

Corporate Parenting Committee

Agenda

Date: Tuesday, 2nd November, 2021
Time: 4.00 pm
Venue: Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields, Middlewich Road,
Sandbach CW11 1HZ

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

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 14 September 2021.

4. **Corporate Parenting Progress Report (Pages 9 - 18)**

To receive the Corporate Parenting Progress Report.

5. **Children's Rights Annual Report 2020-21 (Pages 19 - 46)**

To receive the Children's Rights Annual Report for 2020-21.

6. **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

7. **Virtual School Headteacher's Annual Report 2020-21 (Pages 47 - 94)**

To receive the Virtual School Headteacher's Annual Report for 2020-21.

8. **Youth Justice Service Presentation**

To receive a presentation on the Youth Justice Service.

9. **Adoption Counts Adoption Service Annual Report and Adoption Panel Chairs' Six-Monthly Report (Pages 95 - 138)**

To receive the Adoption Counts Adoption Service Annual Report, and the Adoption Panel Chairs' Six-Monthly Report.

Membership: Councillors M Asquith, 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 and J Saunders (Vice-Chair)

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Committee**
held on Tuesday, 14th September, 2021 at Council Chamber, Municipal
Buildings, Earle Street, Crewe CW1 2BJ

PRESENT

Councillor K Flavell (Chair)

Councillors R Bailey, J Barber, M Beanland, J Buckley, C Bulman, P Butterill,
S Holland, D Jefferay, L Wardlaw

ALSO PRESENT

Kerry Birtles – Director of Children’s Social Care
Annemarie Parker – Head of Service: Cared for Children and Care Leavers
Gill Betton – Head of Service: Children’s Development and Partnerships
Keith Martin – Head of Service: Children with Disabilities and Fostering
Laura Rogerson – Head of Service: Inclusion
Steve Nevitt – Service Manager for Care Leavers
Sarah Probert - Mockingbird Team Manager
Sam Ankers - Team Manager for Care Leavers
Emma Lawton – Youth Justice Service
Sarah Sturmey, Pure Insight CEO and Founder
Sue Pilkington – NHS Cheshire CCG
Josie Lloyd – Democratic Services Officer

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Saunders, G
Hayes, D Marren and S Handley. Councillors M Beanland and L Wardlaw
attended as substitutes.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2021 be approved as a
correct record.

4 CORPORATE PARENTING PROGRESS REPORT AND SCORECARD Q1

The committee received a report which outlined how the service is delivering the priorities for cared for children and care leavers, as set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

A question was raised regarding the scorecard figures for the average number of days between entering care and moving in with adoptive family and the average number of days between placement order and match with adoptive family, both of which were higher than the national average. It was noted that this was an area which was significantly impacted by Covid-19 and it was expected that this would recover. It was also noted that the national average was pre-Covid and, while comparative figures had not yet been collated, it was expected that a similar position would be seen nationally.

A further question was raised regarding the participation and engagement survey and what was being done to address the concerns of the children and young people who did not rate their experiences positively. A further report would come back to the next committee meeting and future reports would include further detail. It was noted that the majority of responses were positive; however, for a small number of children, their responses suggest there is more work to do.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

5 CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

The committee received the Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report which detailed 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, as well as the Terms of Reference for the Committee and the priorities for 2021-22.

It was noted that My Voice (our Children in Care Council) has sessions taking place most weeks. Members of the committee were invited to visit and noted that this could be arranged in advance through Annemarie Parker.

A question was raised as to the number of care leavers who the service are in contact with as the report states this is the case for the 'vast majority'. It was noted that this is a fluid number but that future reports will include percentages.

A further question was raised regarding the completion rate of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) to a good or better standard being at over 85%

and what could be done to reach 100%. Assurances were given that there are robust tracking systems in place and that work will be done to link directly with social workers and schools to ensure PEPs are not missing. It was noted that the 15% without completed PEPs is largely due to missing information, rather than poor quality, and that work is being done to rectify this.

RESOLVED –

1. That the committee endorse the Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2020-21 as set out at Appendix 1 in the report.
2. That future reports detail the percentage of care leavers who are remaining in touch with the service.

6 PREPARATION FOR ADULTHOOD ANNUAL REPORT AND SERVICE PLAN

The committee received a report outlining the impact of the work being done to prepare young people for adulthood.

It was noted that the care leavers service has continued to grow and that the number of care leavers being supported by Cheshire East has risen from 337 to around 400 since the report was written.

The committee noted that the temporary £20 Universal Credit uplift arising from the pandemic was due to end and that this will affect care leavers within the borough. Assurances were given that the impact of this will be looked at on an individual basis.

A question was raised regarding challenges with cared for children and young people accessing dental appointments and whether feeling a lack of control could be a contributing factor. It was agreed that this would be taken away and potential factors impacting access to dental care would be looked into further.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.
2. That Kerry Birtles take away the question regarding barriers to accessing dental care for health colleagues to look into.

7 PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP A NEW CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY

The committee received a report setting out the proposed approach to the development of a new Corporate Parenting Strategy for Cheshire East to improve outcomes for cared for children and care leavers.

RESOLVED –

1. That the committee endorse the proposed approach to the development of a new Corporate Parenting Strategy as set out in the report.
2. That the committee endorse the existing plan for 2021.

8 CHESHIRE EAST MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY MODEL

The committee received a report providing a summary of the Fostering Service's implementation of the Mockingbird Family Model. It was agreed that this was a positive piece of work and it was noted that the next step would be to replicate this model in the north of the borough.

A concern was raised about the reports presented at today's meeting not including any rural implications. It was agreed that Kerry would look into ensuring this is considered for all future reports to the committee.

RESOLVED –

1. That the committee note the report.
2. That Kerry Birtles look into rural implications for future reports.

9 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED –

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.

10 YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE PRESENTATION ON SUPPORT TO CARED FOR CHILDREN

The committee agreed to defer this item due to technical issues.

RESOLVED –

That the item be deferred to the next meeting.

11 PURE INSIGHT REPORT

The committee received a report on the delivery of services provided by Pure Insight to Cheshire East care leavers.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

The meeting commenced at 16:00 and concluded at 18:10

Councillor K Flavell

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Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting:	2 November 2021
Report Title:	Corporate Parenting Progress Report
Report of:	Kerry Birtles, Director of Children's Social Care
Ward(s) Affected:	All

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 seventh 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, as restrictions have been lifted our frontline staff have returned to seeing children and families in person.

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.

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 14 September 2021. Frontline services and strategic leadership continue to deliver our statutory duties in line with our Corporate Parenting Strategy and in response to the pandemic.
- 5.2.** The impact of the pandemic continues to be visible service wide. Children's Services, statutory partners and the third sector continue to identify new and repeating demand within ChECS (Cheshire East Consultation Service), which results in an average of 175 (Q1 – Q2 average) new assessments each month to the Children in Need and Child Protection Teams. We have seen a significant increase in children with disabilities and care experienced adults requiring additional support and where children meet a legal threshold of being at risk of significant harm, there are delays due to the Court capacity in achieving timeliness. However, statutory and support services have, and continue to, support our most vulnerable children and young people and success is visible in many areas and monitored by a whole service action plan and robust performance monitoring process.
- 5.3.** We continue to build upon the success of 26 adoptions in 2020/2021 and to date we have achieved permanence via adoption for a further six children. There are 30 children currently with a Court endorsed plan of adoption of which 12 are placed within their prospective adoptive families. Our trajectory for these children is to achieve permanence within these adoptive families, however we are still experiencing significant delays within the Court arena and the availability of hearings is contributing to our performance around timeliness. The Local Authority continues to challenge this through its participation at the Local Family Justice Board. We are also very pleased that we are achieving early permanence for two children through foster to adopt homes. This means that children can be placed with their forever family at the earliest opportunity, avoids unnecessary transitions, and places the child in the care of caregivers where they can form life-long attachments.
- 5.4.** The impact of Court availability continues to cause delay for children during permanency planning in pre and public law proceedings. 16.6% of children conclude care proceedings within the 26 weeks, which is higher than the 12% Cheshire and Merseyside average, however, is still significantly under target. There are currently 87 children in pre proceedings and 127 within care proceedings. Many of these children continue to live within their immediate or extended family where the risk of significant harm is able to be mitigated, however Court intervention is necessary. Q1 performance analysis offers reassurance that following this level of intervention children are more likely to conclude with a permanency plan to remain within their family network, which again is an extremely positive outcome. However, lengthy care proceedings are not best practice for children and young

people and the impact of Court delays is impacting on frontline capacity and overall demand in frontline teams.

- 5.5.** As children have returned to school following the summer holidays, we have seen an increase in Covid cases amongst our school age children and young people. We have also identified that some of our challenges in relation to timeliness in assessments, for example, are due to either frontline colleagues of children and families needing to self-isolate or having been unwell. The service continues to use individual risk assessments to support safe services delivered for children, young people, their parents, carers and family members and also our frontline colleagues. These risk assessments include the physical risk management of alternative ways of working to ensure that we reduce the risk of Covid as much as possible. Over 90% of our frontline staff are now double vaccinated and it is hoped that this will reduce the impact of Covid and ultimately ensure that we continue to deliver a high level of service to our children and young people. 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.
- 5.6.** As the government begins to roll out vaccines for children and young people, we have taken advice from Public Health England (PHE) in respect of our responsibility as Corporate Parents. The advice from PHE is that no child will receive the vaccine unless there is written consent from a parent even if the child wants the vaccine. In respect of cared for children, if there is any dissent between parties who can give consent on behalf of the child (e.g., if the biological parent does not want the child to have the vaccine, but a foster carer or social worker does for example) the child will NOT receive the vaccine as part of the school Covid-19 vaccine programme but arrangements outside of the school system can be made once consent issues have been clarified. These situations will be explored on an individual basis with Head of Service oversight.
- 5.7.** It is entirely necessary to commend the commitment of frontline colleagues for their triumphant efforts over the past 18 months. Cheshire East Council has supported our frontline throughout this period, ensuring that they are prioritised and have the necessary risk mitigation in place to enable them to keep children in Cheshire East safe. Children's Social Care have seen success in recruitment and retention of frontline colleagues with a running position of less than 10% agency social workers in frontline teams and an overall vacancy rate of 5%.

6. Pledge 1 - Being a Good Corporate Parent

- 6.1.** We are currently developing a new Corporate Parenting Strategy ready to launch in 2022. We plan to review and refresh the Corporate Parenting Strategy over the coming months, to be launched alongside the new Children and Young People's Plan in March/ April 2022.

- 6.2. The Participation Team are now going to visit all children when they enter care. Sophie Cliffe, Participation Worker, will be informed when children become cared for and will then contact children's carers to complete a home visit. This new way of working is aimed at improving awareness about participation events and how children can become involved. We will also ensure that we share information with children about advocacy and the independent visitor service in these meetings.
- 6.3. In response to the Cared for Children's Survey, further consideration has been given as to how we can provide our children and young people with reassurance that we are listening to what they tell us. We have asked our children to help us to develop our recruitment adverts for frontline colleagues. We want to fully involve our children in our recruitment activity. Work is also planned to develop a 'contract of expectations.' Children and young people will develop a contract about what they expect from their social workers and others that support them. Children and young people will work together to develop this with support from the Participation Team. This will then be shared with all social care staff during practice and performance sessions. Through initial discussions with children and young people it is expected that this contract will contain pledges such as when a change of social worker is needed, each child will receive a visit from their social worker/team manager to explain this.
- 6.4. There is currently a national drive to ensure that local authorities offer an independent visiting service to cared for children. In Cheshire East, we currently have 18 children matched with independent visitors. We will ensure that we continue to raise awareness of this with children and young people at regular intervals and when new needs arise.
- 6.5. The Participation Team are busy planning a range of activities to promote November Children's Rights Month. Currently ideas include photo competitions and activity days based around team building and these will be facilitated with Covid secure measures in place.
- 6.6. The Care Leavers Survey was launched at the start of October 2021, a range of incentives is being offered to encourage participation and ensure that we capture young people's views and experiences and use this feedback to shape the service we offer to them.
- 6.7. In 2017 we made the commitment to embrace the covenant and new statutory duties and the responsibility upon local authorities to extend their support to care experienced adults to 25. As part of this commitment, two additional Personal Advisors have been employed to ensure we meet our obligations. Indeed, we continue to offer support to a number of young adults over 25 in recognition that 'parenting' doesn't end at 25.

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

- 7.1. The Virtual School Headteacher Annual Report is to be presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee and will provide the retrospective annual

position, impact of the pandemic, and will demonstrate the resilience that our young people have exhibited with the support of those around them.

- 7.2.** Our not in education, employment or training (NEET) figures are beginning to show some improvement, despite the pandemic, and our current performance is 45% NEET. We have a range of targeted support in place to address this including a specialist role via the Journey First project and a dedicated NEET programme. The next NEET course commences on 5 October 2021. This 12-week internal programme offers young people who are not in education, training or employment the opportunity to build their resilience, confidence, and develop their awareness of local opportunities. Following the last course, seven of the nine participants either found work or entered some form of education/ training. They have also taken part in a camping trip where they achieved their Duke of Edinburgh bronze award. Please see the [online brochure](#)* for an overview of the NEET programme.

**Credit to Andy Sienkiewicz (Andy.Sienkiewicz@cheshireeast.gov.uk) for making the leaflet.*

- 7.3.** During the summer of 2021, 12 of our cared for young people successfully completed their A-Levels or Level 3 Qualifications. Of these 12, nine have been offered places at University.
- 7.4.** The Governing Body for the Virtual School is now up and running and is chaired by the Director of Children's Social Care. The Governing Body is working with the Participation Team on a survey to inform services about the impact of Covid-19 on education, support and experience. This will be taken to the next Governing Board and shared in the workstream group.

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. We also have regular liaison with Cafcass to ensure that we are working together so that plans for children are progressed.
- 8.2.** There has been a significant reduction in the number of children placed at home and subject to Care Orders and our current cohort of children is 60. Since the start of the financial year there has been a 13% reduction in the number of children placed at home with their parents and subject to a care order, and overall, in the last six months, there have been 11 individuals who have left care who were placed with their parents. This is due to successful applications to revoke Care Orders, also a reduction in the numbers being granted by the Court at the end of Care Proceedings. For example, in Q1 there were no new Care Orders at home granted by the Court. We are promoting the use of alternative orders that support children to remain within their own families without the intervention of the local authority sharing parental responsibility, such as Supervision Orders or

Child Arrangement Orders. This means that we have the right children in care and this approach is supported by the [Public Law Working Group Publication](#), a priority for the Local Family Justice Board.

- 8.3.** We are committed to ensuring that we do not criminalise cared for children in their care settings and have actively contributed to a regional group of local authorities, working with Police and Youth Justice, to develop a protocol and guidance for our care establishments to reduce the criminalisation of cared for children.
- 8.4.** The number of children and young people who go missing from care continues to vary from month to month. We are currently undertaking some audit work to ensure that the service we commission to offer return home interviews to these children is effective and is reducing the risk and frequency of missing episodes. Data in respect of children who go missing is shared across all services on a daily basis from the allocated social worker to the Director. There are a small number of children who regularly go missing, however we understand their individual circumstances and there is a high level of scrutiny to ensure that we offer a multi-agency response. We continue to work closely with 'We Are With You', our commissioned service that supports children and young people who go missing from home, on the connectedness between their service and the allocated social worker.
- 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 Mockingbird constellations. The number of children living within the Cheshire East boundary has steadily increased over the last 12 months. At the end of July 2021, 59% of children lived within Cheshire East, this is the highest this has been since October 2019. We are continuing to develop our recruitment strategy to improve sufficiency of foster carers and will be developing the placement service to align it more closely with the fostering service.
- 8.6.** Members will be aware from the last report that we 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, following an accelerated procurement process to re-commission two further homes, one home has successfully been awarded and there are plans to procure the second home. This means that we can provide homes to our most complex children within Cheshire East, and they can be effectively supported by partner agencies.
- 8.7.** There has been a real focus on reducing the number of children who live in residential care. We want to give children and young people the opportunity to live within a family setting wherever possible. Between March 2021 and October 2021, we have been able to 'step-down' eight children from residential placements. We now have 33 children living in residential care, this is the lowest since 2015.

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. The number of notifications to health of new children into care within the 48-hour timeframe continues to be good and in Q1 this was over 90%. We monitor this data on a weekly basis to ensure that the timeliness of health assessments for children remains good.
- 9.2.** As a result of multiple escalations made by the Designated Nurse to NHS England related to difficulties in Cheshire children being able to see a dentist, a pilot has now been launched and is being run across Cheshire and Merseyside. This has been set up and run by NHS England's dental team and represents an opportunity for all our children and young people to access a dentist more easily. A number of dental practices across Cheshire and Merseyside were identified and have agreed to see any looked after child referred to them. An electronic referral form was developed and the Designated Nurse acts as a gatekeeper of referrals made within Cheshire East. Currently 44% of cared for children have had a dental check within last 12 months, improved from 38% previously.
- 9.3.** In addition to the pilot described above, the Designated Nurse has requested that the Supervising Social Workers of all foster carers are made aware that dental practices are open, although operating at reduced capacity (60%). The importance of them taking children in their care for dental check-ups will be reinforced and any difficulties encountered are to be escalated to the Designated Nurse for follow up and action.

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.** 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 or at risk of NEET, and make plans to engage and support them, which is evidencing some encouraging improvements to overall performance. 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. Our new Apprenticeship Coordinator will commence on 1 November 2021. We have also attended a business breakfast with the Chamber of Commerce and have started to build some useful contacts. Steve Nevitt, Service Manager for Care Leavers, is going to deliver a short presentation at one of the breakfasts so that local

businesses can further understand the benefits of offering a care experienced young person an apprenticeship.

- 10.3.** Pure Insight, who deliver mentoring and wellbeing support to our young people aged 16+, continue to offer a range of support to our care leavers. The staff and volunteers work with our young people on an outreach basis. 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. We continue to meet monthly to review children and young people's emotional wellbeing. In addition to this, contract review meetings are held quarterly. Feedback from young people around the support they receive from Pure Insight is overwhelmingly positive.
- 10.4.** In response to improving our services in youth homelessness, we met with Jill Boake from the Ministry of Housing on 3 September 2021. The meeting went well, and we have now received feedback from her and 'sign off' that she no longer needs to support us as a Local Authority. She said that she found 'things continue to go from strength to strength, with young people at the heart of your ambitions to prevent youth homelessness'. The feedback identified that there is a clear pathway for Housing and Children's Services, and that we are working closely and collaboratively with shared goals.

11. Consultation and Engagement

- 11.1.** There are a range of surveys currently being drafted. These are aimed at seeking feedback from children and young people about the service they receive.

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 lapsed on the 30 September 2021 and for local authorities the flexibilities in relation to virtual visiting and changes to fostering and adoption assessments are no longer an option.

12.2. Finance

- 12.2.1.** Financial plans are due to be reviewed to ensure that the service can continue to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people in Cheshire East and will be reflected in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy forecast.

12.3. Policy

- 12.3.1.** Cheshire East is ambitious and committed to ensuring it is a great place to be young. This is demonstrated through the Council's core priority that we are a council which empowers and cares about people. These priorities are supported and driven through the Children and Young People's Plan,

Corporate Parenting Strategy 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.** All communities are affected by the contents of this report and it is necessary to strategically plan the delivery of services to serve all communities.

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.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Annemarie Parker – Head of Service, Cared For Children and Care Leavers Annemarie.parker@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None

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Working for a brighter future together

Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting:	2 November 2021
Report Title:	Children's Rights Annual Report 2020-21
Report of:	Kerry Birtles, Director of Children's Social Care
Ward(s) Affected:	All

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1.** The Children's Society delivers the Children's Rights Advocacy and Independent Visiting Service for Cheshire East. This Annual Report will advise the Corporate Parenting Committee of how The Children's Society has delivered the service over the year, providing an overview of the work undertaken from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.
- 1.2.** The report also provides information on how the service has been delivered during the Covid-19 restrictions, showing how we continued to offer both advocacy and Independent Visiting to children and young people.
- 1.3.** The Advocacy Service ensures that children and young people are aware of, and able to access, appropriate services, advice and information, which empowers them to ensure their views and wishes are heard and reflected in the decision making about their lives.
- 1.4.** The Independent Visitor provision provides a befriending service for children and young people who are cared for and have little or no meaningful contact with their parents, as provided for in the Children Act 1989.

2. Recommendation/s

- 2.1.** Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to:
 - Note the contents of the Annual Report.
 - Scrutinise the service delivery information from The Children's Society Annual Report as set out in the Appendix.

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.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1.** None; this is an update report.

5. Background

- 5.1.** The Annual Report provides an update to the Corporate Parenting Committee since the last report which was presented on the 14 July 2020. The Children's Society has delivered the service to children and young people in terms of Advocacy and Independent Visiting since December 2013.
- 5.2.** The Children Act 2004 gives local authorities a duty to ascertain children's wishes and feelings and give due consideration to them when decisions are being made about a child's care. The report gives data on the number of referrals made to the service, in terms of advocacy and which cohort of children and young people requested an advocate, and the reason for the request. The detail on the delivery and impact is given in the report in the Appendix. Referral data is further referenced in section 7.8.2 of this report.
- 5.3.** There is a statutory duty for all local authorities to provide advocacy services and Independent Visitors for vulnerable children and young people, the report gives data on the number of Independent Visitor referrals received and how many matches the service has where a young person is matched with one of the volunteers. The detail on the delivery and impact is given in the report in the Appendix.
- 5.4.** The Children and Young People Children and Young Persons Act 2008 extended the statutory requirement to provide an Independent Visitor service to any child or young person in care, not just those where communication between the child and a parent or person with parental responsibility has been infrequent, or where they have not visited the child in care in the preceding twelve months. The report shares the recruitment and training delivered to volunteers to ensure there are sufficient volunteers to be matched.
- 5.5.** Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires local authorities to have regard to seven corporate parenting principles when discharging their functions in relation to cared for children and care leavers. This report aligns with the all the Pledges within the Corporate Parenting Strategy. The service is on the local offer, so children and young people are aware of the service and how to access it.

6. Consultation and Engagement

- 6.1** Engagement and working together with stakeholders (particularly children and young people) are core principles within the service and are embedded within the service practice to ensure that children and young people feel valued and listened too. Encouraging co-design (e.g., Team Gold Social Media, Task & Finish Groups), co-evaluation (e.g., feedback, staff recruitment process) and co-delivery (e.g., champions, peers, ambassadors) continues to strengthen service development and improvement.
- 6.2** As an advocacy service we are continually listening to the voices of children and young people and are able to gather themes and issues that we feedback to the Local Authority on a regular basis to ensure any improvements can be discussed or made that will make it better for children and young people. In the report are two cases studies to share how we have worked alongside children and young people in both Advocacy (page 8) and Independent Visiting (page 13).

7. Implications

7.1. Legal

- 7.1.1. There are no direct legal implications of this report.

7.2. Finance

- 7.2.1. There are no direct financial implications of this report. The Local Authority commissions the service to provide the Children's Rights Service.

7.3. Policy

- 7.3.1. There are no direct policy implications of this report.

7.4. Equality

- 7.4.1. Children's individual needs, background and interests are considered when delivering the service.

7.5. Human Resources

- 7.5.1. Our HR department and senior leadership team were very supportive to staff during Covid-19, we had robust risk assessments for work with children, young people carers and colleagues. All staff were offered mental health support and how to keep themselves safe and well.

7.6. Risk Management

- 7.6.1. The Children's Society has robust risk assessments for our work and service delivery. 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.

7.7. Rural Communities

7.7.1. The service does work with a number of out of borough children and young people if they are the responsibility of the Local Authority. For the period April 2020 – March 2021 we had:

- 31 Advocacy cases
- 15 Independent Visitor matches

An Independent Visitor is especially important for children and young people who are placed in rural communities to ensure they are given the same social, health and resource opportunities.

7.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

7.8.1. The contents of this report have implications for cared for children and care leavers, who are some of Cheshire East's most vulnerable children. The report shares information on the many developments we carried out in 2020 to ensure the most vulnerable children and young people were given the opportunity to have an advocate or an Independent Visitor especially in terms of 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless and those children and young people who are in a Private Fostering arrangement. The impact of the service on outcomes for young people is demonstrated within the report in the Appendix.

7.8.2. Referral numbers have steadily and systematically increased over the past three years. There are currently no waiting lists for either service and referrals continue to be actioned promptly and in timescale. The table below reflects the historic and current dataset of the number of cared for children in Cheshire East and those subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP). It is imperative that children and young people continue to feel supported, empowered and their voice central to any decisions made about them. In terms of Independent Visiting, nationally numbers of referrals are low. To address this, in February 2021 a national campaign was launched to raise the profile of the Independent Visiting Service for cared for children.

Year	Number of cared for children	Number of children subject to a child protection plan	Number of children referred to Advocacy Service	Number of children referred to IV Service	Number of Open/Active Cases
April 2018 - March 2019	485	268	64	7	263
April 2019 - March 2020	534	253	77	10	234
April 2020 - March 2021	518	236	89	13	290

7.9. Public Health

7.9.1. The impact of Covid-19 is documented within the report.

7.10. Climate Change

7.10.1. Many of the children and young people supported during this period live outside of the borough; we ensured they had an advocate or an Independent Visitor and recruited for volunteers in their local area to ensure funding was allocated to the activities and not on mileage, and that volunteers know the local area.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Sue Preston, Service Manager, The Children's Society sue.preston@childrenssociety.org.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Children's Rights Annual Report 2020-21
Background Papers:	None

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Children's Rights Annual Report

April 2020 to March 2021



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Introduction

What do we do?

The Children's Society delivers the Children's Rights Advocacy and Independent Visiting Service for Cheshire East. This report provides an overview of the work undertaken from 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021.

Issue Based Advocacy Criteria:

- Children and young people in care 0-21 years inclusive
- Children moving on from care to adult life and who are entitled to a service under Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Children and young people subject to a Child Protection Plan
- Young people who are homeless and aged 16/17 years
- Children and young people making a complaint about a social work service
- Children and young people with a disability 0-18 years, irrespective of whether they have a current service plan
- Young people with a disability following their 18th birthday who are receiving transition services
- Children and young people seeking asylum
- Children and young people subject to a Private Fostering Arrangement

Corporate Parenting Principles



The criteria for our Children's Rights service supports many children and young people and we fully believe in and promote all of the Corporate Parenting Principles, especially:

- *Act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being of children in care and care leavers*

We act as a good advocate to the LA ensuring they are promoting the well-being of all children in care and care leavers.

- *Encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings*

We always try to encourage children and young people to self-advocate. We listen to the children and young people and help them to express their views to adults in their lives. We empower them to understand their rights as a child and help them to feel listened to.

- *Take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people*

This is our main driver as an advocacy service. We work for the child or young person and provide a service to them which is focused on what they want and need.

- *Help those children and young people gain access to, and make best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners*

We are always ensuring children and young people know what they can access and have a right to. We help children and young people to attend their meetings and to request the services and support they are entitled to.

- *Promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes for those children and young people*

Our Independent Visitors are great role models and are always promoting children to try new activities and develop.

- *Be safe, have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work*

Our advocates build trust with children and young people and we are independent so children can share their concerns or worries especially in terms of feeling safe.

- *Prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living*

All of our Independent Visitors support young people's independence skills and will prepare them for adulthood.



Advocacy Referrals

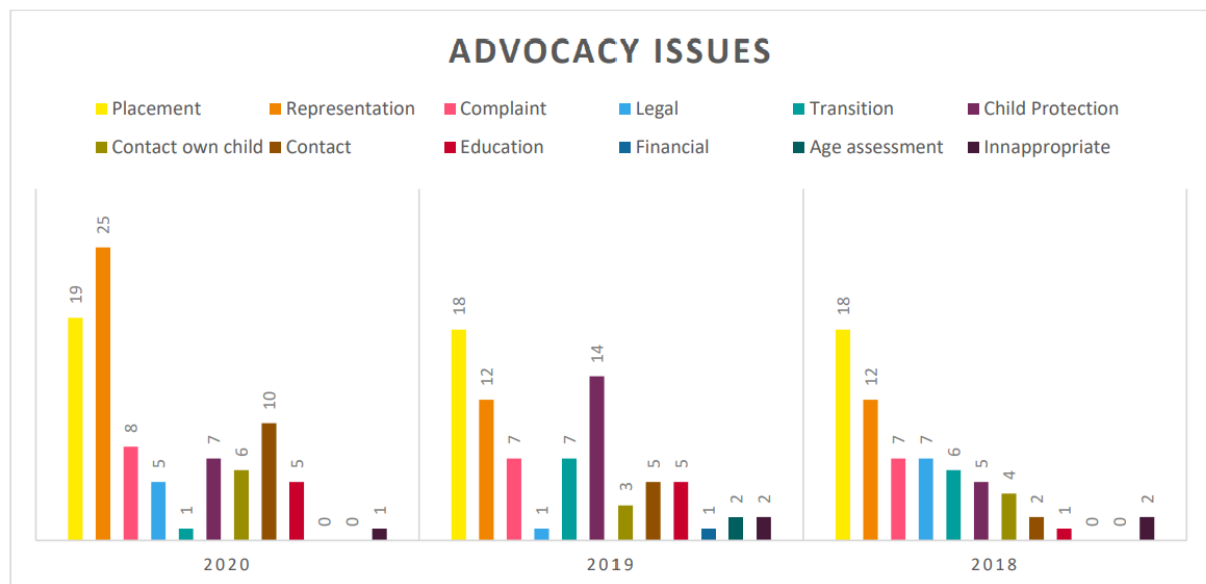
Number of eligible children and young people accessing advocacy services

Child Status	April 2020 – March 2021	April 2019 – March 2020	April 2018 – March 2019
Cared for child	59	36	39
Care Leaver	11	8	10
Child with a disability	7	12	7
Child on CP Plan	8	14	5
Asylum Seeking child	2	4	2
Child or young person making a complaint	1	1	0
Homeless 16/17-year-old	1	0	0
Child or young person in a Private Fostering arrangement	0	0	0
Inappropriate referral	0	2	1
Total	89	77	64

“Best advocate ever to have existed and hardworking and honest and will do anything for you if she can. In my eyes she is special fantastic and amazing and lovely lady and has helped me and supported with everything. I said I couldn’t ask for anybody better and needs to be treated well”

Reason for advocacy referrals

From the 89 referrals we received these were the issues at referral stage



Deep Dive into advocacy cases open for over 6 months

In early 2020 it was decided it would be useful to do a deep dive on advocacy cases open for over six months. This was to check if there was any drift and to look at the reason for remaining open. Reasons can be varied and can include a delay in delivering our service; an issue with the LA or delay, or it could be needs led for that particular young person.

Advocacy Case Study

Reason for referral: Issue Based Advocacy

Young person was referred for advocacy by his parent under the disability criteria. He was not in education and only receiving medical needs tuition. He wanted to be in a school but due to his emotional and developmental needs, he was struggling to access any educational provider.

He has a very strong relationship with his mum and had numerous professionals involved. He needed support to access an education provider that was suitable for his needs.

Advocacy support given

He is extremely anxious and struggles with meeting new people. Advocate spoke with mum at length to gather lots of information about her son to help think of ways she could engage with him. Mum told advocate that he loves dogs and has pet assisted therapy, which works really well. He unfortunately cannot have his own dog, but this is something he would love to do.

Advocate asked mum what she would think about bringing advocate's small family dog on a visit and they could go for a walk in the park.

This was risk assessed and agreed to as a method for engaging with him. The dog walks were a big success and it really helped to build a good relationship with him, he was able to talk to the advocate about what he wanted and how he was feeling. This enabled the advocate to attend his meetings on his behalf and to ensure that professionals knew what he wanted for his education and his future.

Towards the end of the advocate's involvement, he was able to talk on the telephone to his advocate what he wanted to say to professionals. This was huge progress for him as he wouldn't have been able to speak via telephone earlier in our work together.

Outcome:

All felt the dog walks were really positive for the young person, he was happy that he could tell his advocate what he wanted and that his advocate was in his meetings passing this on for him. He still doesn't feel confident enough to be in the meetings but appreciated having an advocate there to be his voice.

Towards the end of the advocate's involvement, he was able to talk on the telephone to his advocate what he wanted to say to professionals. This was huge progress for him as he wouldn't have been able to speak via telephone earlier on in the advocacy relationship.

Thinking creatively for visits with young people can have very positive outcomes. All children and young people are different and using a variety approaches to aid communication is very useful.

Taken from Satisfaction survey

Thank you for helping me I believe that you are a really good listener, and you made my voice be heard. It was really nice to meet you I hope you know how much you helped me.

I don't think I got the chance to say but thanks so much for this. Really shows that people actually care and my life can actually be a bit better.

Independent Visiting Referrals

Number of eligible children and young people accessing the Independent Visiting Service

During April 2020 – March 2021, we had 13 new referrals for an Independent Visitor.

Year	April 2020 – March 2021	April 2019 – March 2020	April 2018 – March 2019
New referrals	13	10	7
<i>Below shows more details</i>			
Lives in Foster care	11	9	5
Lives in Residential	2	1	2
Out of Borough	7	4	2
Has a disability/learning need	4	3	4

We recruit volunteers via The Children's Society website as well as Cheshire East CVS and will do targeted recruiting for those who are out of borough children and young people.

Independent Visitor Matches

From April 2020 to March 2021, we matched 24 volunteers with young people. We trained, inducted and continued to support the matches and see a consistently high retention rate for positive successful matches.

Independent Visitor matches	April 20 – March 21	April 19 – Match 20	April 18 – March 19
New matches	12	8	4
Re matches	7	1	2
Continued matches	5	7	10
Total	24	16	16

We did have more re-matches in this year. Many were Covid related; for example, volunteers no longer able to volunteer as they were vulnerable, some had decided to move closer to family during Covid-19, some their jobs got busier, again due to Covid-19, and they felt unable to commit to volunteering; additionally, one young person moved placement and so required a different geographical match and two of our volunteers experienced significant change in their own family circumstances.

We ask our volunteers to commit to two years as a volunteer. Our longest Independent Visitor match is over five years which is fantastic. All of our volunteers receive a certificate after one year and two years of volunteering, they can also take part in other areas of volunteering within the organisation, as in one volunteer is keen to be a volunteer speaker, speaking in churches and school assemblies.

Review of independent visitor match meeting, I asked how it was going with his Independent Visitor, he said:

I'm doing good with my volunteer we do funny talks and I think you are doing a good job and volunteer is doing well.

One young person who was recently matched with an Independent Visitor said:

I'm glad you've taken the time to get the right person for me.

We have had matches end due to volunteers moving areas or getting a job. We have also had matches end as the young person has moved placement and we have not been able to continue the match and we have had some re-matches.



Independent Visitor Case Study



Reason for referral: Independent Visitor

A referral came in for an Independent Visitor in July 2020 for a child living with foster carers. This was during the restrictions and the foster carer explained that he does not like virtual support so we agreed to wait until we could visit face to face before introducing him to the service.

Support given

The Volunteer Coordinator met with young person in October 2020 outside Costa near to his home as both he and his carer felt comfortable there (due to Covid-19). He filled in his *all about me* sheet and the Volunteer Coordinator posted a Volunteer Profile out as he prefers more visual things, rather than screens. A match meeting was held in November 2020 with the Volunteer Coordinator, young person and the volunteer, which was a walk to Costa for a hot chocolate through the park. Both carer and young person felt comfortable with this as they were both anxious about Covid-19. Going on a walk with the young person and the volunteer allowed the Volunteer Coordinator to demonstrate how to interact with young person and to put boundaries in place, where needed. The volunteer commented that they found this helpful.

Outcome

The volunteer met the young person the following week and went for a walk and lunch, the volunteer had another contact with young person on Teams where they did an escape room activity. The carer had said that he would only manage 20 minutes but "He was completely engaged and thoroughly interested in a whole hour! The Independent Visitor has been brilliant at engaging with the young person, especially online given he does not like this!"

We needed to be creative during the restrictions in adapting how we work, by looking at having walks with young people and adapting how we do things to accommodate children and their individual needs. We accommodated the carers concerns about Covid-19 whilst ensuring that the young person continued to be supported.

In the future we can learn to adapt how we do things and perhaps suggest changing how we complete match meetings (potentially taking them outside the home to help that initial relationship start to build).

On another note, the Independent Visitor has genuinely enjoyed the visits with the young person, which shows the impact that children can have on others.



We have many volunteers who are keen to share their story, here is William's:

My time with The Children's Society

I remember well how I first heard about The Children's Society. Two young volunteers were standing in the middle of a busy shopping mall with a stall advertising the society's work. Then a few years later, I went on their website to see how I could be of practical service, having not long ago retired from teaching. The post of Independent Visitor intrigued me; this involved visiting children in care who were either in children's homes or with foster parents. The idea was to give them an independent and sympathetic ear, and to take the child assigned to you out once a month, somewhere the child enjoyed and was fun. In this way, it is hoped that the child will grow to trust the visitor and maybe confide any worries or fears, or anxieties that they had.

I was interviewed and trained, and the training was really interesting and motivating. A long time passed before I was 'matched' with a child; this is because great care is taken by the service to match the Independent Visitor (the IV) with the right boy or girl who would benefit most from the relationship. Moreover, the child's own wishes and preferences are taken into account, interests and leisure time hobbies etc. If a child wants to go rambling and play golf on his outings, the service doesn't assign him someone who loves sitting in libraries or feeding ducks in the park.

I was assigned my first child, a 13-year-old boy living in a children's home. He is a boy who enjoys ice-skating, swimming, eating in McDonalds and browsing round big stores like Pound Stretcher, Toys R Us and charity shops. I have to say that my skating skills have gone off over the years, but this did not take away from his own enjoyment.

Since the lockdown in late March, visits were suspended for the safety of both of us for a while. Nevertheless, I made weekly telephone calls to him and just lately video calls so that at last we can see each other again!

Lastly, I realise that this particular match won't last forever, there has to be a phased and sensitive ending some time, possibly after two years. I look forward then to working with someone new!

Volunteer Independent Visitors Training

All our volunteers are trained and inducted before they can start volunteering. The training covers; safeguarding, confidentiality, the role of an Independent Visitor, the Care System and relationship building. All our volunteers also take part in group support meetings and supervision.

Two Personal Advisors from the Care Leavers' Service facilitated a session about their role and what a child can expect as they move into becoming a care leaver. The feedback from our volunteers was that they really found the session extremely useful.

Volunteer feedback via email on the Independent Visitor training:

"I do want to take a minute to thank you. Your energy, commitment and passion for supporting children is so apparent and infectious."

"Given some of the content in course it is really heart-warming to know there are people like you (and everyone in TCS) doing their bit to make a difference."

Covid-19



- Children and young people have been given different options on how to communicate with their advocate during the lockdown period. Advocates have used telephone, WhatsApp, Microsoft Teams, text, Skype.
- Advocates have tried to accommodate the children and young people's preferred method of communication where possible.
- The use of video calling has worked really well for some children and young people who have found this a better way of expressing their views.
- In March 2020 when we were in lockdown due to Covid-19, there was a pause on all volunteer recruitment whilst the organisation looked into safe practice during lockdown. Eventually we were able to recruit and process volunteers via skype interviews and video calling to view documents as well as online training.
- All our volunteers during the restrictions had supervision with the Volunteer Coordinator to discuss Covid 19 and risk assessments, and to get an understanding and their wish or not to return to face-to-face visits.
- Service Manager attended virtual training on Thriving Virtually for Managers in order to ensure she was looking after her own wellbeing and that of the staff and volunteers during Covid-19 and the lockdown restrictions.
- In early 2021 we were busy getting back to doing more face-to-face visits for advocacy and Independent Visiting, completing Covid-19 risk assessments and supporting volunteers to ensure they follow the guidance and keep children and young people safe.
- During the restrictions we sent flower seeds to the young people and their Independent Visitors encouraged them to grow them.

We had a lovely positive phone call with a foster carer about the positives for her foster child during lockdown:

She said: He is really doing well at present, as you know my house can be very busy with my own grandchildren visiting, however all is quiet now and we have been working on some self-help skills with him, like bringing his washing down to be washed and supporting him to get dressed himself.

All this has become more easier to do as he is not in school the house is quiet and we have more time for him. So, he is developing really well. He loves buildings and places, and you can show him a photograph and he will know where and what it is, and he use to enjoy doing these activities with his Independent Visitor when they use to go to the library. Thank you so much for calling and asking about us all.

Wellbeing during Covid-19

Since Covid-19 our organisation has been promoting a good deal of wellbeing resources which all staff have access to and can sign post to any children and young people.

Inside the Mind

This is a national resource that The Children's Society have developed, which we have shared with colleagues to pass on to any child or young person they feel would benefit from.

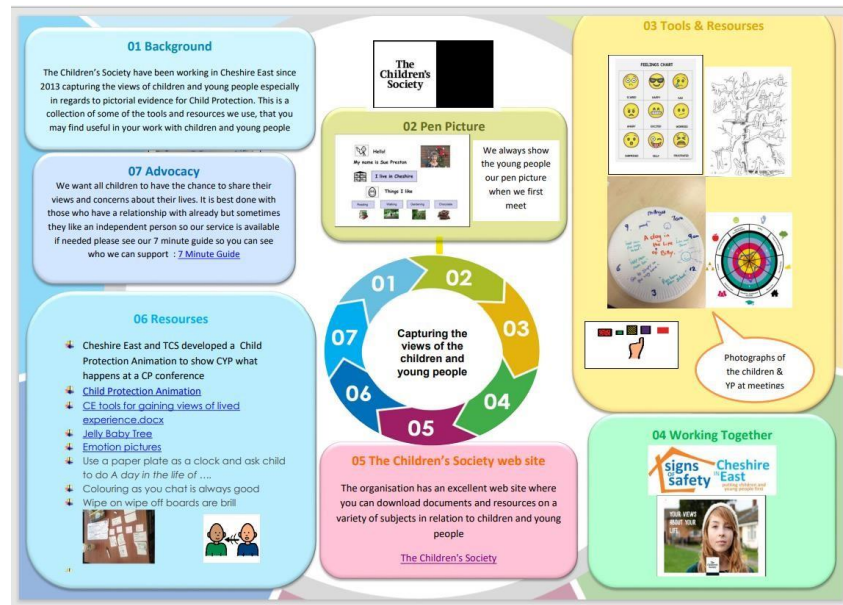
<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/information/young-people/wellbeing/resources>





Developments in 2020

- One young person who is matched with an Independent Visitor was interested in supporting our work and either being on interview panels or helping with training. This young person was supported via a training and discussion session. She did a session on the Independent Visitor Training in June 2020. She completed her own PowerPoint for the session and the Independent Visitors really enjoyed this part of the training. The young person was given a shopping voucher as a thank you.
- She then became involved in our "Team Gold" project which is our national project and involves children and young people deciding where pots of funding are allocated. Other children and young people ask for funding to set up groups or to improve their buildings.
- We attended Local Authority meetings throughout the year to raise awareness about the service and we shared tools and resources on capturing the voice of the child with colleagues.
- We recruited a volunteer advocate ambassador in 2020 who took on some low-level advocacy referrals.
- As part of Refugee Week in June 2020 The Children's Society were campaigning for all unaccompanied asylum seekers to be appointed a Guardian to support them when they arrive in the UK. This information and link was sent to colleagues in the local authority Guardians.



- We worked with Local Authority colleagues to ensure that any homeless 16- or 17-year-old was made aware of our advocacy service if they needed to access an advocate
- We worked with Local Authority colleagues to ensure that any child in a Private Fostering arrangement was aware of our service if they needed to access an advocate
- In September 2020 we shared with colleagues our national Good Childhood Report



The Good
Childhood
Report 2020

Youth Summary

The Children's
Society

What did we find?

What we found is worrying. UK children have the lowest levels of wellbeing and the lowest sense of hope compared to 24 other European countries. The UK has also seen the largest increase in relative child poverty. And while strong friendships are identified as a key ingredient of children's well-being, the report found that children in the UK increasingly feel they have no close friends they could talk to if they are in trouble.

- In November 2020 we took part in November Children's Rights Month our Volunteer Coordinator sent out Christmas activity packs to our children and young people, Service Manager did Random Act of Kindness.



Activity packs were sent out to our young people who are matched with an Independent visitor with letters asking them how they were and asking them to make cards for whoever they wanted to. These were posted to the young people with an office address, and we would post them if they wanted to send this to their Independent Visitor.

- We took on a Social Work student in early 2021 from Salford University who took on some advocacy cases.
- In February 2021 we set up a Task and Finish group alongside Cheshire East colleagues to look at how we communicate and raise awareness about the service as well as look at training and development.

Developments for the future

Take on Social work students to support the Advocacy and Independent Visitor Service as well as offering them the skills and experience to become a great Social Worker.

Work with Cheshire East colleagues to ensure partnership working and better communication, develop more webinars to share with colleagues.

Develop a blended approach to the work ensuring all children and young people have the choice to how they would like the service to work for them.

Promote the service with colleagues and ensure all aware of who they can refer especially children in a Private Fostering arrangement or homeless 16- and 17-year olds.

Promote the Independent Visiting service to ensure all those children and young people who want an Independent Visitor are offered one.

Continue to share our national resources with colleagues in the local authority and other services who work with children and young people.

Sue Preston Service Manager, The Children's Society

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of the Local Government Act 1972.

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