

OPEN

BRIEFING REPORT

Cared For Children and Care Leavers Committee

Date: 02 September 2025

Engagement with frontline services from councillors

Report of: Allison Sollom

Purpose of Report

- 1 To summarise and report on frontline visits undertaken by Councillor Bennett-Wake, Councillor Holland and Councillor Wye to the Cared for Children and Care Leaver service throughout July 2025.

Background

- 2 On the 14th of July, Councillor Bennett-Wake visited the Cared for Children service; on the 17th July 2025, Councillor Holland visited the Care Leaver service and on the 24th of July, Councillor Wye visited the Court team.
 - 2.1 During each visit, the Councillors undertook four meetings. The first was with the Service Manager, the second with a frontline practitioner, the third with a team manager, and the last meeting was a focus group of approximately 6 practitioners. After the visits, each councillor completed a report of their findings.

Briefing Information

- 3 Summary of the strengths identified in relation to quality of practice:
 - Staff are dedicated and passionate and enhance the lives of children and young people and the child's voice is at the centre of practice
 - Social Workers feel supported by managers who want to develop staff and also by peers sharing best practice and expertise

- The implementation of the Court team has had a positive impact on staff in the cared for children service and in the court team
- Experiences of supervision have improved through preparation or through focus and task centred approach
- AI is helping to reduce workload in report writing and to produce higher quality work.

Summary of the areas for development identified in relation to quality of practice:

- Finding time to attend training is a challenge, as is the paperwork required for some process related tasks
- Family time is an area of challenge, both in relation to the lack of supervisors and lack of suitable locations
- Practitioners would like Personal Advisors to be allocated to young people at an earlier stage to support transitions work and support from adult services for care leavers to be improved
- Consistency of practice needs to improve and staff broadly recognise this and the areas of practice which need to be better
- Sufficiency of foster carers means children are not always living in their local area and staff are travelling long distances to visit children, working long hours
- There are not enough good accommodation and care providers for children
- Improved processes are required relating to work moving into the court team.

Summary of the strengths in the experience of working for Cheshire East:

- Progression routes within their careers
- Staff feel supported by managers at all levels and by their peers
- Everyone focuses on getting the best outcomes for children
- Clarity about the improvement journey and what is best practice.

Summary of areas for development in the experience of working for Cheshire East:

- Lack of space in Delamere House and conditions are too hot with insufficient fans
- Meeting rooms are used by other services resulting in a lack of private space and a lack of confidentiality

- Long working hours and long travelling time due to out of area placement
- The tone of Cheshire East feels to be funding and data driven
- Pay not always correct; agency Social Workers paid more
- Turnover of senior management creates changes
- Delay in appointing a Head of Service meant staff felt alone in making important decisions
- Would like purpose built care leaver Hubs and family time space
- Would like training on the use of AI (Co-Pilot).

The Councillor feedback forms can be found as appendices to this report.

3.1 Service response to the findings

It is positive to know that staff feel well supported within the service and that the commitment, passion and care that practitioners within the service demonstrate on a day-to-day basis was evident to the Councillors during their visits.

Staff spoke positively of their interactions with the Councillors and appreciated the time dedicated to listening to them talk about their experiences in Cheshire East.

In reflecting upon the areas identified for improvement, it is apparent that some practitioners have highlighted issues that may have been a concern for them personally, such as their pay being incorrect, but that are not widespread issues experienced by the majority.

Other challenges shared are as a result of challenges within the wider context of social work, such as sufficiency, which is a nationally recognised challenge and through the Families First reforms, should improve to some extent. We have a Cheshire East sufficiency strategy which outlines the work we are doing to improve in this area, including being part of a regional fostering offer, Foster4, and our 16-25 accommodation strategy aimed at growing our own commissioned services for accommodation for young people. The work within the strategies is ongoing and takes time to demonstrate impact.

Other concerns identified relate to resource driven decisions, such as the availability of buildings and space and the request for purpose built buildings. There is ongoing work underway to implement a purpose built family time centre which is due to be online around summer 2026 and a bespoke hub at the Crewe Youth Zone is a longer-term plan. The care leaver improvement plan is being used to constantly improve on our

offer to care leavers, and it is reassuring to receive positive feedback from our Sector Led Improvement Partners in North Tyneside Council that we are making good and timely progress in this area.

All of the feedback is being considered in relation to our cared for service improvement plan which is in the early stages of being drafted.

Finally, sincere thanks to the Councillors who took time to join the service in these visits.

Implications

Monitoring Officer/Legal

3 There are no direct legal implications.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

4 There are no financial implications.

Human Resources

5 There are no human resources implications identified.

Risk Management

6 There are risks associated with staff satisfaction which are outlined in this paper.

Impact on other Committees

7 There is no known impact on other Committees.

Policy

8 There are no identified policy implications.

Commitment 1: Unlocking prosperity for all	Commitment 2: Improving health and wellbeing	Commitment 3: An effective and enabling council

Other Implications

9 No relevant issues identified.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Allison Sollom Allison.sollom@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Frontline Visits reports
Background Papers:	No background papers

