

Corporate Parenting Committee

Agenda

Date: Tuesday, 6th September, 2022
Time: 2.00 pm
Venue: Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields, Middlewich Road,
Sandbach CW11 1HZ

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

It should be noted that Part 1 items of Cheshire East Council decision making meetings are audio recorded and the recordings will be 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.

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

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2022.

4. **Update from Shadow Committee (Verbal)**

5. **Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2021-22** (Pages 7 - 30)

To receive the Corporate Parenting Committee annual report for 2021-22.

6. **Care Leavers Service Annual Report** (Pages 31 - 38)

To receive the annual report of the Care Leavers Service.

For requests for further information

Contact: Josie Lloyd

Tel: 01270 686 466

E-Mail: josie.lloyd@cheshireeast.gov.uk with any apologies

Membership: Councillors Q Abel, M Asquith, R Bailey, J Barber, J Buckley, C Bulman, P Butterill, K Flavell (Chair), S Handley, S Holland, D Jefferay and J Saunders (Vice-Chair)

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Committee**
held on Tuesday, 28th June, 2022 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor K Flavell (Chair)

Councillors R Bailey, J Buckley, C Bulman, S Handley, S Holland, D Jefferay
and S Edgar

ALSO PRESENT

Kerry Birtles, Director of Children's Social Care
Annemarie Parker, Head of Service: Cared for Children and Care Leavers
Laura Rogerson, Head of Service: Inclusion
Josie Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer

37 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Asquith, Barber, Butterill and
Saunders. Cllr Steven Edgar attended as a substitute.

Cllr Brian Puddicombe attended as a visiting member.

38 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

39 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2022 be agreed as a
correct record.

40 UPDATE FROM SHADOW COMMITTEE (VERBAL UPDATE)

The committee received a verbal update on the work of the Shadow
Committee.

The Cared for Children Survey closed last week and the team were in the
process of collating the feedback and considering how best to respond in a
meaningful way.

A number of mobile phone applications were being looked into for development as a mechanism for seeking feedback and engagement from young people.

A query was raised as to whether all Cared for Young People had access to IT to enable them to use the app and it was noted that, at an age appropriate level, IT equipment was provided. A concern was raised regarding safeguarding young people in using technology, particularly Internet access. Assurances were given that foster carers and residential staff were provided with training which included the supervision of Internet access at an age appropriate level. All IT equipment provided by the Council is age appropriately restricted.

A competition was due to be held over the summer to seek suggestions from young people for a new name for Corporate Parenting.

An annual celebration event for the Shadow Committee was due to be held in November and committee members were welcome to attend.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

41 CARED FOR CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVER STRATEGY

The committee received the report which set out the proposed new Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-26, previously known as the Corporate Parenting Strategy, for Cheshire East to improve outcomes for cared for children and care leavers.

A query was raised regarding figures on page 21 which referred to the 76 completed Care Leaver Surveys and it was requested that these figures be clarified for future reports to state that the percentages refer to those who responded, as opposed to all care leavers.

It was confirmed that there was a typographical error on page 48 which referred to 'prisonisation' and should be 'prioritisation'.

The committee noted the positive impact of the Apprenticeship Coordinator and a request was made for this officer to attend a future meeting.

A concern was raised about endorsing the decision to change the name of the committee before all committee members had attended the Corporate Parenting training. It was therefore agreed that this recommendation would be voted on separately. Assurances were given that further training sessions would be scheduled as soon as possible for those who had been unable to attend, with the aim of all having attended by the next committee meeting in September.

RESOLVED:

Unanimously:

1. That the Corporate Parenting Committee endorse the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-26 which will progress to Children and Families Committee for approval on 11 July 2022.
2. That the pledges in the strategy be taken to full Council on 19 October 2022, where members can pledge their commitments to Cared for Children and Care Leavers.

By majority:

3. That the Corporate Parenting Committee endorse the decision to change the name of our Corporate Parenting Committee. Further recommendations regarding the change of name will be brought to a future committee following consultation with children and young people.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 and concluded at 10.50

Councillor K Flavell (Chair)

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Working for a brighter future together

Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting:	06 September 2022
Report Title:	Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2021-22
Report of:	Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director of Children's Services
Ward(s) Affected:	All

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2021-22 at Appendix 1 sets out the work of the Committee and progress against the Corporate Parenting Strategy over the past year.
- 1.2. This report supports the work of the committee in achieving the aim in the council's Corporate Plan to 'be the best Corporate Parents to our children in care.'

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report details the progress and achievements over 2021-22 against the five pledges the Council has made to cared for children and care leavers in the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. Corporate Parenting Committee is recommended to:
 - Endorse the Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2021-22 as set out at Appendix 1.

4. Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1. 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.

- 4.2.** 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.

5. Other Options Considered

- 5.1.** 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.

6. Background

- 6.1.** The Corporate Parenting Committee, established in May 2016, is a cross-party advisory committee. The Committee is comprised of twelve cross-party members, currently with an additional associate non-voting member. Members were appointed on a politically proportionate basis and nominated by the political groups.
- 6.2.** 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.
- 6.3.** The Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2021-22 at Appendix 1 sets out the work of the Committee and progress against the Corporate Parenting Strategy over the past year.

7. Consultation and Engagement

- 7.1.** 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.

8. Implications

8.1. Legal

- 8.1.1.** 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.

- 8.1.2. 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.

8.2. Finance

- 8.2.1. 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.

8.3. Policy

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

8.4. Equality

- 8.4.1. 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.

8.5. Human Resources

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

8.6. Risk Management

- 8.6.1. 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.

8.7. Rural Communities

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

8.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

- 8.8.1. The Corporate Parenting Annual Report, aligned to the Corporate Parenting Strategy, sets out implications for cared for children and young people and priorities for 2021-22.

8.9. Public Health

- 8.9.1. 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.

8.10. Climate Change

- 8.10.1. There are no climate change implications.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Annemarie Parker Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers Annemarie.Parker@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2021-22
Background Papers:	The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018-21 and pledges can be found on the following link: https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/livewell/care-and-support-for-children/services-from-childrens-social-care/cared-for-children/cared-for-children.aspx

Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report

April 2021 – March 2022



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Foreword

In Cheshire East, we believe caring for our cared for children and care leavers is one of the most important responsibilities we have. Elected members reviewed the new Cared for Children and Care Leaver's Strategy 2022 to 2026 at committee in June 2022 and agreed the 6 new pledges. The pledges within the strategy are ambitious in respect of how we will support and guide our cared for children and young people and our care experienced adults to strive to reach their full potential.



We are committed to ensuring that our children and young people have permanent homes that meet their individual needs locally so that they can stay connected to their families and communities. We have pledged that our children and young people will have the very best educational experiences, be healthy, be safe and prepared for their onward journey to adulthood. We added a new pledge to focus solely on participation (working together with children and young people) to ensure that children and young people are always at the heart of everything we do. Children and young people have told us that the most important thing we can do is listen to them.

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 as we recover from the pandemic- Covid 19. 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 be at the heart of everything we do, and our Shadow Committee, My Voice, has continued to meet throughout the year. 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.

We continue to develop the 'One Plan' which is an action plan we use 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.

In November 2021, we had an Ofsted focussed visit which looked at our arrangements for children in need and those subject to a child protection plan. The feedback and letter from Ofsted recognises the improvements we have made in this area and

helpfully supports us in future developments. This is a great foundation for us to continue in our journey for improvement.

In July 2022, we had a 3-week joint targeted area inspection, this inspection looked at how the partnership worked together to help and protect children at risk of exploitation. We await the formal feedback letter. We do however know that the inspection identified some areas of strength but also some areas where we need improvement, some which will require swift action. These areas require us to look at how we can support our workforce as a single agency and together as a partnership too.

We have continued to develop and embed 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 2021-22. 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

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 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. The terms of reference are included within the [council's constitution](#).

The Corporate Parenting Committee is comprised of twelve cross-party members, currently with an additional associate non-voting member, and council officers in attendance to support agenda items as required. The committee is administered by officers from democratic services. The committee has met on four occasions in 2021-22.

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 includes information on how services are supporting cared for children, young people and care-experienced adults, and provides feedback from external scrutiny, so that members can evaluate the service that is being delivered to ensure we are effectively meeting children and young people's needs. Performance reporting and impact is scrutinised by the committee, along with issues and risks.

The committee oversees the delivery of our cared for children's and care experienced adult strategy and the pledges that we made in June 2022.

Corporate Parenting Strategy and Pledges

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018-21 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 in 2021/22 received a report on progress against the pledges from the strategy. **Four workstream groups** aligned to the pledges were in place to ensure that the strategy was delivered effectively.



The new **Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-26** is being co-produced with children and young people and will be launched in 2022, which will replace the current Corporate Parenting Strategy.

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.

Key achievements this year

- The new Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy for 2022-26 has been co-produced with children and young people which sets out our ambitions as corporate parents and what actions we will take to continue to develop our support.

- 99% children and young people participated in their reviews.
- My Voice (our Children in Care Council) and the shadow committee continued to meet and are focused on improving outcomes for children and young people. Our young people have been involved in a range of projects including making cards which were sent by post to all our cared for children to celebrate International Care Day 2022. We have also held an art exhibition where young people contributed a range of artwork, photographs and poems to share their experiences of being cared for. Currently young people are developing a 'coming into care' guide which will be given to children and young people when they become cared for. Our young people have also been involved in interviews for new staff. This is an important part of our recruitment strategy to ensure that we capture the views and opinions of our young people. This is also a good way of young people telling new staff what they want from their social worker.
- Children and young people's views were sought and listened to through the cared for children's survey and care leavers' survey, which has informed our service development.
- The participation team visited more children in their placements to seek their views and wishes. The aim is that the participation team will visit all children and young people when they enter care and share with them all of the ways they can be involved in developing services.

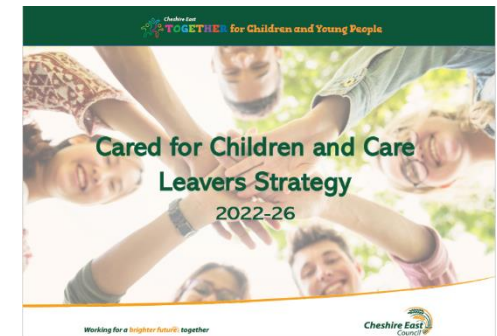
- Young people participated in frontline staff recruitment, particularly interviews.
- Councillors completed monthly visits with frontline safeguarding services which ensured there was councillor oversight of the issues that affect frontline teams.
- Several activities for November Children's Rights Month were ran with the participation team and the care leavers' service. These included photography competitions, a Crystal Maze activity day and a trip to Alton Towers. These activities were run in conjunction with Pure Insight and Just Drop In. Feedback from young people involved in these activities was positive. During the school holidays since February 2021, activity days have also taken place virtually led by a participation worker.

"Being in care has been amazing. My social worker who I have been with has made sure I live with people I can trust. I feel like people are making good decisions about my future."

Feedback from a young person in the cared for survey

Next steps

- Continue to work together with children and young people and enable children to participate in a meaningful way to develop our services and inform practice.
- Stabilise the workforce so that children and young people benefit from enduring relationships with their social worker.
- Work together to ensure that the right children become cared for.
- Launch our Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy for 2022-26 and ensure there is effective governance in place for delivering this.
- Provide ongoing training and support to councillors, stakeholders and employees about being the best parents to our cared for children and care leavers.
- Regularly celebrate the achievements of our cared for children through events such as the Star Awards and national care leaver week.
- Continue to work with cared for children and care leavers to change the language we use.



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**.

Key achievements this year

- We have carefully monitored the impact of covid upon children and young people's education and attendance. At the beginning of December 2021, the overall attendance figures for our school-aged children was 91%. As at March 2022, primary attendance was 88%, secondary was 89% and Special schools 88% - we have dedicated specialist attendance officers who have robust systems in place to track and monitor attendance daily and are

able to ensure timely support is in place. Targeted and creative approaches have been delivered to prioritise educational outcomes of our children, including a survey to children and young people about their experiences during the pandemic.

- A new governing board for the virtual school has been established and is chaired by the director of children's social care to increase accountability for children's outcomes through multi-agency governance including representatives from across foster carers, residential care homes, adoption counts, schools and settings.
- 87% of cared for children are in good/outstanding schools
- 100% cared for children and young people had at least one personal education plan in place during the pandemic.
- We have had no permanent exclusions for the past three years.
- We have 18 young people at university, this is our highest number ever, and we are proud and want to ensure that as many of our young people have this opportunity as possible.
- We have supported 7 young people into apprenticeships: 6 external and one within the council.
- We delivered strong support for the Afghanistan resettlement scheme in securing places in schools for all families involved – this has been recognised as best practice by the Home Office.

- Elective home education (EHE) advisors worked with social workers to review the education provided to electively home educated children on child protection or child sexual exploitation plans, offering support to make school applications if home education was not deemed appropriate as part of the plan.



- In the care leavers survey in October and November 2021, 90% of young people told us they know how to access education, employment or training.
- There has been a strong offer of support for post 16 young people through a dedicated virtual school team. The Virtual School have a dedicated Post 16 education advisor that works

across the team with our young people from year 11 up to year 13 to ensure clear post 16 pathways are in place. We work closely with the care leavers team and meet monthly to ensure smooth transitions are in place for those young people from aged 18. We have a dedicated learning mentor and post 16 tutor that have a specific focus on those not in education, employment or training (NEET) to ensure support is in place for re-engagement back into EET.

- Our NEET figures are continuing to show improvement, despite the pandemic, and our current performance for young people aged 16 to 25 is 37% NEET. We are continuing to work to improve this further. The statutory return figures are 29% of 17-18 are NEET and 41% of 19-21 and have a range of targeted support in place to address this including a specialist role via the Journey First project and a dedicated Venture with Confidence programme. Feedback from the participants is extremely positive and the programme has been successful as a pathway to get young people involved in a range of activities and into education, employment, or training. Previous programmes have seen real successes for our young people.
- The Virtual School and Care Leavers' service attended an employer event in November 2021 – this was a virtual event with 46 employers attending. The event enabled those employers who have successfully offered employment and apprenticeship opportunities to care leavers to share their experience. The

impact of this event was that employers have since offered our young people work experience, apprenticeships and careers advice.

- National Apprenticeship Week was celebrated in February 2022, and we used a variety of methods to increase apprenticeship awareness for our care leavers across the council.
- We established a new role of apprenticeship coordinator to support care leavers.

Next steps

- Develop opportunities for apprenticeships within the council and local businesses. Offer support to care leavers in preparing for and undertaking apprenticeships from our apprenticeship coordinator role.
- Continue to improve the completion rate and quality of personal education plans across all ages from early years to post 16.
- 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 the use of pupil premium.

- Strengthen the voice of children and young people in supporting strategic development across all areas of the virtual school.
- Ensure that agencies providing opportunities for our children and young people are supported and equipped to understand and meet their needs.
- Ensure a robust action plan is in place to reduce NEET and encourage re-engagement opportunities for our care leavers.
- The Virtual School headteachers' report for 2021-22 will be presented in the November committee meeting, for approval. This will provide full details of this academic year with an outline of the impact and achievements of our children and young people.



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**.

Key achievements this year

- We have reduced our cared for population from 539 (end of Q3 2020-21) to 522 end Q4 2021-22 evidencing a whole system approach and shared vision to supporting children and young people to remain with their families where they are safe to do so. This equates to 67 cared for children per 10,000 of the child population within Cheshire East, which is slightly lower than last year. Latest statistical neighbour comparison is 60, the National figure is 67 and the Northwest region is 97.

- Children can remain within their family through bespoke packages of support. Additional resource into edge of care has supported more children to remain in their family where this is safe and appropriate.
- We are continuing to see progress in our vision for children and young people 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. We have increased the number of children living inside the borough: at the end of March 2021, 302 (58%) were placed within Cheshire East and at the end of March 2022 this figure was 321 (61%) of cared for children. Our latest data indicates that we have reduced the number of our children living outside of the boundary and over 20 miles away from 21% last year to 18.6% this year. Nationally the average is 16% and our statistical neighbours are 19%.
- 40% of our cared for children are living with Cheshire East Foster Carers, (this includes connected carers). We are looking to increase this and there has been an active fostering recruitment campaign.
- We are continuing to work to reduce the number of children who live in residential care. In March 2021, we had 40 children living in residential settings, but had reduced this to 31 at the end of March 2022.

- 11 new mainstream fostering households were approved between April 2021 and March 2022.
- The increase in foster carer contacts and referrals has created a net increase of placements of between 17 and 25 (if siblings placed together).
- We have now moved most of the court work from the Child in Need/Child Protection teams to the Cared for Children's teams. The aim of this transfer is to support effective early permanence planning. We have a continued focus on permanence through a weekly panel chaired by heads of service. In the 6 months to end of September 2021, 48% of children who entered care had their plans of permanence endorsed in their second review.
- We have worked in partnership with our regional adoption agency Adoption Counts to achieve permanence for 14 children in 2021/22 through adoption. Another 17 are living in their adoption placements.
- Flude House, one of our bespoke children's homes was inspected by Ofsted and was judged 'Good'.
- The number of children where care orders have been discharged is increasing; in 2020/21, we discharged care orders for eight children and in 2021/22 we have discharged care orders for 18. There are several applications currently before the court so we are hopeful that this number will

significantly increase. This means that children are able to live within their family without the intrusion of the Local Authority where this has been assessed to be in their best interests.

- We have launched 'Together for Fostering', our own fostering recruitment and assessment team.
- We have improved communications and engagement with foster carers with regular newsletters, forums, attendance at gatherings and surveys.
- Foster carers are involved in service developments, and a foster carer is a member of the virtual school governing body.



Next steps

- Continue to ensure that cared for children and young people can live in good, safe homes locally, as early as possible. Develop a discharge team for children that are already living with their family or parents to reduce the need for care orders and ongoing intervention.
- We will ensure children and young people have opportunities to stay connected to their families and friends in the least restrictive way possible.
- Review all residential placements monthly to ensure that children and young people can have the opportunity to live within a family.
- Develop the No Wrong Door model and principles within Cheshire East which will provide support to young people who are within, or on the edge of, care.
- Increase support to cases where there is a possibility of adoption disruption and prevent these children entering the care system again.
- Further strengthen our communication and engagement with foster carers and involve them in service development.

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**.

Key achievements this year

- In the cared for children's survey conducted in January – March 2021, 87% young people said they had someone to talk to if they had any health concerns.
- 79% care leavers said they feel well informed of how to make good choices regarding their health, and the local services to help them.
- 80% of cared for children have an up-to-date health assessment.
- 85% of cared for children in Cheshire East had an up-to-date review health assessment.
- 100% of young people have health passports by their 18th birthday.

- For children 5 and under 94% of developmental checks were completed within timescales.
- 97% of immunisations were completed.
- Our dedicated emotional wellbeing service delivers support for young people and their carers.
- 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 dental access pilot was launched 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 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.



Next steps

- Track and monitor the health needs of our children and young people, including those who are currently living outside of Cheshire East, ensuring their needs are met.
- We will support children and young people in care to have improving emotional mental health and wellbeing.
- We will ensure cared for children and care leavers have their health assessed in a timely way and that assessments are of a good quality and used to inform the care plan.
- Promote the new NHS England dental referral programme to ensure cared for children have access to timely dental health services.
- We will support timely and effective transitions from children's to adults' services.
- Develop an effective tool that can be used to measure health outcomes for cared for children.

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.

Key achievements this year

- We are currently working with 315 young people in the Care Leavers' Service, of whom just over 30 are open to us formally under the 21+ Offer; a further 140 young adults know that they can also access support and advice from us at any time via this provision.
- We are very proud of Cheshire East Council's commitment to our care leavers. The council has covered the £20 cut to Universal Credit for six months from October 2021 for all young adults who receive the benefit and our 16- and 17-year-olds in supported accommodation, a total of 125 young people.

This has been exceptionally well received by our care leavers and Mark Riddell, National Advisor for Care Leavers.

- We have reviewed and enhanced the local offer to care leavers.
- Ignition Panel continues to meet monthly to offer young people choice and involvement in decision making around 16+ and supported accommodation. We continue to find that holding the meeting virtually over Teams has actually increased young people's participation and led to a greater sense of ownership in the decisions that are made.
- We have recommissioned our 16+ supported accommodation offer together with our young people.
- Our successful tenancy ready course has an average of two young people per month completing to secure their B status.
- 98% of our care leavers are in suitable accommodation and we are in touch with these young people. There are four young people who choose not to engage with the service, but we know where they live, and they know they can change their mind if they need support. Our use of emergency accommodation is at an all-time low and when we analysed the last nine cases, we found that in over half of them, the arrangement had suited the young person.
- We have strengthened our practice in relation to 16/17-year-old homeless young people.

- We have reduced our figure for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) to 34% with a further 3% involved in re-engagement work; these figures are lower than the national average and compare well with our neighbouring authorities. Over the past year, our Apprenticeship Coordinator has increased the number of young people in full-time schemes to 9 but is currently supporting another 28 to become 'apprenticeship ready', many of whom are on the verge of securing a position. We also have 18 Care Leavers at University, the highest figure in recent years.
- Our latest NEET course for young people who have experienced specific difficulties in accessing work or training has been another great success: Cal is starting an apprenticeship with the Youth Service; Allie has an apprenticeship with Motherwell, Will is starting a work placement/apprenticeship at a local Farm; Jack signed up for college and Kelly, who has never been able to engage on the course, is looking at volunteering and attending the next one; Gemma has passed her probation as a Teaching Assistant apprentice at a local school and is now considered 'an integral part of our team'. Finally, James, who has been receiving long term tier 4 treatment for mental health problems is attending college and looking to move into supported accommodation; the hospital have stated on many occasions that our involvement and James attending NEET course have been fundamental in improving his wellbeing and progression.
- We have successfully and proactively been involved in the National Transfer Scheme to bring asylum seeking young people to this area from the south coast. We have developed a music project with the Love Music Trust and a group of musicians from Manchester who were originally refugees themselves.
- Mentoring and wellbeing support to our care leavers has continued to be offered through our partnership with Pure Insight. 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. Feedback from young people around the support they receive from Pure Insight is overwhelmingly positive and we're incredibly proud of our 4+ year partnership. It represents an essential cornerstone of the Local Offer to our Care Leavers across emotional well-being and psychological support, mentoring and support to young parents. Pure Insight's amazing staff are passionate and authentic and never fail to go the extra mile, something that is so important in engaging young adults who may have good reason to be fearful of the involvement of statutory agencies. It's always hard to put a price on some of these softer outcomes but we're confident that the partnership delivers both outstanding outcomes, and outstanding value.
- Together with Pure Insight, we actively support our young people to become good parents themselves; Amy had a son in

January last year, she is still in a relationship with the father and they are doing well; she is living independently and working. Kathy, who has 2 children is at University and will complete her degree this year; she has a good bond and relationship with her children and has ongoing support with the counsellor. Megan had her daughter in December; both parents are coping really well and she is attending baby groups and is engaging with the health visitor, who has no concerns.



Next steps

- Involve children in care and care leavers in developing their plans for after care.
- Ensure care leavers are supported to make decisions that affect their lives.
- Understand how children and young people want us to communicate with them and look at ways to develop our digital offer in line with their views.
- Publish and publicise our offer to care leavers in accessible ways, in line with statutory guidance. Ensure that care leavers know what they are legally entitled to and are helped to access support after they leave care.
- Celebrate the achievements of our care leavers during National Care Leavers week and as a matter of routine. One of our Senior PAs regularly collates achievements by our young people during her supervision of team members. Here are just half of those recorded during only two months' work:
 - ❖ Carl has accepted a placement in Crewe with Emerging Futures and his PA has supported him to register with a recruitment agency and complete his CV
 - ❖ Mia has started on the Princes Trust, and she is really enjoying it
 - ❖ Hussein has moved into a shared house with another young person and is loving it!

- ❖ Caleb has done well in his mock exams in college.
- ❖ Jamie had completed his bronze and silver independence packs
- ❖ Ed has completed his Silver Independence packs
- ❖ Kathy has passed her driving test and bought a little Fiat!
- ❖ Nicola is happy working at the cat rescue
- ❖ Adele has just been taken on as an apprentice at a nursery where she was doing a placement.
- ❖ Jemma has completed the Tenancy Ready Course, is registered on Cheshire Home Choice and is now ready to move into her own property.
- ❖ Shameen has passed her theory test
- ❖ Emma finally has her provisional licence
- ❖ Davina has given birth to a daughter and has signed for her own property.
- ❖ Jill and Peter are being stepped down from pre-proceeding to CP.
- ❖ Mohammed has passed his driving test
- ❖ Chien has started his work placement at a nail bar
- ❖ Kevin has nearly finished his four-year apprenticeship and has just signed for his first tenancy.
- ❖ Shane is working with the drug and alcohol service in prison
- ❖ Jake has been engaging with Pure Insight and has been seeing his GP
- ❖ Mary has graduated from the Prince Trust

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Care Leavers' Service Annual Report

Steve Nevitt – Care Leavers' Service Manager

Laura McLoughlin – Team Manager

April 2021 – May 2022

1. Introduction

1.1 This report covers a period of significant change for Cheshire East Care Leavers' Service but a time during which the team has continued to work tirelessly to meet the needs of care experienced young people, wherever they may be living and no matter what their personal circumstances. We have emerged from a global pandemic which has seen the development of new ways of working and engaging with our young people: we are incredibly proud of the way in which both our Team and our partners in other agencies have risen to meet these challenges, thereby ensuring that we have continued to meet our responsibilities as good Corporate Parents.

1.2 Preparing Cared for Children and Care Leavers for adulthood can be a complex process. As I have written elsewhere, 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. We therefore offer a range of support across emotional health and wellbeing, education, employment and training, accommodation and housing, and finances and benefits.

2. Numbers and Staffing

2.1 At the end of the period our Care Leavers' Service was working with 309 young people; of these 200 were between the ages of 18 and 21, 36 were aged 21+ and 73 were between the age of 16 and 17. These numbers mean that caseloads have been slightly higher than the generally recognised ideal of 20 with some workers being closer to 25 for much of the year. In general terms, we can expect continued growth in the work of the team because of the 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 21yrs of age under the 21-25 duties arising from the Children & Social Work Act 2017. However we now have a plan to address these issues which I will outline further below.

2.2 The most significant staffing change this year was the resignation of Sam Ankers from his post as Team Manager after almost 5 years to move on to the House Project. I would like to publicly acknowledge Sam's enormous contribution to the development of the service during this time and his endless commitment to improving the lives of care experienced young people; it has been a genuine pleasure to work with him and see both his own professional development, and the impact that it has had on both his team of Personal Advisors and our Care Leavers.

2.3 Sam has been replaced by Laura McLoughlin who brings a wealth of experience as a social worker in Child Protection and Education settings. Laura has made a great start to her role, she has immediately established excellent working relationships with both the team and partner agencies and we have every confidence that she will build on the fantastic foundations laid by her predecessor. Laura is joined by a number of new PAs: Carol Holmes came to us from Journey First, Claire Stacey has experience of Care Leaver Services in the independent sector, and Julie Chafe and Nikki Brander both have many years' experience in a range of

social care settings in Cheshire East. They have all settled into the team extremely well and are already achieving some great outcomes for our young people.

2.4 Looking ahead, we will be recruiting 2 additional members of the team and changing the work of the Senior PAs to a more managerial and supervisory role; this will enable us to take over the reviews of Pathway Plans for young people aged 19+ from the Safeguarding & Quality Assurance Service and will enable us to keep PA caseloads to more manageable levels.

3. Review of the Local Offer

3.1 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 well-being and others looked at accommodation and employment and training.

3.2 Each year with our Care Leavers, we hold an event at which we review how we have delivered those pledges, be aspirational for the future, and then update our local offer. The next review will be held in the autumn and already, we are in discussions with a company who will produce an app-based version of the offer that young people can access via their mobile phones; this will be particularly helpful to our UASC population who will be able to access the offer in their own language, and it will also enable us to increase participation through the ability to direct message and ask questions of our young people via the app. In the meantime, the current offer can be seen at:

<https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/livewell/care-and-support-for-children/services-from-childrens-social-care/local-offer-for-care-leavers.aspx>

4. Emotional Wellbeing and Mentoring

4.1 We have continued our working relationship with Pure Insight who deliver mentoring and well-being support to our Care Leavers via a contract that is currently in the process of being retendered. In January, our work with them was featured in *Children & Young People Now*, a national publication in which I said:

"We're incredibly proud of our 4+ year partnership with Pure Insight and it represents an essential cornerstone of the Local Offer to our Care Leavers across emotional well-being and psychological support, mentoring and support to young parents. Pure Insight's amazing staff are passionate and authentic and never fail to go the extra mile, something that is so important in engaging young adults who may have good reason to be fearful of the involvement of statutory agencies. It's always hard to put a price on some of these softer outcomes but we're confident that the partnership delivers both outstanding outcomes, and outstanding value."

4.2 Highlights from the last few months of their work include:

- Psychological Wellbeing Worker Becky started in December 2021. Trauma informed counsellor Kirsty has been with the service since May 2019
- Training offered to the PA Team
- 17 new referrals to the service
- 11 received 1:1 interventions from psychological wellbeing worker which include; learning self-care coping strategies, learning 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

- 23 receiving a weekly /fortnightly 1:1 intervention
- 11 young people completed resilience circles – identifying sources of support in their existing networks or in the wider community. Also identifies unhelpful/unhealthy relationships
- 2 Supported to reduce substance use
- 10 Supported to retain/secure new or existing tenancy
- 2 supported to make their flat a home (access grant for soft furnishings)
- 7 young people referred into Trauma Counselling since February 2022 – 9 spaces currently being utilised by CE young people
- 8 young people supported to access mental health advice or appointments in last 3 months
- 55 young people members of closed Facebook group – ‘Insight In Mind’
- 9 Supported to engage in activities to support mental health wellbeing
- 3 young people started EET or voluntary work since being picked up by Pure Insight

If any officers would consider becoming a mentor please email ce@pure-insight.org.uk or check the website www.pure-insight.org.uk

4.3 We also work in partnership with Pure Insight to support our young people who are parents themselves; we appreciate that care experienced young adults can sometimes have genuine reasons for being fearful of the involvement of statutory agencies and therefore need alternative means of engagement and support. We currently have 13 Care Leaver Mums, 2 of whom are pregnant again, 9 Care Leaver Dads and one more who will shortly become a father. The Care Leaver Mums Group meets regularly and recently had a fantastic day out with their children at Wheelock Farm.

5. Support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) & Adults

5.1 Cheshire East Council has continued to take a proactive and humanitarian approach to the plight of migrant young people who arrive in the UK via the south coast but the past year has seen significant changes, largely as a result of the Government’s decision in July 2021 to mandate Local Authorities’ participation in the National Transfer Scheme. This followed the enormous rise in asylum seekers crossing the Channel in small boats which was itself a consequence of the increased security around the lorry terminals in Calais. The NTS now accounts for the majority of our referrals at around one every 3 to 4 weeks although of late, we have also started to see some disputed age claims coming from the Home Office hotels in the Borough that ostensibly house adult asylum seekers.

5.2 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. A few young people are granted leave to remain quickly whereas others are still waiting for a decision after turning 18yrs and beyond, meaning that they cannot work or settle like their peers. As recently as last week, we were contacted by the NW Migration Partnership for a list of delayed cases, and we hope that the extra resources currently being deployed by the Home Office will speed up claims and allow our young people to finally move into independence.

5.3 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.

5.4 Looking ahead, we have secured agreement to recruit 2 social workers to join the Care Leavers' Service who will work with our Cared For UASC and any young person aged 16 & 17 who presents as homeless. The workers have been identified and we believe that this will significantly enhance our work, both in terms of the development of expertise and consistency, and in establishing better transition pathways as the young people turn 18. We also know that many of our migrant young people have fled from war and persecution and that they often have unmet needs around mental health and psychological well-being; therefore Pure Insight's planned development of some specific support in this area and the development of a community café and young people's group will be a welcome addition to our offer.

6. Ignition Panel & Accommodation

6.1 Accommodation is inevitably a key factor in preparing young people for adulthood and in September last year, the Action Plan we had developed from the previous year's Youth Homelessness Focussed Call with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government was signed off as requiring no further follow up visits.

6.2 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 might live in the future. We retain commissioned contracts for accommodation provided by Watermill House in Macclesfield and the YMCA in Crewe; these projects use their own independence programs which prepare young people to move on and be able to live independently.

6.3 At the end of last year we conducted an analysis of the nine cases where our young people had had to access emergency accommodation and the results were encouraging: generally young people were in placements for only short periods of time, and often as a result of actions for which they had had to accept a level of personal responsibility. Nevertheless in five of the cases, the provision actually benefited them in some way: for example one young man who was subject to strict bail conditions was able to remain at college by accessing an emergency placement close by.

6.4 'Staying Put' describes the arrangement when a cared for young person remains with their foster carer post 18yrs. 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 18yrs. Our work with colleagues in the Fostering Service and Independent Fostering Agencies is certainly bearing fruit: in April 2020 we had 13 Staying Put arrangements; at the time of last year's report we had 27 and at the time of writing, we now have 38.

7. Tenancy Readiness Courses

7.1 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 initially imposed by Covid-19. Since the turn of the year, 35 young people have started the course, of whom 25 have completed it. 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 themselves.

8. Independence Packs

8.1 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.

8.2 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.

9. Financial Support

9.1 One of the biggest challenges for our young people 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 are undertaken 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, and we were all incredibly proud when in October last year, Cheshire East became we believe, the only local authority in the country to cover the £20 cut in Universal Credit for 6m to take our young people through the cold winter months.

9.2 The Universal Credit system only pays people 4 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.

9.3 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 four 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. In addition, we always 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.

10. Employment Education & Training (EET)

10.1 We know from all the research arising from the Covid-19 pandemic that young people are likely to be one of the groups who will be disproportionately affected by its impact, particularly in the longer term. We therefore pay particular attention to young people who are not accessing employment, education or training and still have a dedicated EET worker in the Leaving Care Team and a 16-18 EET specialist within the virtual school. These two workers have been joined in the past year by an Apprenticeship Coordinator and they all meet regularly, identify our young people who are NEET and make plans to engage and support them. We are working hard with colleagues across the Council and in other agencies to increase the number of young people who take up Apprenticeships and this has now risen to 9, with a further 28 who are actively engaged in support programmes to get them 'apprenticeship-ready'. We believe that a significant number of these young people will access full-time apprenticeships in the coming months.

10.2 As in previous years, we have again identified groups of harder to reach NEET young people and have run two 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. 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, which for 18-20 year olds is currently running at 33% with a further 3% involved in re-engagement work.

11. Journey First

11.1 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 1-2-1 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.

11.2 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 workers which can spend time building a relationship and be there to support before, during and after starting a new job or new course. This is exactly what Journey First does. 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.

12. 21+ Offer

12.1 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 have over 30 young adults aged 21+ who have been reallocated to PAs and a significant number of others who access the team's help on an 'as and when needed' basis. We want our young people to know that we are there for them and that there isn't a cliff-edge of support that ends either at 18 or at 20; to this end, we are not precious about the duty extending to 25 and will always look to offer help and support to them at whatever age they turn to us for it.