

Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee Annual Report

2024 – 2025



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The Cared for Children and Care Leaver 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 name of the Corporate Parenting Committee was changed to the Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee in 2023 and in response to feedback from care experienced children and young people.

The purpose of the Cared for Children and Care Leaver 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](#), and these are reviewed annually.

The Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee is comprised of twelve cross-party members, with council officers in

attendance to support agenda items as required. The committee is administered by officers from democratic services. The committee meets bi-monthly.

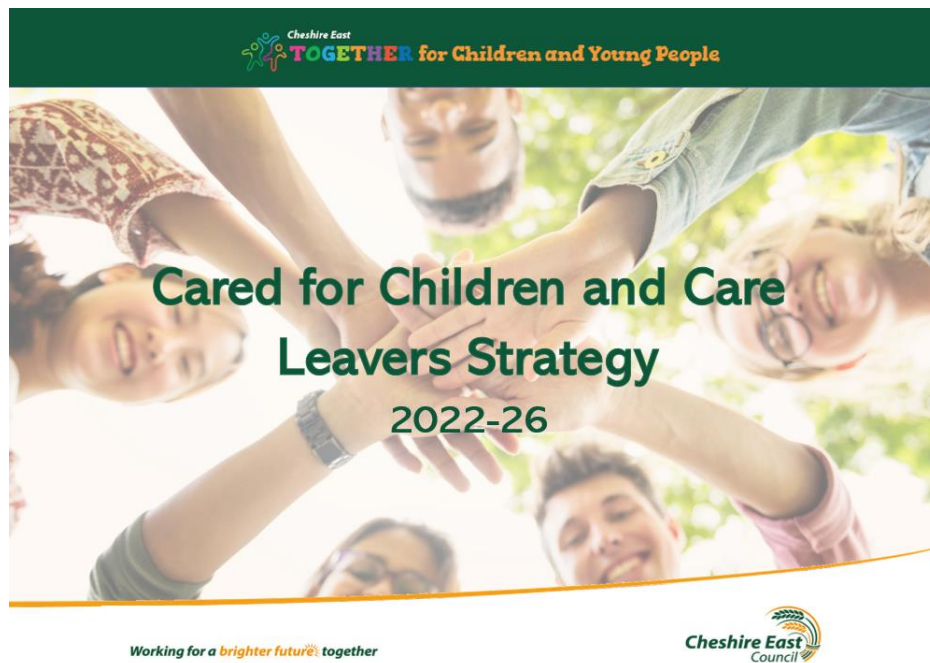
In preparation for the discussion and challenge at committee, our Shadow Committee of young people meets in advance to comment on the matters that are to be presented to committee. They share their lived experience of how services are designed and delivered and ultimately what it feels like to be a cared 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 and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-2026 and the pledges that we made incorporated within this document.

Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy and Pledges

The **Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-26** was co-produced with children and young people and launched in July 2022.



The strategy 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 care for our cared for children and care leavers as any good parent would

Pledge Two

We will improve education, employment, and training outcomes

Pledge Three

We will be truly aspirational to give all children and young people a forever home and to keep them safe

Pledge Four

We will improve health and wellbeing outcomes

Pledge Five

We will prepare young people for adulthood

Pledge Six

We will work TOGETHER with children and young people

Committee meetings receive performance reports alongside the Cared for Children and Care Leavers scorecard. Workstream groups aligned to the pledges are in place to ensure that the strategy is delivered effectively.

Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy Progress

Pledge One

We will care for our cared for children and care leavers as any good parent would
Staff and elected members will understand their responsibilities and be ambitious in their roles and they will 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 cared for children and care leavers 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 timeliness of cared for children’s reviews continues to be good, this was 90% at the end of August 25 and 98% of children were involved in their reviews. This means that our

children and young people have the opportunity to tell us their wishes and feelings in relation to their care planning.

- In May 2025, our Sector Led Improvement Partners from North Tyneside Council undertook a two day visit focusing on our Care Leaver service and to assess the impact of the improvements made since the ILACS in February 2024. Their findings highlighted strengths of practice in relation to performance indicators; the voice of the child was evident in all records viewed; there was strong evidence of the service supporting sustained family connections and strong evidence of engaging young people in education, employment and training.
- We have implemented a Corporate Parenting Champion Group, whose members are staff from across a range of services within Cheshire East Council. This group is led by one of the Cared for Children Service Managers and is in its infancy. The aim of the group is to develop insight into our corporate parenting responsibilities across the organisation and to utilise skills, experience, knowledge and opportunities that this brings for the benefit of our cared for children and care experienced adults. We have recently invited our Counsellor who is our Care Leaver Champion to join this group.
- Councillor Frontline visits took place to our Cared for Children service, our Court team and our Care Leavers service. Councillors told us that they were impressed with the dedication of staff who they described as passionate about

meeting the needs of our cared for children and young people and care leavers.

- We are in a consultation period currently with our care leavers in relation to their views about care leaver status becoming a protected characteristic. So far, this move is welcomed by those who have expressed their views. Once the consultation period ends, work will begin to progress this being agreed.
- Our Shadow Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee continues to take place regularly and our Care Leaver Ambassadors often attend our Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee to update members on the ongoing work of the Shadow Committee and to influence decision-making.
- In 2024, we opened two Care Leaver Hubs, one in Crewe and another in Macclesfield. Our care leavers were involved in this piece of work. There are regular drop-ins at the Hubs with access to a range of services, available to care leavers, including monthly cooking sessions. We have recently extended the opening hours so that late evenings are available to our care leavers in employment.
- Our Care Leaver Survey in 2024 had 92 participants who shared their views on services, including education, housing, health, and adulthood preparation. Regular focus groups are held to gather recommendations for service improvement. Some of the themes discussed include housing, pathway

plans, education, health, relationships and service accessibility.

- We are part of the regional Change and Integration Programme. The programme is a collaboration of 9 Local Authorities across the region who are working together to seek to implement positive change regionally for cared for children and care leavers.

Next steps

- November 2025's Children's Rights Month includes a number of activities for our children and care experienced adults to enjoy, including bowling, willow weaving, bushcraft, a trip to Salford University and an art project.
- We will gather the views of our care experienced young people in relation to our Local Offer, at an evening event scheduled in November 2025, and use their views to shape future developments. Our Care Leaver Ambassadors have been involved in planning this event and will be co-delivering it.
- Our STAR awards are scheduled in November 2025. This event is a celebration of our children and young people's achievements and successes and gives recognition through nominations from professionals. Our young people have been involved in the planning of this event.

- Continue to work with cared for children and care leavers to change the language we use.
- Continued stabilisation of the workforce is a priority, so that children and young people benefit from enduring relationships with their social worker. We have recently converted a number of agency practitioners to permanent roles which is positive, but we have more work to do in this area through our revised Recruitment and Retention strategy.
- Through our Corporate Parenting Champion group, we want to develop insight across the Council internally and more widely across the community in relation to how we can best meet the needs of our cared for children. We aspire for cared for children in Cheshire East to have the best corporate parents possible from within the community extensively.
- Work will continue to progress making 'care leaver' a protected characteristic as recommended in the national review of children's services.
- We are visiting our SLIP North Tyneside Council in December 2025 and the visit will include us looking at the work undertaken there relating to the voice of the child, so that we can inform our ongoing development work.
- Our recently revised Independence Packs, which support young people developing their independent living skills, will be launched in December 2025.

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 ensure that every child and young person will have **access to consistent, high quality, well-matched, opportunities in education, training, and employment**.

Key achievements this year

- As outlined earlier in this report, our Sector Led Improvement Partner work identified strong evidence that we are supporting and encouraging care experienced young people to be engaged in education, employment or training, including our unaccompanied asylum seeking young people being engaged in learning English.
- We have introduced a "Good Education and Skills workstream" which aims to focus on the inclusion of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups; multi-agency collaboration; robust systems to track data and embedding the voice of young people into planning and delivery. This workstream is chaired by the Head of the Virtual School.
- The workstream has implemented an action plan and some task and finish groups are in place to drive forward improvements.
- The last year has seen the introduction and embedding of the Education, Employment and Training (EET) team. Their work covers four primary areas of focus. Supporting young people in EET to remain engaged; supporting those who are not in EET to become engaged; supporting those unable to be in EET in alternative initiatives and developing new opportunities to encourage engagement in EET. The Team Manager is part of the wider workstream.
- There is an EET Adviser and Apprenticeship Co-ordinator in place who offer 1:1 support to those wishing to explore opportunities; they have offered this to 23 young people in the last 3 months.
- All young people who are not in EET and who are considered able to be, are allocated an EET practitioner who works with them to create a 1:1 plan focused on achieving EET. 68% of care leavers aged 19-21 years are in EET which is an 8% increase on figures a year ago. In the last 6 months, the team

have secured education, employment or an apprenticeship for 34 young people.

- All young people at college up to the age of 21 in Cheshire East have termly EET meetings. This aims to support them to remain in education by addressing any identified concerns.
- Young people in apprenticeships up to the age of 21 also have EET reviews which are attended by the Apprenticeship Co-ordinator. Our Apprenticeship Co-ordinator supports all young people on Apprenticeships which is now at a total of 15 across all ages, 17-24.
- A NEET challenge panel is held monthly, to review and explore options for young people who are NEET and deemed able to be in EET. The panel has representation from the Youth Support Service which improves collaboration.
- Drop in support regarding EET is available weekly at the Crewe and Macclesfield Care Leaver Hubs. In the last 6 months, 57 young people have accessed these sessions.
- We have Venture with Confidence programmes available to support young people who need assistance to be able to engage in EET. Recently we partnered with Eleven, a graphic design company, who engaged 11 of our young people in completing an art and design project.
- Venture with Confidence is our 12 week employability programme aimed at improving the skills and confidence of young people with a view to engaging them in EET. The programme includes visits to colleges and universities, outdoor activities, support with CV writing; 25 young people have

engaged in this programme over the last 12 months. Those attending include young people with additional needs and who are supported with an Education, Health and Care Plan.

- We had 13 young people attend a 5 day Ignite employability course, offered by Equans across February to August 2025.
- As part of National Apprenticeship week, we organised 2 Planning your Future events at the Care Leaver Hubs, alongside the SEN Transition Team. These were marketplace events, and we had professionals from colleges, Pure Insight, DWP, Housing, Adult Social Care, Supported Employment, and our own Apprenticeship worker and Venture with Confidence Team offering advice and information to young people and their support workers.
- The Cheshire and Wirral NHS partnership have offered opportunities for care experienced young people. We linked in with them when they had an administrative role available. 3 young people were supported to apply for the role. 1 young person saw the process all the way through and has been offered the role. She is due to start in this position imminently.
- The Virtual School Headteacher's report will be presented alongside this report and will give more detail relating to the work of the Virtual School.
- At the year end March 2025, 60% of cared for children aged 2-4 years were accessing educational provision. By the end of July 2025, this figure had increased to 96% which is a

significant area of strength, with only one child of this age not accessing some form of provision.

- Across the Spring term of 2025, 75% of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) that were completed were of good or outstanding quality.
- In July 2025, 86% of cared for children in primary school had 90% or more attendance. In March 2025, 61% of cared for children in secondary school had 90% or more attendance; this reduced slightly to 53% which is as a result of year 11 children leaving school early, at the end of their exam period.
- At July 2025, 88% of cared for children were attending schools graded good or outstanding. Where schools are not graded good or outstanding, the Virtual School advisor provides increased visiting and support.
- The Virtual School and social work teams have strong and collaborative working relationships, ensuring a co-ordinated approach to education for our cared for children and young people and our care leavers.
- We have had no permanent exclusions of cared for children for over five years.

Next steps

- Our workforce development team have developed an ELSAP framework and are looking at implementing a guaranteed interview scheme for care leavers.

- We are hoping to gain support from our Corporate Parenting champion group in identifying work experience and apprenticeship opportunities.
- Our EET Team Manager has started a piece of work, liaising with Council services, with the aim of creating more work experience and apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers. They are soon to expand this into businesses within the local community.
- We have arranged a trip to Salford University for a day focussed around music. This is open to anyone with an interest in music whether they are planning on going to university or not.
- We plan to deliver another Venture with Confidence programme in Spring 2026.
- As part of November Care Leaver month, we are offering sessions at the Hubs, focusing on aspirations boards, skills and CV's, employers and next steps. As part of this we have invited employers to come and meet with young people. This will include, Equans, Eleven, John Lewis, and Childcare. We also have a representative from the new Youth Zone coming to a session to talk both about the activities that young people will be able to access once they open and also a number of job opportunities they will have coming up.
- The Virtual School are attending the Cared for Children and Care Leaver whole service day on 14th November 2025 to present to the service, ensuring that practitioners who are new to the

service are aware of and engaged with the work of the Virtual School.

- Continue to progress the Good Education and Skills workstream, driving forward completion of the recently implemented action plan.
- Continue to improve the completion rate and quality of PEPs across all years from early years to post-16.

Pledge Three

We will be truly aspirational to give all children and young people a forever home and to keep them 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 long-term 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 are constantly monitoring the numbers of cared for children and looking at ways to ensure that we are reviewing plans for children to achieve permanence at the earliest opportunity.
- In August 2025, we implemented a revised Permanence Panel and tracker, which will mean that all of our cared for children's plans for permanence will be reviewed regularly until permanency is achieved. The Panel's initial focus was to review children placed with their parents (44 as at August 25) and this work resulted in a number of children being

considered for discharge of their Care Order. The Panel is currently reviewing children who are in short-term foster placements to consider whether permanency can be secured through a return to family care, Special Guardianship Order or a long-term match with their carers.

- We have a dedicated resource for our unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) within the service; currently, three Social Workers have specialist knowledge in this area and are able to support our UASC and young people in ensuring they have suitable accommodation and their holistic needs are met.
- In February 2025, a dedicated Court team was established to undertake care proceedings work. The team is not yet fully embedded and there have been some teething problems, however, there has been an improvement in the duration of care proceedings and we are now taking the necessary steps to embed the team into the establishment of the service and to further develop the work being undertaken within the team to ensure early permanence is achieved for children.
- This will also enable us to recruit staff to the team on a permanent basis, resulting in improved stability and increased specialism in this area, which should improve outcomes for children.
- Early explorations of a service available through ReConnect are taking place. ReConnect has the potential to provide intensive intervention to children, their families and carers, in

order to enable children in residential care to return home or to step down into foster care, where they can benefit from living in a family environment, improving their sense of belonging.

- The work with ReConnect will also focus on the recruitment of foster carers, from backgrounds related to working with children, such as education, health and youth justice. This will increase our pool of foster care provision meaning that we will be able to support more children to live within a family. This work would be implemented over the next 18 months.
- Our Ofsted Monitoring Visit in October 2025 identified that decisions for children to enter care are appropriate and that children remain living within their family through kinship care where this is safe.
- The process for children coming into care has been revised and the arrangements now ensure that the Director has oversight of such decisions, including when they take place out of hours.
- The exceptional use of unregistered arrangements and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) are overseen by the Director, both at the point of decision-making and through regular review. Our Ofsted Monitoring Visit identified that there is improved management oversight of such situations.
- As at August 2025, 87% of our cared for children under the age of 16 years are living within a family environment (foster

care, kinship care, placed with their parents), with 54 children and young people placed in residential care.

- 65% (August 25) of children in care for 2.5 years or more have been in their placement for more than 2 years. We are placing a focus on the earlier use of stability meetings in order to improve stability of living arrangements for our children.
- 64% (August 25) of cared for children and young people are living within a 20-mile radius of their home address. Some of those placed out of area are living within their family networks or are in the process of achieving permanence. We expect that our work with ReConnect will help us to bring more children and young people closer to home.
- At the end of Q4, 2025, we had 46 children with a decision that they should be placed for adoption.
- Across 2024 we had 23 Adoption Orders granted, and the first two quarters of 2025 show a similar performance. We currently have 11 children placed for adoption where Adoption Orders are likely to be made, within the next 6 months. Our Regional Adoption Agency, Adoption Counts, has shared that other Local Authorities who have been Pathfinders in relation to the reforms have seen a reduction in the number of children adopted, likely because of the improved and increased focus on working together to enable children to remain in their family.

Next steps

- We continue to work with our colleagues in Commissioning to mobilise our 16-25 accommodation plan, which is due to go live in 2026.
- Our Families First work is currently a priority, and will continue to be, through until April 2026, when the model will be implemented. The aim of this work is to provide improved and earlier intervention to families; to enhance our multi-agency working in order to increase the number of children who can be supported to remain living within their families and with the least intervention.
- Within our Families First work, we are going to be introducing a revised offer through an Edge of Care service which will provide intensive support to families who require this in order for children to remain living safely in their family.
- We are ensuring that there is additional resource available within our legal services team to enable us to achieve discharge of Care Orders for children who no longer need our intervention, including the progression of Special Guardianship Order applications for children who can achieve permanency within their wider family and network.
- In November 2025, we are due to begin our revised Legal Gateway Panel. This is intended to improve the rigour and robustness of our pre-proceedings work and decisions to issue care proceedings for children, ensuring that where appropriate, all children have had the opportunity of a family network meeting and that intervention to support children living safely with their families is robust. This will help to ensure that children come into care in a planned way, which is an area for development identified in our Ofsted Monitoring Visit.
- There will be consideration of commissioning a service from ReConnect, which should lead to an increase in the number of foster carers we have and the step-down into foster care for some children who are currently in residential care, as a result of sufficiency challenges.
- Our Ofsted Monitoring Visit identified that our assessment work is variable, so we will be doing some work to improve this. This includes a scheduled training plan to be delivered by our Lead Practitioners and support to Team Managers through Ingson, a management development programme due to commence in November 2025.
- We are working with our SLIP, North Tyneside Council, and staff from Cheshire East are scheduled to visit North Tyneside for two days in December 2025. During this visit, we will learn about the work undertaken in North Tyneside in their Legal Gateway Meeting, family time service, life story work, their IRO service and their work around permanency. We will be able to bring learning back to Cheshire East or consideration of how this can influence our practice positively.
- We are due to review our Special Guardianship work. Currently, the work around assessments, support and

oversight happens across our fostering service, cared for children service and early help service. We would like to streamline this so that we have a Special Guardianship team under one service area to improve consistency of practice and support in this area. We also want to develop a clear process and policy around entitlements and support for Special Guardians.

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 ensure that **practitioners understand and meet the diverse health needs** of our children and young people, **including those with health inequalities** faced by race, ethnicity, ability and disability and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

We have **ambition to ensure that we further improve responses** to children and young people in relation to having their **health needs met**.

We will **equip** our children and young people to have **high aspirations for their own health and wellbeing**.

Key achievements this year

- Annual audit of feedback following annual health assessments told us that 100% of children and young people who responded reported their experience of the health assessment to be either good or excellent.

- The percentage of children who had their annual health assessment in 24/25 was 91.8 %; this is an improvement on last year's figure of 91.0% and ahead of last known England average of 89%. The figure is slightly higher than our statistical neighbours' average of 85%.
- Weekly meetings take place between health and social care teams to help to resolve barriers in children receiving their initial health assessment in a timely manner, which is helping to reduce the length of delays.
- 100% of children aged five and under had their developmental checks completed within timescales.
- 93.2% of routine childhood immunisations were completed.
- A group has been set up to focus on the health needs of care leavers. Achievements include consulting with care leavers to redesign and improve the care leaver health summary and work to improve uptake of sexual health services and immunisations by separated migrant young people.
- Health colleagues have access to the case record system to improve the timeliness of health assessments. They are automatically notified when a child enters care.
- We have had a focus over recent months on improving the number of our cared for children who are seen by a dentist and as a result, this data has significantly improved from

66% at the end of Q4 2025 to consistently 95% each month since then. This performance is above that of the national and statistical neighbour average of 70% and 65% respectively.

- The NHS England dental referral scheme across Cheshire and Merseyside provides an opportunity for our children and young people to access a dentist more easily. However most under 18s can access a dentist routinely, resulting in reduced demand for the scheme. As such in 2025/26 the scheme will be expanded to include care leavers as a 12 month pilot.
- Our performance in ensuring we complete Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ's) for our cared for children, to understand any unmet health needs had been reported at around 45-50%. In seeking to address this, we were able to recognize that the data reporting is based on children who have been in care for 3 months or more, and our local practice is to seek SDQ's for children in care for 10 months or more. There is an SDQ task and finish group in progress and we will be implementing SDQ's at the point that children enter care, which will provide a baseline of cared for children's health needs at an early stage and an understanding of any change upon follow up.

- We continue to commission a strong emotional wellbeing offer through Pure Insight, which is supporting 150 young people annually.
- We have maintained 100% of young people that consent to a health passport having received one by their 18th birthday.

Next steps

- Progression of the work around SDQ's needs to be made, in a timely way.
- Dr Suzie Roberts, Public Health Consultant, is attending a Cared for Children and Care Leaver whole service day in November 2025 to deliver a presentation outlining the range of emotional wellbeing support available for our children.
- Set up a multiagency workstream to focus on improving the health and wellbeing of cared for children and care leavers, supported by a care leaver ambassador.
- Promote the NHS England dental referral program to ensure care leavers have access to timely dental health services.
- Raise awareness across our workforce and promote and monitor access to a range of services and agencies available to support the health needs of our children and young people.
- 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.

- 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.
- Work with regional colleagues to understand best practice to improve access and timeliness of full health-screening for all UASC.
- We will support timely and effective transitions from children's services to adult services.

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 545 former relevant care leavers aged 18 – 25 years, and we are in touch with 498. A further 23 young people are open to the 21+ offer and the remainder do not want to have contact with us.
- Following the ILACs Inspection in February 2024, an improvement plan was devised and has been driven forward. Monthly Care Leaver workstreams have taken place to ensure actions are being completed and embedded within the service. The most recent workstream took place on 5th November 2025 and 32 of 35 actions are complete (91%), 2 are amber E (6%), and 1 is on track (3%).

- In May 2025, our Sector Led Improvement Partner (SLIP) North Tyneside, completed a two-day evaluation of the care leaver service and found that quality and consistency of practice for care leavers in Cheshire East had improved. They noted several strengths of practice, including, passionate and committed staff; excellent resources for separated migrant children and young people; improvements to case recordings; young people reporting good support from their Personal Advisors and they felt that as a service, we know our strengths and areas for development well.
- Care Leaver Ambassadors joined a cared for children and care leavers service day to present the Local Offer and associated Junction 16 app and data tells us that between 3rd July and end September 2025, there were 85 new users, an increase of 142.9% from quarter 2. We have appointed a dedicated Personal Advisor to ensure the Junction 16 app remains up to date and to push notifications to care leavers of events and support available to them.
- Pathway plan data is consistently good in relation to young people aged 18-20 years, with 90% or more having up-to-date plans on a regular basis. This means that we are ensuring we understand and meet the needs of our care leavers in this age range.
- Following the ILAC inspection, we strengthened our 21+ offer, where young people did not want an allocated PA, we would

complete In-Touch calls every 12 weeks to ensure welfare. The guidance states “although there is no requirement to proactively keep in touch with all young people aged over 21 up to age 25 throughout the year, the new duty requires local authorities to make care leavers aware that they can continue to request PA support when the person turns 21; and on at least an annual basis thereafter” (Extending Personal Adviser Support to all Care Leavers to age 25 February 2018 pg13). Therefore, as a Local Authority we are exceeding our requirements.

- We have improved our service to cared for young people by seeking to allocate a Personal Advisor at age 17 years. This allows time for relationship building and identification of transition support needs. We would like to extend this by offering this service to young people when they turn 16 years old.
- We have developed a Staying Close team with the support of DfE funding. The team provides bespoke support, including in relation to accommodation, employment, education and training to young people leaving residential care, who often have a limited support network available to them.
- We have improved our oversight of performance, to ensure that our cared for children and care leavers are receiving the right service at the right time. This includes weekly performance meetings being delivered by Team Managers and Service Managers, 6 weekly performance clinics with the Head

of Service and a directorate performance meeting 6 weekly chaired by the Director of Family Help and Children’s Social Care.

- On a monthly basis, managers across the service meet to thematically dip sample young people’s case files to better understand the quality of practice. Findings are disseminated across the service and used to target specific areas of practice where improvement may be required.
- When a young person is allocated within the care leaver service, we have introduced a joint supervision of Social Workers and Personal Advisors, so that there is robust information sharing and understanding of the young person’s own needs, which enables targeted support to be provided and mitigates the need for our young people to “retell their experiences”.
- We have a strong financial offer for care leavers, including an increased £3000 setting-up grant, dedicated financial support for young people at university, financial support while young people wait to receive Universal Credit, and financial incentives for those who are not ready for work but can volunteer.
- The monthly Ignition Panel helps young people make informed choices about where they might live in the future. All 16-year-olds continue to be considered at Ignition Panel to strengthen early planning and support for independence.

- At the end of Q4 2025 we had 26 young people attending university and 11 young people in apprenticeships, with an increase to 16 as at August 2025.
- We currently have 49 young people in Staying Put arrangements, which means that post 18, they can continue to live with and receive support from their foster carers.
- 47 care leavers have been housed via Cheshire Homechoice into social housing in 2025 to date and a total of 90 care leavers in the last 2 years
- We have purchased 67 tenancy ready courses since April and there have been 30 courses completed since April, an average of 4 per month in last 7.5 months.
- The number of ignition taster flats has increased from 16 to 18 to support young people to be tenancy ready.
- The Care Leavers Survey found that 68% of care leavers rated their support as being 8-10 out of 10 with 35% rating at a 10 (on a scale of 1-10 where 10 is very good). When asked how the service could be improved, one young person said *“Nothing. J has been an absolute god send for me. I suffer really easily sometimes and J is always there to talk to when things get hard. She is the best.”*
- 89% of young people reported feeling listened to by their Personal Advisor (PA) with 91% confirming that they are confident about getting in touch with their PA. 82% of care leavers felt in control about decisions made about their life.
- Effective mentoring and wellbeing support, including support for young parents, is in place through Pure Insight which supports 150 young people per year.
- Q4 2025 data shows that 95% of care leavers aged 19-21 are in appropriate accommodation compared to 88% nationally and for our statistical neighbours. The rate is not 100% because we have a small number of young people who are in prison, currently 9. The other main reasons for accommodation being classed as unsuitable is emergency accommodation or homelessness. We have a weekly meeting to seek to prevent homelessness for our young people and typically have no more than 3 young people in homelessness accommodation.
- As of the end of Q4, 95% of care leavers had up-to-date pathway plans. Pathway plan reviews continue to be undertaken by the safeguarding service to ensure that they are reviewed in a timelier way and to allow for external scrutiny.
- 65% (August 2025) of our 19 to 21-year-old care leavers are in education, employment or training (EET), compared to 62% nationally and 63% across our statistical neighbours. Our performance in this area has increased from 55% in 2023 and we continue to strengthen our work in engaging young people in EET.

- We are in touch with 99% of our former relevant care leavers aged 18-21 years which demonstrates significantly strengthened practice in this area and means we are providing improved support to this cohort of care leavers.

Next steps

- Across the month of November, we are supporting Care Leavers month with a range of activities being on offer to our care leavers, in collaboration with our partner agencies.
- There will be a Local Offer review, with care leavers and staff invited, on 12th November 2025 to further promote the use of the Junction 16 app.
- We are working with our Business Intelligence team to improve the performance data available in relation to our practice for cared for children and care leavers, making key data more easily accessible.
- We continue to work with managers and practitioners across the service to raise the quality of Pathway Plans for young people. We know that practitioners know young people well and we want their Pathway Plans to reflect this and to incorporate up to date information and planning. Team managers will be working together to devise what a good Pathway Plan looks like and what information needs to be included in each section of the plan. They will then deliver this to their team within team meetings.
- We are working with the Participation Team to recruit new Care Leaver Ambassadors, who will be involved in all aspects of service delivery and improvement.
- The Junction 16+ App contract is due for renewal during 2026/27. The service will work with procurement and finance to ensure the app remains live and fit for purpose.
- We will give consideration to extending our Personal Advisor service to young people when they turn 16 years old.
- Staying Close is being mandated through the Children's Wellbeing and School Bill. The current DfE funding ceases in March 2026 so we will need to determine how we continue to provide this support to our care leavers.
- To ensure there is a clear qualifying care leavers process, we will be writing to all qualifying young people to ensure they understand their entitlements and we will be delivering training to children's social care colleagues to ensure that care leavers who are qualifying as a result of the Care Order being discharged are identified and offered the relevant support.
- We will continue to drive practice improvements for our young people, specifically in relation to the quality of their Pathway Plans, case summaries and supervision, recognising that these are areas of practice which need to be stronger.

Pledge Six

We will work TOGETHER with children and young people

We will work **TOGETHER with children and young people** in all that we do.

We will work to make sure that **participation is at the heart** of everything that our staff, partners, and elected members do.

Cared for children and care leavers will be **empowered to make decisions that affect their lives**.

Key achievements this year

- My VOICE is a group of care experienced young people who work together to make a positive difference for others who are cared for. They campaign for change, share their experiences, and help improve services and support for cared for children and young people. They work with decision makers and the participation team to make sure children and young people's voices are heard and acted on, helping shape policies, practices, and outcomes.
- Cared for Children attended and took part in the National Youth Work Week event, sharing views and experiences to

inform the work of Children's Trust Board and Children and Young People's Plan.

- They also took part in opportunities for November Children's Rights Month in 2024 including a Takeover Day and developing the understanding of Hate Crime and Discrimination by taking part in the Hate Stops Here campaign sessions.
- At the beginning of 2025, Cared for Children were given the opportunity through phone calls, one to ones and focus groups to contribute feedback, experiences and ideas to the recommissioning of the Independent Visitor and Advocacy Service.
- Our young people worked with the Virtual School to review Personal Education Plans and made recommendations for improvement.
- Young people take part in interview panels so that they are part of the decision making about staff we recruit to work in the service. They were involved in the recruitment of the Executive Director of Place and a Family Help Worker, gaining skills in interview preparation and decision-making.
- Young people co-delivered training on "what makes a good foster carer," to our Fostering Panel, shaping their recruitment practices and contributing ideas to the questions asked at Panel.

- Care Leaver Ambassadors have been recruited; there are currently five. They support various aspects of our work, including co-production of strategies, policies and events, co-delivery of events and recruitment of staff. They are our Shadow Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee and attend our Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee to help to influence decision-making.
- We have continued to embed our practice of writing to the child on their electronic records and in the minutes of their cared for child reviews. This is a strength in practice on the case notes of children's files and continues to develop in relation to other key documents. This practice helps to focus on the language used when writing about our children and young people and means that if children view their case records when an adult, they will be able to see that we have thought about them individually at every stage of practice.
- We will be delivering focus groups to inform the forthcoming Cared for Children Survey, which will be co-produced with our young people.
- We will be supporting our young people to choose and lead their next campaign project.
- We are going to begin ASDAN accreditation for our Care Leaver Ambassadors.
- Following the annual survey of cared for children, all services to evidence actions based on recommendations by children and young people.
- Ensure that children and young people are involved in the recruitment of all key posts in Children's Services.
- Ensure that the child's voice and their lived experience is evident in decision making when commissioning services.

Next steps

- Continue to work together with children and young people to enable children to participate in a meaningful way to develop our services and inform practice.
- Embed the TOGETHER approach with our children and young people, making sure that all staff, partners, and elected members are working to listen to and act on what children and young people tell us.

