

# Corporate Parenting Committee

## Agenda

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**Date:** Tuesday, 14th September, 2021  
**Time:** 4.00 pm  
**Venue:** Council Chamber, Municipal Buildings, Earle Street, Crewe  
CW1 2BJ

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**PLEASE NOTE – This meeting is open to the public and anyone attending this meeting will need to wear a face covering upon entering and leaving the venue. This may only be removed when seated.**

**The importance of undertaking a lateral flow test in advance of attending any committee meeting.** Lateral Flow Testing: Towards the end of May, test kits were sent to all Members; the purpose being to ensure that Members had a ready supply of kits to facilitate self-testing prior to formal face to face meetings. Anyone attending is asked to undertake a lateral flow test on the day of any meeting before embarking upon the journey to the venue. Please note that it can take up to 30 minutes for the true result to show on a lateral flow test. If your test shows a positive result, then you must not attend the meeting, and must follow the advice which can be found here:

[https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council\\_and\\_democracy/council\\_information/coronavirus/testing-for-covid-19.aspx](https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/council_information/coronavirus/testing-for-covid-19.aspx)

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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.

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

### **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.

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3. **Minutes of Previous meeting** (Pages 3 - 8)

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2021.

4. **Corporate Parenting Progress Report and Scorecard Q1** (Pages 9 - 20)

To receive the Corporate Parenting Progress Report and the scorecard for Q1 2021/22.

5. **Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2020-21** (Pages 21 - 54)

To receive the Corporate Parenting annual report.

6. **Preparation for Adulthood Annual Report and Service Plan** (Pages 55 - 68)

To receive the Preparation for Adulthood report and the Care Leavers Service Plan.

7. **Proposal to Develop a New Corporate Parenting Strategy** (Pages 69 - 74)

To receive a proposal to develop a new Corporate Parenting strategy.

8. **Cheshire East Mockingbird Family Model** (Pages 75 - 82)

To receive a summary of the Fostering Service's implementation of the Mockingbird Family Model.

9. **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

The reports relating to the remaining items on the agenda have been withheld from public circulation and deposit pursuant to Section 100(B)(2) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the matters may be determined with the press and public excluded.

The Committee may decide that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items pursuant to Section 100(A)4 of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 and public interest would not be served in publishing the information.

**PART 2 - MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED WITHOUT THE PUBLIC AND PRESS PRESENT**

10. **Youth Justice Service Presentation on Support to Cared for Children**

To receive a presentation on the Youth Justice Service support to cared for children.

11. **Pure Insight Report** (Pages 83 - 116)

To receive a report on the delivery of services provided by Pure Insight to Cheshire East care leavers.

**Membership:** Councillors R Bailey, J Barber, J Buckley (Associate Non Voting Member), C Bulman, P Butterill, K Flavell (Chair), G Hayes, S Handley, S Holland, D Jefferay, D Marren, K Parkinson and J Saunders (Vice-Chair)

**CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Committee**  
held on Tuesday, 30th March, 2021 at Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

**PRESENT**

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

Councillors R Bailey, M Beanland, J Buckley, C Bulman, P Butterill, S Edgar,  
S Holland and M Warren

**ALSO PRESENT**

Ged Rowney- Interim Director of Children's Services  
Kerry Birtles- Director of Children's Social Care, Children in Need & Child Protection  
Laura Rogerson- Head of Service for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Virtual School Headteacher for Cared for Children  
Nick Crick, Interim Head of Service for Cared for Services and Care Leavers  
Dave Leadbetter, Head of Children's Commissioning  
AnneMarie Parker, Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers  
Lauren Conway- Interim Head of Service: Children's Service Development and Partnerships  
Nicola Booth- Operations Manager, Adoption Counts  
Hilary Thomas- Adoption Support Team Manager, Adoption Counts  
Shan McParland- Designated Nurse Looked after Children and Care Leavers , NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)  
Helen Davies- Democratic Services Officer

**32 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies of absence were received from Councillor James Barber.

**33 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**34 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting 19 January 2021 be received and noted as a correct and accurate record.

**35 CORPORATE PARENTING UPDATE REPORT- QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE**

Nick Crick, Interim Head of Service for Cared for Services and Care Leavers introduced the item to the Committee and took the opportunity to introduce and welcome AnneMarie Parker to the meeting who had recently been appointed to the Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers post.

Nick advised the Committee that the report was laid out in terms of priorities for Cheshire East. This included support to ensure the most vulnerable were engaging with education.

Cheshire East would continue to monitor the recovery of children going back into Education and those who were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).

One specific point was that dental appointments were at 22%, the objective was to improve this figure in partnership with NHS.

The Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions and there was some discussion on:

- The steps being taken to address the low figures that related to dental appointments. This was a nationally recognised issue; Dentists were working at 45% capacity since reopening during the pandemic which has been a barrier;
- Tracking and tracing vulnerable children who are NEET, virtual school came under the same remit for Cheshire East with the same support mechanisms for all school children;
- The challenge of attracting new adopters. When children were placed for adoption, they were continually reviewed;
- The NEET figure for 18+ was high even though it was below the national average. Nick advised the health and emotional wellbeing challenges for young people was an area for improvement for the service and confidence, self-esteem and low morale was a high priority for this year.

RESOLVED-

That Nick and AnneMarie be thanked for their attendance and update, and that the report be received and noted.

**36 CARED FOR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION**

Laura Rogerson, - Head of Service to Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Virtual School Headteacher for Cared for Children

introduced the item to the Committee. Laura highlighted key points of the report:

- Virtual school attendance had been at 50-60% during lockdown and since returning to school had gone up to 90% with no significant issues. During Lockdown those who weren't in school had a temporary support plan;
- Remote learning had been reviewed and any further support that was needed had been identified, any issues were then raised with social care and the schools. PEPS (Personal Educational Plan) had been continued and these were at just over 90% for over school age children and 97% post 16. The next stage was to look at the impacts and targets of PEPs and to link with the participation team to survey young people for data and analysis;
- A governing body had been formed and two meetings had been held;
- A Student Council was being developed and implemented alongside the governing body (over next 12 months);
- Foster parents were supported with some funding for devices for young people so no one was without technology; and
- There had been no increase in exclusions but an increase in schools reaching out ahead of potential exclusions, this included those both in and out of borough.

The Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions. There was some discussion on:

- The possibility of work based placements or Apprenticeships within the Council;
- The possibility of one of the Members of this Committee to sit on the Virtual School Governing Body;
- The need to integrate Cared for Children into society and being mindful of creating niche environments that take them away from society.

RESOLVED-

That Laura Rogerson be thanked for her attendance and update and that the report be received and noted.

### **37 CARED FOR SUFFICIENCY STATEMENT**

Councillor Carol Bulman advised the Chairman that during this item she would temporarily leave the meeting and rejoin as soon as she could.

Dave Leadbetter, Head of Children's Commissioning presented the item to the Committee.

The Committee were advised that legislation required the Council to publish an annual Sufficiency Statement for Cared for Children. The Council ensure the Statement aligned with other Council strategies and plans and included direct feedback from children.

Dave noted that alongside the approach to the Sufficiency Statement, that centred around children were best supported within their families and their local communities, any Ofsted Inspection would focus on how the Council managed during the pandemic and what the challenges were.

Some of the priority actions for 2021-23 included recruitment and retention of internal foster carers through a new fostering brand, recruitment and marketing strategy. The target was for 30 foster carers and 6 short break carers and 6 specialist foster carers.

The Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions or make comments. There was some discussion on:

- The positive work being done through the Mockingbird programme and the recognition from the Committee about the work from the Officers and the service for Cared for Children;
- The admissions for care figures were low because there was an emphasis to ensure only the correct children were brought into care. The low figure reflected a positive outcome as less had been brought in. The Council provided a robust Early Help and Prevention offer and an understanding that Children were better to remain with their families. The Children in Need population was healthy, there was an increase in the number of children in pre-proceedings. However the service was managing risks earlier to prevent children coming into care;
- There was a question that related to whether the pandemic could be a reason for low figures throughout the report. Officers reassured the Committee that numbers were one indicator of how the system looks overall. Ofsted were satisfied that the thresholds were correct and continued to be correct. The service did not want a re-referral rate as it was currently at 14% and below national average, however, Cheshire East was not an outlier but there was more to be done;
- The new volunteer approach through early help was considered to be a more sustainable model; and
- Officers reminded the Committee that any quality items and products they had or knew off that could be suitable for Young people would be accepted.

RESOLVED-

That Dave be thanked for his attendance and presentation and that the report be received and noted.

### **38 PROPOSAL ON CHANGES TO THE MEETING FREQUENCY**

The Chairman addressed the Committee and gave the reasons, as outlined in the report, for the proposal to change the meeting frequency from bi monthly to quarterly these being primarily the work of the Committee would be more efficient and align with officer quarterly reports.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that the Corporate Parenting Committee is a statutory committee sits within the Children and Families Directorate. Members did not have to come from the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and would continue to be made from nominations from political groups in alignment with political proportion.

The Committee were given the opportunity to make comments on the proposal.

Councillor Bailey made the point that this would be a premature decision when there were uncertainties about the model for the Committee System and would prefer to defer the proposal until the Committee System model is better known. One of the concerns from Councillor Bailey that when there was a change of governance the role of Corporate Parenting could slip.

There was an agreement from the Committee that the Corporate Parenting role was primary for Members.

Councillor Carol Bulman re-joined at this point in the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the meeting frequency be retained as it currently stands with a review following the implementation of the new Committee System.

### **39 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item pursuant to Section 100(A) 4 of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 and the public interest would not be served in publishing the information.

### **40 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Nicola Booth, Operations Manager for Adoption Counts introduced the item to the Committee.

Councillor Jos Saunders joined the meeting.

The Committee considered a Six Monthly report on the Adoption Service from Adoption Counts. The report fulfilled the obligations in Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002 to report to the “executive side” of the local authority.

The report gave an overview of specific numbers of children subject to Placement Orders, those with a Change of Plan, those Placed for Adoption and those Adopted. Nicola spoke to the Committee about performance of the organisation during the period, aims of the service, funding, referrals and enquiries for Adoption Support.

RESOLUTION:

That Nicola be thanked for her attendance and presentation and that the report be received and noted.

The meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and concluded at 5.45 pm

Councillor K Flavell (Chairman)



*Working for a brighter future together*

## **Corporate Parenting Committee**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	14 September 2021
<b>Report Title:</b>	Corporate Parenting Progress Report
<b>Report of:</b>	Ged Rowney, Director of Children's Services
<b>Ward(s) Affected:</b>	All

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### **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1. This report advises the Corporate Parenting Committee of how the service is delivering the priorities for cared for children and care leavers which are clearly set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- 1.2. This report provides the sixth update to the Corporate Parenting Committee since the restrictions of Covid-19 came into force. Services for cared for children and care leavers embraced new ways of working in the initial stages of the pandemic; this report outlines any existing variations to our statutory service delivery and also highlights the progress in planning for children and young people as restrictions are lifted.
- 1.3. The Corporate Parenting Scorecard for quarter 1 2021-22 is included within the Appendix.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 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 and the performance in the scorecard.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1. The Corporate Parenting Committee is an advisory group to the Children and Families Committee 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.

- 3.2. The Corporate Parenting Committee needs to be able to scrutinise and challenge performance to improve outcomes for cared for children and young people and care leavers.

#### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1. None; this is an update report.

#### **5. Background**

- 5.1. This report provides an update to the Corporate Parenting Committee since the last report which was presented on the 30 March 2021. Frontline services, in line with the priorities set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy, continue to deliver our statutory duties and 18 months into the pandemic we continue to see evidence of permanence for children within the Court arena, including an increasing number of children achieving adoption compared to the previous year. 26 babies and children (over twice as many as last year) have been matched and permanently placed (as of March 2021). So far this year we have achieved five adoptions with many more before the Court. The tremendous efforts of our frontline colleagues, partners, and children and young people themselves, is testament to the resilience that exists within the services that we deliver and the children and families that we serve.
- 5.2. The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 for Children's Social Care Services continue to reflect the amendments authorised on the 25 September 2020. This ultimately means that frontline services have a statutory obligation to operate within 'a mainly business as usual' model. There remains a small number of regulations in place to assist social care services in responsibly managing their statutory safeguarding responsibilities to children and young people whilst managing the risks of the virus to frontline practitioners. These temporary regulations remain in place but will likely end on 30 September 2021, unless the Government decides to extend beyond this date. This will mean that all visits will need to be undertaken face to face and that 'virtual' visits are not permitted.
- 5.3. The service continues to use individual risk assessments to support a safe service delivered for children, young people, their parents, carers and family members and also our frontline colleagues. These risk assessments include the physical risk management and also the emotional impact of the prolonged period of alternative ways of working where there are many avenues available including mindfulness, the employee assistance programme and home-based risk assessments. Daily monitoring returns of staff are in place to ensure appropriate oversight of staff and their welfare. The corporate response to promoting diversity, equality and inclusion

throughout the pandemic for the families who access our services and the frontline colleagues who deliver them has been well received.

## **6. Pledge 1 - Being a Good Corporate Parent**

- 6.1.** Annemarie Parker was appointed as permanent Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers and started with us on 1 March 2021. Cheshire East Council is committed to the pledges of the Corporate Parenting Strategy which were endorsed at full council on the 13 December 2018. We are keen to truly understand the lived experience of our children and young people and, like no other time before, we must ensure that their views, wishes and feelings are captured and shape the way forward in how we continue to prioritise their needs.
- 6.2.** The intention was to develop a new Corporate Parenting Strategy in 2020, ready to launch in 2021. However, due to the increased demands from the Covid-19 pandemic, this was put on hold. The current plan is to review and refresh the Corporate Parenting Strategy over the next few months, to be launched alongside the new Children and Young People's Plan in March/April 2022. An outline timescale for actions will be presented to Committee in a separate report.
- 6.3.** The participation and engagement survey was rolled out in early January 2021 with the intention of truly understanding the lived experiences of our cared for children and young people. 85 completed surveys were received in total. The survey was accessed by young people using a website link. This was promoted to young people via their social workers, IROs, by social media platforms and newsletters.
- 6.4.** The survey asked cared for children and young people to rate the support that they have received from their social worker. There was a total of 79 responses to this question. 34 young people (which is 43% of the total number of responses) rated the support as 10 out of 10 (10 being fantastic), 31 young people gave ratings of between 6 and 9 (39.3% of the responses), 14 young people gave a rating of 5 or below, which was 17.7% of the total number of responses.
- 6.5.** We also asked young people if they felt listened to by their social worker. There was a total of 80 responses, 54 young people stated that they "always" feel listened to, which is 67.5% of the responses. 21 young people stated that they "sometimes" feel listened to. 5 young people stated that they "never" feel listened to, which accounts for 6.3% of the total.
- 6.6.** The results of the survey were shared at a Practice and Performance session with our social work teams in July 2021. Frontline colleagues have

been asked to send pledges in response to the survey results and these will be shared with children and young people. Additionally, the results of the survey have been shared within the Corporate Parenting Operational Group workstreams with a view to improving the experiences of our children and young people.

- 6.7. We are ambitious corporate parents to our children, young people and care experienced adults. We made the commitment in 2017 to embrace the covenant and new statutory duties and the responsibility upon local authorities to extend their support to care experienced adults to 25. The Care Leavers' Service has continued to 'reach out' to our care experienced adults who had chosen not to continue to access a service pre-Covid. We saw an increase in care experienced adults accepting the support offered during the pandemic and this has included support provided in relation to emotional wellbeing, finances, and support with employment.
- 6.8. My Voice (our Children in Care Council) has continued throughout the pandemic through virtual sessions and has now reverted back to face-to-face meetings. During the school holidays, since February 2021, Activity Days have taken place virtually led by Sophie Cliffe, our Participation Worker. Additional sessions are on offer throughout the summer holidays.
- 6.9. Officers and members are keen to re-establish plans for frontline visits to take place across the service and the menu of options to support in the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy was presented to Members at committee in September 2020. These opportunities include attendance at our Corporate Parenting workstream groups, participating in the Fostering Panel and virtual visits to our commissioned children's homes. This has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and is a key part of current action planning. These observations and interactions will enable Members to gain an understanding of frontline service delivery and collectively, with officers, continue to influence the way that Cheshire East Council prioritises our cared for children and young people and care leavers, particularly during this challenging time. Feedback from interactions has already demonstrated impact as Members are reporting having a better understanding of the pressures faced by frontlines colleagues as well as a greater understanding of the complexity of need presented across the service. This feedback will continue to be used to develop participation and services.

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

- 7.1. Throughout the pandemic, the Virtual School Advisors monitored and tracked each child/young person to ensure clear communication and support was in place. Children and young people were supported regarding

the return to school, in particular those from transition year groups and those moving to new schools.

- 7.2. Pupil Premium Funding has been used to support the purchase of ICT equipment to ensure that all children and young people were able to access remote learning. Funding is also in place for individual children to ensure they have had access to extra tuition and for carers to support continued access to education/activities whilst at home.
- 7.3. Support from the Post 16 Learning Mentor and Advisor has meant that no Year 11 pupils moving into post 16 have been unable to access the courses they identified. There has been a reduction in the number of young people aged 16-18 who are not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) at the start of the new academic year, and the Autumn term programme for post 16 young people identified as NEET was successfully implemented.
- 7.4. Early Years support has ensured all the carers of our 2-4-year-old children have received advice, guidance and support on learning activities and useful websites. All children transferring to school have had school places, and carers of 2-year olds have been supported to access nursery places when eligible.
- 7.5. During the March – July lockdown period the Virtual School requested that there was a specific focus on transition year groups to ensure that clear plans were in place to support our children/young people who would be having school/placement changes. A one-minute guide was developed to support schools and social care to have clear process/procedures of how to undertake PEPs virtually. The Virtual School team were able to attend more PEPs than usual while completing them online as they did not have any travel time restricting them and they were able to coordinate their diaries to attend more, which has been of significant benefit. The feedback from all parties, including Children's Social Care, has been positive and they agree that this could be a way for the Virtual School to be flexible with completing PEPs in the future, in particular for those living/educated out of borough.

## **8. Pledge 3 - Achieving Permanence and Keeping Children Safe**

- 8.1. Achieving permanence for cared for children and care leavers is one of our service priorities and we have a clear plan to ensure that the children who require local authority care receive this in a timely way, that the care they receive is excellent, and for children who no longer need to be in care, that their plans are progressed without delay.
- 8.2. I am pleased to share that we are now seeing some of the delays caused by Covid-19 reducing, which means that children are achieving their

permanent plans by way of adoption, special guardianship, and discharges of care orders. There continues to be a reduced but still significant challenge of the cumulative backlog of Court progression work and we continue to work closely with the Local Family Justice Board to progress this.

- 8.3.** We remain committed to ensuring that we do not criminalise cared for children in placements, so we are actively contributing to a regional group of local authorities that has been established, working with Police and Youth Justice, to develop a protocol and guidance for our care establishments and commitment to support and engage our children placed to ensure consistent support and approach to our children and young people placed in care.
- 8.4.** Children who go missing from care continue to receive support from a commissioned service with the aim of responding to these risks in a timely way. The number of children missing can vary week by week however every child who experiences a missing episode will be offered a return home interview where in depth discussions take place to inform subsequent risk assessments from the social worker who can consider the bigger picture. We are examining the effectiveness of the commissioned service through audit activity; this is to ensure that our children and young people receive a quality service.
- 8.5.** Our vision for children and young people is focused on children living in the borough where we believe their needs will be best met and we continue to develop a range of sufficiency options including our Bespoke children's homes and our first Mockingbird constellation which was launched in November 2020. As a result of the great progress of this first constellation, a second constellation is now being established.
- 8.6.** We have de-commissioned two of our Bespoke homes as we were not satisfied with the quality of care provided to our children and young people. However, the demand for good quality residential placements remains a priority and we are now entering an accelerated procurement process to re-commission 2 further homes.
- 8.7.** This has been a busy quarter within the Fostering Service as we continue to embed our own marketing and recruitment functions. We have successfully recruited a team manager from within our own workforce who started leading the new team in May and is already having a positive impact on recruitment. During Foster Care Fortnight some of our foster carers helped produce [videos about their experiences as foster carers](#) for Cheshire East which was posted across all of our social media platforms.

- 8.8.** Since 1 April 2021, we have recruited 6 new mainstream foster carers, which keeps us on track with our aim to have recruited a total of 30 new foster carers before April 2022. In addition we have also approved 10 family and friends foster carers. This all means that we have a greater ability to keep our cared for children and young people closer to their local networks and communities.
- 8.9.** We have continued our social media presence throughout this period and have also been attending events across Cheshire East to promote recruitment of foster carers. We recently attended the Royal Cheshire Show, where we received 11 enquires from people wanting to be foster carers. We are due to attend the Geronimo festival in a few weeks and will also be launching a radio campaign with one of our partners Silk FM.
- 8.10.** As part of Cheshire East's commitment to developing our Corporate Parenting duties, the Director of Children's Social Care and the Head of Service for Children with Disabilities and Fostering recently attended the Cheshire East Business Forum to start a dialogue with local companies around supporting our recruitment of foster carers by allowing the recruitment team into their businesses. We have had commitments from several of the companies who are part of the Forum wanting to support this and introductory meetings have already been scheduled. We are confident that these links will prove to be beneficial for our children and young people
- 8.11.** Our first Mockingbird Hub is a success, despite being launched during the pandemic. We have satellite foster carers linked to the hub who are mainstream as well family and friends foster carers, we also have a child being supported on the 'edge of care' as their parent is terminally ill. We have recruited our second home hub carers and are currently developing the group of satellite carers with an aim to be launching the second hub during the autumn.
- 8.12.** We are currently recruiting a new chair for our fostering panel as our current panel chair retires in September of this year.
- 8.13.** Delivering support to our disabled children and their families during the pandemic has proved to be a challenge for both our Children with Disabilities Social Work Team and our Children with Disabilities Short Breaks Team. The efforts that they and our short break providers have gone to to ensure that the needs of our children have continued to be met are impressive. Whilst we and our support services could not deliver services at the same level as pre the pandemic, they have been able to be creative and imaginative in continuing to support our children and families, for example we have added flexibility into the way Early Help Individual Payments could be spent.

- 8.14.** During this quarter we have also recommissioned our short breaks local offer for another 2 years and have added some new providers to the list of support being offered to our disabled children, young people and their families. If you have not had the opportunity to have a look at our short breaks local offer yet, here is the link

<https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/livewell/local-offer-for-children-with-sen-and-disabilities/care/short-breaks-services.aspx>

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

- 9.1.** Performance in relation to requests for initial health assessments, completion of initial health assessments, and annual review health assessments, continues to show that health assessments for children and young people are delivered with a continued focus on timeliness.
- 9.2.** Challenges remain in relation to our children and young people accessing routine dental appointments. We are now part of a regional pilot for an E-referral pathway which will ensure that all cared for children and young people have access to a dentist. In the first instance it is recommend trying to get each child an appointment their regular dentist if they have one, however any difficulties will be escalated to a named nurse who will support in arranging access to a local dentist. In a situation where it is confirmed that a dental practice does not have capacity, or if the child is new to the area and their carer has been unable to access an appointment for them, the online referral and an appointment will be made at a dental practice participating in the pilot that is closest to where the child lives. We hope that this new initiative improves the outcomes for our children and young people and that we see an improved picture for dental checks taking place at least every 12 months.

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

- 10.1.** The Care Leavers' Service continues to be focused on supporting the needs of our care experienced adults in relation to accommodation, NEET, social isolation, emotional wellbeing, and relationships.
- 10.2.** An addendum report focuses on the actions and plan regarding the review of our Local Offer to care leavers and provides detail in respect of the service plan.
- 10.3.** We remain aspirational for our children and young people and want them to be able to make the most of their potential in whatever field they choose. We still have a dedicated NEET worker in the Leaving Care Team and a 16-18 NEET specialist within the virtual school. These two workers meet

regularly, identify our young people who are NEET and make plans to engage and support them. We are also working hard with colleagues across the Council and in other agencies to increase the number of young people who take up Apprenticeships and have a specific action plan in this regard.

**10.4.** We have continued to offer a range of support to care leavers through our partnership with Pure Insight who deliver mentoring and wellbeing support to our Care Leavers. It is an excellent service whose workers regularly go above and beyond any reasonable expectations to ensure that young people can access support in ways to which they feel able to respond, particularly when times are hard. In April 2021 we increased our funding to Pure Insight in response to demand from our young people. As a result of this additional funding, we were able to ensure that no young person was on a waiting list to access support.

**10.5.** RAGE fitness and wellbeing provision for care experienced young adults was launched during the pandemic and was initially offered on a remote/virtual basis. However, recent feedback from young people identified that they wanted face to face support and we are currently exploring how we can support RAGE Fitness to offer face to face sessions to our young people.

## **11. Consultation and Engagement**

**11.1.** A participation and engagement survey has been carried out with cared for children and young people as detailed in section 6.3.

## **12. Implications**

### **12.1. Legal**

**12.1.1.** The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 were introduced to provide flexibility in the statutory obligations of local government relating to cared for children, adoption and fostering. These regulations were reviewed on the 25 September 2020 by government and significantly reduced the flexibilities initially introduced.

### **12.2. Finance**

**12.2.1.** There are no financial implications or changes needed to the MTFS as a result of the recommendations of this report.

### **12.3. Policy**

**12.3.1.** Cheshire East is ambitious and committed to ensuring it is a great place to be young and every child has the best start in life. This is demonstrated through the Council's core priorities that people live well and for longer and have the life skills and education they need to thrive. These priorities

are supported and driven through the Children and Young People's Plan and the Health and Wellbeing Strategic Plan. Our Corporate Parenting Strategy has a clear vision that our cared for children and care leavers are safe, happy, healthy and achieve their full potential.

#### **12.4. Equality**

- 12.4.1.** 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.

#### **12.5. Human Resources**

- 12.5.1.** 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.

#### **12.6. Risk Management**

- 12.6.1.** 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.

#### **12.7. Rural Communities**

- 12.7.1.** There are no direct rural communities' implications of this report.

#### **12.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children**

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

#### **12.9. Public Health**

- 12.9.1.** The impact of Covid-19 is well documented within this report.

#### **12.10. Climate Change**

- 12.10.1.** 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.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Annemarie Parker <a href="mailto:Annemarie.parker@cheshireeast.gov.uk">Annemarie.parker@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a>
Appendices:	Corporate Parenting Scorecard Q1 2021-22
Background Papers:	None

Ref	Info available from	Commentary/ Lead		Polarity	Stat Neigh Av	National Av	Target	Q1 20-21	Q2 20-21	Q3 20-21	Q4 20-21	Q1 21-22
<b>General</b>												
G1	BI Team	Kerry Birtles	Number of cared for children				400-475	544	537	539	517	527
G2	BI Team	Kerry Birtles	Rate per 10,000 cared for children		61	64		71	69	70	67	67
G3	BI Team	Sam Ankers	Number of care leavers (aged 16-21)									257
<b>Priority 1 - Being a Good Corporate Parent</b>												
P1.1	BI Team	Karen Chan	% cared for children reviews in timescales	High is Good			97%	99%	99%	99%	99%	96%
P1.2	BI Team	Karen Chan	% of children and young people involved in their reviews	High is Good				97%	98%	99%	97%	96%
<b>Priority 2 - Improved Education, Employment and Training</b>												
P2.1	Laura Rogerson/ Score card	Laura Rogerson	Number of children living in educational/ residential provision	Low is Good				7	6	6	6	5
P2.2	Laura Rogerson/ Score card	Laura Rogerson	Number of 16-18 year olds in Care that are NEET (monthly )	Low is Good				17	8	7	9	7
P2.4	Laura Rogerson/ Score card	Laura Rogerson	Number of 16-18 year old Care leavers that are NEET	Low is Good				17	1	7	9	11
P2.5	Sam Ankers	Sam Ankers	Number of care leavers accessing Higher Education (University)	High is Good								12
P2.6	Sam Ankers	Sam Ankers	Number of Cheshire East care leavers in apprenticeships (18+)	High is Good				10			7	7
P2.7	Sam Ankers	Sam Ankers	% 19 - 21 year Care leavers NEET (as per national reporting)	Low is Good				48%	45%	45%	51%	47%
<b>Priority 3 - Achieving Permanence and Staying Safe</b>												
P3.1	Jacqui Hall	Jacqui Hall	Number of cared for children in internal foster care	High is Good				120	112	116	117	128
P3.2	Jacqui Hall	Jacqui Hall	Number of children in care living with Friends & Family					73	70	70	79	85
P3.3	Jacqui Hall	Jacqui Hall	Number of cared for children in external foster care	Low is Good				153	147	139	145	144
P3.4	Jacqui Hall	Jacqui Hall	Number of children and young people in residential care	Low is Good				40	40	38	39	36
P3.5	Jacqui Hall	Jacqui Hall	Number of children placed with parents					64	60	63	59	59
P3.6	Jacqui Hall	Jacqui Hall	Number of cared for children placed over 20 miles from home address (Cheshire East and out of borough)	Low is Good								147
P3.7	Jacqui Hall	Jacqui Hall	Number of children living out of Borough	Low is Good								218
P3.8	BI Team	BI Team	Number of children who have been missing	Low is Good								35
P3.9	Jacqui Hall	Kerry Birtles	% of cared for children with a plan for permanence endorsed at 2nd review	High is Good				34%	22%	50%	24%	64%
P3.10	Jacqui Hall	Jacqui Hall	Number of children who have achieved permanence in foster care	High is Good				104	106	132	129	131
P3.11	Jacqui Hall	Jacqui Hall	Number of children that moved homes in the quarter	Low is Good				77	52	60	55	75
P3.12	Jacqui Hall	Jacqui Hall	Number of children ceased to be looked after due to granting of special guardianship order (SGO) - year to date figure					2	2	11	13	7
P3.13	Jacqui Hall	Jacqui Hall	Number of children with an adoption decision					53	52	51	34	30
P3.14	Jacqui Hall	Jacqui Hall	Number of children ceased to be looked after due to adoption - year to date figure	High is Good				0	2	6	26	3
P3.15	Jacqui Hall	Jacqui Hall	Average number of days between entering care and moving in with adoptive family (A10 national indicator) - yearly figure	Low is Good		376					638	589
P3.16	Jacqui Hall	Jacqui Hall	Average number of days between placement order and match with adoptive family (A2 national indicator) - yearly figure	Low is Good		185					275	275

Ref	Info available from	Commentary/ Lead		Polarity	Stat Neigh Av	National Av	Target	Q1 20-21	Q2 20-21	Q3 20-21	Q4 20-21	Q1 21-22
<b>Priority 4 - Improve Health and Wellbeing Outcomes</b>												
P4.1	Jacqui Hall	Jacqui Hall	% of initial health assessments requested within 48 hours of coming into care	High is Good				79%	83%	59%	68%	84%
P4.2	Jacqui Hall	Jacqui Hall	% of initial health assessments completed by paediatricians within 20 working days	High is Good				67%	72%	52%	81%	43%
P4.3	Jacqui Hall	Jacqui Hall	% of review health assessments completed (ytd fig)	High is Good				85%			82%	76%
P4.4	Shan McParland	Shan McParland	Number of care leavers with a health passport	High is Good								12/12 100%
P4.5	Jacqui Hall	Steve Nevitt	% of young people with a SDQ score of 20 or above	Low is Good				23%			26%	26%
<b>Priority 5 - Preparing for Adulthood</b>												
P5.1	BI Team	Sam Ankers	Number/ % of care leavers with an up to date pathway plan	High is Good				97%			89%	92%
P5.2	BI Team	Sam Ankers	% of care leavers in suitable accommodation	High is Good				97%	96%	96%	97%	97%
P5.3	Sarah Probert	Jacqui Hall	Number of individuals in staying put arrangement					18			28	27



*Working for a brighter future together*

## **Corporate Parenting Committee**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	14 September 2021
<b>Report Title:</b>	Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2020-21
<b>Report of:</b>	Ged Rowney, Director of Children's Services
<b>Ward(s) Affected:</b>	All

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### **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1. The Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report details the progress and achievements over 2020-21 against the five pledges the Council has made to cared for children and care leavers in the Corporate Parenting Strategy. It also sets out the Terms of Reference for the Committee and the priorities for 2021-22.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. Corporate Parenting Committee is recommended to:
- Endorse the Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2020-21 as set out at Appendix 1.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1. As an advisory committee to the Children and Families Committee, one of the roles of the Corporate Parenting Committee is to act as advocate 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.
- 3.2. The Terms of Reference for the Corporate Parenting Committee included within the Constitution set out a requirement for the Corporate Parenting Committee to report to the Children and Families Committee on at least an annual basis.

#### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1. It could be decided that the Corporate Parenting Committee no longer needs to produce an annual report, but the Annual Report provides an opportunity for the Children and Families Committee to review the effectiveness of this advisory Committee and the impact on outcomes for cared for children and care leavers.

#### **5. Background**

- 5.1. The Corporate Parenting Committee, established in May 2016, is a cross-party advisory committee. During 2020-21 there were 11 members with 1 vacancy. Members were appointed on a politically proportionate basis and nominated by the political groups.
- 5.2. The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Committee as an advisory committee to the Children and Families Committee 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.
- 5.3. The Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2020-21 at Appendix 1 sets out the work of the Committee and progress against the Corporate Parenting Strategy over the past year.
- 5.4. The report also references the impact of Covid-19 on service delivery, the challenges faced and how these have been overcome to ensure our cared for children and young people and care leavers have continued to be supported throughout the pandemic.

#### **6. Consultation and Engagement**

- 6.1. Key stakeholders, including cared for children and young people and care leavers, are regularly consulted on the work of the Corporate Parenting Committee and Council and partner services. The five pledges within the Corporate Parenting Strategy are based on what young people told us matters most to them.

#### **7. Implications**

##### **7.1. Legal**

- 7.1.1. There is a range of legislation and statutory guidance that sets out the role of the local authority in respect of cared for children and care leavers. There are statutory obligations and guidance in relation to the Local Authority's role as Corporate Parent in the Children Acts 1989 and 2004; the Children and Young People Act 2008; the Children and Families Act 2014; and the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

- 7.1.2. In particular, the Children and Social Work Act 2017 defines, for the first time in law, the role of corporate parents, in addition to expanding and extending support for care leavers.

## **7.2. Finance**

- 7.2.1. Bringing children into the care of the local authority represents a significant cost for the Council and growth in the base budget has been approved in recent years based on the increasing levels of demand and complexity of need as well as the priority of achieving appropriate outcomes.

## **7.3. Policy**

- 7.3.1. As a corporate parent, all Council policies should consider the impact on cared for children and care leavers.

## **7.4. Equality**

- 7.4.1. All children and young people have a right to be treated equally and have their disability, gender, ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic needs met. As corporate parents for children and young people in care and care leavers, it is essential that the Council is able to demonstrate that it considers equality implications in all decisions made in relation to cared for children and care leavers. Cared for children and care leavers can be a vulnerable group because of their experiences so we need to ensure they are supported to achieve the same outcomes as their peers as they can experience disadvantages and are at risk of poorer outcomes.

## **7.5. Human Resources**

- 7.5.1. The number of children in care and care leavers has implications for staffing, both within Children's Social Care and enabling services.

## **7.6. Risk Management**

- 7.6.1. Cared for children and care leavers are a vulnerable group for whom there are a number of risks, including poor outcomes in education and training, health, safeguarding and transition into adulthood. The Corporate Parenting Strategy outlines plans to mitigate these risks.

## **7.7. Rural Communities**

- 7.7.1. There are no direct implications for rural communities.

**7.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children**

- 7.8.1. The Corporate Parenting Annual Report, aligned to the Corporate Parenting Strategy, sets out implications for cared for children and young people and priorities for 2020-21.

**7.9. Public Health**

- 7.9.1. Cared for children and care leavers are more at risk of poor health outcomes. Health services need to be targeted to ensure that they meet the needs of this group of children and young people.

**7.10. Climate Change**

- 7.10.1. There are no climate change implications.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Kerry Birtles <a href="mailto:Kerry.Birtles@cheshireeast.gov.uk">Kerry.Birtles@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a> Director of Children's Social Care
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2020-21
Background Papers:	The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018-20 and pledges can be found on the following link: <a href="https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/livewell/care-and-support-for-children/services-from-childrens-social-care/cared-for-children/cared-for-children.aspx">https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/livewell/care-and-support-for-children/services-from-childrens-social-care/cared-for-children/cared-for-children.aspx</a>



# Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2020-21

## Foreword

As Corporate Parents we made pledges as a council in December 2018 to be truly ambitious in supporting and guiding our cared for children and young people and our care experienced adults to strive to reach their full potential. We committed to ensuring that our children and young people had permanent homes that met their individual needs locally so that they could stay connected to their families and communities. We pledged that they would have the very best educational experiences, be healthy, be safe and prepared for their onward journey to adulthood.

The Corporate Parenting Committee have continued to support, challenge and scrutinise the outcomes for our children and young people in line with the pledges that we made. This year we have focused on supporting children and young people through the Covid-19 pandemic. We have ensured that children and young people have continued to receive the support they need despite the challenges the pandemic has brought. Children and young people have continued to receive face to face visits from their social worker. We have also prioritised and invested in the emotional support available to our children and young people, recognising that they needed some additional support through the pandemic.

Children and young people have continued to be at the heart of everything we do, and our Shadow Committee, My Voice, has continued to meet throughout the year albeit virtually when this was necessary. My Voice has subsequently returned to face to face meetings. Children and young people continue to raise awareness of pertinent issues that we as a Council have within our gift to influence. As ever my thanks are given to our children and young people in their efforts in bringing this perspective and challenge to the forefront.

Despite the pandemic, the participation team have offered children and young people a range of virtual activity days and this summer they have a wide range of activities planned to keep children and young people active during the school holidays.

Following the ILACS Ofsted Inspection in November 2019 there has been a focussed effort in addressing areas which required further improvement. We have particularly worked to strengthen our offer of accommodation to care leavers as well as working to ensure that all children and young people receive the very best support we can offer. The findings from the inspection have informed our onward journey in improving outcomes for children and young people in Cheshire East. We have subsequently developed an action plan we are using to improve the support we offer to children, young people, families and carers. Our continued focus is on achieving excellent outcomes for children and young people through establishing consistently good practice.

We have developed a clear vision for children, young people, and care experienced adults in Cheshire East, **Together for Children and Young People**. We want to ensure that across the Council and the partnership, everyone is clear on our shared ambition for children and young people, and we work together to achieve the best outcomes.

I am pleased to present the Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2020-21. This report highlights the successes achieved in delivering positive outcomes for children and young people and more crucially, the next steps in our journey to success.



*Cllr Kathryn Flavell – Lead Member for Children and Families*

## The Corporate Parenting Committee

We know that having the right values, beliefs and culture around prioritising and championing the needs of cared for children and young care experienced adults is essential to achieving excellent outcomes for children and young people. Our Corporate Parenting responsibility is a shared one that requires a high level of commitment from the leadership of the Council, as well as the support and ambition of all council employees and partners.

The Corporate Parenting Committee is comprised of eleven cross-party members with Council Officers in attendance to support agenda items, as required. The Committee is administered by Officers from Democratic Services.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Committee has met virtually, via Microsoft Teams, on five occasions in 2020-21:

- 14<sup>th</sup> July 2020
- 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020
- 17<sup>th</sup> November 2020
- 19<sup>th</sup> January 2021
- 30<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

In preparation for the discussion and challenge at Committee, our Shadow Committee of young people meets in advance with the Chair of the Committee and the Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers to comment on the matters that are to be presented to Committee. They share their lived experience of how services are designed and delivered and ultimately what it feels like to be a cared for child or care experienced adult in Cheshire East.

Officers and partners present information to the Committee. This can be themed in relation to key areas for children and young people, is responsive to changing times, or provides feedback from external scrutiny, so that members can scrutinise and challenge the service that is being delivered to ensure we are effectively meeting children and young people's needs.

The function of the Committee is to oversee the effective delivery of our Corporate Parenting responsibilities and the pledges that we made in December 2018. The Committee ensures that the statutory duties placed upon Cheshire East Council are met.

Officers support members in ensuring that they have the most up to date information available to them about local and national legislative changes. Induction training is also offered to new Members.

The Corporate Parenting Committee has reviewed its Terms of Reference for 2020-21 which is attached at Appendix 1.



## Corporate Parenting Strategy and Pledges

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018-20 sets out a number of pledges we are making to our cared for children and young people and those who are care experienced. These are based on what these children and young people have told us will make the most difference to their lives:

### Pledge One

**We will be a good corporate parent**

### Pledge Two

**We will improve education, training and employment outcomes**

### Pledge Three

**We will work to achieve permanence and keep children safe**

### Pledge Four

**We will improve health and wellbeing outcomes**

### Pledge Five

**We will prepare young people for adulthood**

Each Committee meeting receives a report on progress against the Pledges from the Strategy. Performance reporting and impact is scrutinised by the Committee, along with issues and risks.

**Four Workstream Groups**, aligned to the five pledge areas, are in place to ensure that this strategy is delivered effectively. Previously five workstreams were in place, and in January 2020 workstreams one and three agreed to merge to strengthen the shared focus.



## Service Delivery during Covid-19

Services for cared for children and care leavers embraced new ways of working in the initial stages of the pandemic, reports to Committee over the last 12 months have outlined any existing variations to our statutory service delivery and also highlighted the progress in planning for children and young people.

In response to the initial stages of pandemic, the government introduced the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 for Children's Social Care services. These regulations provided guidance for Local Authorities and Social Care providers in the alternative options for service delivery and were introduced to provide flexibility in the statutory obligations of local government relating to Cared for Children, Adoption and Fostering. These regulations were reviewed by Parliament on 25 September 2020 and the majority of the variations to service delivery were removed.

This ultimately meant that frontline services have a statutory obligation to operate within 'a mainly business as usual' model. There remains a small number of regulations in place to assist social care services in responsibly managing their statutory safeguarding responsibilities to children and young people whilst managing the risks of the virus to frontline workers. Established weekly reporting systems are in place, which identify how and where we are applying the amended regulations, in the main in relation to some Covid-specific virtual visits. Quality assurance activity is regularly undertaken which provides reassurance around the appropriate use of the regulations. The temporary regulations were due to expire on

the 31 March 2021, although following a public consultation have been agreed to be extended.

Frontline services, in line with the priorities set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy, continue to deliver our statutory duties. Almost eighteen months into the pandemic we continue to see evidence of permanence for children within the Court arena, including an increasing number of children achieving adoption than in the previous year. 26 babies and children (twice as many last year) have been matched and permanently placed (as of April 2021). The tremendous efforts of our frontline colleagues, partners and children and young people themselves is testament to the resilience that exists within the services that we deliver and the children and families that we serve.

The service continues to use individual risk assessments to support safe service delivery for children, young people, their parents/carers and family members, and also our frontline colleagues. These risk assessments include physical risk management and also the emotional impact of the prolonged period of alternative ways of working where there are many avenues available including mindfulness, the employee assistance programme and home-based risk assessment. The corporate response to promoting diversity, equality and inclusion throughout the pandemic for the families who access our services and the frontline colleagues who deliver the service has been well received.

## Corporate Parenting Strategy Progress

### Pledge One

#### We will be a good corporate parent

Staff and elected members will understand their roles and responsibilities and be **ambitious corporate parents, who advocate and champion** the needs of cared for children and care leavers in everything they do.

We will **know ourselves and the needs of our children and young people well** and design and deliver services that meet these needs.

**Decisions** about children and young people's lives, and the services that support them, **will be made with them and for them**. We will always value their views.

### What the data tells us

- At the end of March 2021 there were 517 children and young people being cared for by Cheshire East. This is a decrease of 16 children and young people from March 2020.
- This equates to 67 cared for children per 10,000 of the child population within Cheshire East, which is slightly lower than last year.

### What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

- We have continued to monitor and scrutinise the progress and impact of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- We have received quarterly updates on our cared for children and care leavers through the Corporate Parenting Scorecard.
- We have had regular updates from the Participation Team.
- The Chair of the Committee and the Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers have attended 'My Voice' to develop a direct relationship with some of our cared for children and young people. Additionally, every Personal Advisor and Social Worker is on a rota to attend regularly to promote participation from our children and young people.
- Unfortunately, this year's annual Star Awards celebration event needed to be cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the teams did encourage our children and young people across the whole service in designing their own picture to be printed on a Tote Bag based on the theme of "Over the Rainbow". The bags were then filled with books and activities and sent to our children and young people to represent just how well they have managed during this challenging time. We continue to celebrate the achievements of our children and young people and ask everyone to ensure they highlight special achievements



no matter how big or unique so that we can look at ways to keep recognising these.

- My Voice has continued throughout the pandemic through virtual sessions and has now reverted back to face-to-face meetings.
- During the school holidays since February 2021, Activity Days have taken place virtually led by Sophie Cliffe, our Participation Worker.

**Merging of Workstream Groups 1 and 3** – The new workstream will focus on the following areas:

- Training, support and direct work tools to be developed around **placement stability, matching of placements and strengthening sibling assessments**.
- Embedding understanding of warning signs of **placement instability** to aid professionals in recognising signs of risk of placement instability, to prevent instability. In addition, support to prevent adoption breakdown and collaborative working with adoption counts and the front door.
- Continuation of the use of trajectories with an aim of all **children placed at home** having a Signs of Safety trajectory and safety plan in place to aid discharge of the care order.
- Strengthening **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire** resources to triangulate views and to develop a holistic picture of emotional health.

- Development of **life story work** and use of **words and pictures** to help children and young people understand their journey through care.
- **Corporate Parenting Induction Training** will be established with a rolling pattern of focussed thematic training through the year.
- **Corporate Parenting Update Training** will be established for all elected members.
- Developing resources for cared for children and for staff supporting around **LGBTQ+** and **understanding transgender needs**.



### Wellbeing of Our Cared For Children and Care Leavers

- The wellbeing of our Cared For Children And Care Leavers has been an absolute priority for officers throughout this pandemic, particularly where we know they are likely to have experienced the pandemic in a detrimental way. Some of these known areas are in relation to access to employment, education and training, mental health services and where they are experiencing social isolation. Officers and partners are focused on how we offer services creatively across the Council to ensure that these young people are prioritised as we move through the 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.

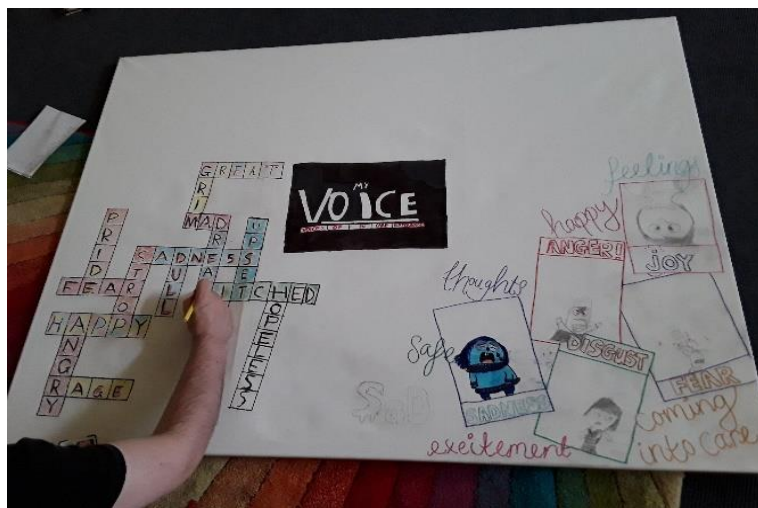


- In the early stages of the pandemic, virtual visits were undertaken to our cared for children and care leavers where this was assessed to be safe, however we very quickly returned to our statutory obligations. During this period all children and young people's needs were assessed individually, as were the risks to our frontline practitioners.
- In recognition of the impact of Covid and the wellbeing needs of our young people we have extended funding to Pure Insight to ensure that no young person was waiting for a service.
- An additional service was offered to young people through RAGE Fitness; Five Steps to Wellbeing, a structured programme focusing on wellbeing and mental health.
- Monthly meetings have also taken place with partners focusing on the emotional wellbeing and planning for any gaps in resources and identifying ways to work together to support the emotional wellbeing of our children and young people.

### My Voice and Participation Lead

My Voice are an established group of cared for children who support the service and the Committee to understand the lived experience of children and young people in Cheshire East. The support to My Voice was previously delivered via the Youth Service which is situated within Early Help and Prevention.

The decision was made to move the resource into the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Teams, and from early November 2020 a part-time Participation Lead has been working within the service. This is a fantastic opportunity to strengthen the voice of children and young people as we continue to drive improvements forward and we will see further developments in shaping services using the feedback that young people provide.



We are keen to truly understand the lived experience of our children and young people and like no other time before we must ensure that their views, wishes and feelings are captured and shape the way forward in how we continue to prioritise their needs. The participation and engagement survey was rolled out in early January 2021 with the intention of truly understanding the lived experiences of the broadest audience of children and young people. We also plan to subsequently shape our

participation and engagement offer as we take the very best bits of the pandemic and where alternative ways of working have been helpful for children and young people into new ways of working with our children, young people and care leavers, being led by My Voice.

### Engagement with Corporate Parenting Members

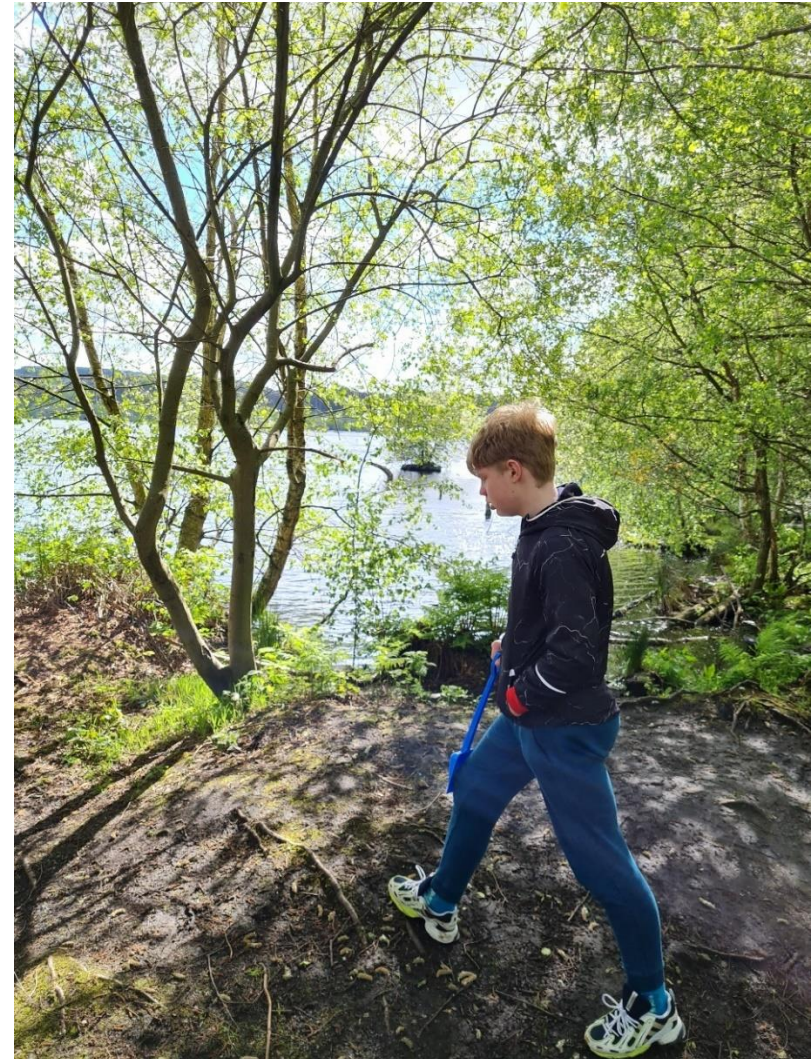
Officers and members are keen to re-establish plans for frontline visits to take place across the service and the menu of options to support in the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy was presented to Members at committee in September 2020. These opportunities include attendance at our Corporate Parenting workstream groups, participating in the Fostering Panel and virtual visits to our commissioned children's homes. This has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and is a key part of current action planning. These observations and interactions will enable Members to gain an understanding of frontline service delivery and collectively, with officers, continue to influence the way that Cheshire East Council prioritises our cared for children and young people and care leavers, particularly during this challenging time. Feedback from interactions has already demonstrated impact as members are reporting having a better understanding of the pressures faced by frontlines colleagues as well as a greater understanding of the complexity of need presented across the service. This feedback will continue to be used to develop participation and services.

## What impact has it made?

- Whilst we have not been able to facilitate a celebration day due to Covid restrictions, the continuation of participation activities has ensured a regular forum for young people to share experiences of care, an opportunity to meet with peers and to support service development.
- There has been a continued and increased offer to ensure that the impact of Covid-19 on emotional well-being and loneliness has been mitigated or reduced.

## Next steps

- To ensure the participation lead meets each child or young person when they enter care to provide key information regarding their status and services available.
- To increase attendance and engagement with My Voice.
- To consider areas of further need such as specific support for cared for children who are LGBTQ+ and more specifically those who are transgender and have issues of trauma and attachment.



## Pledge Two

### We will improve education, employment and training outcomes

We will have **high aspirations** for every child and young person and will **help them to achieve their ambitions**, using opportunities in the 'family business' and our contacts so that they can be **happy and successful** in their education, training and employment.

Every child and young person will have an **education plan that is targeted to enable them to reach their full potential**.

We will strive to that ensure that every child and young person will have **access to consistent, high quality, well matched, full time opportunities**.

### What the data tells us

- At the end of the 2019/20 academic year there were 546 cared for children on the Cheshire East Virtual School roll, this was an increase from 496 recorded for the same time in 2018/19, of these 407 were of school age.
- 72% of cared for children are in 'Good' or 'Outstanding' schools.
- From September 2020 to February half-term 2021, attendance had increased compared to last year with the average Primary attendance increasing from 90% to 93%

and the average Secondary attendance increasing from 90% to 94%.

- In addition to the 10 care leavers currently at university, a further four had places secured for September 2020.
- The completion rate of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) was over 85% as was the percentage completed to a good or better standard. This is due to the robust quality assurance process that is in place within the Virtual School Team and training offered to schools through the Designated Lead teachers network events which allows staff in all schools to access practical working sessions to look at outstanding PEPs, to allow self-evaluation and development of their own systems at the start of each year. However, the percentage was then impacted due to Covid-19 where we had requested that children within the transition cohort must be prioritised.
- All data with regards to attainment is based on Teacher Assessments as no formal baseline assessments, SATs or GCSEs were undertaken due to Covid-19. Full details regarding this can be found in the [Virtual School Head Teacher's Annual Report 2019/20](#).

### What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

- The **Post 16 Education Subgroup** is focusing on achieving apprenticeships for cared for children and care leavers in and out of the council. This is a measurable target within our Corporate Parenting Strategy and local offer. One of the key

focuses of this year is to develop council apprenticeships and further increase our offer for post 16 young people.

- The **School Age Children Subgroup** is also focusing on raising attainment for our cared for children and improving their outcomes. Cared for children can experience unplanned changes to their education when they come into care or during their time in care and therefore there is a greater challenge to ensure that they are supported above and beyond so that they achieve their potential. Areas to be addressed by this group have been identified as improving attendance, minimising the time between school moves, reducing exclusions and the development of PEPs content and quality.



- The Virtual School now has three full time learning mentors who were newly appointed in March 2020 and we are in the process of recruiting one more. The main aim is to work with school aged children to support social, emotional mental health and transition, when children have had a placement or school change or where children have high levels of anxiety. The learning mentors work alongside Designated Teachers and other agencies to support cared for children to overcome barriers to learning. This year we have one of our learning mentors specifically for supporting post 16 young people with a focus on increasing support for our NEET young people.
- During this year the Virtual School Team have had to adapt to new ways of working due to the national pandemic. Throughout this period, we have continued to develop new ways of working and we are continuing to deliver a good level of support to all of our children and schools.
- During lockdown, we contacted all the carers of our 2-4-year-old children at least once each month providing advice, guidance and support on learning activities and useful websites. We made sure that all children transferring to school had school places and had a handover of cases. We supported 2-year olds to access a nursery place when eligible.

- The educational and employment experiences of our cared for children and care leavers was significantly disrupted from March 2020 to the end of the school term in July 2020. Cheshire East Council took the approach to prioritise the reintegration of cared for children back into school where this was deemed necessary. This resulted in many children returning to school and having a positive experience, crucially preparing them for a more permanent return to school in September 2020.
- We have established and robust safeguarding measures in place to track and review vulnerable pupils not in education. Support is made available to children and families in this situation. We have established a partnership planning meeting to look at any such children and young people and worked closely between the school, Virtual School, and parents/foster carers to ensure education is being provided.
- The Virtual School and frontline teams continue to focus on frequency of Personal Education Plan (PEP) completion and quality related to targeted support to ensure that we continue to have high aspirations for our children and young people.
- The service and the broader Council continue to be focused on not in education, employment or training (NEET) for our 16-18-year-old cared for children and our care experienced adults. Our NEET figure for 16-18 years olds remains steady at around 4-6% on average. More targeted support is being put into supporting and prioritising our care experienced

adults and where opportunities for creative ways of furthering their skills and employment opportunities exist, that we action this for them.

- The service has participated in a Council-wide NEET summit to give the best opportunity for care leavers to have a strategic priority as we move forward and tackle the unemployment challenges resulting from Covid-19. Within the Care Leavers service, we have a dedicated NEET Lead who has coordinated for the second year a NEET programme which began in November 2020. This ran as two groups of four young people to reintroduce them to the world of education, training and employment. Young people choose a community initiative that not only re-establishes their aspiration for their own path to EET but also gives back to the community. Last year the programme focused on homelessness and had a significant social value impact for the young people attending the course and the broader community.
- The service is also targeting our most vulnerable young adults through the Journey First Programme, where keyworker capacity has increased to work with our most vulnerable care leavers in being creative in re-engaging them in education, training and employment. The funding will be available over a three-year period which will offer consistency in relationships, a key driver for care leavers.

- The Virtual School Governing Body was launched in February 2021. The Director of Children's Social Care is the Chair of Governors. Core members include representatives from across all partners including schools and carers. This governing body will allow the Virtual School to have the same level of support, scrutiny and challenge that would exist within mainstream and specialist provision and will provide an additional avenue to challenge our statutory responsibilities and outcomes for children and young people, as well as also monitor and support the longer term consequences of the pandemic.

### What impact has it made?

- Throughout the pandemic the Virtual School Advisors monitored and tracked each child/young person to ensure clear communication and support was in place. Children and young people were supported regarding the return to school, in particular those from transition year groups and those moving to new schools.
- Pupil Premium Funding has been used to support the purchase of ICT equipment to ensure that all children and young people were able to access remote learning. Funding is also in place for individual children to ensure they have had access to extra tuition and for carers to support continued access to education/activities whilst at home.
- There has been clear and robust planning for Education Recovery; the Virtual School Headteacher has worked closely with the Director of Education and the Heads of Service across both Education and Children's Social Care.
- Virtual training/network sessions for designated lead teachers focused on sharing good practice and how to further support children/young people's return to school. Resource guides for carers and children and young people have subsequently been created across all age groups (early years to post 16), these include advice and links to a wide variety of education, mental health and wellbeing resources.
- Support from the Post 16 Learning Mentor and Advisor has meant that no Year 11 pupils moving into post 16 have been unable to access the courses they identified. There has been a reduction in the number of young people aged 16-18 who are not in Education, Employment or Training at the start of the new academic year, and the Autumn term programme for post 16 young people identified as NEET was successfully implemented.
- Early Years support has ensured all the carers of our 2-4-year-old children have received advice, guidance and support on learning activities and useful websites. All children transferring to school have had school places and carers of 2-year olds have been supported to access nursery places when eligible.
- During March – July during the lockdown period we requested that there was a specific focus on transition year groups to ensure that clear plans were in place to support our children/young people who would be having school/placement changes. We developed a one-minute guide to support schools and social care to have clear process/procedures of how to undertake PEPs virtually. The team were able to attend more PEPs than usual while completing them online as they don't have any travel time

restricting them and they are able to coordinate their diaries to attend more, which has been of significant benefit. The feedback from all parties including Children's Social Care has been positive and they agree that this could be a way we can be flexible with completing PEPs in the future, in particular for those living/educated out of borough.

### Next steps

- Continue to work with the new Governing Body for the Virtual School to ensure governance and scrutiny including core members from across key partners and stakeholders.
- Work with council leaders to ensure development of apprenticeship opportunities for our cared for children and care leavers.
- Development of a pupil voice to ensure our children and young people are fully involved with key developments across the service.
- Continue to work alongside Council Members as part of the Corporate Parenting Strategy to develop access to front line services including the Virtual School Governing Body, Priority 2 Workstream, and direct work with children and young people to improve access to education.
- Continue to provide support and interventions for schools and children to improve outcomes (narrow the gap and lost learning) and attendance, evaluating the impact of the intervention and use of Pupil Premium.
- Identify and implement changes resulting from the Social Care Act 2017 which includes the Virtual School Head Teacher to have responsibilities for previously cared for

children as well as currently cared for and to promote mental health and attachment awareness in schools.

- Monitor the impact of commissioned and front-line services through engagement, progress and outcomes.
- Implement the self-assessment tool for use with and by schools to improve their practice and support for cared for children.
- Continue to improve the completion rate and quality of PEPS and continue to develop to extend to Early Years and Post 16.



## Pledge Three

### We will work to achieve permanence and keep children safe

We will strive to ensure that every child and young person will have the **opportunity to live in a good, safe home locally**, either with their family or in another permanent home. All decisions will be made and reviewed with them without delay.

We will **respect those people who are important to our children and young people** and make sure that these safe relationships are sustained.

We will **keep children and young people safe**.

### What the data tells us

- 96% for cared for children reviews took place within statutory timescales, with 98% of children participating in their reviews.
- 272 cared for children live with foster families, 55 live with family and friend carers, 59 live with their parents, 11 children are placed for adoption and 41 live within residential care.
- 107 children are living in permanently matched homes with their foster carers and a further 20 have remained in 'staying put' arrangements with their foster carers after they became 18.

- Of the children who ceased to be cared for during the past year, 13 became subject to Special Guardianship Orders, 26 children were adopted, 6 Child Arrangement Orders were made, 11 Supervision Orders and 7 Care Orders were discharged.

### What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

- We considered the Annual Independent Review Officers Report and how the outcomes for our cared for children and care leavers are quality assured.
- We considered the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report.
- 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 wherever practicably possible.
- Committee has been made aware of the impact of Covid-19 in achieving permanence in permanence in a timely way and that the initial stages of the pandemic created a significant challenge. We are now seeing those delays reduce, with children achieving their permanent plans by way of adoption, special guardianship and discharges of care orders. We are faced with a smaller but still significant challenge of the cumulative backlog of Court progression work and continue to work closely with the Local Family Justice Board to progress this.
- We have been successful in funding a legal executive to work closely with team managers to address delays and

promote permanency for our children and young people and support rapid work with revocations on orders of care for children placed at home.

- Despite the delays in Court and the impact of the pandemic, the frontline service has continued to drive our priorities forward and three children have been discharged from care as they no longer require that level of safeguarding. Cheshire East Council are identified as an outlier in relation to the number of children living at home and subject to Care Orders, however, there is now clear evidence that the work that the service have been doing to make this cohort of children a priority is becoming evident and is fundamentally achieving positive outcomes for children and young people.
- Throughout the pandemic, our commissioned service to children who go missing from care has continued to operate and has been successful in maintaining an offer to children and young people that can respond in a timely way and disrupt this risky behaviour.
- Our children who are living out of borough or 'at a distance' represent around 40% of our cared for population and include children living with Cheshire East foster carers, children placed for adoption, with parents and family members, and also children in independent residential and foster care. Our last inspection offered reassurance that our children who live outside of Cheshire East are at no detriment and our statutory services delivered throughout the pandemic have continued to ensure that our children are seen and plans progress. We have undertaken random dip sampling to assure ourselves of consistent practice and service, irrespective of where our children live.

- Our vision for children and young people is focused on children living in the borough where we believe their needs will be best met and we continue to develop a range of sufficiency options including our Bespoke children's homes. Our first Mockingbird constellation was launched in November 2020, this continues to make great progress and has impact with the children and carers directly involved.



### Bespoke Children's Homes

We developed 'Bespoke' and mobilised our new Children's Homes. Bespoke is a hub-based model similar to the North Yorkshire 'No Wrong Door' model which has received national recognition. This will provide wrap around support to children and young people who are in care or on the edge of care.

We have a variety of services linked to Bespoke such as Speech and Language Therapists, mental health services and

the Virtual School who are all supporting ambitious outcomes for the children in our care.

### **Fostering**

Cheshire East Council commissioned an independent review of the Fostering Service which made recommendations about how an alternative delivery structure may assist with recruitment and retention of foster carers, a key objective within our Action Plan to address the recommendations from the Ofsted Inspection in 2019. A decision was reached to depart from our collaborative relationship with Foster4, which took place in September 2020 and to engage on our own recruitment and assessment processes to recruit new foster carers to Cheshire East. We have developed our own marketing and recruitment capability in-house to maximise our local foster carers and with commitment from the Corporate Communications Team, a designated officer works with the service on our marketing, recruitment and communication. At the end of December 2020, figures showed our enquires have increased significantly and our expressions of interest have doubled compared with the same period last year under Foster4.

### **Foster Care Fortnight**

Foster Care Fortnight in May 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.

### **Family Time**

During the initial lockdown restrictions, one of the most significantly affected areas was that of family time between cared for children and their parents, siblings and friends, however, we 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.

A Family Time coordinator is now in post. She is currently reviewing all family time arrangements to ensure that they remain appropriate and to ensure that the service runs efficiently and that children are supported to see their family at an appropriate level and with the right level of support/supervision.

### **Adoption Counts**

Cheshire East have been in regional arrangements with Adoption Counts since 2017 where success in the partnerships is evident in children achieving permanence via adoption and the timeliness of achieving these plans. Officers have been working in partnership with Adoption Counts and are seeking an 'in principle' decision to move to permanent arrangements

within the year, subject to TUPE consultation and agreement of the Integrated Service Agreement.

### Resource and Accommodation Panel

Achieving permanence for cared for children and care leavers is one of our service priorities and we have a clear plan to ensure that the children who do require local authority care receive this in a timely way; that the care they receive is excellent; and, for children who no longer need to be in care, that their plans are progressed without delay. The service has reviewed how we strategically link our priorities to the operational delivery of services and from the October 2020 we launched a new 'Resource And Permanence Panel' (RAPP) where Heads of Service are setting expectations about the timeliness of plans and the resource allocation across the service.

### What impact has it made?

- There is a greater understanding of the needs of our children. The Fostering Service and Commissioning are working together to ensure we have high quality placements to meet our children's needs.
- In addition, the redevelopment of RAPP and the creation of 'step down panel' has ensured that there is clear strategic oversight of placement quality, care planning, and cost. There is a renewed determination to ensure that children have the opportunity of living within a family and that fewer children live in residential placements.

- There is a robust system in place to ensure children who go missing are supported on a multi-agency basis and that safety planning to reduce risk occurs.
- There is a greater understanding of the development areas for social work practice and the workstream will enable practice tools and guidance to be developed.

### Next steps

- To continue to develop practice guidance and resources to ensure we achieve consistently good social work practice.
- To develop support around placement stability – particularly support targeted to adoption breakdowns and 16-17 year old's presenting as homeless.
- To continue to develop our offer of support around healthy relationships through commissioned services
- To continue to develop the Fostering Service to ensure placement stability and choice of placement options to meet children's individual needs.
- To ensure children that can be supported to step down from residential care and have the opportunity of living within a family.



## Pledge Four

### We will improve health and wellbeing outcomes

We are committed to **understanding the health needs** of our children and young people **as early as possible** and to ensure they are **given the highest priority** in every service.

We will **equip** our children and young people to have **high aspirations for their own health**.

### What the data tells us

- 85% of cared for children in Cheshire East had an up to date review health assessment.
- 94% of immunisations were completed.
- For children 5 and under 100% of developmental checks were completed.
- 38% of dental checks were completed in timescales.
- 100% of care leavers received a summary of their health at the time of their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

### What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

- We have considered the Annual Health Report for Cared for Children and Care Leavers.
- Following the **'Help me to be healthy' group**, the Cared for Children Specialist Nurses are now regularly attending service meetings to provide an update for social workers

around the health processes for cared for children. This includes discussion around the requirements for making a request for an initial health assessment, the role of the nurse specialists, and how the health needs of cared for children are identified and met, with the intention of impacting on timeliness for requests for health assessments.

- 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 workstream.
- Our cared for children and young people and care leavers have not received a 'lesser' or reduced IHA service as a result of Covid-19. Initial health assessments were prioritised throughout Covid-19 and continued to be delivered face to face by a consultant paediatrician throughout the pandemic, ensuring health needs were identified promptly.
- Review health assessments have been undertaken virtually where appropriate and currently assessment clinics are now operating face-to-face once again. The partnership is exploring how we can offer a varied service going forward as for some young people, having options about how we assess and meet their health needs has been of benefit to them.
- 85% of our cared for children had an up-to-date review health assessment where any health needs are identified within statutory timeframes and services put in place to respond to these needs. The Social Care service and the

Health service continue to work in partnership to understand the complexities for children and young people in accessing health screening and assessment.

- Overall, performance in relation to requests for initial health assessments, completion of initial health assessments and annual review health assessments, continues to deliver robust health assessments for children and young people, and this continues to be a priority for the help me be healthy workstream.
- The emotional wellbeing and mental health needs of our cared for children and care leavers has been an issue raised throughout the pandemic and is a current focus for our Designated Nurse for Cared for Children and Care Leavers. We seek to make the offer to children and young people much more visible to them as we continue in our recovery phase and challenge providers to ensure that cared for children and care leavers are prioritised in the delivery of their service.
- Accessing annual dental checks is a statutory requirement for all our children and young people and there have been challenges in relation to access to routine checks during the pandemic. This is due to the impact of enforced surgery closure and emergency care prioritisation during Covid-19.
- After raising concerns regarding the statutory Dental requirements with NHS England on behalf of our young people NHS Cheshire CCG were selected to take part in a dental access pilot which commenced late March and will continue into the next year.

- The objective of the pilot is to ensure cared for children have access to a dental check and any subsequent treatment which is identified. Dental practices across Cheshire have been identified to provide this service and a referral can be made via the Designated Nurse. NHS England are also providing support to access dental care at practices the children are already registered with wherever possible.



- A launch event was held and attended by the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children. The Cared for Children teams in Cheshire East have started to complete referrals. The pilot will be evaluated with a view to rolling this out across the NHS system, and the Designated Nurse will be tracking referrals and outcomes.

## What impact has it made?

- Cared for children new into care have had the opportunity to have a face to face comprehensive health assessment with a consultant paediatrician. This has ensured that health needs are identified in a timely way and an appropriate health plan is put in place.
- Positive feedback has been received from children in care regarding the use of technology to facilitate review health assessments. Young people have reported that they are not taken out of school, do not have to spend time in clinics and have felt more at ease and less intrusive. This blended approach will continue in response to individual needs.



## Next steps

- The main priority for the next year will be continuing to ensure that cared for children have access to appropriate healthcare as the Covid-19 restrictions ease. This includes the continued delivery of face to face services wherever possible, supported by platforms such as Attend Anywhere and Chat Health.
- We will continue to work with partners to support cared for children and care leavers who are living in semi-independent hostel residences who have been finding the restrictions of lockdown difficult. This will include liaison with mental health and substance misuse services.
- An audit of effectiveness will be completed to ensure that the help me to be healthy workstream is continuing to have a positive impact on children in care and care leavers' health and wellbeing.

## Pledge Five

### We will prepare young people for adulthood

We will **support young people early with the skills needed** to prepare for their future through access to a range of good quality services.

We will be a **consistent guide** for our young people. We will **celebrate their successes** and **support them when things don't go well**.

We will **respect our care leavers as young adults** and adapt our relationships to their needs.

### What the data tells us

- As of the end of March 2021, there were 291 care leavers eligible for services.
- 89% of Pathways Plans were completed within timescales.
- Pathway Plans are reviewed by an Independent Reviewing Officer, 97% of children and young people have been involved in their reviews.
- As of the end of March 2021, there were nine 16-18-year-old care leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET) and 51% of 19-21-year-old care leavers.

### What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

- In March, we met with some of our care leavers, Councillors, local employers and a whole range of

organisations who are in a position to offer advice, guidance and practical help to review our Local Offer. The event was a great success and focused on mental well-being and the impact of the pandemic, education, employment and training opportunities, money matters and housing. Our [updated Local Offer is available on our website](#).

- 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 so that there were no unnecessary moves during the pandemic. Care leavers have also been provided with additional financial support on a weekly basis, and with access to technology and data so that they can stay connected.
- We are ambitious corporate parents to our children and young people and care experienced adults and made the commitment in 2017 to embrace the covenant and new statutory duties and the responsibility upon local authorities to extend their support to care experienced adults to 25. The Care Leavers Service 'reach out' to our care experienced adults who have chosen not to continue to access a service, and pre-Covid we saw a relatively low response to our extended offer of support. We have seen however an increase in care experienced adults accepting the support offered during the pandemic and this has seen additional support provided in relation to emotional

wellbeing, finances and support with employment. We have written to all care leavers to ensure they understand that support, help and advice is available to them. This is evidence of our corporate parenting commitment. We are now considering what the prolonged period of additional demand could mean for capacity with the service as well as potential recovery from the pandemic.

- 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 wellbeing 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.
- 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 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.



- The care leavers service continues to be focused on supporting the needs of our care experienced adults in relation to accommodation, NEET, social isolation, emotional wellbeing and relationships.
- The sustainability of dedicated emotional wellbeing support has been explored with the CCG, provided by Pure Insight, as we continue to explore with the CCG psychological support to Adoption Services. The fitness and wellbeing provision (RAGE fitness) for care experienced young adults is now launched and we actively continue to engage young people with referrals to participate in this programme, offering therapy, advice, support; an offer that has been well received in different local authorities.



### Recommission of 16+ Accommodation

The accommodation needs of our care leavers also remain a priority. The service has worked closely with care leavers to coproduce a tender for the 16+ supported accommodation offer for cared for children aged 16-18 years old, including emergency accommodation. The tendering process has been successful, and we have identified two providers to deliver excellent support and accommodation services to our young people at a crucial part in their journey. The service is now in the mobilisation phase of the contract and has a very strong offer in place to support our young people. The recommission has embraced the feedback from the Ofsted inspection in the need to tailor the delivery model when young adults are accessing emergency accommodation.

### Care Leavers Service

The Care Leavers Service has in recent years experienced a higher demand as a result of the changes in legislation to support care-experienced adults from 21-25 years old. A service redesign has taken place and resulted in an internal restructure and Service Manager Steve Nevitt being appointed as the leader of the service. Steve and the team intend to reignite the Corporate Parenting challenge in Cheshire East and have plans to continue to drive the service forward, tackling some of the known challenges for care leavers such as NEET, and also reviewing the Local Offer for Care Leavers.

### What impact has it made?

- We are in touch with the vast majority of our Care Leavers, barring a couple of individuals who have specifically requested that we do not provide them with a service. Our care leavers know that we have been 'open for business' throughout the pandemic and who they can turn to when they need help, guidance and practical support.
- Our use of emergency accommodation has been at an all-time low in the past year and in only one case has a young person had to remain in this sort of temporary provision for any amount of time.
- Our NEET figures continue to fall as a consequence of the team's efforts in developing and delivering the NEET Programme, our engagement with employers and

education providers and the work of our new Journey First worker.

- Financial support to Care leavers has been responsive and proactive, particularly for those young people who have experienced difficult times or personal crises during the pandemic.
- Similarly, our 21+ Offer has provided an invaluable safety net for young adults in the early twenties who may not qualify for assistance from Adult Services but who nevertheless require some additional support from time to time.

### Next steps

- We believe that we have the foundations in place to deliver a genuinely outstanding service to our care leavers; we want to ensure that their voice is heard in everything we do and that there is a regular feedback loop into service development.
- We are particularly keen to increase the number of our care leavers who take up apprenticeships and have just advertised a 12-month coordinator post to particularly focus on this exciting development.
- We will also be working closely with colleagues in the Domestic Abuse Service and will be seconding one of our Personal Advisors to particularly focus on working with care

leavers who experience housing problems as a result of abusive relationships

- We will be taking part in the revised National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied migrant young people and will be developing a project with the 'I Love Music Trust' to build cohesion and integration for our UASC Care Leavers.
- The Service will once again be focusing on their successful Social Activity program now that restrictions have lifted. This includes care leaver holidays, parent and child trips, mental health walks and our weekly football engagement programme.



## Priorities for 2021-22

- To improve and develop participation between cared for children, care experienced adults and children's services with the aim of using children and young people's views to inform service development.
- To ensure there is a robust placement offer, sufficiency, and stability for cared for children, through the restructure of the Fostering Service, further development of Mockingbird and the Care at Home Strategy. This involves using a range of commissioned providers to support children to remain at home.
- To further extend the Stability Practice Lead post to support homeless 16-17-year olds to ensure they can remain at home or return home through family networking.
- To further extend the Stability Practice Lead post to support families at risk of adoption breakdown and prevent them returning to care.
- To consider and develop stronger links and resources to meet the emotional wellbeing needs of our cared for children and young people through Pure Insight and development of services for LGBTQ+.
- Creation and development of a dedicated Court Team within the Cared for Service – to ensure that children are provided permanence at the earliest opportunity. To develop good working relationships with the local Court, so that they are confident in the Local Authority's assessments and planning for children.
- Development of an Apprenticeship Coordinator for Care Leavers. The post holder will provide support for care leavers who are undertaking an apprenticeship and will also develop opportunities for further apprenticeships within the Council and with local businesses.



## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

### **Cheshire East Corporate Parenting Committee**

#### **Membership: 12 Councillors**

Additionally, the Committee is informed by representative young people from My Voice (Cheshire East's Children in Care Council) to advise the Committee.

The Chair is the Lead Member for Children and Families.

#### ***Functions***

1. The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Committee in its role as an advisory committee to the Children and Families Committee 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.
2. The Committee's responsibilities include:
  - 2.1. acting as advocate 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;
  - 2.2. ensuring key strategic plans relating to children in care and care leavers are in place and are delivered including the Corporate Parenting Strategy, Sufficiency Statement and Children and Young People's Plan;
  - 2.3. overseeing the implementation of Cheshire East's Corporate Parenting Strategy and action plan and monitoring the quality and effectiveness of services to ensure that they fulfil the Council's responsibilities;
  - 2.4. monitoring the quality of care delivered by Cheshire East's residential children's homes through visits and reports, including summary reports of Ofsted inspections;
  - 2.5. reviewing 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;
  - 2.6. establishing an environment whereby Councillors 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;
- 2.7. overseeing with the Children and Families 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;
- 2.8. supporting the work of foster carers and adopters in making a difference to the care and support they provide;
- 2.9. making 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**

- 3. The Committee will:
  - 3.1. meet bi-monthly;
  - 3.2. report to the Children and Families Committee on at least an annual basis; and
  - 3.3. review its terms of reference annually.
- 4. The Committee will be serviced by Democratic Services.
- 5. Minutes and agendas will be distributed and published no later than 5 clear working days prior to the meeting.

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## **BRIEFING REPORT**

### **Corporate Parenting Committee**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	14 September 2021
<b>Report Title:</b>	Preparation for Adulthood Annual Report and Service Plan
<b>Report of:</b>	Ged Rowney, Director of Children's Services

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#### **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1. The accompanying report replaces the 'Care Leavers Annual Report' that has been presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in previous years. It outlines the impact of the work to prepare our young people for adulthood. It is aligned with the Corporate Parenting Operational Group and its Subgroups; 'Preparing for Adulthood' is subgroup 5 and meets bi-monthly with a range of representatives from Children's Services, Safeguarding, the Childrens Society, Housing, the Participation Team, Youth Support Services and the Fostering Service.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1. The purpose of the subgroup is to ensure that all Cheshire East Cared for Children and Care Leavers are supported with the transition into adulthood. It ensures that Preparation for Adulthood is on the agenda for our services at all times. We aim to improve our young people's independence skills, increase their preparedness for adulthood and to embed any changes in our services across the partnership

#### **3. Briefing Information**

- 3.1. Please see the accompanying report and service plan.

#### **4. Implications**

##### **4.1. Legal**

- 4.1.1. The report explains how we discharge our statutory responsibilities to our care leavers from the time we start to plan their independence at 15/16 to age 25.

## 4.2. Finance

- 4.2.1. Services to care leavers are provided on a statutory basis; the 21+ offer is funded by additional resources from the DfE which we are anticipating will increase from last year.

## 4.3. Human Resources

- 4.3.1. Three members of the team are currently employed on temporary arrangements which we will be able to make permanent when renewed 21+ funding is confirmed.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Steve Nevitt, Service Manager Resources <a href="mailto:Steve.nevitt@cheshireeast.gov.uk">Steve.nevitt@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a> 01606 271823
Appendices:	Appendix 1: Preparation for Adulthood Report Appendix 2: Care Leavers Service Plan 2021-22
Background Papers:	None



# **Preparation for Adulthood Report**

**Steve Nevitt – Care Leavers' Service Manager**

**April 2020 – May 2021**

## **Introduction**

This report replaces the 'Care Leavers Annual Report' that has been presented to committee in previous years. It is aligned with the Corporate Parenting Operational Group and its Subgroups; 'Preparing for Adulthood' is subgroup 5 and meets bi-monthly with a range of representatives from Children's Services, Safeguarding, the Childrens Society, Housing, the Participation Team, Youth Support Services and the Fostering Service.

The purpose of the subgroup is to ensure that all Cheshire East cared for children and care leavers are supported with the transition into adulthood. It ensures that Preparation for Adulthood is on the agenda for our services at all times. We aim to improve our young people's independence skills, increase their preparedness for adulthood and to embed any changes in our services across the partnership.

Preparing cared for children and care leavers for adulthood can be a complex process. The average age at which young people in the UK now leave home for good is approaching 28: for our cared for children, early childhood experiences which affect their readiness to be independent and challenging timescales mean that most care experienced young people are faced with the pressures and responsibilities of adulthood at a much earlier age than peers who live with their families.

## **Background**

In last year's report Cheshire East Council was supporting 269 care leavers, a number that has now risen to a total of 337. This increase is a function of the significant rise in our population of cared for children during the past five years, many of whom are now turning 18; we are also continuing to see care leavers returning for a service post 21 years of age under the 21-25 duties arising from the Children & Social Work Act 2017.

It scarcely needs to be stated that the past year has been like nothing that we could ever have imagined in our lifetimes and keeping services for vulnerable young people and adults up and running in the midst of a global pandemic has inevitably seen multiple challenges. We are incredibly proud of the way in which both our team and our partners in other agencies have risen to these challenges and adapted their working practices to ensure that the needs of our care leavers have continued to be met, and to fulfil all our responsibilities as good Corporate Parents.

## **Review of the Local Offer**

In July 2018 some of our care leavers met with their Corporate Parents to produce the local offer; people attended from the council, voluntary organisations and major employment firms in Cheshire East. They each wrote a pledge about what they would offer our care leavers in the future; some of the pledges included prioritising emotional health and wellbeing and others looked at accommodation and employment and training.

Each year with our care leavers, we hold an event where we review how we have delivered those pledges and our aspirations for the future before we update our local offer. The most recent review was held on 17 March 2021 and was attended by care leavers, Councillors, local employers and a whole range of organisations who are in a position to offer advice,

guidance and practical help. To see what's changed, please visit the [local offer on our website](#).

### **Independence Packs**

Our Gold, Silver, Bronze and Platinum Independence packs are well established and are used routinely throughout the local authority. Social Workers, Personal Advisors and Foster Carers complete them regularly with their young people to increase their knowledge and experience of self-care and independence tasks. The aim is for young people to start working on their bronze pack from aged 14 and up; the tasks are achievable for that age group and difficult though it may be for teenagers to have to start thinking about independence, preparation for adulthood cannot wait until the young person becomes a care leaver.

There is now twice-yearly training around independence for our foster carers. Feedback from the training has been hugely positive and it is run in partnership between the Care Leavers Service, Safeguarding and the Fostering Service. In the past year we have also extended the training to include families in Independent Fostering Agencies.

### **Tenancy Readiness Courses**

The Care Leavers' Service and our colleagues in Housing have continued to run the Tenancy Readiness Course although it has been taken online as a result of the restrictions imposed by Covid-19. Fortunately (thanks to the support provided by Personal Advisors) the pandemic has not had a significant impact on completion rates with 19 care leavers finishing the course in the first six months of the business year and a further 7 undertaking it at the time of writing. Like so many aspects of our lives that have changed, many young people report that they actually like the online course as they can complete it in their own time and to suit them; as a result and given that there is a cost with the current provider, we are currently developing our own version of the course.

### **Mentoring**

We are proud to continue our working relationship with Pure Insight who deliver mentoring and wellbeing support to our care leavers. It is an outstanding service whose workers regularly go above and beyond any reasonable expectations to ensure that young people can access support in ways to which they feel able to respond, particularly when times are hard. Highlights from the last few months of their work include:

- Psychological Wellbeing Worker (PWW) Ami started in August 2018; Trauma-informed counsellor Kirsty started in May 2019.
- 15 new referrals to the service in the most recent quarter (4 picked up by PWW, 5 picked up by the counsellor and 6 remain on waiting list for a PWW offer to become available).
- In total 31 are receiving a weekly or fortnightly 1:1 interventions from the Psychological Wellbeing Worker which include learning self-care coping strategies, self-regulatory skills, understanding trauma and the impact it has on physical and emotional wellbeing, understanding their own story and what impact that has on them now.

- 31 young people completed resilience circles to identify sources of support in their existing networks or in the wider community and which also helps identify unhelpful/unhealthy relationships.
- 3 Supported to reduce substance use in last 3 months.
- 4 Supported to retain/secure new or existing tenancy in last 3 months; 5 supported to make their flat a home (access grant for soft furnishings through Pure Insight).
- 5 young people referred into Trauma Counselling since Feb 2021 – 12 spaces currently being utilised by Cheshire East young people.
- 12 youngsters supported to access mental health advice or appointments in last 3 months.
- 65 young people are members of a closed Facebook Group – ‘Insight In Mind’.
- 17 supported to engage in activities to support mental health wellbeing.
- 7 young people started education, employment or training or voluntary work since being picked up by Pure Insight between February and April 2021.
- 20 young people currently have active mentoring relationships.
- 13 have ‘progressed’ mentoring relationships which have exceeded two years duration.
- 45 young people are currently engaging with the team in work to get ready for a mentor or in stabilising their situations.

If any officers would consider becoming a mentor please email [ce@pure-insight.org.uk](mailto:ce@pure-insight.org.uk) or check the website [www.pure-insight.org.uk](http://www.pure-insight.org.uk).

### **Support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) & Adults and Helping them Prepare for Adulthood.**

The past year has seen a continuing pattern of stability in our population of asylum seeking young people and at the time of writing, the council has 14 cared for children and 33 care leavers who have arrived in this country unaccompanied. Because of growing pressure in the port authorities, we accepted two young people under the National Transfer Scheme in December and as recently as last week, we had two more spontaneous arrivals from Sudan who were discovered close to the M6. The Home Office is currently consulting with local authorities nationally in an attempt to ensure a fairer distribution of young people from Portsmouth and Kent and our feedback was submitted as part of the overall response of the North-West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership. If all councils can be persuaded to accept the proposals and work collaboratively, we will not see any increase in the number of young people that we take into our care in an average year.

The offer to our UASC is the same as for any other cared for young person or care leaver although planning can be more difficult as the support we offer can change, depending on the outcome and timeliness of their asylum claim with the Home Office. Some young people are granted leave to remain quickly whereas others are still waiting for a decision after turning 18 years and beyond, meaning that they cannot work or settle like their peers. Inevitably, the pandemic has seen these delays only worsen although we are now seeing the first Home Office assessment interviews conducted virtually.

We have an excellent accommodation offer for our UASC’s within Cheshire East with emergency provision available for the day they arrive and then more independent shared accommodation options available once assessments of their needs and abilities have been completed. In the past 12 months a number of young people have successfully obtained

their own tenancy via Cheshire Home Choice and are making roots, connections and friendships in the borough. This has followed a path of supported accommodation and advice and assistance from their Personal Advisors to make sure it will be a success.

### **Ignition Panel & Accommodation**

Accommodation is a key factor in preparing young people for adulthood and is discussed in the subgroup as a standing agenda item. In December, Cheshire East received a Youth Homelessness Focussed Call from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and this has resulted in the production of an action plan for partner agencies which we have adopted in the group.

Moving into independence is an anxious time for cared for children and changes in placement need to occur at the right time and to the right home for our young people. To facilitate this, the Ignition panel has been running since 2017: the monthly panel brings together what is available locally so that our young people can make an informed choice about where they live in the future.

We retain commissioned contracts for accommodation provided by Watermill House in Macclesfield and the YMCA in Crewe after a successful re-tendering exercise. These projects use their own independence programs which prepare young people to move on and be able to live independently.

There is ongoing work by our Housing Department to work with our Social Landlords throughout the borough to dispel myths and give them a greater understanding of care experienced young people. The work has been positive with many Social Landlords changing the way they work. Although the work with landlords is ongoing the conference with Social Landlords planned for July last year had to be postponed because of the pandemic. Even with these challenges however, we have still had many care leavers move into their first home across the borough and our use of emergency accommodation is essentially close to zero.

‘Staying Put’ describes the arrangement when a cared for young person remains with their foster carer post 18 years. It is an option that we actively encourage as staying with a family in a settled and safe environment can only help a young person achieve and fulfil their potential. It also gives them the opportunity to progress to independence at a stage they choose rather than something that is forced upon them. To try and increase the number of staying put placements we offer training and have a Staying Put champion in the Fostering Service. Foster carers can be anxious about the changes from caring for a child to an adult and also any financial implications so we try to iron these out well before the young person turns 18 years. Our work with colleagues in the Fostering Service and Independent Fostering Agencies is certainly bearing fruit: when we last reported to the Corporate Parenting Committee in April 2020, we had 13 Staying Put arrangements which has now increased to 27.

The past year has been a time when our young people have been under pressure like never before and inevitably this has occasionally led to difficulties in settling in their accommodation, whatever the provider type. Nevertheless, there has been only minimal use of emergency placements (hotel, hostel, B&B) for care leavers and only one young man has found himself in such accommodation for more than a few days.

### **Financial Support**

One of the biggest challenges for our young people moving into adulthood is financial security and having the ability to live independently and manage this on a small income. Education and activities in relation to budgeting happen with all our young people via independence packs as described above and ASDAN modules. The reality of what a non-working care leaver will receive on Universal Credit is stark when one takes into consideration what they will need to purchase from this, albeit that the £20 increase arising from the pandemic has provided some welcome additional support. In Cheshire East we always try to support and encourage our young people into work to increase their income and offer financial incentives for those who may not be ready for work but are in a position to do some volunteering.

The Universal Credit system also only pays people four weeks in arrears, meaning that when they make their application they have to wait four weeks for their first payment. They can get an advance however this means that they are immediately in debt with the DWP and their payments are decreased for the following 6 months. We do not want our children in debt so continue to offer financial support until they receive their first payment. We are only one of a handful of Local Authorities that offer this.

We have made good links with our local DWP centres and have a joint working protocol between our services which has been in place now for almost three years. This ensures that the job coaches are aware of our young people's needs and that they will be in communication with each person's Personal Advisor. We have seen a reduction in benefit sanctions and fewer challenges having to be made to the DWP in the past 12 months.

### **Employment Education & Training (EET)**

It has been stated widely since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic that it is likely that young people will be one of the groups who are disproportionately affected by its impact, particularly in the longer term. We have therefore seen some young people become more disillusioned about their life chances and perhaps less able than in ordinary times to engage with services. As a result, the number of our young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is higher than we would wish, although not as high as we originally feared a year ago. We remain aspirational for our children and want them to be able to make the most of their potential in whatever field they choose. We have a dedicated EET worker in the Leaving Care Team and a 16-18 EET specialist within the Virtual School. These two workers meet regularly, identify our young people who are NEET and make plans to engage and support them. We are also working hard with colleagues across the Council and in other agencies to increase the number of young people who take up Apprenticeships and have a specific action plan in this regard.

As we are emerging from lockdown, we have again identified a group of NEET young people and are currently running an internal 12 week program to build on their confidence and resilience and to make them aware of local opportunities in both the employment market and in further education and training. Following the conclusion of the last course, 7 of the 9 participants either found work or continued onto a work placement or are volunteering. The 12 week program not only looks to make the young people work-ready but it helps with life skills and communication, thereby facilitating their preparation into adulthood. There is no

doubt that it is one of the factors that has contributed to declining NEET numbers for care leavers in recent months.

### **Journey First**

Cheshire East and other pan-Cheshire Local Authorities (Cheshire West and Warrington) were successful in obtaining funding from the European Social Fund to support people into employment or training. This project is called the Journey First programme and provides intensive 1:1 support for young people and adults across Cheshire and Warrington. The dedicated team can help participants to identify their skills and reach their goals, whether that be support with job searches and employment or access to further education or training.

The Care Leavers Service has their own dedicated Journey First Work Placement Officer embedded in the team. They have been in post since April 2021, and they are currently actively working with 34 young care leavers. Our care leavers need consistent support, and our Journey First worker spends time building a relationship, and is there to support before, during and after starting a new job or new course. Our worker is a corporate parent who is there to call our young people in the morning to encourage them to work and to celebrate their first days with them.

In the past week our dedicated worker has helped three care leavers into full-time employment, two into College and one young person to access a local Construction Skills Certification Scheme from making a partnership with a local training provider.

### **21+ Offer**

The Children & Social Work Act 2017 introduced a new duty on local authorities to provide Personal Advisor support to all care leavers up to the age of 25 should they wish to receive it. We recruited two additional Personal Advisors to meet our obligations in this respect and we have recently taken part in a 'deep-dive' of our offer with the DfE who were interested in looking at the extent and variation of the support we now provide; this will hopefully have a positive impact on continued funding for our workers. Some anonymised examples of the sort of work that the 21+ Offer encompasses are provided below:

1. Tom is 22 and used to be in foster care; he is a vulnerable young man who now lives in his own accommodation in nearby Stoke-on-Trent. He struggles to understand complex issues and requires a great deal of support in dealing with professional agencies. Tom is involved in a Child Protection process in relation to his 11 month old son in another area and sadly like many care leavers, he has experienced this somewhat negatively. We have supported him on over 30 occasions in the past year after he was reallocated to a Personal Advisor in December 2020; this has included help with accommodation, dealing with rent arrears and other financial matters, reaching out to family members to try to extend his support network, advising him about his Parenting Assessment, accompanying him to sessions, advocating for him when dealing with Telford Social Workers and meeting jointly with his legal representative. Contact with Tom has been at least weekly, sometimes with multiple contacts and phone calls throughout many days. Young adults like Tom often don't meet the threshold for support from Adult Services and in effect, their Personal Advisor can often become the de facto 'Adult Social Worker'.

2. Marie is 23 and is part of a large family with multiple relatives in care either now or formerly. She has learning needs and requires support in dealing with many of life's day to day matters; most notably she has a 3 year old daughter who was adopted and lives in another area far away. We have supported her over 20 times in the past year with issues including general support and providing a listening ear, help with financial matters, budgeting, food parcels etc, relationship advice, and facilitating contact with family members.
3. Paul is 24, has undiagnosed learning needs and served a custodial sentence as a teenager for sexual offences against children. He has previously been the victim of a social media 'campaign' in the local area in which fake Facebook profiles were used to spread untrue stories about him, thereby placing him at even greater risk. Paul contacted us last year when he started a new relationship with someone who has young children; it was obviously good that he felt able to reach out to the service in these circumstances. Since that time, he has been provided with regular support and advice around Children's Services and the assessment process; we have also advised him when he has been feeling down and drinking too heavily. We have helped Paul with practical issues including accommodation, helping him to move house and supporting him with contacting the Police when his flat was burgled.
4. Mohammed is a former UASC from Afghanistan who now has indefinite leave to remain; he is settled in Stoke-on-Trent and has recently had an arranged marriage and become a father. We have continued to support him in relation to Housing and financial advice and he was thrilled to receive a laptop from the DfE. Considering his life experiences, Mohammed is a remarkable young man who has adapted to life in this country amazingly well; he works in the Asian fast-food businesses of Shelton where he has developed a good support network for himself. Nevertheless, he remains confident about approaching the service for help and advice whenever he needs it.

### **Next Steps**

We have produced a Service Plan for 2021/22 to indicate our priorities over the coming year.

## The Care Leavers Service Plan 2021-22

What do we want to achieve?	How will we get there?	When will we know we have succeeded?	Progress mid-point review (Oct 21)
<b>Review the Local Offer for Care Leavers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review Meeting has already taken place on 17 March 2021</li> <li>Changes to website will be completed by third week in April 2021</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Service Manager to write to all Care Leavers and Stakeholders by end April to launch the new offer</li> </ul>	
<b>To ensure the cohort of former relevant care leavers that are engaged in education, employment and training does not drop below 70%.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tracking 17 year olds prior to becoming former relevant and ensuring that they have an EET destination (via SPEED meeting).</li> <li>Monthly NEET panel to find options for long term NEET young people with support from services across the council.</li> <li>Continuation of financial incentive for those young people volunteering and undertaking training programmes.</li> <li>Cygnets Program to work with 10 care leavers.</li> <li>NEET program starting in April 2021 to be run by the team and potentially to be run again later in the year.</li> <li>Increase the number of young people who are undertaking apprenticeships, including those within the Council itself.</li> <li>Continue to offer a top-up payment for those young people on low paid apprenticeships and living in their own tenancy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weekly EET report will highlight statistics and whether 70% target is being met.</li> <li>See separate Apprenticeship Action Plan</li> </ul>	
<b>To reduce benefit sanctions and improve the process in care-leavers applying for benefits.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invitation for the DWP to attend a PA Forum.</li> <li>Personal Advisors to meet the DWP Single Point of Contacts and discuss the backgrounds of our care leavers.</li> <li>A joint DWP – Care Leavers protocol to be agreed – this to be signed off at Corporate Parenting Committee.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduction in the Care Leavers' Service using emergency payments.</li> <li>Reduction in Personal Advisors lodging appeals on behalf of our care leavers.</li> <li>Fewer food parcel applications.</li> </ul>	
<b>Care leavers to</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bi-monthly 'Meet the Manager' events at Cledford.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive feedback from care</li> </ul>	

<p><b>participate in the development of the service and for them to have regular contact with the management team and the leaders of the council.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-launch of the care leavers forum by the Youth Support Service.</li> <li>• Creation of a Facebook page to engage more care leavers.</li> <li>• Annual care leaver survey.</li> <li>• A cared for young person or care leaver to sit on every Children's Social Care interview.</li> <li>• A care leaver apprentice to sit within the Participation Team.</li> <li>• A care leaver to attend at least one YPBMF per year.</li> <li>• Two care leavers to join the Fostering Panel.</li> </ul>	<p>leavers survey.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mark Riddell to give feedback on participation/development when he returns.</li> <li>• Facebook page to have over 50 members.</li> <li>• Relaunched care leavers forum to have engagement with the Corporate Parenting Committee by mid review.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Ensure young people are prepared for independence.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20+ young people to attend the tenancy readiness course per year.</li> <li>• Foster carers to be trained to use the gold, silver and bronze independence packs.</li> <li>• Transition senior personal advisor to oversee the transition plans for all 16/17 year olds and offer consultations to staff.</li> <li>• Develop our own tenancy readiness course so that we can run it as necessary.</li> <li>• Use of one of the Ignition flats in the Crewe area as a training flat when void.</li> <li>• Housing officer to sit within the team once a fortnight.</li> <li>• Young people to present at Ignition panel if unclear of their future options.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased use of independence packs – this to be monitored in monthly challenge meetings.</li> <li>• No unplanned moves for our care leavers.</li> <li>• No care leavers presenting as immediately homeless.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>To reduce the number of care-leavers who become pregnant but to ensure those that do are able to parent effectively.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All personal advisors to be C-Card trained and be able to give out contraception.</li> <li>• Young people at risk of pregnancy identified and direct work undertaken.</li> <li>• Refer to Pure Insight's 'Angels' team for new mothers.</li> <li>• Refer for support from the Family Nurse Partnership for new mothers.</li> <li>• If concerned about a mother and/or her situation, ensure referral is completed to ChECS before the unborn child reaches 20 weeks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To have less than 9 pregnancies in the year.</li> <li>• No care leavers having proceedings issued on their child.</li> <li>• Reduction in referrals to the safeguarding midwifery service and the Family Nurse Partnership.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use electronic babies for those young people identified at risk of pregnancies.</li> <li>• Care leaver parent groups in Congleton and Crewe.</li> <li>• Refer to Cheshire East's Parenting Journey.</li> </ul>		
<b>To improve the emotional wellbeing of our care leavers.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued use of the emotional well-being tool to track change.</li> <li>• Emotional Wellbeing worker to offer bridging support to x10 care leavers.</li> <li>• Wellbeing worker to feedback at each PA Forum.</li> <li>• To utilise the use of mentors to increase socialisation and improve emotional wellbeing.</li> <li>• Reduced CAMHS waiting time.</li> <li>• Fast-track support from Visyon and Just Drop-In</li> <li>• 1:1 mindfulness sessions offered to care leavers.</li> <li>• Personal Advisor to attend council offices with a care leaver when they choose to access their files.</li> <li>• All care leavers to be given a health summary (passport) at 18 years so they are aware of their own health history.</li> <li>• Mental Health Awareness Training for the team.</li> <li>• Social activities to recommence as lock-down rules are eased.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scores from the emotional wellbeing tool will increase evidencing positive changes.</li> <li>• Decrease in NEET figures.</li> <li>• Positive scoring in 2021 annual care-leaver survey.</li> </ul>	
<b>To celebrate the achievements of our care leavers no matter how big or small.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young person's achievements to be celebrated in monthly staff team meetings.</li> <li>• Celebration event during care leavers week.</li> <li>• Well done / congratulations cards to be sent out following an achievement.</li> <li>• Young people to be taken to Pure Insights monthly Sunday roast club.</li> <li>• Bi-monthly celebration dinner for group of care leavers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people will feedback positive experience of their relationships with their personal advisor in the care leaver survey.</li> </ul>	

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*Working for a brighter future together*

## **Corporate Parenting Committee**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	14 September 2021
<b>Report Title:</b>	Proposal to Develop a new Corporate Parenting Strategy
<b>Report of:</b>	Ged Rowney, Interim Director of Children's Services
<b>Ward(s) Affected:</b>	All

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### **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1. This report sets out the proposed approach to the development of a new Corporate Parenting Strategy for Cheshire East to improve outcomes for our cared for children and care leavers.
- 1.2. The Corporate Parenting Strategy meets the strategic aims and objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25 as it contributes to 'A council which empowers and cares about people' and the priority to 'be the best Corporate Parents and improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people'.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. Corporate Parenting Committee is recommended to:
  - 2.1.1. Endorse the proposed approach to the development of a new Corporate Parenting Strategy as set out in this paper; and
  - 2.1.2. Endorse the existing plan for 2021.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1. As an advisory committee to the Children and Families Committee, one of the roles of the Corporate Parenting Committee is to act as advocate 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.
- 3.2. The existing Corporate Parenting Strategy was due to expire in 2020. However, due to the increased demands from the COVID-19 pandemic, the review and refresh of the new strategy was put on hold. We are now

in a position to carry out this piece of work, working with cared for children and care leavers and other key stakeholders.

#### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1.** The existing Corporate Parenting Strategy could be extended for a further period. However, whilst the overarching pledges are likely to remain unchanged or with minor amendments, it is timely to check that these still meet the needs of our cared for children and care leavers.

#### **5. Background**

- 5.1.** The existing Corporate Parenting Strategy runs from 2018 to 2020 and was endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Committee in November 2018, along with the 'youth proofed' pledges to cared for children and care leavers.
- 5.2.** The pledges were subsequently accepted and endorsed by the full Council in December 2018 in order to make the commitment to cared for children and care leavers by the Council's Members and officers and to ensure that there is a clear and joint vision about Corporate Parenting in Cheshire East as being everyone's responsibility.
- 5.3.** The Council also decided that all key council decisions be considerate of the potential consequences, unintended consequences and benefits to cared for children and care leavers, and that this be achieved by asking a mandatory question in each report about the impact of the decision upon cared for children and care leavers.
- 5.4.** Good progress has been made in achieving the pledges set out in the 2018-20 Corporate Parenting Strategy. This progress has been reported to the Corporate Parenting Committee each year via the Corporate Parenting Annual Report.
- 5.5.** The intention was to develop a new Corporate Parenting Strategy in 2020, ready to launch in 2021. However, due to the increased demands from the COVID-19 pandemic, the was put on hold.
- 5.6.** The current plan is to review and refresh the Corporate Parenting Strategy over the next few months, to be launched alongside the new Children and Young People's Plan in March/April 2022. An outline timescale for actions is set out overleaf:

Date	Action
<b>2021</b>	
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek endorsement from Corporate Parenting Committee to proposed approach</li> <li>• Focussed sessions together with cared for children and care leavers to review pledges and identify current priorities</li> </ul>
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage with staff from Cheshire East Council and partner agencies to feedback views of cared for children and care leavers and seek their responses to how these need to be addressed in the new strategy.</li> </ul>
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collate information gathered into headline priorities</li> <li>• Share draft and take any final feedback from cared for children and care leavers, key staff and partners</li> </ul>
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalise draft strategy</li> </ul>
<b>2022</b>	
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek endorsement from Corporate Parenting Committee on the draft strategy</li> </ul>
February/March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek endorsement of the draft strategy and pledges from Children and Families Committee/Council.</li> </ul>
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalise document for launch</li> </ul>
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch new strategy</li> </ul>

## 6. Consultation and Engagement

- 6.1.** The new strategy will be developed together with cared for children and care leavers and involve key stakeholders to ensure that the new strategy addresses their needs.

## 7. Implications

### 7.1. Legal

- 7.1.1.** There is a range of legislation and statutory guidance that sets out the role of the local authority in respect of cared for children and care leavers. There are statutory obligations and guidance in relation to the Local Authority's role as Corporate Parent in the Children Acts 1989 and 2004; the Children and Young People Act 2008; the Children and Families Act 2014; and the Children and Social Work Act 2017.
- 7.1.2.** In particular, the Children and Social Work Act 2017 defines, for the first time in law, the role of corporate parents, in addition to expanding and extending support for care leavers.

**7.1.3.** The priorities within the new strategy will be developed in line with current legislation and best practice.

## **7.2. Finance**

**7.2.1.** There are no direct finance implications at this stage. However, the new strategy may identify initiatives that may require additional funding. These will be identified through the business planning process and follow existing approval routes.

## **7.3. Policy**

**7.3.1.** The new strategy will be developed in line with current Council and partner policies, where appropriate. Any changes in policy required as a result of the new strategy will follow existing approval routes.

## **7.4. Equality**

**7.4.1.** All children and young people have a right to be treated equally and have their disability, gender, ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic needs met. As corporate parents for children and young people in care and care leavers, it is essential that the Council is able to demonstrate that it considers equality implications in all decisions made in relation to cared for children and care leavers. The new strategy will consider any actions to improve equality issues for cared for children and young people and care leavers (a vulnerable group because of their experiences) and ensure that they are supported to achieve the same outcomes as their peers.

## **7.5. Human Resources**

**7.5.1.** There are no direct HR issues in developing the new strategy, although delivery of the strategy will need sufficient staff with the right skills to deliver it.

## **7.6. Risk Management**

**7.6.1.** There is a risk that if the new strategy does not address the right priorities, then outcomes for cared for children and care leavers are not improved. There are also financial and reputational risks for the Council of not getting services right for this group of children and young people.

## **7.7. Rural Communities**

**7.7.1.** There are no direct implications for rural communities.

## **7.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children**

**7.8.1.** The new Corporate Parenting Strategy is a key document that sets out our ambition and plans to improve outcomes for cared for children and care leavers.

**7.9. Public Health**

- 7.9.1.** Cared for children and care leavers are more at risk of poor health outcomes. Improving health outcomes is a pledge within the current strategy and is expected to remain within the new strategy to target the needs of this group of children and young people.

**7.10. Climate Change**

- 7.10.1.** There are no climate change implications.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Gill Betton Head of Children's Development & Partnerships Gill.betton@cheshireeast.gov.uk 07764 166262
Appendices:	Not applicable
Background Papers:	The current Corporate Parenting Strategy can be found at: <a href="https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/livewell/corporate-parenting-strategy.pdf">https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/livewell/corporate-parenting-strategy.pdf</a> Our pledges to cared for children and care leavers can be found at: <a href="https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/livewell/care-and-support/youth-proof-pledges-feb-2019.pdf">https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/livewell/care-and-support/youth-proof-pledges-feb-2019.pdf</a>

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*Working for a brighter future together*

## **Corporate Parenting Committee**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	14 September 2021
<b>Report Title:</b>	Cheshire East Mockingbird Family Model
<b>Report of:</b>	Ged Rowney, Director of Children's Services
<b>Ward(s) Affected:</b>	All

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### **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1.** The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the Fostering Service's implementation of the Mockingbird Family Model.
- 1.2.** The Mockingbird Family Model is based on building and strengthening relationships between children, young people, foster carers and birth families. The aim of Mockingbird is to build a small community by bringing together a group of 6 to 10 foster carers, children and young people to provide support, strengthen relationships, improve placement stability, and safeguard children. This links directly to the Council's Corporate Plan aims and objectives to care about and empower people.
- 1.3.** Our Mockingbird model in Cheshire East has linked individuals from the Virtual School and the in-house therapeutic support team to enable a consistent approach for any children requiring support for education or with additional needs. Within the Mockingbird family, the carers work together to promote the best outcomes for all the children living within their Mockingbird family network, supported by the Mockingbird Team within the Fostering Service. This is consistent with the council's objectives to support communities, work together to strengthen communities, safeguard children, and ensure children can access and achieve good educational outcomes.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1.** The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1.** This report is to inform members of the development and progress of the Mockingbird Family Model in Cheshire East.

### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1.** Not applicable as this is an update report.

### **5. Background**

- 5.1.** The Mockingbird Family model was originally developed by the Mockingbird Society in America in 2004. Mockingbird is an evidence-based practice model based using a philosophy of 'It takes a village to raise a child'. In 2015 the Fostering Network successfully began their first pilot scheme of the model in the UK with the support of the Department for Education's (DfE) Children's Social Care Innovation programme.
- 5.2.** An opportunity arose in 2019 for Local Authorities throughout the UK who were able to evidence that they fulfilled the criteria requirements to obtain DfE funding, join the Mockingbird Programme and become part of a further evaluation. Cheshire East were successful in our application and began implementing the model in 2020 in conjunction with the Fostering Network.
- 5.3.** The Mockingbird model aligns closely with our Signs of Safety and Stability model to further develop our strength-based approach and networks across all areas of service. We believe that this approach will improve placement stability for the children, young people, and the fostering family to help them to build and sustain lifelong relationships and support networks.
- 5.4.** The model requires there to be a 'Hub Home', and then a further 6-10 satellite fostering families around the Hub Home, and all the people in all of those households are part of the 'constellation'. The Hub Home Carer is an experienced carer who coordinates and supports all the satellite carers in their hub.
- 5.5.** We work closely with the Fostering Network and have a Fostering Network 'coach' who is tasked in supporting the development of Mockingbird in Cheshire East, and ensuring we continue to meet the required criteria (or fidelity) to enable us to use the terms associated with the model, these are:
- 6-10 satellite homes in a constellation
  - Each constellation provides care for 6-18 cared for children and young people, and constellation members (both adults and young people) should be diverse in terms of age, background, ethnicity, experience, strengths, and needs.

- The constellation is supported to build a micro community based on an extended family concept.
- The Hub Home is geographically close to the satellite homes.
- The Hub Home has two spare Mockingbird beds available for sleepovers for children in the constellation.
- The Hub Home carer is available nearly 24/7 but does have days off and annual leave also.
- The Hub Home carer hosts monthly constellation meetings and provides planned and spontaneous opportunities for social events and interactions between the hub home and the satellite families.
- The 'Mockingbird Liaison Worker' role is a Supervising Social Worker from the Fostering Service and is a key support for the Hub Home carer to prevent burnout.
- Collaborative working is important, the service must support the Hub Home carer and members of the constellation to problem solve (e.g. deciding when to offer crisis respite, delegation of authority, etc.)

**5.6.** We are required to feedback monthly evaluations of our constellation and we are subject to quarterly fidelity checks by the Fostering Network to ensure that we remain committed and consistent in meeting the fidelity.

**5.7.** We currently have one established constellation in Cheshire East, which we launched in November 2020. The Constellation covers the areas of Alsager (Hub Home), Sandbach and Crewe. The constellation is made up of the following Satellite homes:

- Mainstream experienced carer couple (deputy for Hub Home Carer) – 17-year-old in placement (unaccompanied asylum-seeking child), 16 year old (unaccompanied asylum seeking child) and recently increased their capacity to take one other UASC.
- Mainstream carer couple – 14-year-old long term matched placement and offering regular day care and sleepovers when required to a 10-year-old boy.
- Mainstream single carer – 3-month-old baby.
- Newly approved mainstream single carer – care of 2 siblings, aged 15-year-old and 12 years old.
- Single male connected carer – 15-year-old step-grandson.
- Single female connected carer – 5-year-old granddaughter.
- Mainstream carer couple – 1 baby placed 4 months old.

- Single female connected carer – 2 grandchildren, a boy aged 2 year and a girl aged 10 months.

**5.8.** Our current Mockingbird Constellation has celebrated some recent successes as follows:

### **Case Examples**

Two related children were referred into the Constellation. We approached one of our Mockingbird Satellite carers, who was initially worried that she did not have the experience to meet the identified needs of these two children. The Fostering Service and the Children's Team worked closely with the Mockingbird constellation to explore the needs of the children and the needs of the carer. That same day we arranged both children to visit the carer's home so they could all meet and then sourced tailored training for the carer. This meant both children could stay together, locally in Cheshire East, with a tailored support package through the Mockingbird Constellation. The children have settled remarkably well, and the carer has continued to develop her skills, knowledge and confidence in providing a high standard of care to both children using the support available through Mockingbird.

Recently a young primary aged child was referred into the Children's Team. The child and his father had travelled over from another country approximately 2 years ago, sadly whilst residing in the UK the child's father has become terminally ill. The Fostering Service received a referral for day-care and possible sleepovers within a fostering family who can develop a relationship with the child and his father. Again, we approached one of the satellite families and they and the Hub Home carer are now linked to this little boy and his dad. Dad is reassured that the child is building a relationship with the same carers who will be able to step in in an emergency who know the situation and the family background. The child is Vietnamese, and an added benefit is we have an older young person living with one of the other Satellite families who is also from Vietnam this has enabled familiarity in relation to their culture for both this child and the young person and also assisted in communication.

**5.9.** As well as strengthening those relationships for children and young people, Mockingbird has strengthened relationships between the foster carers, so it really is like a Family Network. Earlier this year 2 of our Mockingbird Carers informed us that they were in a relationship together and they are now undergoing a Fostering Assessment as a couple. Pending the outcome of the assessment, they will remain with the constellation, and this means we can invite another newly approved carer to join the constellation.

- 5.10.** The Constellation enjoyed a Summer Celebration in July, which all carers and the Mockingbird Team attended, Kerry Birtles Director of Children's Social Care was also in attendance and the event was a huge success. The Satellite carers were delighted to have opportunity to talk to Kerry about the Mockingbird Project and Fostering in general – pleased that “Managers are interested in Fostering and what Foster Carers do”. Following the event one of the carer commented, “It was nice to see you are all just normal people, and do things normal people do” referring to walking in on a member of the Mockingbird Team washing dishes in the kitchen at the event.
- 5.11.** The children and young people also had opportunity to meet face to face for the first time, the teenagers enjoyed engaging in a game of pool and have asked to have sleepovers at each other's homes. The younger ones enjoyed having a family ‘party’ and eating party food and cakes. We are looking forward to further social events in the coming months, including brunch at the Hub Home at the end of the summer.
- 5.12.** Finally, we have recently advertised and interviewed for a second Hub Home Carer and successfully appointed our second Hub Home Carers, a couple with 20 years fostering experience caring for all age ranges of children and experience of working within residential settings. The second constellation will cover the Crewe, Nantwich and Middlewich areas and we aim to launch this by October.

## **6. Consultation and Engagement**

- 6.1.** We shared our vision for implementing the Mockingbird Model with foster carers prior to the implementation stages and invited foster carers to express an interest in finding out more details about the model and/or becoming involved in the implementation of the programme
- 6.2.** We have a multi-agency Steering Group which meets every month. The group is made up of local authority officers and foster carers who are actively involved in the implementation and development of the Mockingbird programme. The Steering Group also hold the Fostering Service and wider directorate accountable for ensuring we continue to meet the fidelity criteria for Mockingbird.
- 6.3.** We have two in-house foster carers in our Mockingbird Steering Group. A key requirement at the time of recruiting these carers was that in opting for this role, they were putting themselves out of consideration for being either the Hub Home carer or part of the constellation. They are active members of the group and are involved in the policy development for

Mockingbird, problem solving and sharing ideas in relation to both the further development and implementation of the model.

- 6.4. Information sessions have been offered to all in-house foster carers run by the Mockingbird Team Manager and the Hub Home Carer. The aim of these sessions has been to increase overall knowledge in our fostering community and for carers to consider whether it's something that would work for them in the future.
- 6.5. Our Mockingbird constellation has two Supervising Social Workers linked to it, one has the role of Liaison Worker and offers direct support to the Hub Home as well as some of the other satellite homes. Both the social workers and the Hub Home carer are involved in continuing to develop the model within the current constellation and moving forward in the development of the next constellation.
- 6.6. Information about the Mockingbird Model is shared within the Fostering Service and across the wider directorate and partner agencies through Practice Workshops, drop-in information sessions and is also discussed during decision making panels exploring options for permanence for children and young people.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1. Legal**

- 7.1.1. There are no legal implications. Any children or young people who become part of the Mockingbird programme is cared for by the local authority under the Children Act 1989.
- 7.1.2. The Corporate Parenting duties for Council Officers and Elected Members continues as it would do for any child or young person in our care.

### **7.2. Finance**

- 7.2.1. All carers within the constellation are paid in line with all other foster carers in Cheshire East. The Hub Home carer is paid a fee in line with the Cheshire East Specialist Fostering fee.
- 7.2.2. Cheshire East receive match funding from the Department for Education for the duration of the programme. Once the programme has ended (March 2022) Cheshire East will be responsible for sole funding of our programme.

### **7.3. Policy**

- 7.3.1. The current policies for Foster Carers are applicable also to Foster Carers who are part of Mockingbird. There are some additional Mockingbird policies and procedures which link specifically to the fidelity criteria of Mockingbird.

#### **7.4. Equality**

- 7.4.1.** There are no implications in relation to equality, our constellation has a diverse group of carers and children. Any carer can express an interest in becoming part of a Mockingbird Constellation, though the viability of that is dependent upon their proximity to the Hub Home.

#### **7.5. Human Resources**

- 7.5.1.** There are no implications for Human Resources.

#### **7.6. Risk Management**

- 7.6.1** The implication in relation to risk management is that we must ensure that we consistently meet the fidelity requirements for Mockingbird. Failure to meet the criteria for fidelity would impact on the success of the model and would mean that we would be unable to be part of Mockingbird.

#### **7.7. Rural Communities**

- 7.7.1.** The Mockingbird Model includes foster families in the towns and rural communities across Cheshire East dependent on their proximity to the Hub Home.

#### **7.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children**

- 7.8.1.** The Mockingbird Family Model will consider any children who could benefit from becoming part of the constellation. Evidence is clear that whilst there are many benefits for children, young people and foster carers, the model will not suit everyone. Therefore, any decision to include or exclude a child or young person will follow a careful matching process which involves all the professionals around the child, and a view from the Hub Home Carer and Liaison worker who will have good knowledge of children and families already part of the constellation.
- 7.8.2.** Where children and young people are part of Mockingbird or may become part of Mockingbird, their views will be sought during their statutory visits and cared for reviews completed by their allocated social worker, including prior to becoming part of a Mockingbird Constellation.

#### **7.9. Public Health**

- 7.9.1.** The first constellation was set up during the Covid pandemic and over the time of its operation, the levels of Covid restriction have varied. During normal times, the Hub Home carer would arrange monthly face to face meetings for all carers, young people and children, this would revolve around things such as barbeques, picnics and so on.
- 7.9.2.** During the last 6 months this has not been able to happen, however the Hub Home carer has been very resourceful in being able to ensure that all of the carers have met the other carers face to face whilst ensuring

that the Covid restrictions have been observed. This has made things a little more difficult, but we believe that this has worked well, and we hope that as we move forward that the monthly events can now begin to happen in a way that keeps everyone safe and enables relationships and support to prosper.

#### **7.10. Climate Change**

**7.10.1.** In developing the constellation, we considered the geographical area of the Hub Home and ensured that each Satellite home is within a 30 minute travelling distance of the Hub Home and each other to minimise the travel distance.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
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Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None

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