

OPEN

Cared For Children and Care Leavers Committee

02 December 2025

Cared for Children and Care Leavers Scorecard August 2025

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

Ward(s) Affected: All

For Scrutiny

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report sets out the performance for the Cared for Children and Care Leavers service for July and August 2025. The Cared for Children and Care Leavers committee is asked to note the performance for July and August and to provide support and challenge in relation to performance for our Cared for Children and Care Leavers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the contents of the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Scorecard August 2025 report.

Background

- 2 The Cared for Children and Care Leavers Scorecard provides key performance data, previously reported quarterly, however currently reported monthly, 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.

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

3.1 Strengths

Across July and August 2025, the continuing downward trajectory in relation to the number of children becoming cared for in Cheshire East has been consistent, albeit by small numbers of children. This 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%). 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.

Across July and August, 90% of our cared for children have had their cared for children reviews within timescales; this shows an improvement on Q1 data which was 80% and means that children's care planning is being reviewed and scrutinised independently without delay. 98% of children have been involved in their reviews, again this is a positive increase on Q1's data of 92%.

There has been an improvement in the number of care leavers being in apprenticeships, 16 in August 2025, an increase by 33% from 12 in Q1. We have 35% of care leavers aged 19-21 years who are not in education, employment and training (NEET); this has remained consistent and is below the national and statistical neighbour data of 38% and 37% respectively.

The previous Scorecard report to the Committee highlighted that an area of focus within the service is the updating of child and family assessments so that we effectively understand and are able to meet children's needs. The data tells us that 70% of cared for children have an up-to-date assessment which is an increase on Q1 data of 62%.

3.2 Assurance

The scorecard shows an increase in the number of children living in residential care, at 54 children and young people in August 2025, an increase from 46 in Q1. We know that this figure has remained the same during September 2025. This is indicative of the challenges we face regarding placement sufficiency, something which is a challenge for most Local Authorities throughout the country.

We have recently commissioned an organisation called ReConnect. ReConnect co-designs and delivers targeted intervention programmes that enable children to transition from high-cost residential care into more beneficial

care settings. The organisation aims to improve foster carer sufficiency by providing proactive and targeted recruitment strategies that enhance foster carer availability, by tapping into the transferable skills of individuals in related fields. Our aim is to work with ReConnect to enable children, for whom residential care is inappropriate, move to suitable family environments, either within their own family or a foster carer. This work is in very early stages, with initial meetings held on 4th November 2025 and decisions relating to commissioning awaited.

The narrative provided in relation to children living in residential provisions also applies to children living out of borough, which has increased to 205 in August from 197 in Q1. For a small number of children, their care plan includes them living outside of the local area, due to risk factors identified; however, for the majority of children living outside of the local area, this is influenced by availability of placements. A number of the children living out of area are also living in residential care, so the work with ReConnect should support us in bringing children closer to Cheshire East.

Data for children having review health assessments and dentist visits has remained stable over the last two months. SDQ performance remains low, and this is due to, as outlined in the last report, the reporting differing to the practice. Reporting is for SDQ's after 3 months in care; however, we seek SDQ's after a child has been in care for 10 months, current compliance against this indicator is 76%. 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.

It is understood that work is ongoing within the ICB for SDQ's to be completed at the point a child enters care, and once this process is implemented, this will allow for a baseline of a child's strengths and difficulties and the review at around 10 months into care will tell us the areas in which the child is progressing or requires additional support.

The number of 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) has risen by 5 between Q1 2025-26 and the end of August. There are a number of factors influencing this, which include young people finishing study programmes in June/July and being unsure what they want to do next, taking a period of time until engaged in EET. The Local Authority had a high number of UASC enter care around 2022/2023 and this impacts upon an increase in data of NEET to some extent, as for some of our UASC who become care leavers, they do not have the right to work and may have exhausted all study options at age 18 due to language barriers. It is anticipated that data in September and October will remain high, as typically, it is during this time of year that young people commence a programme of study which they decide not to pursue and move between courses or between education, training and employment.

- 3.3 Our ongoing improvement work will continue, with a particular focus on the below indicators.

Whilst we have improved performance relating to children having up to date assessments of their needs, 70% compliance in this area remains lower than we want it to be. Therefore, this area of practice remains a key focus over the remainder of 2025 because it is crucial that we understand our children's assessed needs so that we can ensure their care plans are responding to unmet need.

We will be working closely with ReConnect over the coming months to identify children and young people who are living in residential provisions because of sufficiency challenges, rather than as a result of their individual needs, and seeking to implement a step-down plan into foster care or family care. Similarly, we will be considering children whose plan is one of residential care, to review their current needs and to consider whether a step-down to foster care would meet their needs.

The leadership team will consider the most helpful way to report on SDQ data. We need to better understand from ICB colleagues, a timeframe for implementing SDQ's being requested at the time a child enters care, to make a decision upon whether to retain the current performance measure indicator or to alter it to report on SDQ's at 10 months in care so that the data aligns with practice. Attempts have been made to gather this information from the ICB however the person who can provide the information is on annual leave.

Consultation and Engagement

- 4 There is no consultation required; the report is for information.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 5 The Committee's role includes scrutinising the performance of Children's Services so this report is for information.

Other Options Considered

- 6 Not applicable; the report is for information.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 7 No relevant issues identified.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 8 There are no direct financial implications or changes required however for context the 25/26 Cared for Children net budget is £45.513m.

Human Resources

- 9 There are no human resources implications identified.

Risk Management

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

Impact on other Committees

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

Policy

- 12 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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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 13 There are no decisions or proposals being made within this paper which require and Equality Impact Assessment.

Other Implications

- 14 None identified.

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
<i>Statutory Officer (or deputy) :</i>			
Ashley Hughes/ Chris Benham	S151 OfficerDeputy S151 Officer	19/11/25	19/11/25
Kevin O'Keefe	Interim Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)	19/11/25	21/11/25

<i>Legal and Finance</i>			
Jennie Summers	Head of Legal Services	20/11/25	20/11/25
Kathy Oliver / Samantha Longshaw	Principal Accountant	19/11/25	20/11/25
<i>Other Consultees:</i>			
<i>Executive Directors/Directors</i>			
Dawn Godfrey	Executive Director, Children's Services	18/11/25	18/11/25

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Allison Sollom Allison.sollom@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Cared for Children and Care Leavers Scorecard August 2025
Background Papers:	No background papers.