new structure currently being embedded throughout the service will yield some exciting results in the future months and years.
- 10.2 With this in mind, the Group would like to stress the importance of targeting resources towards the fostering service. Rather than being idealistic, this is a policy that has a strong invest to save business case behind it. Hopefully this review has adequately illustrated the savings available to Cheshire East in increasing its own fostering placements thereby reducing our dependency on expensive IFA and residential placements.
- 10.3 Whilst increasing payments to foster carers to make them as competitive as possible, is an important and central issue for increasing recruitment and retention and thereby making the aforementioned savings, the Group were made aware that Cheshire East will never be able to compete financially with IFAs. Therefore, it is vital that Cheshire East makes the most of its links with other agencies both internally and externally to provide as good a service as possible to its cared for children. Indeed, there is a real need to look at the systems and administrative processes around fostering to make sure we are making the most of our resources.
- 10.4 One issue that does not have a cost attached to it and yet is vital for improving retention is making sure that our Foster Carers feel appreciated and valued. Indeed, there seems in some respects, a tacit understanding of a hierarchical structure in place in which foster carers are seen as separate from other professionals. Whilst recognising that there are distinct differences in roles, the Group would like to see our carers explicitly stated as part of the professional service and indeed, Cheshire East going above and beyond in recognising the service they provide for our most vulnerable children.

11.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 That all staff involved in the Fostering & Adoption service be situated on a single site, where appropriate.
- 11.2 That in line with the corporate parenting strategy, all corporate policies must consider their impact on cared for children.
- 11.3 That consideration be given to a renewed focus on recruitment and assessment of mainstream foster carers in order to ensure that Cheshire East Council meets its sufficiency requirements.
- 11.4 That Cheshire East continues to provide support and resources for the recruitment of foster carers.
- 11.5 That the process from initial expression of interest to approval by panel be given a speedy, yet achievable timescale from which clear milestones are communicated to both prospective carers and staff throughout the development of the application.
- 11.6 That prospective carers moving through the application process be paired with an experienced carer as a mentor.
- 11.7 That an investigation be carried out to assess the viability of creating a budget to enable Cheshire East to pay commercial mortgage rates for home modifications in order to allow prospective carers take on their first or additional placements.
- 11.8 That the information from placement request forms in terms of demand in particular placements be made available to the recruitment officer to inform the marketing strategy.
- 11.9 That 'disruption meetings' along the lines of the Stoke-on-Trent model be held with foster placements that have been identified as being at risk of disruption.
- 11.10 That experienced foster carers be used in delivering training sessions or work shops to make best use of their professional skills.
- 11.11 That a budget be made available for the service to either purchase a small library of publications from the Safer Foster Carer Network for the use of foster carers or to explore web-based training opportunities.
- 11.12 That training be provided for the safe handling of Children in Care.
- 11.13 That financial support be maintained for carers attending training events.
- 11.14 That support and resources for the Cared For Children's Support Team be maintained.
- 11.15 That the possibility of making links with Cheshire East Leisure Facilities under the auspices of the Corporate Parenting Strategy be investigated to provide respite breaks using the same principles of the Dreamwall project. Within this, that the possibility of reciprocal relationships with adjacent authorities be

explored in terms of respite facilities – particularly for Cheshire East children placed out-of-Borough.

- 11.16 That Cheshire East formalises the on-going support that foster carers provide for themselves in partnership with appropriate fostering networks.
- 11.17 That the possibility of links being made with the family support service to assist with out-of-hours support for foster carers be investigated. In addition, that the service explore the possibility of commissioning an out-of-hours support line.
- 11.18 That the awards might be continued, currently undertaken by the Cheshire Foster Carer Association, to recognise the achievements of our Children in Care and the contributions of our foster carers.
- 11.19 That foster carers be provided with the contact details of their local Councillors.
- 11.20 That a 'starter pack' be produced for each new placement which provides the requisite information about the child/young person with a small, flexible budget.
- 11.21 That support and resources for the Virtual School be maintained including the Personal Educational Allowance, Education Support Fund and educational psychologists.
- 11.22 That a comprehensive register of the appropriateness of out-of-Borough educational settings is compiled with a rigorous quality assurance programme put in place to monitor it.
- 11.23 That the Virtual School provides training to teachers so that they provide an appropriate level of support for Cared for Children and assist in any transitional processes between settings.
- 11.24 That a Task and Finish Review be established to examine the processes, systems and staffing issues around health and Cared for Children.
- 11.25 That a new electronic recording system be purchased to ensure seamless information sharing between children's and adult's services.
- 11.26 That links are made with Registered Social Landlords to secure decent housing for care leavers, particularly in the Macclesfield area.
- 11.27 That a fit-for-purpose facility be procured so to curtail the practice of 'sofa-surfing' and to assist in the training of young people as they prepare for independence.
- 11.28 That Cheshire East pays a retainer to Foster Carers for keeping open a placement for a young person at university.
- 11.29 That strong performance monitoring systems be put in place and embedded throughout the fostering service.
- 11.30 That exit interviews be conducted on all foster carers who resign from the service and the resulting information be analysed for trends.
- 11.31 That links are made, whenever possible, with the early intervention agenda – particularly with the SureStart programme.

- 11.32 That Cheshire East's payment rates be constantly tracked against and compared to our geographical and statistical neighbours
- 11.33 That a business case be commissioned which investigates the benefit cost ratio of investing in fostering services to reduce dependency on residential placements and IFAs.
- 11.34 That a Task and Finish Review be established to examine the 16 plus service for cared for children.

13.0 Background Information

- 13.1 For Background information relating to this report, please get in touch with the report author:
- 13.2 Mark Grimshaw, Overview and Scrutiny
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CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY

Date of Meeting: 14 February 2012
Report of: Lorraine Butcher, Strategic Director Children, Families & Adults
Subject/Title: Response to Fostering Task & Finish Recommendations
Portfolio Holder: Cllr Hilda Gaddum

1.0 Report Summary

1.1 This report is a formal response to the Recommendations from the Task & Finish Group in respect of the Fostering Service.

2.0 Decision Requested

2.1 For information and discussion

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 n/a

4.0 Wards Affected

4.1 All

5.0 Local Ward Members

5.1 n/a

6.0 Policy Implications including - Carbon reduction - Health

6.1 n/a

7.0 Financial Implications (Authorised by the Borough Treasurer)

7.1

8.0 Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

8.1

9.0 Risk Management

- 9.1 The recommendations contained within the Task and Finish Groups Report provides opportunities to increase not only the numbers in house foster carers but also the support available to them. A failure to implement some of the recommendations may result in poor recruitment/retention of carers and an increased pressure on the external placements budget.

10.0 Background and Options

- 10.1 The Task and Finish Group completed its report in April 2011. A previous recommendation had been made by the Residential Task & Finish Group.

“All Cared for Children should be placed within a family setting wherever possible and that sufficient resources are targeted at the fostering service to ensure sufficient capacity is available”

As a result, the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee at a midpoint meeting on the 16 November 2010 agreed that a review which looked in more detail at the resources and capacity of the fostering services would be appropriate. In a time of austerity and difficult decisions, the Committee felt it imperative that the Borough’s most vulnerable are made a priority and that the services which support them are performing optimally. The Task and Finish Group, its Membership, Chairmanship and terms of reference were all agreed and ratified at the Committee meeting on 7 December 2010.

Responses to the recommendations contained in the report are attached as Appendix 1.

11.0 Access to Information

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

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Appendix 1

Response to Fostering Task & Finish Recommendations

Recommendations	Response	Proposed	Lead & timescale	Risk Factors
<p>3.7 That all staff involved in the Fostering & Adoption service are situated on a single site, where appropriate.</p>	<p>Agreed in Principle</p> <p>However it is important to ensure that some operational services are best placed within dedicated areas.</p>	<p>Current plans are in place to relocate adoption and care planning services this will include the Cared for Support Service at the former Cledford Primary school in Middlewich. In addition Independent Safeguarding Chairs will also have a dedicated area within the site, which will also provide conference facilities to enable Child Protection Conferences, Adoption and Fostering Panels to take place.</p> <p>The two fostering teams however will remain within their current base of Macclesfield Town Hall and Delamere House.</p>	<p>Head of Service for Social Care.</p> <p>Target date June 2012</p>	
<p>3.8 That in line with the corporate parenting strategy, all corporate policies must consider their impact on cared for children.</p>	<p>Agreed in Principle</p>	<p>It is proposed that this recommendation is managed through the Corporate Parenting Board membership, which has been recently refreshed with new members enabling wider council representation.</p>	<p>Monitored by Corporate Parenting Board members through their bi monthly meetings</p>	<p>Cared for Children may not achieve their full potential.</p>

Appendix 1

Response to Fostering Task & Finish Recommendations

Recommendations	Response	Proposed	Lead & timescale	Risk Factors
3.9 That consideration be given to a renewed focus on recruitment and assessment of mainstream foster carers in order to ensure that Cheshire East Council meets its sufficiency requirements.	Agreed in Principle. There is a commitment within Children's and Families to develop a wide and varied range of foster homes including short break carers and specialist carers for hard to place teenagers who are on the edge of criminality	Recent events has seen Cheshire East be part of the regional recruitment campaign, alongside the authorities own recruitment drive all of which continues to attract high numbers of adults interested in fostering.	Principal Manager Cared for Children Service Through agreed recruitment strategy for 2012/13	
3.10 That Cheshire East continues to provide support and resources for the recruitment of foster carers.	Agreed in Principle However in light of the current financial climate and recruitment freeze there remains a real risk of this not being achieved	Proposal is to continue to recruit to current vacancies	Head of Service – Social Care & Principal Manager for Cared for Children Service	
3.11 That the process from initial expression of interest to approval by panel be given a speedy, yet achievable timescale from which clear milestones are communicated to both prospective carers and staff throughout the development of the application.	Agreed in Principle	Proposal is to continue to work where possible to realistic timescales. However, due to the difficulties in recruitment to current vacancies the decision has been made in the interim to use experience independent sessional workers who will be paid on performance and results	Principal Manager Cared for children	Vacancy management has slowed the recruitment of social workers to undertake assessments which in turn has not achieved the desired improvement in timescales
3.12 That prospective carers moving through the application process be paired with an experienced carer as a mentor.	Agreed in Principle	Fostering Service are currently exploring this and will develop further throughout 2012	Principal Manager Cared for Children Group Manager Fostering	Unable to Identify a workable process for this to be achieved.

Appendix 1

Response to Fostering Task & Finish Recommendations

Recommendations	Response	Proposed	Lead & timescale	Risk Factors
3.13 That an investigation be carried out to assess the viability of creating a budget to enable Cheshire East to pay commercial mortgage rates for home modifications in order to allow prospective carers take on their first or additional placements.	Agreed in Principle	Budget for this financial year was secured with great success and a policy is currently under development. However, this recommendation requires further exploration as to the affordability for the council over the coming years.	Director of Children, Families & Adults	Unable to Identify monies for future years
3.14 That the information from placement request forms in terms of demand in particular placements be made available to the recruitment officer to inform the marketing strategy.	Agreed in Principle	Ongoing developments within the placement service has resulted in this recommendation already being achieved and informing targeted marketing	This will continue to be monitored by the Head of Service – Social Care and Principal Manager Cared for Children	Demand outstrips need resulting in cared for children needs not being met
3.15 That 'disruption meetings' along the lines of the Stoke-on-Trent model be held with foster placements that have been identified as being at risk of disruption.	Agreed in Principle	This will progress following the successful appointment of an Independent Safeguarding chair	Principal Manager Cared for Children & Group Manager Fostering. Plan will be to Further develop process within 2012	Unable to progress due to not being able to fill vacancy in 2012
3.16 That experienced foster carers be used in delivering training sessions or workshops to make best use of their professional skills.	Agreed in Principle	Currently exploring how a foster carer who is an ex ICT lecturer can assist in skilling up others who are not computer literate. Proposal will be to roll out and expand in 2012	Group Manager Fostering Plan will be to Further develop a process within 2012	

Appendix 1

Response to Fostering Task & Finish Recommendations

Recommendations	Response	Proposed	Lead & timescale	Risk Factors
3.17 That a budget be made available for the service to either purchase a small library of publications from the Safer Foster Carer Network for the use of foster carers or to explore web-based training opportunities.	Agreed in Principle	This recommendation is being considered alongside the overall training programme for foster carers. However, this recommendation requires further exploration as to the affordability for the council over the coming years.	Head of Service and Principal Manager Cared for Children	
3.18 That training is provided for the safe handling of Children in Care.	Agreed in Principle	This is included in the overall training programme for foster carers. Bespoke training for foster carers in relation to management of challenging behaviour has also been commissioned in collaboration with the Workforce Development Team.	Principal Manager Cared for Children alongside Workforce Development team	
3.19 That financial support be maintained for carers attending training events	Agreed in Principle	Currently being maintained.	Head of Service Social Care	Current Financial Climate may result in this financial support not being sustained
3.20 That support and resources for the Cared for Children's Support Team be maintained.	Agreed in Principle	Currently being maintained	Head of Service Social Care	

Appendix 1

Response to Fostering Task & Finish Recommendations

Recommendations	Response	Proposed	Lead & timescale	Risk Factors
<p>3.21 That the possibility of making links with Cheshire East Leisure Facilities under the auspices of the Corporate Parenting Strategy be investigated to provide respite breaks using the same principles of the Dream wall project. Within this, that the possibility of reciprocal relationships with adjacent authorities be explored in terms of respite facilities – particularly for Cheshire East children placed out-of-Borough.</p>	<p>Agreed in Principle</p>	<p>The Fostering service is currently exploring opportunities with Tatton Park and the scouting association in relation to providing foster families with respite breaks.</p>	<p>Group Manager Fostering will continue to explore and progress during 2012</p>	
<p>3.22 That Cheshire East formalises the on-going support that foster carers provide for themselves in partnership with appropriate fostering networks.</p>	<p>Agreed in Principle</p>	<p>Support groups are being established. To be launched in the new year.</p>	<p>Group Manager Fostering will continue to develop during 2012</p>	
<p>3.23 That the possibility of links being made with the family support service to assist with out-of-hours support for foster carers be investigated. In addition, that the service explore the possibility of commissioning an out-of-hours support line.</p>	<p>Agreed in Principle</p>	<p>Out of hours support currently under development.</p> <p>However, analysis of the use of the current provision is needed to help inform future planning</p>	<p>Principal Manager Cared for Children Service & Principal Manager Early Intervention and Prevention Service</p>	

Appendix 1

Response to Fostering Task & Finish Recommendations

Recommendations	Response	Proposed	Lead & timescale	Risk Factors
<p>3.24 That the awards night be continued, currently undertaken by the Cheshire Foster Carer Association, to recognise the achievements of our Children in Care and the contributions of our foster carers.</p>	<p>Agreed in Principle</p>	<p>Awards night continues however, this now sits as corporate council event.</p> <p>Planning for 2012 event has begun.</p> <p>Aim of the Awards event is to recognise the achievements of all Cheshire East cared for children and their carers including staff within residential settings, kinship carers as well as foster carers</p>	<p>Corporate Parenting Board & Awards Steering Group</p>	
<p>3.25 That foster carers be provided with the contact details of their local Councillors.</p>	<p>Agreed in Principle</p>	<p>This information is to be provided following Corporate Parenting Training to Councillors in Feb 2012</p>	<p>Principal Manager Cared for children</p>	<p>Risk that information is not kept up to date</p>
<p>3.26 That a 'starter pack' be produced for each new placement which provides the requisite information about the child/young person with a small, flexible budget.</p>	<p>Agreed in Principle</p>	<p>Currently exploring how this can be best achieved, this will be further progressed in 2012.</p>	<p>Principal Manager Cared for children</p>	<p>Current financial climate may impact on achieving fully this recommendation</p>
<p>3.27 That support and resources for the Virtual School be maintained including the Personal Educational Allowance, Education Support Fund and Educational Psychologists.</p>	<p>Agreed in Principle</p>	<p>PEA and ESF no longer exist. This has been replaced with one fund called Virtual School Support Fund.</p> <p>This fund is managed by the Head of the Virtual School on a needs led basis.</p>	<p>Head of Virtual School</p>	

Appendix 1

Response to Fostering Task & Finish Recommendations

Recommendations	Response	Proposed	Lead & timescale	Risk Factors
3.28 That a comprehensive register of the appropriateness of out-of-borough educational settings is compiled with a rigorous quality assurance programme put in place to monitor it.	Agreed in Principle	Collaboratively working with other local Virtual School teams	Head of Virtual School	
3.29 That the Virtual School provides training to teachers so that they provide an appropriate level of support for Cared for Children and assist in any transitional processes between settings.	Agreed in Principle	Termly training to Designated Teachers is ongoing as well as direct training to individual schools and a comprehensive programme of training for Foster Carers on the world of education.	Head of Virtual School will continue to monitor and evaluate	
3.30 That a Task and Finish Review be established to examine the processes, systems and staffing issues around health and Cared for Children.	Agreed in Principle	Task and Finish group currently undertaking this. Propose a respond to recommendations once completed	Head of Service Social Care , Principal Manager Cared for Children & Health Colleagues	
3.31 That a new electronic recording system be purchased to ensure seamless information sharing between children's and adult's services.	Agreed in Principle	Complete roadmap is underway to establish the full requirements of a new system to inform a tender process, and a bid for Capital Funding has been completed. Pending this continue to work with the existing system developing information contained within and ensuring that it meets the needs of the service	Director of Children, Families and Adults	Current financial climate may impact on achieving fully this recommendation

Appendix 1

Response to Fostering Task & Finish Recommendations

Recommendations	Response	Proposed	Lead & timescale	Risk Factors
3.32 That links are made with Registered Social Landlords to secure decent housing for care leavers, particularly in the Macclesfield area.	Agreed in Principle	16 plus group currently exploring options for this. Recommendations will be made once group has completed task	Principal Manager Cared for Children & Corporate Housing Colleagues	
3.33 That a fit-for-purpose facility be procured so to curtail the practice of 'sofa-surfing' and to assist in the training of young people as they prepare for independence.	Agreed in Principle	The successful relocation of the 16 plus service to enable practical training of young people towards independence is key to this recommendation being achieved. This together with 3.32 recommendation of ensuring priority & affordable housing for cared for children occurs thereby avoiding the need for young people to sofa surf	Corporate Assets, Corporate Housing Colleagues. Principal Manager Cared for Children	
3.34 That Cheshire East pays a retainer to Foster Carers for keeping open a placement for a young person at university.	Agreed in Principle	Currently the service is revising the financial policy in respect of this recommendation. However, the question of affordability given the current financial climate, together with the shortage of in house foster carers may result in this not being achieved	Head of Service Social Care	

Appendix 1

Response to Fostering Task & Finish Recommendations

Recommendations	Response	Proposed	Lead & timescale	Risk Factors
3.35 That strong performance monitoring systems be put in place and embedded throughout the fostering service.	Agreed in Principle	<p>Figures for recruitment, approval and deregistration collected as routine. Also referrals for Family Finding and Family and Friends Carers.</p> <p>However this continues to still be under development in terms of reporting systems.</p>	Head of Service Social Care & Principal Manager Cared for Children	
3.36 That exit interviews be conducted on all foster carers who resign from the service and the resulting information be analysed for trends.	Agreed in Principle	To be implemented once staffing secured.	Principal Manager Cared for Children	
3.37 That links are made, whenever possible, with the early intervention agenda – particularly with the Sure Start programme.	Agreed in Principle	Currently analysing the take up of the free nursery places to ensure all foster carers are accessing for our Cared for children.	Principal Manager Cared for Children & Principal Manager Early Intervention and Prevention	
3.38 That Cheshire East's payment rates be constantly tracked against and compared to our geographical and statistical neighbours	Agreed in Principle	Recently revised pay rates to match Fostering network recommended rates. New payment rates agreed for 2011-2012 in October. Cheshire East is part of the North West Regional Looked After Children Group, who provides essential regional information. Further work is being developed around geographical and statistical neighbours.	Head of Service Social Care & Principal Manager Cared for Children	

Appendix 1

Response to Fostering Task & Finish Recommendations

Recommendations	Response	Proposed	Lead & timescale	Risk Factors
<p>3.39 That a business case be commissioned which investigates the benefit cost ratio of investing in fostering services to reduce dependency on residential placements and IFAs.</p>	<p>Agreed in Principle.</p> <p>Residential placements can and do offer a valuable resource to some young people who cannot manage a foster home environment.</p> <p>Therefore the need to ensure a mix economy of provision is essential to ensure children/young peoples needs are being appropriately met</p>	<p>Work will be undertaken in the new year alongside a commissioning strategy for Cared for Children in developing a mixed economy of provision within the authority</p>	<p>Head of Service Social Care, Principal Manager Cared for Children & Colleagues from commissioning services</p>	
<p>3.40 That a Task and Finish Review be established to examine the 16 plus service for cared for children.</p>	<p>Agreed in Principle</p>	<p>16 plus group established to report to SLT in April 2012.</p>		

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

REPORT TO: CABINET

Date of Meeting: 14th February 2012
Report of: Director of Children, Families and Adults
Subject/Title: Family Support Services Review
Portfolio Holder: Cllr Hilda Gaddum

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 This report is an update on the steps taken to implement the recommendations of the Review of Family Support Services undertaken by the task and finish group of Children and Families Scrutiny Committee presented to Cabinet on 20th December 2010. It follows on from the agenda item presented in June 2011 to Scrutiny regarding the implementation of Cheshire East Family Services (CEFS).

2.0 Decision Requested

- 2.1 That members note the progress made towards implementing early help and take a further report in September 2012 regarding progress made.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The implementation of an early intervention model for family support in Cheshire East is aimed at ensuring children and families' needs are met at the earliest possible point. This will provide an opportunity for improving outcomes for families before issues escalate and will reduce the need for more complex, expensive interventions at a later stage that will have a reduced chance of positive outcomes.

4.0 Wards Affected

- 4.1 All

5.0 Local Ward Members

- 5.1 All

6.0 Policy Implications including - Carbon reduction - Health

- 6.1 A number of central government commissioned reports were published in 2011 all of which were pointing to the need for the greater development of an Early

Intervention offer at a local level. The Allen Review – Early Intervention the Next Steps was published in January 2011. This cross party review highlighted the importance of early Intervention, particularly in the early years and drew on relatively new research into child development that has highlighted the lifelong impact that the early year's environment has on a whole range of outcomes for children.

- 6.2 The second key report published in the summer of 2011 was the Munro Review of Child Protection. Whilst this review largely focused on the child protection system Professor Munro dedicated a chapter of the report to "Sharing the responsibility for provision of early help." Within this chapter she highlights the persuasive arguments for the importance of Early Help (as she terms early intervention) and points out that "Preventative services will do more to reduce abuse and neglect than reactive services." The Munro Review argued that the Early Help offer by Local Authorities and our partners should become a statutory responsibility.
- 6.3 This recommendation was not fully accepted by the government however it has been influential in shaping future inspections of Safeguarding and Looked After Children which will have much more of a focus on the child's journey and the services available within local authority areas that prevent the need for the provision of high end services.

7.0 Financial Implications (Director of Finance and Business Services)

- 7.1 The development of the Cheshire East Family Service is being achieved within existing budgets which are wholly taken from the Early Intervention Grant which is due to end in March 2013.

8.0 Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

- 8.1 There is no specific legal implications attached to this report

9.0 Risk Management

- 9.1 By not developing a coherent early help offer risks having an adverse impact on families in regard to assisting with issues earlier. Also future Local Authority inspections could be affected. Lack of prevention services will mean that the number of families requiring expensive specialist services will continue to increase at a time when the resources available to the local authority and our partners are static or decreasing.

10.0 Background and Options

- 10.1 In October 2011 the restructuring of resources within Children's Services resulted in the creation of Cheshire East Family Service. A Principal Manager was appointed and came into post in mid-November. These resources predominantly came from the combination of Children's Centres and Family Centres and their associated staffing. These resources are organised into four localities and are aimed at meeting the early help needs of children and families

across the age range from 0-19 and acting as a catalyst for early intervention multi-agency work. The service is built on strong partnerships with all partner agencies both internal and external to the Council. Co-location opportunities with health and voluntary sector colleagues are in place

- 10.2 Much progress has been made in re-engineering the current resource. All staff have a more generic job role and the full restructure is complete. Improved use of data and a streamlining of systems have improved timely access to preventative services. The development of a 'one front door' service – First Contact has resulted in co-located staff from family services, social care and domestic violence. Plans to also have representations from Police and health are well advanced
- 10.3 Whilst it is still early days regarding the introduction of an early help offer the signs are positive that progress is being achieved. Families are feeding back that there issues are being addressed earlier and they are seeing a more joined up offer from agencies. In order to give members a flavour of the work currently being undertaken by CEFS a number of anonymised case studies are attached to this report.
- 10.4 Early indications of the volume of work being undertaken by CEFS are that the First Contact Service has been:
- handling around 2000 calls per month from families and professionals
 - on average around 58% of these calls were dealt with directly by First Contact
 - 29% resulted in liaison with the case-holding social worker
 - 13% were directly referred to the Children's Assessment Team (CAT)
 - Contacts resulted in 178 service requests being dealt with to offer families services in their own locality.
 - Between 18th October and 16th December: 107 practitioners received support and advice from the First Contact regarding more complex cases.
- 10.5 However, there is still much to do which include a number of key developments for the service.

10.5.1

S

Securing Good Ofsted inspection outcomes for Cheshire East's Children Centres

Since April 2010 Children Centres have been subject to inspection by Ofsted. Originally these inspections were based on a framework that inspected children centres as universal provision. We had one inspection under this framework, this being Underwood West in early 2010 which resulted in a 'good' overall rating. A new inspection framework was introduced in September 2011 that has started to inspect children centres as targeted provision. A recent inspection of our children centre in Congleton resulted in an overall rating of 'satisfactory'. It was clear that in the feedback from Ofsted that changes are needed which require

a significant refocusing to target more vulnerable groups. This work is already well underway.

10.5.2 **Developing the CEFS workforce to work at an early intervention level** **D**

Whilst the CEFS structure is in place there is a significant amount of work that was carried out by the former family support staff, based in family centres around facilitating family contact for looked after children which needs to continue but which restricts the availability of staff. We are currently working with our colleagues in social care and commissioning to look at new models for the delivery of contact so that we can free up these staff to increase the volume of early intervention work that takes place across the authority.

10.5.3 **Training the workforce** **T**

CEFS was created from a range of staff with different backgrounds and skill sets. A key priority in the early development of the service is to ensure that staff have a consistent range of competencies across the 0-19 age range that will enable them to meet the service's objectives. The training will be undertaken with a range of partners and is being facilitated in part through the Children's Trust

10.5.4 **Building strong partnerships** **B**

Given the numbers of children and families in any area who may require some form of early help, it is way beyond the resources of a local authority to meet these needs without reference to our partners. When the resources of schools, health agencies and voluntary sector organisations are combined there is much more likely to be sufficient resource and sufficient people with specific skills to meet the needs of the vast majority of children and families without them progressing up the level of needs. Good strong working relationships are providing a solid platform to realise a more joined up approach for families.

11.0 Access to Information

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

Name: Jonathan Potter
Designation: Principal Manager, Cheshire East Family Service
Tel No: 01606 275891
Email: jonathan.potter@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Case Study 1

Background

Alice rang in a distressed state asking for help with her stepson Frank, who was refusing to go to school and had locked himself in the bathroom. Frank is 13 and moved to live with Alice and his father Bob as a young child because of issues with his care. Frank has grown increasingly aggressive over the past few years, verbally abusing Alice, and damaging property in the house. He says he hates her and Bob and does not want to live with them. He has been on the waiting list for counselling for a long time.

Action taken

First Contact staff reassured Alice that she and Bob seem to have been doing well in a difficult situation, and that she had done the right thing in asking for help rather than walking out and leaving Frank alone in the house. First Contact suggested the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) approach which would help them look together as a family at what Frank's needs were so that they could find the right help for him. With Alice's consent, First contact called Frank's school and explained the circumstances. The school did not have any concerns about Frank, but they agreed to meet with him and Alice and assess his needs using CAF. The CAF Support Officer helped them with this, and to make a service request to CEFS. The case was quickly allocated to a Family Service Worker and local voluntary organisation became involved to provide counselling for Frank. Support for the parents was also identified and put in place in discussion with the family

Outcomes for family

By working together, agencies have assessed Frank's needs and are providing the family with services to help meet those needs. Frank is currently more settled and working on the unresolved issues which were leading to his anger. The support they receive helps Alice and Bob to feel less isolated and they are relieved that arrangements have been put in place to help the family.

Case Study 2

Background

A hospital maternity unit contacted Children's Assessment Team (CAT) to make a referral to 'social services'. A new mother with post natal depression had expressed concern that she was not coping. The hospital did not have any specific concerns about the safety of the baby, more about the isolation of the mother and lack of support networks available.

Action taken by agencies

Staff in CAT quickly discussed the situation with the First Contact Complex Needs Officer, and agreed that the mother could best be supported via CAF processes. First Contact staff contacted the Midwife who had already begun compiling information for a common assessment. The CEFS Locality Team assessed the situation and the agencies involved agreed the need for an urgent allocation of a Family Service time. This was arranged and co-ordinated to be available to support the mother as soon as she returned home.

The CAT team advised the hospital of the arrangements which had been put in place and they agreed that it was no longer necessary to make a child protection referral to CAT.

Outcomes for family

The situation is now more settled. The Family Support Worker visited the mother and arranged for her to join the new parents group at her local children's centre. She has now made new friends at the group and feels less isolated and better able to meet the needs of her baby. There is now no further need for additional support and the CAF had been closed.

Case Study 3

Background

A report was received in the school holidays from police regarding a domestic incident between 2 adults where an 11 year old child was involved.

Action taken by agencies

Utilising the co-location opportunity provided with the Domestic Violence worker liaison established some of the already known facts regarding this case. Staff immediately contacted the mother and supported her to move to safer accommodation with her child. Following the return of the schools staff liaised with the child's school to update them on recent circumstances and advise them of the change of address. All agencies agreed that the school would monitor the situation and offer support to the pupil. Whilst the school will lead on supporting the mother and son all agencies were agreed that any further escalation of issues would result in a multi agency plan being implemented.

Outcomes for family

The mother was supported to move to an address where she could keep herself and her child safe. The school were engaged in the provision of support and will be able to monitor the child's needs for any further support in the future.

Changes Introduced in the School Admissions Code and Admissions Appeal Code 2012

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In the White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' published in November 2010, Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Education, announced a review of the school admissions system to make it 'simpler, fairer and more transparent building on the on the principle of placing the trust back in schools and head teachers'.
- 1.2 Following a review by Ministers, two new 'draft' simplified versions were published for consultation, which commenced on Friday 27 May 2011 and closed on Friday 19 Aug 2011
- 1.3 Changes to associated regulations were also made with the intention that, wherever possible, the Codes would be the single point of reference on admissions accompanied by concise and consistent regulations.

2 The Codes and Associated Regulations

- 2.1 The revised School Admissions Code and School Admission Appeals Code came into force on 1 February 2012.
 - The School Admissions Code (2012)
 - The Admissions Appeals Code (2012)
 - The School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012
 - The School Admissions (Appeals Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012
 - The School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012
- 2.2 The Codes are made under Section 84 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998
- 2.3 The School Admissions Code and associated Regulations apply to admissions arrangements for the 2013/14 academic year and thereafter.
- 2.4 The School Admission Appeals Code and Appeals Regulations 2012 apply to appeals lodged on or after 1 February 2012.

3 Application of the Codes

3.1 The Codes apply to

- Admission authorities of maintained schools as defined in Section 88(1) (a) and (b) of the SSFA 1998
- Governing bodies and local authorities (when not admission authorities)
- Schools Adjudicators
- Admission Appeal Panels.

3.2 Academies Schools (including Free Schools), University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools¹, are state-funded, non fee-paying independent schools set up under a Funding Agreement between the Secretary of State and the proprietor of an Academy (Academy Trust). Academies are required by their funding agreements to comply with the Code and the law relating to admissions, though the Secretary of State has the power to vary this requirement where there is demonstrable need.

3.3 Admission authorities are responsible for ensuring their admission arrangements² are compliant with the Code. Where a school is the admission authority, this responsibility falls to the governing body or Academy Trust.

4 Simplifying the Codes

4.1 There were in total over 130 pages in the 2010 Codes and included in this were over 660 mandatory requirements. The new 2012 Codes have been reduced significantly with the purpose of making them simpler and comprise of a combined total of 65 pages. During consultation it was stated that *'they have been written from an assumption that all schools and admission authorities seek to comply with the Codes'*.

4.2 To achieve simplification, the sections in the 2010 Codes that prescribed what an admission authority 'should' or 'should not' do have been removed. The 2012 Codes offer guidance which, if not followed, admission authorities can be challenged on.

4.3 The Codes continue to impose mandatory requirements, which if not followed, result in unlawful arrangements of practice.

4.4 Regulations are still recognised as a key part of the legislative framework but for simplification, these are included in the 2012 Codes.

¹ Studio Schools are a new type of government-funded state school for 14-19 year olds of all abilities

² The overall procedure, practices, criteria and supplementary information to be used in deciding on the allocation of school places and refers to any device or means used to determine whether a school place is to be offered.

5 Changes to the Admissions Code – Consultation

- 5.1 In order to ensure fair admission arrangements, consultation on changes remains a statutory requirement and objections to unfair or unlawful arrangements can still be made.
- 5.2 The 2012 Code introduces an extended role for the Schools Adjudicator to hear objections to admission arrangements of *all* state-funded schools, including those of Academies and Free Schools.
- 5.3 The deadline for objections to be referred to the Schools Adjudicator has been brought forward to 30 June in the determination year – previously 31 July. (Para 1.50)
- 5.4 Objections to unfair arrangements can now be made by anyone (Para 3.3)
- 5.5 Where there are no changes proposed, consultation on admission arrangements must be actioned only once every 7 years and not every 3 years as previously (Para 1.42)
- 5.6 A main change introduced in 2012 Code is the removal of the requirement to consult on changes to published admission numbers (PANS)³ PANs are still required but the Department for Education (DfE) wants all schools that are ‘popular with parents to be free to increase their PAN, and thereby offer more parents more options for a place’. Therefore, own admission authorities are not required to consult on their PAN where they propose either to increase or keep the same PAN, however, the local authority (as admission authority) must consult at least the governing body of the community or voluntary controlled school.
- 5.7 Objections can be submitted to the School Adjudicator by community and voluntary controlled schools regarding a *decrease* in the PAN determined by the local authority and the Schools Adjudicator is required to have regard to the strong presumption in favour of an *increase* to the PAN when considering such objections.

6 Changes to the Admissions Code – In Year Coordination

- 6.1 The 2012 Code states that ‘any parent can apply for a place for their child at any time to any school outside the normal admissions round’.
- 6.2 Changes in legislation introduced for September 2010 placed a new requirement on local authorities (LAs) to coordinate all ‘in year’ applications. These are applications received for admission into any year group during the course of the year and which are made outside the normal admissions process. This became mandatory from September 2010. In the 2012 Code,

³ The PAN is the number of pupils to be admitted at the normal point of entry for example, the reception class in a primary or the year 7 in a secondary school otherwise known as relevant year group.

this requirement to coordinate has been removed for 2013/2014 academic year and subsequent years. (Para 2.21)

- 6.3 LAs must nevertheless continue to provide an application form for parents, together with information about the places available in its area.

7 Changes to the Admissions Code – Oversubscription Criteria and Random Allocation

- 7.1 Admission authorities are no longer permitted to use random allocation as the principal oversubscription criterion⁴. (Para 1.34) Admission authorities that use any other form of random allocation must set out clearly how this will operate.

8 Change to the Admissions Code – Oversubscription Criteria and ‘Looked After/Cared For Children’.

- 8.1 The mandatory highest priority given to looked after children within the oversubscription criteria has been extended to include ‘previously looked after’⁵ (Para 1.7)

9 Changes to the Admissions Code – Oversubscription Criteria and Pupil Premium

- 9.1 Free Schools and Academies may now, where their Funding Agreements permit, give priority in admission arrangements to children eligible for Free School Meals (in future, the Pupil Premium). (Para 1.9(f))

10 Changes to the Admissions Code – Oversubscription Criteria and Children of Staff

- 10.1 Admission authorities are permitted to include children of staff at the school within their oversubscription criteria. (Para 1.39) as follows:

- a) where the member of staff has been employed at the school for two or more years at the time at which the application for admission to the school is made, and/or
- b) the member of staff is recruited to fill a vacant post for which there is a demonstrable skill shortage.

- 10.2 A definition of what constitutes ‘staff’ e.g. teachers, supply teachers or non-teaching staff, including those undertaking tasks such as catering and cleaning must be included to ensure clarity of arrangements.

⁴ The published criteria that an admission authority applies when a school has more applications than places available in order to decide which children will be allocated a place.

⁵ Previously looked after children are children who were looked after, but ceased to be so because they were adopted (or became subject to a residence order or special guardianship order).

11 Changes to the Admissions Code – Infant Class Size Legislation

11.1 The law requires that infant classes must not contain more than 30 pupils to a single school teacher. In very limited circumstances, further admissions can be agreed and these are considered as ‘permitted exceptions’. The problem has always been that this is time limited with ‘qualifying measures’ needed by the following year and that no allowance is made to admit children of multiple births.

11.2 Legislation still restricts infant classes to 30 pupils to a single school teacher, but changes introduced in the 2012 Code and Infant Class Size Regulations mean that children will remain an ‘excepted pupil’ for the time they are in an infant class or until the class numbers fall back to the infant class size limit. (Para 2.15)

11.3 In addition, the number of permitted exceptions (Para 2.15) has been extended to include

- children whose twin or sibling from a multiple birth is admitted otherwise than as an excepted pupil
- children of UK service personnel
- previously looked after children (*in addition to current provision for admission of looked after children*)

12 Change to the Coordination Regulations

12.1 For admissions for 2014 and subsequent years, local authorities must include within their coordinated scheme⁶ the ‘national offer day’ for primary school places of 16 April. This change brings the primary coordination process in line with the secondary process and is the date on which all English local authorities will be required to send out decisions to parents and carers on applications. (Para 2.23)

13 Other Admissions Code Changes

13.1 Schools Adjudicator role to be extended to consider *all* objections to admission arrangements, but to remove the Schools Adjudicator's ability to modify a school's arrangements in a determination with this responsibility resting with the admission authority.

13.2 Removal of the statutory requirement on local authorities in England to set up Admission Forums.

14 Admission Appeals Code 2012

⁶ This is the LA process for co-ordinating applications for school places and offers for their area. All local authorities are required to co-ordinate the normal admissions round for primary and secondary schools in their area. Schools can take in-year applications directly from parents, provided they notify their local authority of each application and its outcome.

- 14.1 The Code applies to all appeals lodged on or after 1 February and applies to admission appeals for all maintained schools in England. Academies are required by their funding agreements to comply with the Code and the law relating to admissions.
- 14.2 The requirement for appeal panels to refer unlawful admission arrangements to the Schools Adjudicator has been removed. Instead, panels are required to refer such arrangements to the local authority and the admission authority, if applicable, so that they can be reviewed for the next admissions round. (Para 3.4)
- 14.3 On receipt of their decision on an application, parents and carers were previously allowed 10 working days to lodge an appeal. This has been changed with a requirement on admission authorities to allow parents and carers at least 20 working days from receipt of an offer to prepare and lodge an appeal. (Para 2.1)
- 14.4 Previously, if a member of the panel withdraws, the requirement was that all appeals in a multiple appeal for a school would have to be re-heard. The new Code has been revised to allow the appeal hearing to be postponed until the third member returns or the admission authority appoints a third member. (Paragraph 1.9)
- 14.5 The previous Appeals Code required that admission authorities accept evidence provided by parents at any stage of the appeal process, including on the day of the hearing. The revised Appeals Code gives parents at least two opportunities to provide evidence, including a new requirement that parents can be requested to provide initial evidence when lodging an appeal. The Code requires that admission authorities inform parents that any information or evidence not received in advance of the hearing may not be considered at the appeal. (Paras 2.7 and 2.10)
- 14.6 The guidelines around venues have been relaxed. Admission authorities must nevertheless hear appeals in appropriate venues, (Para 2.14)
- 14.7 The requirement for admission authorities to advertise for lay appeal members every three years has been removed. Instead, the requirement is to ensure that panel members retain their independence for the duration of their service. With regard to training of panel members, this has also been relaxed with the removal of the requirement for training every two years and annual updates being replaced with the requirement that initial training is mandatory and any further training by agreement between individual members or panels and the admission authority. (Paragraph 1.10)
- 14.8 There is a new requirement placed on admission authorities to publish their appeals timetable on their website by 28 February each year (Para 2.2)

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

REPORT TO: CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 14 February 2012
Report of: Borough Solicitor
Subject/Title: Work Programme update

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 To review items in the 2012 Work Programme, to consider the efficacy of existing 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 In reviewing the work programme, Members must pay close attention to the Corporate Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy.

10.2 The schedule attached, has been updated in line with the Committees recommendations on 17 January 2012. Following this meeting the document will be updated so that all the appropriate targets will be included within the schedule.

10.3 In reviewing the work programme, Members must have regard to the general criteria which should be applied to all potential items, including Task and Finish reviews, 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

10.4 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

11.0 Access to Information

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

Name: Mark Grimshaw
Designation: Scrutiny Officer
Tel No: 01270 685680
Email: mark.grimshaw@cheshireeast.gov.uk

As of 03/02/2011

Children and Families Scrutiny Committee Workplan: September 2011 – April 2012

Portfolio Holder – Hilda Gaddum

Historical Record

Date of Meeting	Agenda Setting Meeting	Topic	Purpose/Key issues (including origin)	Comments post meeting
20 September 2011		Management Structure Update	Members top receive verbal update	That a breakdown of responsibilities aligned to each senior manager be distributed to the Committee.
		OFSTED inspection	Members to consider report,	That a special meeting be convened pre 18 October 2011 to discuss in further detail. That congratulations be passed to staff and mgmt at Claremont rd.
		Summary of Schools Performance		Item be added to work programme relating to what CE do to improve underperforming schools.
		Training Requirements		Training sessions on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- LA's changing interface with schools and education- Architecture of partnerships.
18 October 2011		FOSTERING AND ADOPTION VIDEO		That the Fostering and Adoption team be congratulated for their work in producing the film. That it be suggested to Stephen Kelly that he contacts

				other media outlets such as Cinemac, the BBC, BBC North West and ITV to see if the film could be distributed more widely.
		VIRTUAL HEAD		That the following additional information be provided in future Virtual School reports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The national 'mainstream' educational attainment figures for comparison b) The Cheshire East 'mainstream' educational attainment figures for comparison c) The number of students in each yearly cohort.
		WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE		That the item regarding what Cheshire East was doing to improve underperforming schools be added to the agenda for the meeting scheduled 15 November 2011. That the proposed 2012/13 budget be brought to the Committee for consideration at the next scheduled meeting. That thanks be extended to Gill Betton for drafting the Children's Directorate glossary.
15 November 2011		'CHILD & ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES' (CAMHS) OVERVIEW	Members to consider and comment	That the Committee support the work to integrate the existing autism provision into a single 'multi-agency' pathway to improve the autism assessment and support pathways across the authority. That the Committee support further progress in preventative approaches and services to meeting the emotional health and wellbeing needs of children, young people and their families/carers. That more detail on the financial background and

				<p>requirements for increasing investment into preventative approaches be circulated to the Committee for consideration. That this information include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) What current funding was in place proportionately from each organisation for CAMHS as a whole and for the preventative agenda. b) Who managed the current budget in terms of allocation. c) How the investment needs had been worked out. d) Where it was expected the money would be spent and from which organisations proportionately would the extra funds come from. <p>That a geographical map indicating where services relating to CAMHS were located be circulated to the Committee.</p>
		CHILDREN'S TRUST AND CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN 2011-2014	Members to be briefed.	<p>That the Committee supports the work of the Trust as the best way of achieving joined up, integrative working for the benefit of children and young people in Cheshire East.</p> <p>That an update report be brought back to the Committee in 12 months outlining the progress against the Trust's proposed outcomes and priorities and that this report include the budget implications of retaining the Trust along with evidence of any possible savings the joint working fostered by the Trust has produced.</p> <p>That the minutes of each respective Trust meeting be circulated to the Committee for their information.</p>
		ADDRESSING SCHOOL UNDERPERFORMANCE :	Members to consider	That when a school receives an OfSTED report and/or when a school has a number of issues identified, the

		LOCAL AUTHORITY INTERVENTIONS INCLUDING THE 'IMPROVING OUTCOMES PROGRAMME' (IOP)		<p>relevant ward Councillor be made aware and adequately briefed.</p> <p>That detailed performance data relating to Cheshire East Schools be circulated to Members when available.</p> <p>That 'appendix c' be brought back to the Committee as part of the regular performance report and that this include the date of publication for respective OfSTED reports.</p>
		DRAFT SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY POLICY	Members to consider and comment	<p>That the draft SEND policy be brought back to the Committee on 13 December 2011 for further consideration.</p> <p>That site visits to the special schools in Cheshire East be arranged.</p>
		WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE	Members to comment	<p>That the following items be deferred until January 2012:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The impact on council services following the opening of Academies b) Out-of-Borough Care Placements Task and Finish Report from Lancashire County Council c) Disabled Respite Care <p>That a line by line analysis of the Quarter 2 budget report be brought to the next scheduled meeting.</p>
13 December 2011		DRAFT SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY POLICY	Members to consider	<p>That thanks be passed to the Headteachers of the special schools which hosted Councillor visits.</p> <p>That the following comments be considered in the formulation of the final SEND Policy document:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) That the wording in the penultimate bullet point on page 39, beginning 'Out of Borough

				<p>Placements’ be considered in order to protect the Council from legal challenge. Important to state clearly that the Council would have the final say on whether a child’s assessed needs could be met appropriately in a Cheshire East setting or not.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> b) That the wording in the fourth bullet point on page 39, beginning ‘Parents/Carers’ be changed to the following: “Parents/carers will be listened to and their views treated with respect. Their expertise will be valued and help to inform the provision put in place for children and young people” c) That a clear definition of ‘special educational needs’ be added to the ‘principles’ section that all stakeholders would sign up to and agree. d) That ‘the pledge’ be put at the beginning of the document as this was easy to understand and helped put the rest of the policy in context. <p>That a training session be arranged which, with the aid of case studies, would explore how ‘the pledge’ stated in the policy was being practically articulated with service users.</p> <p>That a review of the consultation responses be brought to a subsequent Committee meeting.</p>
		CHILDREN AND FAMILIES BUDGET	Members to be briefed	<p>That the report be noted.</p> <p>That a request be made that more detailed financial information be brought to the next appropriate meeting.</p> <p>That a request be made that information regarding the 2012/13 budget be brought as soon as possible to a subsequent meeting.</p>

		WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE		That the work programme be noted That the Home to School Transport Task and Finish Review be added to the next agenda for consideration.
17 January 2012		HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT TASK AND FINISH REVIEW	Members to consider	That both the report of the Task and Finish Group and the Minority Report be put forward for consideration by Cabinet. That the Minority Report be endorsed by the Committee.
		ACADEMIES THE IMPACT ON CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL	Members to consider	That the Committee support the department in providing services to Academies at competitive market rates. That the Committee have sight of the packages being offered to Academies prior to them being put on the market and that the Committee be involved in the monitoring of their efficacy. That it be recommended to the service that they consider Public Relations initiatives with regard to the possible false perception of Cheshire East school performance decreasing as a result of the loss of high performing Academies from the data set.
		DISABLED RESPITE CARE		That the update be noted. That a report outlining future respite care options and the improved transition between children's and adult's respite care be brought to a subsequent meeting. That thanks be extended to Cath Knowles and her team

				for all their hard work in achieving a positive outcome in challenging circumstances.
		WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE		That the work programme be noted That a special meeting be arranged to consider the 2012/13 budget proposals prior to the 23 February 2012. That an item regarding the transfer of an element of the early intervention budget from local authority to police control be added to the work programme.
		FORWARD PLAN - EXTRACTS		That the forward plan be noted That the item regarding Admission Arrangements be considered by the Committee prior to the 2 April 2012

Next Agenda Setting Meeting: 15 March 2012

Ongoing items/reviews/Monitoring Papers

Item	Reporting:	Committee Meeting							
		20/9	18/10	15/11	13/12	17/01	14/2	13/3	10/4
PERFORMANCE REPORTING (key exceptions – red/amber and explanations/commentary) to include adoption rates, staffing information and profile of children in Cheshire East	Quarterly	X		X					
INDEPENDENT INSPECTIONS OR REVIEWS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Unannounced Inspection • Children Services Performance Rating • Schools Inspection 	Quarterly	X							
SAFEGUARDING	When Appropriate								
REGULATION 33	Bi-annual							X	
BUDGET PROCESS – summary of budget position update given to Cabinet.	When Appropriate				X				
REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME	Regular	X	X	X	X	X	X		

Possible Future Issues / Items (Chronology)

Meeting dates: 13 March 2012, 10 April 2012

Item	Corporate Priority / Targets	Suggested Action	Notes	Due Date and Status
Budget Briefing	Support our Children and Young People	Members to be briefed	To include emerging proposals for 2012/13 budget. As requested in December 2011.	20 February 2012 On track
OFSTED inspection paper	Support our Children and Young People	Members to go over in more detail the paper discussed in September 2011 and to be updated on the progress made on the action points.		March 2011 On track
School Organisation Plan	Support our Children and Young People	Members to consider		March 2011 On track
Admission Arrangements and Local Authority Co-ordinated Scheme 2013	Support our Children and Young People	Members to consider	Requested on 17 Jan 2012	March 2011 On track
Youth Offending service – closer integration with the police.	Support our Children and Young People	Members to consider	Requested on 17 Jan 2012	March 2011 On track

Possible future items for consideration:

- Every Child matters
- Director of Public Health inc. work on Obesity and Diabetes (when appointed)
- Childcare support for working parents
- How safeguarding issues are checked in schools
- Complaints – tba
- Services packages for Academies
- Future respite options and the successful transition between children's and adult's services.

Training Requirements/Planned sessions

- Local Authorities' changing interface with schools and education – **part II tba**
- Budget Session – **20th Feb 2012**
- Training session on the SEN 'Pledge' - **tba**

Disregarded / Discontinued Items

Item	Date	Reason
Post 16 Transfer of Funding to Local authorities	22.09.10	Responsibility no longer with LA
Analysis of School Performance	22.09.10	To be merged with educational attainment item
Early Years Funding Reform	22.09.10	Briefing heard on 27.07.10
Children's Centres	26.10.10	Dealt with as part of the Family Support review.
School Status report	26.10.10	Merged with Academies item
Interventions in Schools	26.10.10	To be dealt with in the schools inspection item.
School Admissions Policy / TLC review	14.12.10	Superseded by White Paper item
Redesign of Children's Services	17.02.11	Incorporated into Safeguarding item
Teenage Pregnancy	17.02.11	Superseded by Director of Public Health Item
NEETS	17.02.11	Superseded by Connexions Item
Macclesfield High School Review	04.05.11	Item no longer needing consideration
Transport for Young People	18.05.11	Superseded by Home to School Transport Review
Aiming Higher Report	13.06.11	Superseded by Disabled Respite Care item.
Member Engagement in Social Services Systems	03.08.11	Superseded by Training session on Contact, Referrals and Assessments

Task Groups – potential/current/completed

Title	Progress Notes	Actions
Managing the Provision of School Places (formerly TLC)	Went to Scrutiny November 2009.	
Residential Provision	Recommendations agreed 07.09.10 – went to Cabinet 20.09.10 for consideration. Members to review action plan following Officer's response to recommendations.	
Family Support	Reported to Committee 07.12.10. Went to Cabinet 20.12.10	Cabinet Response required ASAP
Education attainment	Set up Task and Finish Group to review the work of the multi agency improvement and achievement group	
Foster services	Recommendations agreed 04.11. Went to Cabinet 06.11	Cabinet Response required December 2011
Health and Looked After Children	Discuss with Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee.	To set up with conjunction with the Health and Wellbeing Committee.
Cared for Children 16 plus service.	Set up Membership 28/06/2011 – deferred to January 2012	Re-establish
Home to School Transport	Following recommendation from Cabinet meeting.	Reports received by Cabinet – February 2012
Health and Cared for Children	Following Fostering service review – in partnership with H&W Committee	Ongoing.

Dates of Future Cabinet Meetings

5 March 2012, 2 April 2012 and 30 April 2012.

Dates of Future Council Meetings

23 February 2012, 19 April 2012 and 16 May 2012.



FORWARD PLAN 1 FEBRUARY 2012 - 31 MAY 2012

This Plan sets out the key decisions which the Executive expect to take over the next four months. The Plan is rolled forward every month. It will next be published in mid February and will then contain all key decisions expected to be taken between 1 March and 30 June 2012. Key decisions are defined in the Councils Constitution.

Reports relevant to key decisions, and any listed background documents may be viewed at any of the Councils Offices/Information Centres 6 days before the decision is to be made. Copies of, or extracts from these documents may be obtained on the payment of a reasonable fee from the following address:-

Democratic Services Team
Cheshire East Council ,
c/o Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach Cheshire CW11 1HZ
Telephone: 01270 686463

However, it is not possible to make available for viewing or to supply copies of reports or documents, the publication of which is restricted due to confidentiality of the information contained.

A decision notice for each key decision is published within 6 days of it having been made. This is open for public inspection on the Council's Website, Council Information Centres and Council Offices.

The law and the Council's Constitution provides for urgent key decisions to be made. A decision notice will be published for these in exactly the same way.

Forward Plan 1 February 2012 to 31 May 2012

Key Decision	Decisions to be Taken	Decision Maker	Expected Date of Decision	Proposed Consultation	Relevant Scrutiny Committee	How to make representation to the decision made
CE11/12-25 Cheshire Youth Offending Service Governance Arrangements	To consider recommendations for greater collaboration of youth offending services in Cheshire.	Cabinet	5 Mar 2012		Children and Families	Lorraine Butcher, Strategic Director (Children, Families and Adults)
CE11/12-34 Proposed Expansion of Oakefield Primary and Nursery School, Crewe	To approve the expansion of Oakefield Primary and Nursery School, Crewe from 315 to 420 school places, with a proposed implementation date of September 2012.	Cabinet	5 Mar 2012	School organisations, East Cheshire Association of Primary School Heads, local Headteachers through meetings and the School Organisation website.	Children and Families	Lorraine Butcher, Strategic Director (Children, Families and Adults)
CE11/12-28 Admission Arrangements and Local Authority Co-ordinated Scheme 2013	To approve changes in admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools for which the LA is the admission authority.	Cabinet	2 Apr 2012	With admission authorities and neighbouring authorities.	Children and Families	Lorraine Butcher, Strategic Director (Children, Families and Adults)