

OPEN

BRIEFING REPORT

Cared For Children and Care Leavers Committee

02 September 2025

Cared for Children and Care Leavers Scorecard Q1 2025/2026

Report of: Tracy Stephen, Director of Family Help & Children's Social Care

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report sets out the performance for the Cared for Children and Care Leavers service for quarter 1 of 2025/26 (1 April 2025 – 30 June 2025). The Cared for Children and Care Leavers committee is asked to note the performance for quarter 1 and to provide support and challenge in relation to performance for our Cared for Children and Care Leavers.

Background

- 2 The Cared for Children and Care Leavers Scorecard provides key performance data, reported quarterly, which indicates the trajectory of practice and performance across the service and for our cared for children and care experienced young people. This report highlights key practice areas with supporting narrative for information, assurance and scrutiny purposes.

Briefing Information

- 3 Key strengths and areas for development identified within the scorecard are outlined.

3.1 Strengths

Quarter one of the current year shows a continuing downward trajectory in relation to the number of children becoming cared for in Cheshire East which is positive as it indicates that our work is supporting children to remain living with their parents safely. Our rate per 10,000 of cared for children (66%) sits below the national average (70%) and above that

of our statistical neighbours (60%) so there are further improvements to be made in this area, which should be achieved through our Families First reforms and in progression of discharging Care Orders for children who no longer require us to share parental responsibility.

Over the last quarter, there has been a significant focus, with the support from IRO colleagues, in ensuring children and young people have seen a dentist and the scorecard indicates an excellent improvement since last quarter from 66% to 96%.

There has been good progress in securing permanency and stability for children with an increase in the making of Special Guardianship Orders which is above our statistical neighbours achievements of 12%, standing at 17%, and a small reduction in the number of children who have experienced 3 or more placement moves in the last quarter from 63% to 61%. Aligned to this, there has also been a reduction in the number of children who have had a placement move in the last quarter from 83 to 65 individuals.

The number of children who have a long-term matched placement over the last quarter (119) has remained stable from last quarter (117). We have recently revised how we have oversight of children's permanence plans and the revised permanence panel took place for the first time on 19.8.25. The panel includes representatives from other service areas, such as fostering, the Independent Reviewing Officers and the Virtual School. This will mean information leading to decision-making will be improved and the panel is designed to respond more fluidly to children's needs so should see an improvement in children achieving permanence through SGO, reunification to family or long-term match over the coming 12 months.

3.2 Assurance

The scorecard shows a significant rise in the reported data in relation to 16-18 year olds that are not in education, employment or training (NEET - 51). This is linked to a number of young people not returning to college post Easter, alongside some of our young people leaving their apprenticeship or job. There has also been a change to how the data is being reported, as it now includes those young people who are attending employability programmes. In order to offer some assurance, more detail is provided regarding the current position in this area of practice.

There are currently 145 eligible or former relevant care leavers aged 16-18 years old. Of these, 51 are not in education, employment or training (NEET) (35%). This is in line with our statistical neighbours and the national average.

8 young people are unable to be engaged in education, employment or training (EET) due to ill health, disability or pregnancy. 13 are currently attending a Venture with Confidence employability programme, intended to equip young people so that they are able to enter EET.

The remaining 23% of young people who are considered able to be engaged in education, employment or training are subject to multi-agency monthly meetings to discuss individual young people and how we can support them into EET and an individualised EET plan outlining manageable steps into securing education, employment or training, including work experience which is available through Cygnet, Safe Opportunities and within Cheshire East Council.

Weekly Drop ins are available at the Care Leaver Hubs and 1:1 support is available from the EET Adviser, Apprenticeship Co-ordinator and Post 16 Learning Mentor.

The Virtual School Tutor offers 1:1 and group tuition for English and Maths to those who need support to achieve GCSE's and also to ESOL students.

Equans are commissioned to offer employability courses called IGNITE and two are on offer over the summer break. Work has commenced on securing a further employability course with Cheshire College South and West which would support access to adult education also.

Our scorecard data shows an upward rise in the number of care leavers who are accessing apprenticeships (12) and higher education (29) which indicates that the intervention being offered is having a positive impact.

We have recently (July 2025) undertaken some analysis of our care leavers in unsuitable accommodation and this work established that those considered to be in unsuitable accommodation were all serving custodial prison or youth custody sentences.

- 3.3 Over the coming quarter, our ongoing improvement work will continue, with a particular focus on the below indicators.

There are currently 62% of our cared for children that have an up-to-date Child and Family Assessment. This will be a key area of focus across the service over the next quarter as it is important that we understand our children's assessed needs so that we can ensure their care plans are responding to unmet need. The management team are currently finalising a recovery plan which will support practitioners in completing assessments for children in a timely way.

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ) has dropped from 52% to 46%. There is a working group already established which includes colleagues from the ICB. There is significant work to do in this area of practice, and this has started over recent weeks and will continue to be a focus across the next 3 months. We are exploring practice in this area across other Local Authorities to consider whether and how we can adapt our practice so that more of our children benefit from an SDQ and so that health professionals have improved access to the information gained in order to meet identified health needs. Importantly, this should, over time, show a reduction in the health related needs of our cared for children. We have identified that the current practice differs to the indicator used to report the data. The data tells us how many children aged 4-16 years and who have been in our care for 3 months or more have had an SDQ, however our current practice is to offer an SDQ to children aged 4-16 years who have been in our care for 10 months or more; this aligns to statutory guidance that an SDQ should be available at a child's review health assessment, completed at 12 months in care and annually thereafter. Performance based on this indicator is currently 71%.

Implications

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 4 No relevant issues identified.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 5 There are no financial implications.

Human Resources

- 6 There are no human resources implications identified.

Risk Management

- 7 There are risks associated with some performance measures as set out above.

Impact on other Committees

- 8 Scorecard information in relation to cared for children and care leavers will also be reported to the children and families committee.

Policy

- 9 There are no direct policy implications.

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

- 10 No relevant issues identified.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Allison Sollom Allison.sollom@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Cared for Children and Care Leavers Scorecard Q1 25/26
Background Papers:	No background papers