

Corporate Parenting Committee

Agenda

Date: Tuesday 14th July 2020
Time: 4.00 pm
Venue: Virtual Meeting

How to Watch the Meeting

For anybody wishing to view the meeting live please click on the link below:

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

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

1. **Apologies for Absence**

2. **Declarations of Interest**

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

3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting** (Pages 3 - 6)

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2020.

Contact: Rachel Graves
Tel: 01270 686473
E-Mail: rachel.graves@cheshireeast.gov.uk

4. **Corporate Parenting Update Report** (Pages 7 - 16)

To receive an update on the impact of Covid-19 for cared for children and care leavers.

5. **Children's Rights Annual Report** (Pages 17 - 34)

To receive the Children's Rights Annual Report.

6. **Review of the Corporate Parenting Committee's Terms of Reference**
(Pages 35 - 36)

To agree the revised Terms of Reference for the Corporate Parenting Committee.

THERE ARE NO PART 2 ITEMS

Membership: Councillors R Bailey, J Barber, M Beanland, J Buckley, C Bulman, P Butterill, S Edgar, K Flavell (Chairman), S Holland, J Saunders (Vice-Chairman) and M Warren

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Committee**
held on Tuesday, 21st January, 2020 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor K Flavell (Chairman)
Councillor J Saunders (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors J Barber, J Buckley, C Bulman, S Edgar, S Holland, A Moran (for Cllr Butterill) and M Warren

Officers in attendance

Gill Betton, Head of Service: Children's Development and Partnerships
Kerry Birtles, Head of Service: Cared for Children and Care Leavers
Sue Pilkington, Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children
Jacquie Sims, Director of Children's Social Care
Kayleigh Wilshaw, Service Manager: Cared for Children and Care Leavers
Julie Zientek, Democratic Services Officer

38 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED – That Councillor K Flavell be appointed Chairman.

39 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P Butterill.

40 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

41 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2019 be approved as a correct record.

42 CORPORATE PARENTING UPDATE FROM ELECTED MEMBERS

Councillors J Buckley, C Bulman and K Flavell reported that they had attended the STAR celebration day at Tatton Park, which had recognised and celebrated the achievements of cared for children and care leavers.

Officers' contact details were to be shared with Members, to facilitate the completion of DBS checks.

Some pen profiles and options for engagement forms had been completed. Paper copies were circulated to Members, who were asked to complete any outstanding information and send it back as soon as possible. Pen profiles would be put into the correct format by the unit coordinators and sent to Members for final approval prior to being shared with young people. Officers were to collate the options for engagement responses and they would ensure that everyone had the opportunity to engage in different areas.

43 INPUT FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Around 300 children, young people and their carers had attended the STAR celebration day at Tatton Park, and the feedback had all been positive.

The Head of Service: Cared for Children and Care Leavers reported that she had recently attended 'My Voice', the Children in Care Council. They had discussed the outcome of the Ofsted inspection, and the young people had stated that their biggest wish was to be involved in their care plans. They had also discussed the document produced by TACT, which recognised that the language of the care system sometimes created stigma and barriers for understanding, and suggested alternative terminology.

44 THE HEALTH OF CARED FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19 (DEEP DIVE ON PLEDGE 4 - IMPROVE HEALTH AND WELLBEING)

The Committee considered the above report, which outlined the delivery of health services to children in the care of Cheshire East Council during the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019. The report reviewed performance indicators, clinical work undertaken by the Wirral Community Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust Cared for Children Health Team, service improvements and plans for further development.

During the discussion and in response to points raised by the Committee it was reported that:

- The reported drop in the percentage of Cheshire East cared for children who had visited a dentist was partly attributable to the way in which the data was recorded. A more accurate method of reporting was being explored.
- It was recognised that the figures for the completion of Review Health Assessments for Cheshire East cared for children placed out of area were unacceptably low in the second half of 2017-2018 and the first half of 2018-19. However, there was a significant improvement during Quarters 3 and 4, and work was continuing to continue this improvement.

- Young people were engaging with the Care Leavers Health Passports, but the current A4 paper format was not popular. It was intended to review the health passport document during 2019-2020, to ensure that it remained relevant and useful.
- With respect to emotional wellbeing, there were long waiting lists for talking therapies. To address immediate need, personal advisors could refer young people to a part-time emotional wellbeing personal advisor and a full time emotional wellbeing practitioner from Pure Insight.
- Most requests for Initial Health Assessments were submitted within the statutory target of 48 hours, and all requests were sent within 6 days. A review of the arrangements for Initial Health Assessments was a priority for 2019-2020, to ensure that all children entering care had their health care needs identified and met in a timely way.

RESOLVED - That the report be noted.

45 OUTCOME OF CHESHIRE EAST OFSTED INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ILACS)

The Committee considered a report and received a presentation regarding the outcome of the Ofsted inspection of Cheshire East Council's children's social care services, which had been undertaken between 11 and 29 November 2019. The report and presentation also outlined the proposed actions to ensure that improvements were made in the areas for development identified in the Ofsted report.

In response to points raised by Committee Members it was reported that:

- With respect to the delays in pre-proceedings, there was to be a joint evaluation with legal services by February 2020.
- The time taken to identify risks and take children into care when risks were chronic rather than acute, and they were not at risk of immediate harm, could be days or a number of weeks.
- Local authorities had a responsibility to ensure the safety of children who were home educated, and they were visited annually.
- The full action plan would be considered by the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED - That the report be noted.

46 CORPORATE PARENTING UPDATE AND SCORECARD

The Committee considered a report regarding national and local developments in relation to cared for children and young people and care

leavers. The report aligned with the pledges of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

The report also provided an update on performance measures in quarter 2 of 2019-20, and detailed areas of concern and what was being done to address them.

During the discussion it was reported that the average number of days between placement order and match with adoptive family was marked red because it had increased. The number of adopters had decreased but it was now increasing. Family finding was undertaken by the regional adoption agency, which worked very hard.

RESOLVED - That the report be noted.

The meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and concluded at 5.30 pm

Councillor K Flavell (Chairman)



Working for a brighter future together

DECISION REPORT

Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting: 14 July 2020

Report Title: Corporate Parenting Update Report

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Kathryn Flavell, Portfolio Holder for Children and Families

Senior Officer: Mark Palethorpe, Executive Director of People

1. Report summary

- 1.1. This report provides an update to the Corporate Parenting Committee specifically in relation to the impact of Covid-19 for cared for children and care leavers.
- 1.2. Statutory services for cared for children and care leavers were adversely affected by the restrictions imposed by government in response to the national pandemic. This report will outline the impact of those restrictions for children and young people and the service ability and capacity to operate in a business as usual way.
- 1.3. The Corporate Parenting Committee has not met since January 2020 (with March and May being stood down as a direct result of Covid-19), however officers have attended weekly meetings with the Portfolio Holder and have provided bi-weekly update reports for members of the Committee.
- 1.4. The Shadow Committee has not met in person or virtually at this time as a direct result of Covid-19.

2. Recommendation/s

2.1. Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of the report.
- Provide support and challenge to the local authority actions in respect of the report.

3. Reasons for Recommendation/s

3.1. The Corporate Parenting Committee is an advisory group to the Cabinet and, as such, needs to be aware of any national or local issues that are likely to impact on cared for children and care leavers. The Corporate Parenting Committee needs to be able to scrutinise and challenge performance to improve outcomes for cared for children and young people.

4. Other Options Considered

4.1. None; this is an update report.

5. Background

5.1. On the 23rd March 2020 the government imposed significant restrictions throughout England where we were tasked as a nation to stay at home in response to the pandemic. This occurred without any real warning and so for statutory services, like those that we deliver to cared for children and care leavers, were required to plan quickly and efficiently to ensure the safety of children and young people and the frontline practitioners who undertake those statutory duties.

5.2. We immediately assessed the level of risk for each individual child and young person across the service and the impact of not having a social worker or other professional visit in a direct face to face capacity. The majority of the contact that we had with children and young people at this time was virtual and Cheshire East were very quickly able to equip frontline staff with the technology they needed to undertake their work virtually. There were a number of children where the risk assessment identified that the risk to the child would be too great if the social worker did not visit in a face to face capacity and so through pre-screening assessments and the allocation of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) this was safely undertaken.

- 5.3. The feedback from children and families has been, in the main, positive, where they have described feeling that the local authority have supported them in a time of national crisis. One of the most significantly affected areas was that of family time between cared for children and their parents, siblings and friends, however, we have worked hard to enable virtual arrangements to happen, and by mid May we were planning for recovery and offering many families safe face to face family time. By the second week of June, all cared for children had the opportunity for a face to face family time session with significant people in their lives.
- 5.4. As Public Health and the Government have shared further information about the national response to the pandemic we have been able to quickly adapt our service response and have been able to make informed decisions about the safety for children, families and frontline practitioners in undertaking our statutory duties in a business as usual way.
- 5.5. At the beginning of June we had enough information and support from public health, with risk assessments available for staff, to be able to resume our face to face visits to cared for children and care leavers. Again each situation has been individually risk assessed and there remain a number of children where a face to face visit would pose a significant risk, for example due to the foster carer shielding. These situations are reducing and kept under regular review by senior leaders.

6. Pledge 1 - Being a Good Corporate Parent

- 6.1 The wellbeing of our cared for children and care leavers has been an absolute priority for officers throughout this pandemic. We have ensured that, wherever a child or young person has been living, that we have remained in regular contact and offered support where needed. We have seen our parents, foster carers and residential children's homes providers support our children and young people tremendously well with a real reduction in placement instability.
- 6.2 Cheshire East recognised early on that our annual celebration event was unlikely to take place this year and so instead set up an 'over the rainbow competition' for our children and young people to keep them engaged and positive about the future. We had some wonderful entries. Certain entries will be chosen to champion our cared for children in Cheshire East and will deliver Tote Bags containing activities for children and young people to keep them busy.

- 6.3 We have been keen to celebrate all of the achievements that our children and young people have been able to make during this time, for example, two young people securing employment and other care leavers securing their own tenancies.
- 6.4 It is essential that as we enter into the recovery phase of our journey that we identify the specific impact Covid-19 has had for our cared for children and care leavers and champion their voice when we are faced with challenges in the borough such as unemployment and the impact of this period on emotional well-being and mental health.

7. Pledge 2 – We will improve education, employment and employment outcomes.

- 7.1. The majority of our cared for children have not accessed education since the 23rd March. Whilst cared for children were identified by the government as a ‘vulnerable’ group because they have a social worker, under the previous government direction to ‘stay home, stay safe, save the NHS’ the majority of cared for children remained at home with the exception of those where the social worker assessed the level of risk to be greater if the child were to be out of education. At its peak there were 12 cared for children attending their educational setting. As the government moved into recovery and issued new guidance to schools we encouraged all cared for children in transition groups to attend education where safe to do so and this saw a greater number of children gradually see the benefits of this. We continue to monitor this situation very closely and thank our colleagues in the Virtual School and our parents and carers for all the hard work and commitment to caring for our children during this period.
- 7.2. Our care leavers’ experience of not being able to go to work or college, or where young people are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and not being able to actively search for work has been more problematic with the most significant impact being that of social isolation. Whilst we have seen some positive steps where two care leavers have secured employment during this period we remain concerned about the long term impact for care leavers when faced with the challenges of less employment opportunities because of the volume of people looking for work.
- 7.3. We are working closely with the Ambassador for Care Leavers, Mark Riddell, who had brought together nationally a group of leaders from local authorities to share ideas about how to prioritise care leavers as we enter into recovery. There is no easy answer to this challenge but

as corporate parents we must continue to seek all opportunities to prioritise and ring fence opportunities for our care leavers.

8. Pledge 3 - Achieving Permanence and Keeping Children Safe Being a Good Corporate Parent

- 8.1 One of the most significantly affected areas of the pandemic has been the ability to progress permanency plans for children and young people in a timely way. Children with care plans before the Court have been adversely affected by the impact of Covid-19 and the Courts' capacity to undertake hearings and specific cohorts of children such as those moving onto their adoptive families.
- 8.2 We are very clear in our expectation with our regional colleagues in Adoption Counts that we must ensure that all opportunities for children to find their forever families must be utilised and at the beginning of March we were in a much better position to begin to safely transition children from their foster placement to their adoptive families.
- 8.3 Permanency for children and young people is potentially the most significant thing that we can achieve in their lives once they become cared for and so we have remained focused during this period of continuing to achieve this for children where ever practicably possible.

Bespoke Childrens' Homes

- 8.4. We have seen some real success since the last committee in January and have three of our four children's homes registered with Ofsted and caring for Cheshire East children and young people who have previously either been living out of borough or in independent residential settings. We plan to have the fourth home fully mobilised by July and this collectively will provide 12 homes for children in Cheshire East with a greater potential to achieve much better outcomes as a result of being back in their communities.

Fostering

- 8.5. In February, Cheshire East commissioned an independent review of the fostering service which made recommendations service wide but specifically in relation to our engagement in the fostering collaboration, Foster4. It was highlighted that despite attempts to make the collaboration a success, fundamentally this was not achieving its key priority to recruit new foster carers and so the decision was made to exit

from this arrangement and to develop a Cheshire East recruitment and retention strategy. It is pleasing to share that to date there is an increase in enquiries and assessment of potential new foster carers with a provisional date for the permanent exit from Foster4 in September 2020.

Foster Care Fortnight

- 8.6. Foster Care Fortnight 2020 was a success in sharing our vision for Cheshire East children to live in Cheshire East. We were able to prepare and record our own fostering advert for a local radio station with lots of presence on social media. Foster Care Fortnight is not only about generating enquiries to become Cheshire East foster carers but in the time of a national pandemic, was an opportunity to pay credit to all the hard work our foster carers do for our children on a daily basis.

9. Pledge 4 – We will Improve Health and Wellbeing Outcomes

- 9.1 Committee will be aware from the data previously provided that the timeliness and completion of our initial health assessments (IHAs) for our cared for children can be a challenge. We have a specific focus on this in the Help me to be Healthy corporate parenting subgroup and the designated nurse for cared for children returned to work in April which will greatly assist in this task.
- 9.2 Health services when faced with this national crisis were able to be clear with the Local Authority at the beginning of the pandemic that whilst virtual, there would be no detriment to the availability to complete IHAs for cared for children.
- 9.3 Other health outcomes for children have seen some compromise as a result of the pressure on the NHS and the way they have been able to work and so routine dental examinations for cared for children and care leavers have been delayed as a direct result of Covid-19.

10. Pledge 5 – We will prepare young people for Adulthood

- 10.1 Our care experienced adults are one of the cohorts of young people who have experienced the pandemic most severely because of social isolation and subsequent emotional well-being challenges. Frontline staff have worked hard to continue to keep in contact with young adults and we have seen positive examples of where this has worked well, for example two care leavers who were previously of no fixed abode sought support and accessed emergency housing and are now safer as a result of this.

10.2 There have been challenges corporately around housing for care experienced adults being able to transition into social housing, the spontaneous arrivals of UASC young people and the sheer restrictions of lockdown for young people in supported accommodation. However we have had a clear sufficiency plan in place from the point at which we went into lockdown and identified ring fenced offers for care leavers within our current supported accommodation offer to ensure that they were not placed at any greater risk during this period and essentially had a home if they needed it in a crisis.

10.3 Care leavers have been provided with additional support in many ways such as agreeing extended staying put arrangements to enable them to remain in their family homes post 21, additional financial support on a weekly basis, and access to technology and data so that they can stay connected.

10.4 The Committee will be aware that we had planned to review the local offer for care leavers this year however have postponed this to January 2021 along with the 16+ supported accommodation recommission to ensure that we deliver this at a time when we can engage the market and make the offer to care leaver clear and consistent.

11. National or legislative changes

11.1 On the 6th April, the Government issued guidance for local authorities in direct response to the adverse impact of the lockdown restrictions. This guidance outlined amendments to 10 specific regulatory frameworks for adoption, fostering and care planning to support local authorities to undertake their duties.

11.2 Officers considered the benefits of the relaxation of these regulatory amendments however continued to pursue our duties in line with statutory frameworks, albeit with a short period where virtual working dominated in the initial stages of lockdown.

12. Implications of the Recommendations

12.1. Legal Implications

12.1.1 The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 came into force on 24th April 2020 and will remain in force until 25th September 2020.

12.1.2 The regulations are intended to assist local authorities in relation to the operation of their duties under normal statute and regulations.

12.1.3 We have liaised carefully with Legal Services about the effect of the Amendment Regulations and we are clear that any operations that do not adhere to normal legislation and regulation should be the subject of a clearly recorded rationale.

12.3.4 This is particularly important because the Amendment Regulations themselves are the subject of a pending legal challenge to the Government's introduction of the Regulations, by those concerned about the diminution of local authority duties at this time and the adverse impact that would have on children.

12.3.5 Accordingly, whilst we have been challenged by the new ways in which we have had to support our cared for children, we have been quick to enact a recovery plan and are able to evidence where usual standards have been not 'reasonably practicable' only in a small number of cases.

12.2. Financial Implications

12.2.1 The impact of the resource pressures relating directly to Covid-19 need to be clearly evidenced and we will be able to collectively monitor the impact of this for cared for children and care leavers in the coming months.

12.2.2 The Council will include such costs in monthly returns to the Government.

12.2.3 The Covid-19 funding received by the Council to date is over-subscribed so these costs may form pressures against the Council's budget.

12.3. Equality Implications

12.3.1 Cared for children and care leavers can be a vulnerable group because of their experiences and so the impact of Covid-19 could mean further marginalisation.

12.4. Human Resources Implications

12.4.1 HR and Public Health have been supportive of officers in ensuring that robust risk assessments are in place and available to staff in undertaking their duties.

12.5. Risk Management Implications

12.5.1 Cared for children and care leavers are a vulnerable group that are at risk of a number of factors, including poor education and training, health, safeguarding and transition into adulthood; the Corporate Parenting Strategy prioritises these areas.

12.6. Rural Communities Implications

12.6.1 There are no direct rural communities implications of this report.

12.7. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children

12.7.1 The contents of this report have implications for cared for children and care leavers, who are some of Cheshire East's most vulnerable children.

12.8. Public Health Implications

12.8.1 The impact of Covid-19 is well documented within this report. Public Health advice has been sought and followed in relation to service changes.

12.9. Climate Change Implications

12.9.1 There is a commitment to ensure that Cheshire East cared for children live as close to their home community as possible, wherever this is safe to do so. This will ensure that children can continue to feel connected to their families and local community. It also reduces the geographical footprint of children, families and staff as travel is reduced.

13. Ward Members Affected

13.1. Although the number of Cheshire East cared for children and young people is relatively small, they are a vulnerable cohort, who live across Cheshire East and in other local authority areas.

14. Consultation & Engagement

14.1. Our cared for children group have been unable to meet as a group as a result of Covid-19 however the participation service intend on undertaking a children and young people survey in the coming months which may form part of our planning in relation to shadow committee.

15. Access to Information

15.1. None.

16. Contact Information

16.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

Name: Kerry Birtles

Job Title: Head of Cared for Children & Care Leavers

Email: Kerry.Birtles@cheshireeast.gov.uk



**The
Children's
Society**

Children's Rights Annual Report

April 2019 – March 2020

Sue Preston Service Manager
The Children's Society
May 2020

Charity Registration
No. 221124

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Introduction

WHAT DO WE DO – Advocacy and Independent Visiting

The Children's Society delivers the Children's Rights Advocacy and Independent Visiting Service for Cheshire East. This report seeks to provide an overview of the work undertaken from 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020.

We are in the 7th year of delivery and have continued to develop and grow the service over the term of the contract to respond to the changing needs of Children and Young People and the Local Authority. In October 2019, we were successful in winning the contract for a further 5 years up to 2024.

ISSUE BASED ADVOCACY

Criteria:

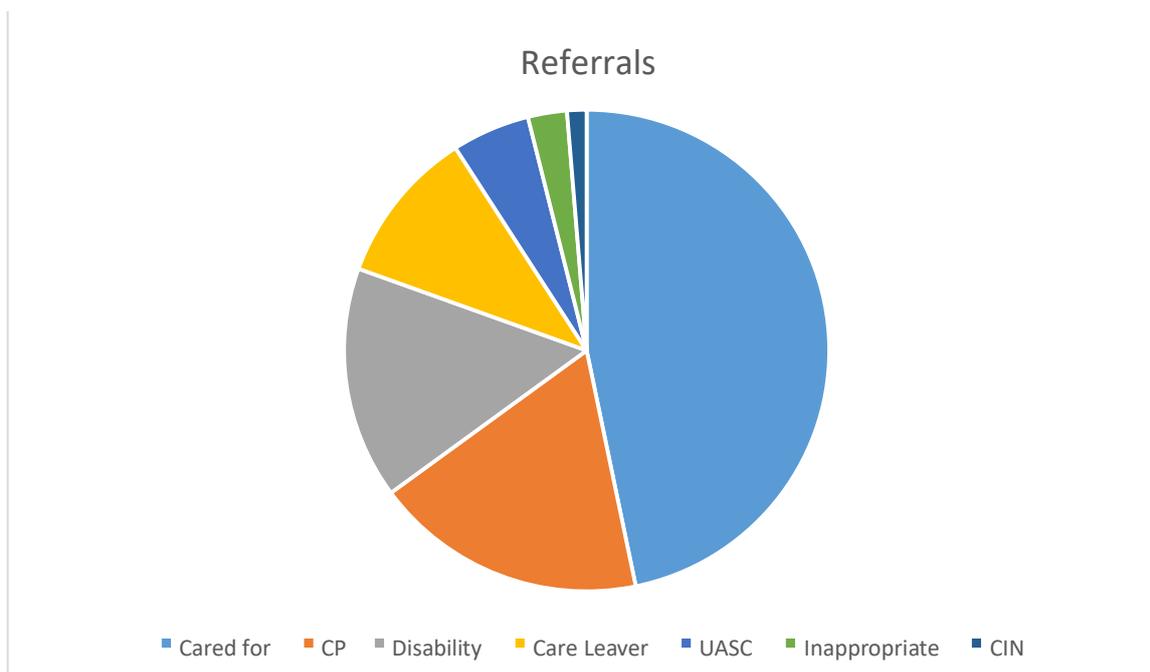
- ❖ Children and young people in care 0-21 years inclusive
- ❖ Children moving on from care to adult life and who are entitled to a service under Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- ❖ Children and young people subject to a child protection plan
- ❖ Young homeless people aged 16/17
- ❖ Children and young people making a complaint about a social work service
- ❖ Disabled children and young people 0-18 years irrespective of whether they have a current service plan
- ❖ Disabled young people after their 18th birthday receiving transition services
- ❖ Children and young people seeking asylum
- ❖ **Private Fostering added to new contract in October 2019**

A recommendation from the Ofsted inspection in 2019 was that Private Fostering and Young Homeless 16/17year olds required a more robust system of support.

Therefore, we have strengthened the pathway for referral to advocacy support for young people who are presenting as homeless to ensure this is discussed in every case, and recognise the particular vulnerabilities there may be for children who are identified as being in Private Fostering arrangements. As a result, we have agreed that they would be automatically referred for advocacy as best practice.

Advocacy Referrals

From 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020, we had 77 new referrals for advocacy



The numbers on the graph of the 77 new issue based referrals are the following:

Child status	April 2019 – March 2020	2018	2017
Cared for child	36	39	34
Care leaver	8	10	13
Child with a disability	12	7	13
Child on a Child Protection plan	14	5	0
Asylum seeking child	4	2	0
Private fostered child	0	0	0
Automatic Referrals to represent child's views at CP conference	NA	NA	54
Child in Need making a complaint	1		
Inappropriate referral	2	1	0
Total	77	64	60(+54)

In 2017, the number 54 indicates when the advocacy service was receiving automatic referrals for representing children and young people within their Child Protection Conferences.

The Children’s Society continues to remain available for any child who is subject to a Child Protection plan who require someone independent to help represent their wishes and feelings. Advocates continue to do visual representation to support the reviews, which has been welcomed by the Conference IROs

The focus for 2019 was on improving the quality of the visual representations within the conferences. Therefore, it was agreed that support would be provided to social workers through consultation, development of tools and training and awareness raising in terms of the child’s view about the effectiveness/ impact of their safety plan

The LA have has been auditing Child Protection Reviews to ensure that visual representations of the child or young person’s view’s is consistently captured and shared at conference reviews by the Social Workers.

Reason for Advocacy referral:	April 2019 – March 2020	2018	2017
Placement Issue	18	18	20
Representation	12	12	14
Complaint	7	7	2
Legal Issue	1	7	1
Transition	7	6	2
Contact/ legal issue with own child/ren	3	4	2
Contact Issue	5	2	6
Education Issue	5	1	2
Financial Issue	1	0	4
Housing issue	0	0	2
Private Fostering	0	0	0
Age Assessment	2		
Inappropriate referral/ Sign posted	2	2	5
Child Protection representation	14	5	54
Total Issues for advocacy	77	64	60 (54 CP)

What the numbers tell us!

From the numbers placement issue is still one of the main issues that children and young people want advocacy support with

We have worked with 17 children and young people who have a disability or additional needs over the year. In some of these cases, advocates carried out non-instructed advocacy. This entailed; having discussions with the young person's carer, teachers, and placement staff as well as observing the young person in different settings to get an overall view of the young person's views.

Non-instructed advocacy has been crucial for a number of children and young people. In many cases, our advocates have been the consistent person in the child's life. This has enabled the advocate to have a good picture of what child or young person would want if they could tell us.

Children's Commissioner Report June 2019

The Children's Society were very pleased that the Children's Commissioner's did a report in June 2019 which recognised the essential role of advocacy for children and young people and they set recommendations to ensure children and young people get a quality Advocacy service. We responded to the report alongside the LA

[CCO-Advocacy-for-children-June-2019.](#)

here to
HELP



Deep Dive into cases open for over 6 months

We are an Issue based Advocacy Service, which tends to be a short-term piece of work, however and some of our cases had been open for 6 months or more. We decided, along with our commissioners, to carry out a deep dive on these cases; this was carried out in the last quarter January to March 2020.

This was to ensure there was no drift in cases and to look at the reasons why they remained open to advocacy of which is generally a short- term piece of work and to look at any issues that needed to be addressed by the Local Authority or our service.

We had 11 cases that had been open for over 6 months:

- Two of them were Child Protection, which is understandable as the Child Protection process could be for many months.
- One case was due to the young person's mental health needs and him struggling to get back to us the IRO asked us to persevere with him, which we did and he is now engaging with us.
- One case is in regards to young person wanting to move placement and this case has specific complexities and is consequently taking longer to arrange.
- One case was trying to connect with the young person and get him engaged in our service.
- One case was in terms of young person putting in a complaint
- One case was around a legal issue and the young person not agreeing with the Local Authority so it took a long time to resolve the issue for the young person.
- One was in terms of the young person not being happy about her care order and needing an advocate throughout the process to support her to get her views across with social care.
- Then we had three cases that were around transition into adult social care

We will continue to monitor cases to ensure that there is no drift for children and young people, whether that is due to our service or whether the Local Authority can speed up their processes for children and young people. This will ensure all children and young people receive a quality service from The Children's Society and the Local Authority

Advocate Case Study

Reason for referral:

Issue Based Advocacy:

Young person was referred for advocacy J was 18 and had been open for an extended period due to his transition and the many changes that have happened in J's life, education and placements. J was initially referred to have an independent advocate to help to oversee his transition. as there were many concerns for J and there had been drift on his plan for the future due to his behaviour, J had a very supportive family who were fully involved in all of J's care and education. Transition needed to happen soon so that J's behaviour did not escalate further.

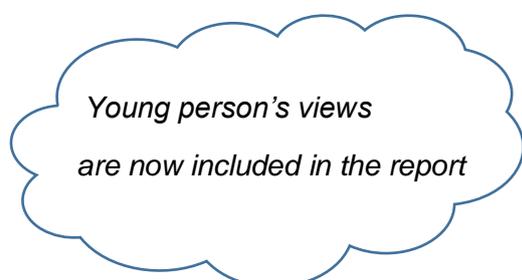
Support given:

Advocate worked with J for a long period and had been able to gain knowledge about him and how he reacts in different settings. He was observed in a variety of settings and with a variety of peers, professionals and family. Advocate attended all of J's meetings and been able to gather all the information needed and was able to feed in her observations of what J would want if he could tell us. All the work the advocate did enabled her to compile a report for adult's services to ensure he got the settled placement that he would want and deserve.

Outcome:

All the work the advocate did enabled her to compile a report for adult's services to ensure he got the settled placement that he would want and deserve. J's wishes were taken into consideration by his transition social worker. Hopefully J will be happy in his long-term placement and will be able to start recovering from his many recent moves

J's parents are feeling better and more hopeful for J's future knowing that he is going to be settled in the right kind of placement



Training Workshops to Social care staff

Social Workers have been doing visual representation at conference reviews and Cheshire East are keen for more social workers to be actively doing the visual representation at every conference review. The Children's Society have been attending Practice and Performance reviews and other meetings to share the tools and resources we use and are in the process of developing a 7 Minute Guide which can be more widely distributed to Cheshire East colleagues

Our Advocates attended Kate Mercer Training in January 2020 delivered by Kate herself to update them on the Care Act.

The Service Manager attended a webinar arranged by Kate Mercer Training on the new Coronavirus Act

We continue to raise awareness of our service at meetings and have sent out a new seven Minute Guide to our service with links to our web site and referral forms. This is also on the Local Authority website.

[7 Minute Guides Advocacy & IV Service 2020.](#)



Independent Visitor Referrals April 2019 – March 2020

Independent Visitors are volunteers who volunteer with a child or young person who are in the care of the Local Authority in residential or foster care. Volunteers usually visit the child/young person once per month, get to know them, go out, do activities, have fun, and are great role models for them, supporting independence skills and generally being there for them.

It is a great opportunity as children, young people like the fact the person they are matched with are not paid to be there and just want to spend time with them, having fun, and forming a good relationship with them, young people are matched with an Independent Visitor for at least 2 years.

In April 2019 to March 2020, we had 10 new referrals for an Independent Visitor

Child status	April 2019 – March 2020	2018	2017
Lives in foster care	9	5	3
Lives in residential	1	2	2
Home & Respite	0	0	0
Inappropriate referral	1	0	1
Total	10	7	6
Out of the total number of referrals those out of borough or with a learning need			
Out of Borough	4	2	2
Disability or learning need	3	4	4

The number of referrals for an Independent Visitor increased in 2019 as we were active in promoting the service amongst Cheshire East colleagues, however nationally referrals for an Independent Visitor remains low. A number of Independent Visitor services are actively promoting the value of independent visiting for children and young people ourselves included.

Independent Visitor Matches

In April 2019 to March 2020, we had nine new active face-to-face matches

Independent Visitor Matches	2019	2018	2017
New matches,	9 1 of which was a re match	6 2 of which were re matches	7 2 of which were re matches
Continued to support matches	7	10	11
Total	16	16	18

We have three long-term matches two were matched in March and October 2016 and one has been matched since December 2017, which is fantastic.

The volunteers have again been fantastic again this year, one young person did her first ever charity walk alongside her Independent visitor which gave her an interest in future volunteering and raising money for good causes.

Volunteers

Hello!

My name is William and I am an Independent Visitor

I live in Cheshire

Things I like

- Snooker & pool
- Big Parks
- Music
- Museums

Things about myself

- Good Listener
- Kind
- Reliable
- Easy Going
- Jokey

Places & things we can do

- Swimming
- Cooking
- You choose?

William our volunteer from last year who was already and waiting volunteer is now matched and the match is going extremely well, the young person moved placement during the match and William continued to be his Independent Visitor through this transition which was great.

Independent Visitor Case Study

Reason for referral:

Referral came in for an Independent visitor in January 2018. K requested an independent visitor during her cared for review. K wanted someone who is separate from social care and foster carers to help and support her through her change of circumstances.

K was matched in April 2018 to a female Independent Visitor

Support given:

K and volunteer made a good relationship very soon and have done various visits together to the cinema, Waterworld, Trafford centre and K has experienced doing a marathon with her IV which she really enjoyed and now knows about fundraising for a charity.

IV was told by foster carer that K had been self-harming, this being from contact with family. Volunteer was able to support K and offer her suggested techniques when stress triggers and the need to self-harm. Such as writing down, try to keep exercising, (volunteer is a keen mental health advocate, practising yoga and mindfulness)

In September 2019, K was taken into emergency foster care and now lives with another foster carer luckily the Independent visitor was able to still volunteer with K so the relationship was able to continue.

During the move to other foster carers, we also supported K with an advocate who supported her during the disruption meetings

Outcome:

K chats to the volunteer about the Art Therapy she attends and she says she enjoys it and had said she was going to do the race for life with her foster carer. The matched

The match lasted for nearly two years until K moved to another placement; however, we felt this was a good piece of work as the volunteer had been able to continue her visits to K despite moving placements, which had a huge benefit to K and she benefited from an advocate from our service as well.

Recruitment of Independent Visitors

We recognise that a number of volunteers find our opportunities through online platforms. This year we have advertised on a number of online websites such as Charity Job, the Children's Society website, Manchester CVS, Cheshire East and West CVS. We have contacted a number of educational providers to ask to advertise online to their students including Chester University, Staffordshire University, Macclesfield College and Derby University (Buxton Campus).

In September 2019, the Service Manager attended the Corporate Parenting Meeting and asked members if they could promote and encourage anyone they knew to come forward to be an Independent Visitor.

We have redeveloped our posters and leaflets, and circulated them at colleges, businesses and faith organisations. We are liaising with The Children's Society relationship managers who collaborate with the Church of England, to distribute these resources and promote awareness of Independent Visiting. We would really like more male volunteers to come forward and have amended some of our leaflets to incorporate more male images to we hope encourage males to come forward to volunteer.



Developments

In 2019 we were successful in recruiting two Administration volunteers to support all the administration of the service and to add some extra value to the work.

One such development was a list of activities and venues compiled from different areas that we were able to send to our matched volunteers to help them with the many free activities that they could talk to their young person with and decide where to visit on the next visit. This proved very successful as it shown many places that the volunteers would not have thought of to suggest to the young person also the young people felt more in control of planning the next visit with their independent visitor

Walton Hall Gardens Warrington



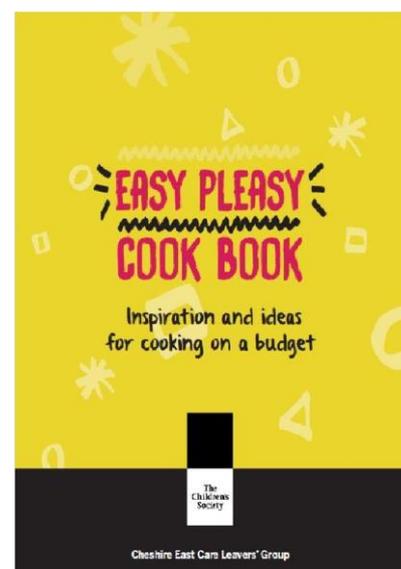
See Cheshire
list:
[Activities In
Cheshire](#)

Easy Pleasy Cook Book

If anyone can remember 2014 when Cheshire East Care Leavers alongside staff from The Children's Society and the Local Authority did a £21 pound challenge where young people and staff cooked food for £3.00. The recipes were written down and we published the Easy Pleasy Cook Book, which was a great book with some lovely easy recipes. In April 2019 another Local Authority asked us if we could share the book with their care leavers

We amended the publication and took young people's photographs and names out so it could be shared more widely to other young people in lots of different authorities which is great that Cheshire East young people have helped to share their good work with hundred's more young people

[TCS The Easy Pleasy Cook Book.WEB 2019](#)



In August 2019 we welcomed our new Chief Executive Mark Russell who is committed to disrupting the disadvantage that many of our children and young people face Mark has a passion and determination to protect, support and speak up for children and young people



As a national organisation we are able to share some of our research and publications with the local authority so whenever we are in meetings or when the organisation publishes anything we pass this onto our Cheshire East Colleagues which has been greatly received.

Please see the publications we have shared over the year:

[*The Good Childhood Report 2019*](#)

[Good Childhood Report-2019-youth-summary](#)

[Bright-Light-Guide-for-Care-Leavers.](#)

[CCE Toolkit.](#)

[You are not on your own.](#)

[Loneliness.in .childhood.2019](#)

[Recruitment Stages CCE](#)

[Counting-lives-report July 19.](#)

[TACT-Language-that-cares-2019](#)

In January 2020 we moved offices from Warrington to Greater Manchester which was a saving to us in terms of office use.

Covid 19

In March 2020 all, our worked changed due to the Covid 19 restrictions, meaning all face-to-face work was no longer happening. However, this did not stop our staff or volunteers who continued to have contact with the children and young people remotely following all the safe guidelines from the Children's Society.

We regularly update our commissioner on any changes to the work, following any Government announcements and are looking into April 2020 to develop the service to ensure children and young people continue to receive a quality service in whatever ways the future holds for us all. A challenge like Coronavirus means young people may need support in new and different ways. We will do everything in our power to make sure we can be there and give them the support they need.

We continue to receive referrals for independent visitors, and we are recruiting virtually to ensure there is a limited delay for children and young people.

Volunteers are sending cards to their young person and calling them on the phone during the lock down in order to continue the match virtually.

Managing IV matches safely during the Coronavirus pandemic



We are members of the National Independent Visitor network, which gives us the opportunity to find out what is happening nationally in terms of volunteering as well as sharing good practice and receiving up to date information

They are working on a document with information drawn from Network members like ourselves, the National Volunteer Standards and Net-Aware. To develop a resource on managing Independent Visitor matches during the Coronavirus pandemic

We hope the document to be published in April 2020 so we can make use of it as we look to the future.

Our plans for the future

Continue to grow and develop Advocacy and Independent Visitor Service responding to emerging Best Practice, the requirements of Cheshire East Council and The Children's Society

Continue to share our national work amongst both CE colleagues and the wider partnerships

Create more tools and resources to share with Cheshire East colleagues in terms of children's rights and the voice of the child

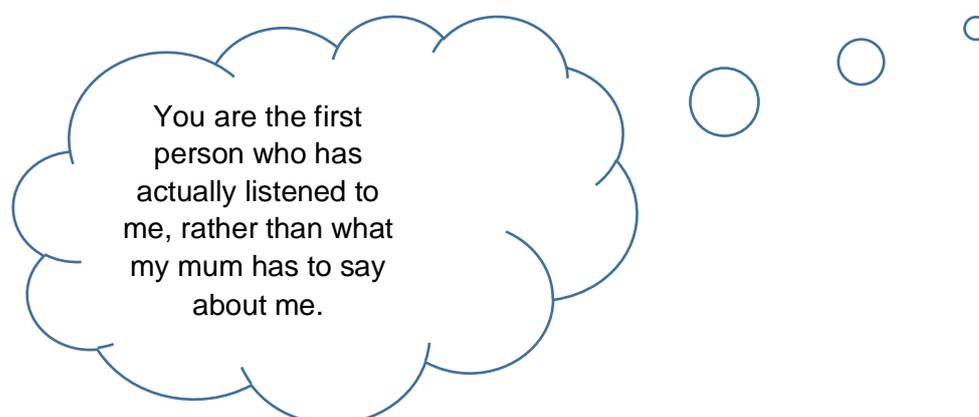
Develop creative ways of working with children and young people during the Covid 19 restrictions and beyond

Recruit volunteer ambassadors to visit the Local Authorities Children's Homes and offer low-level advocacy support

Develop safe and creative approaches to a blended method of both face-to-face and virtual contact for our Independent Visitor matches

Work with the Local authority in ensuring all children and young people who are subject to a Private Fostering Arrangement have the opportunity of an advocate if they choose to

Work with the Local authority in ensuring all 16 & 17 years olds declared homeless have the opportunity of an advocate if they choose to.



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TERMS OF REFERENCE

Cheshire East Corporate Parenting Committee

Functions

This is a cross party advisory committee appointed by the Cabinet.

It has 12 Members who are appointed on a politically proportionate basis and nominated by the political groups.

The Committee ~~includes~~ is informed by representative young people from the Children in Care Council to advise the Committee.

Purpose

The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Committee in its role as an advisory committee to the Cabinet is to ensure that the Council effectively discharges its role as Corporate Parent for all children and young people in care and care leavers from 0- 25 years of age and holds partners to account for the discharge of their responsibilities.

Terms of Reference

1. Act as advocates for cared for children and care leavers, ensuring that their needs are addressed through key plans, policies and strategies throughout the Council and its commissioned services.
2. Ensure key strategic plans and reports relating to children in care and care leavers including the Corporate Parenting Strategy, Sufficiency Statement and Children and Young People's Plan.
3. Oversee the implementation of Cheshire East's Corporate Parenting Strategy and action plan and monitor the quality and effectiveness of services to ensure they fulfil the council's responsibilities.
4. Monitor the quality of care delivered by Cheshire East's residential children's homes via the provision of reports including summary reports of Ofsted inspections.
5. Review the performance of the Council in relation to outcomes for children and young people in care via the scrutiny of both quarterly performance reports and annual reports, including the Health of Cared for Children and Care Leavers, the Virtual School, Fostering and the Independent Reviewing Service.
6. Establish an environment whereby Elected Members and young people work together to address the needs and aspirations of Cheshire East's children and young people in care and empower children and young people to participate in decision making with adults.

7. Oversee, with the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the implementation of best practice principles in all aspects of service delivery, with the aim of producing positive outcomes for children and young people in care.
8. Support the work of foster carers and adopters in making a difference to the care and support they provide to children and young people in care and those adopted.
9. Make sure that staff and partners commit to follow the pledges to cared for children and young people and care leavers set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

Governance

The Committee will:

- meet bi-monthly;
- report to the Council's Cabinet on at least an annual basis;
- report to the Council's Scrutiny Committee annually: and
- ~~include~~ be informed by young people representatives from My Voice (Cheshire East's Children in Care Council); and
- review its terms of reference annually.

Administration

The Committee will be serviced by Democratic Services in line with other Council Committees.

Minutes and agendas will be distributed and published no later than 5 clear working days prior to the meeting.

The meetings will take place out of school hours to enable cared for children and young people to participate.