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STRATEGY

CORPORATE PARENTING



Strategy Content	Page
1) Foreword	3
2) Aims and scope of the Strategy	3
3) Background and context	4
4) Vision	6
5) Our Pledge to Children and Young People in our Care	7
6) Principles	7
7) Priorities	8
8) Resources	8
9) Measures of Success	9
10) Equality Impact Assessment	10
11) Links to the Aspire Values	10
12) Monitoring and Evaluation	11
13) Arrangements for reviewing the Strategy	11
14) Feedback	11
Appendix TBC – Cheshire East pledge to Children and Young People in Care	TBC

Appendix TBC – National Indicators relating to Cared for Children	TBC
Appendix TBC – Corporate Parenting Board Terms of Reference and Membership	TBC
Appendix TBC – Children in Care Council Constitution	TBC
Appendix TBC - Action Plan	TBC

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Strategy Content

1. Foreword

‘Our aim is to make this the best place in the world for our children and young people to grow up.’

The Children’s Plan, Cheshire East Council

Our experiences in early childhood and through to our teenage years are critical in shaping our future happiness and set the foundations for what we can achieve throughout our adult lives. Good parenting is vital. This is why the role of Corporate Parent is one of the most important responsibilities of the Local Authority. Cheshire East has a legal and moral duty to support children in our care and those leaving care in the way that any good parent would support their own children. This is a role that we take very seriously. The circumstances and experiences of cared for children and young people mean that they are often disadvantaged in life. Narrowing the gap between the achievements of children in care and all children requires us to do much better for this vulnerable group. No one team or agency can do this alone. It is essential that every department within the Council and our partner organisations share the responsibilities of the corporate parent.

As a corporate parent, we are committed to do the very best to improve outcomes. To this end, we have made a pledge to our cared for children and young people. Our challenge is to deliver on this pledge, putting these children and young people at the heart of all that we do so that they have the opportunities they need to fulfil their potential.

This strategy sets out how Cheshire East intends to fulfil its Corporate Parenting responsibilities in a way that puts children and young people at the heart of improvements in the planning, delivery and evaluation of our services. This strategy forms the framework to which all Cheshire East staff, Councillors and our partners will work.

Signed
Councillor Hilda Gaddum
Lead Member for Children’s Services

Signed
Lorraine Butcher
Head of Children & Families

2. Aims and Scope of the Strategy

“Central government, local authorities and their partners in children’s trusts, individual professionals and carers all share a responsibility for ensuring the best for children and young people in care – as they would for their own children. Children in care should be cared about, not just cared for” (Care Matters: Time for Change, DFES, June 2007)

- 2.1 When a child becomes cared for by Cheshire East, the Council becomes their Corporate Parent. This means that everyone who works for the Council and the councillors elected to represent the Council and make decisions for Cheshire East have a special and important responsibility in meeting the corporate parent role. A child or young person is 'cared for' if they are subject to a Care Order or are being cared for under a voluntary agreement, subject to the Children Act 1989. The local authority has a statutory duty to those aged 0-18 years and up to 21 years as care leavers or 24 years if they are in full time education.
- 2.2 The role of the local authority as a corporate parent is to achieve good parenting for cared for children and young people and, in broad terms, the whole Council is expected to do what any good parent would do. This includes promoting our children's educational aspirations, economic prospects, ensuring their health, safety and well-being, supporting their culture and celebrating their achievements in life.
- 2.3 The overall aim of this strategy is to improve the life chances of Cheshire East's cared for children and young people through the development of a joint approach to the delivery of services. Working with key partners from other agencies, Cheshire East aims to continuously improve the outcomes of cared for children, in line with their peers.
- 2.4 The purpose of this strategy is to outline a council-wide vision of our role as corporate parents and to ensure that we are all, supported by our partners, working towards a common vision and priorities for our cared for children and young people.
- 2.5 The aspirations and objectives outlined within this strategy are by no means exhaustive and will be contributed to over time. As other council departments and partners sign up, other aspirations and offers will be revealed.

3. Background and Context

National Picture

- 3.1 At any one time around 60,000 children and young people are cared for nationally. This represents around 0.5% of all children. As many as 85,000 children will spend some time being cared for over the course of a year, with many entering and leaving the system rapidly. Forty per cent of children remain looked after for less than six months and only 13% are cared for five years or more. It is well documented that these children and young people underachieve educationally and are highly represented in areas such as teenage pregnancy, unemployment, youth offending, poor mental health, drug and alcohol misuse and homelessness.

The Statutory Framework

- 3.2 The *Children and Young Persons Act*, which was granted Royal Assent on 13 November 2008, provides the necessary legislative support to improve the care system for children and young people in England. It underpins the Care Matters White Paper, *Care Matters: Time for change (June 2007)* and the implementation plan *Care Matters: Time to deliver for children in care (March 2008)*. This aims to support the Children's Trust, led by the Lead Member and the Director of Children's

Services, to transform outcomes for children and young people in care, encouraging systematic planning and improvement, led by local agencies and professionals.

- 3.3 The current Ofsted inspection regime has a particular focus on services and outcomes for looked after children, alongside the inspection of safeguarding. The government has set out some key national indicators for local authorities to work towards improving provision for cared for children. These are set out in Appendix X

Cheshire East Context

- 3.4 Cheshire East has 460 (July 2010) children who have been placed in the care of the Local Authority. This represents 0.6% of the total population of Cheshire East children aged 0-19. The number of children brought into the care of the LA has been steadily increasing. This rise is evident across all LAs in the North West. The need to provide additional resources to strengthen services for cared for children has been recognised by members who have secured additional resources to improve provision. As a result the LA has improved residential accommodation and a developed Cared for Children's team which incorporates a new placement team which will ensure cared for children are matched to, and placed in, appropriate provision according to their individual needs. The majority of Cheshire East's cared for children are placed with foster cares; 53% of Cheshire East's are placed with Cheshire East foster parents (53%) and 18% are placed with external foster carers. The percentage of cared for children in residential placements is small, 0.09% in Cheshire East and 9% in external placements. Rigorous monitoring of cared for children's academic progress is undertaken on an annual basis and initial results, which have yet to be verified, show an improving picture in 2010.

4. Vision

- 4.1 To reach their full potential cared for children have a right to expect everything from the local authority that would be expected from a good parent. Cheshire East's vision for cared for children and young people is to create an environment and deliver services in which they can flourish, as the basis for a fulfilling life. By working together effectively our children should:
- be and feel safe and protected
 - make healthy choices and have opportunities to live active lives
 - enjoy and do well in school – all should achieve their potential in learning
 - be engaged in positive activities that challenge and inspire
 - be confident about their plans and on a path to a secure and independent future
- 4.2 Cheshire East's Children and Families vision is for:
- a place where all children and young people are supported well to maximise their life choices

- responsive, locally based services, that make sense to children, young people and their families, that addresses their needs early
- a place where no child is left behind because organisations do not work together

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5. Our Pledge to Children and Young People in our Care

- 5.1 Young people themselves through the Children in Care Council have agreed a pledge which sets out their expectations of the Council which are detailed in Appendix ...

'You will be as passionate and committed to looking after us as you would your home grown children – and want no less for us. Being in care will not be a reason for missing out.'

The Pledge, Cheshire East Council

6. Principles

6.1 Cared for children have the right to:

- Be heard and their voices acted upon
- Feel safe
- Help and support through to their adult life
- High quality placements that meet their needs
- Well trained and skilled staff and carers
- Stay in touch with people who are important to them
- Timely decisions, robust plans and regular reviews
- Access to high quality education, health, sport, leisure and cultural activities
- Have their achievements recognised and rewarded

6.2 Cheshire East will ensure that:

Corporate Parents all ask, “Would this be good enough for my child?”

In line with the Children in Care Council’s pledge corporate parents will aim to ensure that Cheshire East’s cared for children:

- Remain with their locality wherever possible
- Wherever possible ensure they have contact with their family
- Be listened to and have their views respected
- Have access to the services and activities they need, when they need them
- Be treated as an individual
- Not discriminated against because of gender, race, disability, sexuality or by the fact of ‘being in care’
- Know that everybody in the council is working for them to meet their needs
- Have our support and care for as long as it takes.

6.3 Cheshire East will support cared for children by offering for example:

- High quality nursery, school and Further Education places
- Priority housing for care leavers
- Work experience within the council
- Employment opportunities
- Apprenticeships and traineeships
- ICT support for care homes and foster carers
- Free leisure passes
- Visits to children's homes
- Mentoring from staff to support young people

7. Priorities

Our Priorities for those children cared for by Cheshire East include

- Understanding the individual nature of our 'cared for children' in order to provide appropriately for them
- Ensuring they have safe, stable placements with carers best able to meet their needs
- Ensuring that they are involved in decisions about their lives and in the development of services provided for them
- Ensuring where necessary they have access to additional services which will improve their life chances and enable a successful transition to adulthood
- Ensuring every councillor and officer of the council understands their corporate parenting responsibilities.

8. Resources

The Corporate Parenting Board will have responsibility for ensuring that all council departments and their partner agencies contribute effectively to their corporate parenting responsibilities. This may include the provision of specific resources.

Children in Care Council (CiCC)

'Care Matters' and its implementation plan require the local authority to set up and support a 'Children in Care Council' to enable the council and its partners to have regular dialogue with local children in care, involving them in shaping and delivering services.

Cheshire East has pro-active Children in Care Council that meets monthly. The constitution for this group is set out at Appendix X. The CiCC has a regular input on services that affect them. Representatives from the CiCC are also involved in the recruitment of key staff, including the Virtual Headteacher for Cared for Children.

Cheshire East Corporate Parenting Board

The Corporate Parenting Board for Cheshire East is the strategic board which will promote, support and monitor all corporate parenting activity of the council. It was established in 2010. The Board will report progress in respect of corporate parenting activity to the Trust and to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board. The views of the Children in Care Council and of those people engaged in caring for our Cared for Children will also be made available to the Board. In addition, it will present an Annual Corporate Parenting Report to the Council. The Terms of Reference of the Board are set out in Appendix ?

Virtual Headteacher for Cared for Children

Cheshire East has appointed a 'Virtual Headteacher' to:

- Ensure that there is cohesive educational entitlement and effective educational provision for all cared for children.
- Ensure that cared for children achieve their full potential in accordance with the Every Child Matters Change for Children programme.
- Be responsible for the vision and leadership of the Local Authority's approach to the education of cared for children and consult and share appropriately with all stakeholders.
- Contribute to safeguarding and welfare of cared for children.
- Champion the educational needs of cared for children across the local authority area and those placed out of the authority.

The Virtual Head will work closely with social workers, schools, settings and services to raise their awareness of the importance of education for cared for children and ensure that they treat education as a high priority.

Cared for Children Service

The Cared for Children service has responsibility for ensuring the LA discharges its duties for Cared for Children in line with its statutory duties and best practice requirements. Aspects of this service include; care planning, placements and support for the emotional health and well-being of cared for children.

9. Measures of Success

- 9.1 If Cheshire East is successful in achieving its vision, cared for children and young people can expect to see improvements in the following:
- The **voices of cared for children and young people** will be heard and will influence practice and policy

- **Greater stability of placements** - children and young people will be well matched and supported in their placements
- **Educational achievement** – children will reach their potential and the gap in achievement between cared for children and their peers will be narrowed
- **Health of cared for children** – health assessments and positively responding to their needs will improve their physical, emotional and mental health
- **Safeguarding** – staff who are appointed to care for children and young people will be safely recruited, trained, supervised and managed
- **Services will work together and communicate effectively** to meet the needs of cared for children and young people
- **Positive activities** – cared for children and young people will be supported in their emotional well-being, self esteem and confidence through engaging in leisure activities, volunteering etc
- **Transition to adult services** – children and young people will be supported into adulthood
- **Access to employment and training opportunities** will ensure that cared for children and young people achieve economic well-being
- **High and realistic aspirations** of cared for children and young people

10. Equality Impact Assessment

10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was completed in August 2010.

11. Links to the Aspire Values

11.1 Cheshire East's Corporate Parenting Strategy works towards the Aspire values set out below.

Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implementing change • balancing urgency to change with quality • taking responsibility for solving problems • Being flexible about the way we work
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating clearly and openly • Sharing information and best practice • Working together, being prepared to compromise • Encouraging and supporting others to achieve their potential
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding people's needs and requirements • Treating each person as an individual, providing choice, where possible • Making processes simple • Agreeing realistic timescales and keeping people informed

Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treating everyone with dignity and respect • Speaking up when others are behaving inappropriately • Facing up to difficult or awkward questions • Separating personal feelings from professional requirements
Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involving all team members, valuing their differences • Acknowledging everyone's efforts and contributions • Giving feedback positively and constructively • Celebrating success
Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking the initiative and making suggestions • Keeping up to date with new developments • Trying new ideas and approaches • Reflecting and learning from our own and others' experiences

12. Monitoring and Evaluation

12.1 This strategy will be monitored and evaluated in the following ways:

- **Listening to cared for children and young people** will be an intrinsic part of Cheshire East's monitoring and evaluation of this strategy
- The **effective use of local data** will aid Cheshire East in identifying areas for improvement and the extent to which national and local indicators around cared for children are being met
- **Internal audit** of our services and their effectiveness
- **External evaluation** of Cheshire East's effectiveness in delivering this strategy is essential if the LA wants to ensure it delivers continuous improvement. Ofsted's role, as a regulator for settings and services and as the inspectorate for local authority children's services, is vital in terms of monitoring the effectiveness of policy and practice
- **Positive feedback** from partners, agencies, parents, carers and children and young people about the service

13. Arrangements for Reviewing the Strategy

13.1 This strategy will be reviewed regularly to ensure that it is in line with legislation, guidance and good practice around cared for children. As a minimum, this will be reviewed annually by the Corporate Parenting Board. The Board will agree any changes to the strategy.

14. Feedback

- 14.1 If you have any feedback on the contents of this document, we would very much like to hear from you. Please contact the author detailed below.

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NATIONAL INDICATORS RELATING TO CARED FOR CHILDREN

Be Healthy

NI 58 Emotional and behavioural health of children in care

Stay Safe

NI 61 Stability of looked after children adopted following an agency decision that the child should be placed for adoption

NI 62 Stability of placements of looked after children: number of moves

NI 63 Stability of placements of looked after children: length of placement DCSF

NI 66 Looked after children cases which were reviewed within required timescales

NI 71 Children who have run away from home/overnight care

Enjoy and Achieve

NI 99 Children in care reaching level 4 in English at Key Stage 2

NI 100 Children in care reaching level 4 in Maths at Key Stage 2

NI 101 Children in care achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs (or equivalent) at Key Stage 4 (including English and Maths)

Economic Well-being

NI 147 Care leavers in suitable accommodation

NI 148 Care leavers in employment, education or training

LOCAL INDICATORS FOR CHESHIRE EAST

Fostering

- no's of expressions of interest
- no's of initial visits
- no's of approvals
- no's of reasons for de-registrations

Adoption

- no's of expressions of interest
- no's of initial visits
- no's of approvals
- no's of reasons for de-registrations

Attainment

- Take up of nursery places for 3/4

All Cared for Children

- Take up of leisure opportunities
- Take up of apprenticeships

Unit cost of placements