



Cheshire East

TOGETHER for Children and Young People

Together we will make Cheshire East a great place to be young

Cheshire East Children and Young People's Sufficiency Statement for Cared for Children

2021-2023



Our Shared Ambition in Cheshire East is that:

Children and Young People are **valued as individuals** in their own right

Children and Young People **feel and are safe and protected**, free from fear and danger

Children and Young People are brought up and cared for within their own families wherever possible but **experience good care** where this is not the case

Children and Young People are **physically, mentally and emotionally healthy**

Children and Young People **enjoy their childhood** and youth and have a positive experience of social engagement with each other and their communities

Children and Young People have every **opportunity to achieve** and reach their potential and enjoy their school and learning experiences

Children and Young People **have a say in the services they receive** - and **see meaningful participation as their right**

Children, young people, their families and services **work together to meet individual needs** and problem solve, and support is based on their lived experience

Young People are supported into adulthood **able to shape their own destiny**

The borough **celebrates the successes and achievements** of all children and young people

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Foreword

We believe that through working together with our children, young people, families and partners, we will make Cheshire East a great place to be young. Our vision, **Together for Children and Young People**, sets out that we want Cheshire East to be a place where children and young people thrive, are safe from harm, feel physically and emotionally healthy, have access to outstanding education and feel prepared for and excited about adulthood.

We believe that:

- Children are best supported within their families and their communities.
- All children should enjoy the best education which prepares them to thrive in adulthood.
- Families and communities are strong and resilient with the right help, by the right people, at the right time.

The Cheshire East **Children and Young Peoples Plan** 2019-2021 was developed with young people within the children's trust and branded our approach as "**TOGETHER**".

We work extremely hard to make sure that the experience for all our children and young people is truly collaborative and that everything we do is focused on our belief that children are best placed within their families and communities. We have a strong Early Help and Prevention offer in place to support families to stay together, however there are a small number of children and young people whose families are unable to care for them or where it remains unsafe for a child to remain living within the family network. In these circumstances it is the Local Authority's responsibility to provide the very best care and support and achieve a route to permanence without delay.

When children and young people become cared for the local authority becomes the child's corporate parent, a role that we take with privilege and significance. Corporate parenting is a role that is very well understood throughout the council and where members and officers work together to offer high support and high challenge around the plans to provide excellent care and support and maintaining high aspirations for the futures of our children and young people.

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In Cheshire East our children and young people are clear that they wish to be described in the terms 'cared for children' and 'care leavers'.

All children are unique; children who come into care even more so with needs and circumstances each requiring an individual, tailored care plan. As Corporate Parents it is our collective responsibility to ensure that we understand what these needs are and that we have the skills, knowledge and resources to meet those needs. We believe that children's needs are best met when they can continue to be connected to their family, friend and communities and plan to be able to offer this level of sufficiency in borough.

The purpose of this sufficiency statement is to set out the current provision which is underpinned by our analysis of the presenting need and to set a clear work plan and trajectory around how we will achieve greater sufficiency in the areas that we know are most required to meet the individual needs of our children and young people. We will ensure that the approach is flexible, diverse and most importantly is influenced by what our children and young people tell us.

Introduction

The majority of children are brought up in their own families, but for a small number of children circumstances may dictate the need to grow up in alternative settings which can include care by alternative family members, foster care, residential care, adoptive homes and supported independent living.

We are clear about the need to secure permanency for children and young people as a matter of urgency and therefore recognize the need to generate enough sufficiency in the right places.

No one service or provider can by itself provide all the support needed by cared for children and care leavers. It requires all services and agencies to take a shared responsibility to meeting the needs of our children, young people and care experienced adults as an effective corporate parenting body.

Local Authorities are required, under s22G of the Children Act 1989, to publish an annual Sufficiency Statement for children in care however as an authority we recognize the importance and usefulness of a clear strategy that the service and partnership can work towards.

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Cheshire East's Cared for Children and Care Leavers Corporate Parenting Strategy and the Children and Young People's Plan set out the principles by which agencies and services in Cheshire East will ensure that cared for children have the same opportunities as their peers to enable them to fulfil their potential and make a good start in adult life. It sets out the achievements so far, shared priorities for children and young people in care, and the actions to be taken to make a positive difference to their lives.

As corporate parents we have high aspirations for our children and young people in and encourage them to have high aspirations for themselves. We want them to transition to adulthood with a sense of achievement and security, looking forward to a future where they will be valued and involved citizens who are economically independent and able to contribute positively to the communities in which they live.

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy details five outcomes for which we can measure progress to ensure we are all working as hard as possible to ensure children and young people feel supported, encouraged and hopeful; these outcomes are in the words of our cared for children and care leavers:

- Involve Me
- Providing me with a Good Safe Home
- Keep Me Healthy
- Help Me to Achieve
- Support Me to Move to Adult Life

Each outcome has priorities and detailed actions of what needs to be achieved to meet each outcome; the voice of children and young people is central to the Corporate Parenting Strategy and informs this Sufficiency Statement.

The Sufficiency Duty for Children in Care

The Statutory Guidance sets out a requirement for Local Authorities to work with key partners to be in a position to secure, where reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for children in care in their local authority area which meets the needs of children and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area ('the sufficiency duty').

The sufficiency duty requires local authorities to do more than simply ensure that accommodation be 'sufficient' in terms of the number of beds provided. They must also

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have a regard to the benefits of securing a number of providers and a range of services. Fundamentally, the accommodation available must meet the needs of children. To achieve this, Cheshire East's Children's Commissioning Team follow the commissioning cycle of analyse, plan, do, review. A wealth of data is used to inform our analysis including the quarterly Cared for Children Monitoring Reports and Placements North West census. We do not rely solely on data, the biggest contribution to our analysis is the feedback from our children and young people and our partners / professionals. The views and aspirations of our young people are instrumental to our planning, delivery and achieving outcomes.

TOGETHER is our shared definition of coproduction in Cheshire East because it's inclusive to all:

- Teamwork
- Open-minded ideas and discussions
- Genuine communication for all partners
- Equal partners help to shape and improve support for all
- Trust each other to make the right decisions
- Honest
- Engage and empower children, young people, adults and families
- Respect for everyone's views and opinions

Our **TOGETHER** values and commitment:

We will:

- Listen to your views
- Communicate honestly
- Trust each other
- Be person centered
- Adapt to people's needs
- Respect and value all opinions
- Do what we say we will

We won't:

- Use jargon or acronyms
- Give too much information
- Rush meetings

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- Take too long to complete our actions
- Be judgmental

There are **standards of excellence** set out in the 1989 Children's Act for the sufficiency duty:

- All children are placed in the local authority area, except where this is not consistent with their needs and welfare
- All children with adoption recommendations are placed with an adoptive family within 12 months of that recommendation
- There is a diverse range of universal, targeted and specialist services working together to meet children's needs, including children and young people who are already looked after, as well as those at risk of care or custody
- Children's Trust partners, including housing, work together to secure a range of provision to meet the needs of those who become looked after at the age of 16 and 17, and support the continuity of accommodation beyond the age of 18
- Services are available in adequate quantity to respond to children and young people, including predicted demand for a range of needs, and emergencies
- In addition to meeting relevant National Minimum Standards, services are of high enough quality to secure the specific outcomes identified in the care planning process for children and young people
- Services are situated across the local authority area to reflect the geographical distribution of need
- Providers of homes for children (including private, voluntary and public sector providers) are linked into the wider network of services and work with these services to offer appropriate support to deliver identified outcomes for looked after children
- Universal services know when a child or young person is looked after and have good links with the range of targeted and specialist services which support them, including providers of homes for children
- There are mechanisms in place to ensure that professionals involved in home and family finding decisions have sufficient knowledge and information about the supply and quality of homes for children and availability of all specialist, targeted and universal support services within the local authority area
- The local authority and its Children's Trust partners collaborate with neighbouring Children's Trusts to plan the market for services for looked after children and commission in regional or sub-regional arrangements

This sufficiency statement sets out how Cheshire East has met these standards and currently working towards developing them further.

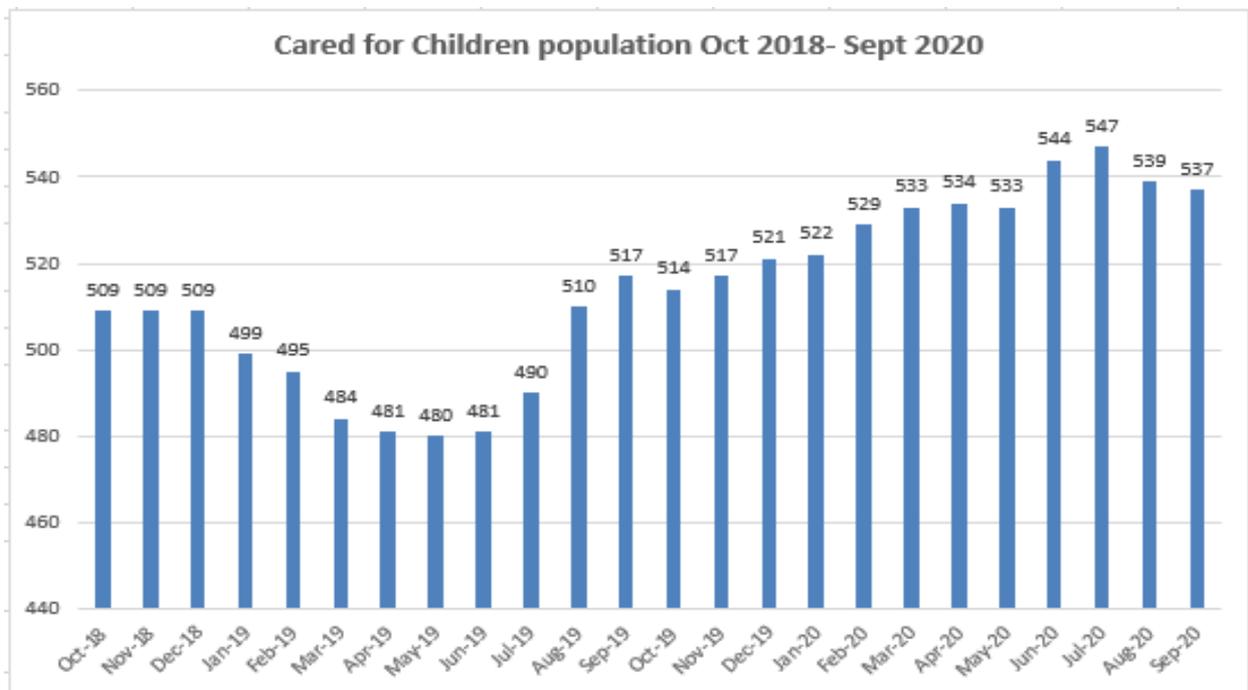
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Demand for Local Accommodation and Support

The data published by Placements North West showed that as of 31st December 2019; the average number of cared for children per authority in the north west region was 637 with Cheshire East having a total of 521 children on that date. We have seen a 10% increase in the number of cared for children over the last year and as of 31st March 2020, we had a total of 533 children in care.

Similar to the National trend in increasing numbers of cared for Children and Young People, our own numbers of cared for children have also risen. we are confident that for these cared for children and young people, that they are in the right environment that will best meet their needs; the highest reason for removing children from their family home continues to be abuse and long-term neglect. We have seen an increase in the local child/ young person population and this, alongside national drivers and a change in culture and practice, we believe contributes to the pressure on care for children numbers.



We continue to see an increase in young people aged 11 to 15 who are cared for. It has become more difficult to find homes for children in this age group both locally and

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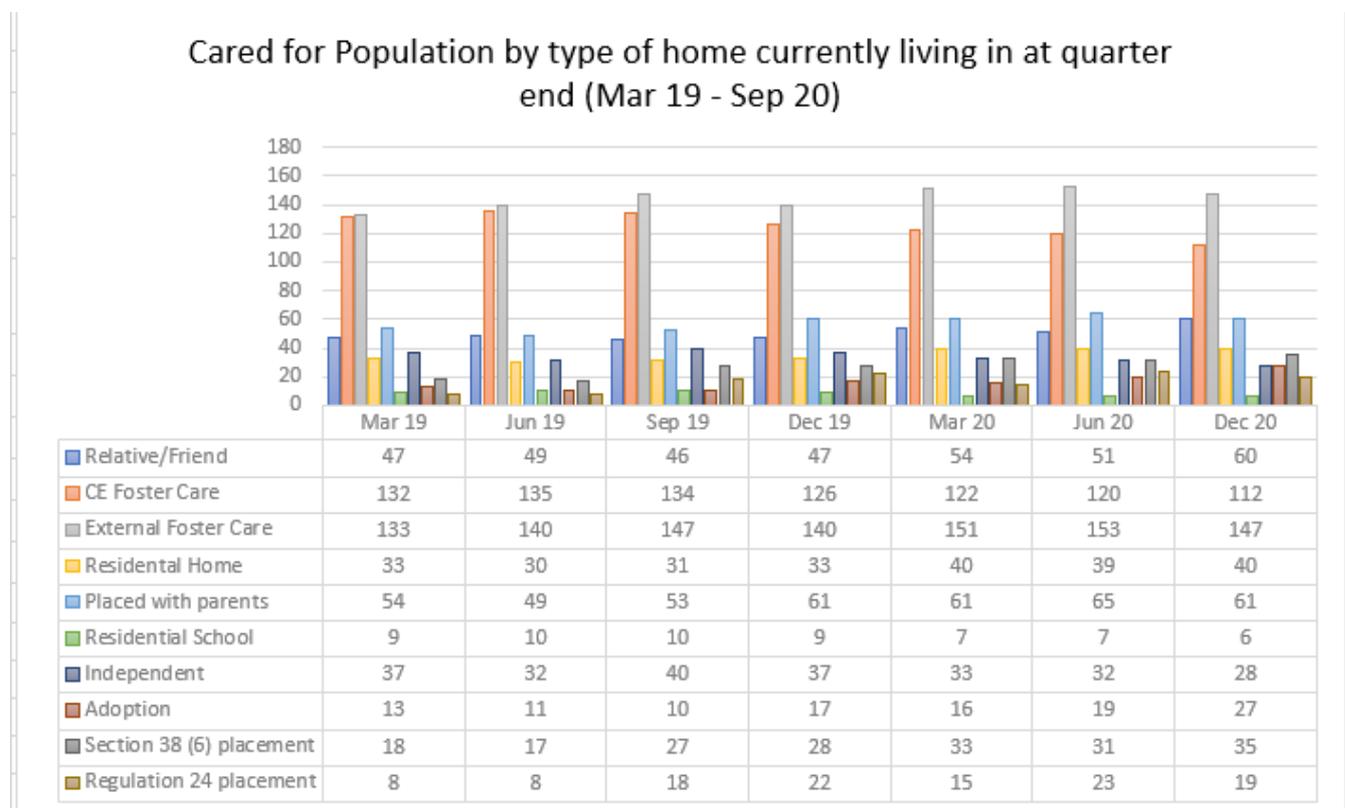


regionally. As of 30th September 2020, this was our largest age group with 37% of our young people in this category; this is just below the national average of 39%.

Age range of cared for children

Age band	31 Dec 2019	31 Jan 2020	29 Feb 2020	31 Mar 2020	30 Jun 2020	30 Sep 2020
0 to 4	103	107	110	106	108	105
5 to 10	118	121	122	124	123	128
11 to 15	178	179	183	186	199	198
16+	122	115	114	117	114	106
Total	521	522	529	533	544	537

Cared for Population by type of home currently living in at quarter end (Mar 19 - Sep 20)



The table above shows the cared for population by type of home each child was living in at the end of the last 7 quarters. There can also be a small number of individuals in other placements such as hospitals or secure accommodation.

**A family and friends carer is a family member, friend or other person connected to the child that has been assessed and approved as a foster carer specifically for that child. The numbers include those placed with family members temporarily whilst assessment is ongoing.*

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The main reason for entering care continues to be due to abuse or neglect with 0-4 year olds continuing to account for around 1 in 3 of every admission.

Reasons for admission in to care

April 2019 – March 2020						April 2020 – Sep 2020					
Admission reason	0 to 4	5 to 10	11 to 15	16+	Total	Admission reason	0 to 4	5 to 10	11 to 15	16+	Total
Abuse or neglect	61	38	44	15	158	Abuse or neglect	20	9	18	6	53
Disability	0	0	0	1	1	Disability	0	2	1	0	3
Parental illness/disability	0	0	0	0	0	Parental illness/disability	0	1	0	0	1
Family in acute stress	2	1	2	6	11	Family in acute stress	0	0	2	0	2
Family dysfunctional	1	1	0	1	3	Family dysfunctional	1	0	0	0	1
Socially unacceptable behaviour	0	0	0	0	0	Socially unacceptable behaviour	0	0	0	0	0
Absent parenting	1	0	3	5	9	Absent parenting	0	1	0	4	5
Total	65	40	49	28	182	Total	21	13	21	10	65

Keeping children and young people safe is paramount; this begins with our Early Help offer. Supporting families to stay together with the help they need to maintain this. Our weekly Resource and Permanency Panel (RAPP) has strengthened this approach with challenge and support given to colleagues to consider and resource alternative solutions that align to our belief that children’s needs are best met within their family and community.

Child Protection

As of 31st March 2020, the total number of children subject to a child protection plan was 253 which is below the north west average of 343. The main category of abuse continues to be neglect.

Year	Total number of children	Neglect	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Emotional Abuse
31-Mar-20	253	195	13	23	22
31-Mar-19	268	166	35	25	42
31-Mar-18	286	133	61	18	74
31-Mar-17	275	135	46	26	68

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Children in Need

As of 31st March 2020, the total number of children in need was 2106 which is in line with the same point in the previous year and is below the north west average of 2525. Due to the range of numbers in the NW ranging from 1007 – 8502 depending on authority, the rate per 10,000 helps to provide further context. CE rate was 272.5 compared to the NW average of 371.5. The rate across the NW ranges from 251.3 in Trafford to 717.8 in Blackpool 9% of those children in 2020 were recorded as having a disability.

Number of children in need

Year	Total number of children
31-Mar-20	2106
31-Mar-19	2108
31-Mar-18	2182
31-Mar-17	1974

Children with Disabilities

The Children with Disabilities Social Work Team are currently working with 150 disabled children and young people. 125 of these are subject to ongoing assessment or Child in Plans delivering specific support. The remaining 25 children are 'cared for', 1 having recently been placed for adoption, 12 within residential provision, most of which includes education on site, 2 are living with family and friends foster carers and 10 are living with mainstream foster carers, either with in-house foster carers or Independent Foster Agencies. In line with the focus on increasing numbers of in-house foster carers (described further in this document), we are also embarking on a specific targeted recruitment campaign to increase our number of specialist in-house short break foster carers for disabled children by 6 over the next 3 years.

Standards of excellence - All children are placed in the local authority area, except where this is not consistent with their needs and welfare

At a Distance

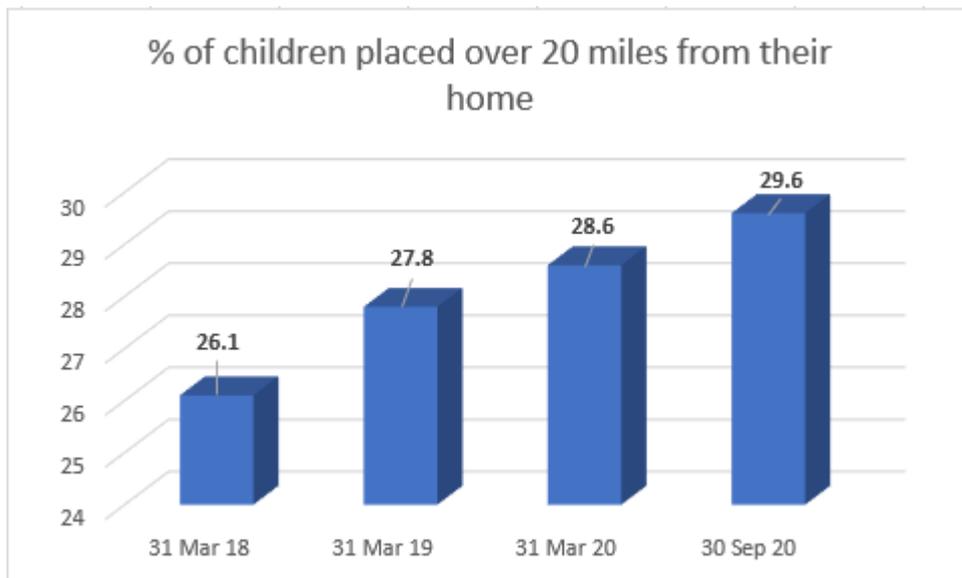
The number of children placed beyond a 20 mile radius from their home address at point of entering care has risen slightly in the past three years (see figures below). As of 30th September 2020, we had 29.6% of children placed beyond a 20-mile radius

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(this does not include children placed for adoption, UASC and those living with parents or relatives). Some of these children will still be placed in Cheshire East and some placed outside Cheshire East will still be close to family networks. The target is to reduce from 29.6 % to 20% and to better understand the rationale for those placed at distance from the authority. Analysis is consistently undertaken to understand the homes for children decision, presenting need and any gaps in local provision that would have supported a home closer to the young person’s home community.

For those young people who are placed further away there is robust evidence provided in the homes for children approval request to demonstrate why that home best meets need which is endorsed by the Director of Children’s Social Care. However, for some children it is necessary for them to be placed a distance from their home setting due to being placed for adoption or within a family placement, safeguarding concerns or to accommodate significant levels of need. Where this is required, we work closely with the host authority to ensure there are the right support and services available within that area and that there are clear strategies around Missing from Home, Child Sexual Exploitation and that it has a strong safeguarding children’s partnerships arrangements in place that supports local providers. The ILAC inspection 2019 found that children needs were not compromised by being placed at a distance.



All young people that are placed at a distance from Cheshire East (in an authority that does not share a border) have approval from the Director of Children’s Services.

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When analysing the current cared for children population and their hometown prior to coming into care the majority of our cared for children come from the Crewe and Macclesfield areas. This geographical mapping of the communities from which our cared for children originate has, influenced the early help strategy and the spread of accommodation that is required; be that through the residential redesign, additional supported living properties or foster carers.

The level of cared for children accommodation within Cheshire East boundaries at 31 December 2020 is detailed in the tables below:

Residential – Children’s Homes

Internal - Commissioned service	12 beds
External - Private provision	61 beds
External - Residential School provision	24 beds

Fostering – Placements

Cheshire East households	159
Independent Fostering Agency households	71

Independent Living 16+

Internal - Commissioned service	26 beds
External - Private provision	Approx. 28 beds

The above position provides a clear picture that for residential and Independent Living for 16 and 17 year olds sufficiency is appropriate and should cover demand outside of those young people were matching to other young people is a barrier and complex needs is also a factor. A clear sufficiency gap is apparent for Cheshire East foster carers and this is dealt with via analysis and actions within this statement.

It is recognised that our local providers, both Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) and residential providers, accommodate a large proportion of young people from other local authorities. We have been working with providers to target recruitment within Cheshire East and to have greater communication and strengthen existing relationships to ensure first choice on local provision.

Achievements and plans

Achievements from 2018- 2020:

- Our four bespoke children’s homes have opened in Crewe and Macclesfield

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- We have worked with local providers to enable much closer working; knowing in advance what vacancies are coming up and what the matching considerations will be.
- We continue to improve the recruitment of Cheshire East (CE) foster carers and have worked with IFA's to encourage targeted recruitment within CE and have seen local recruitment growth for some of our more specialist IFA's
- We initiated and began the implementation phase of our first Mockingbird Constellation
- We have Short Breaks providers working with us to look at the opportunities for more closer working
- Strengthened relationship and coproduce service design with foster carers to enhance the offer to foster carers
- Successfully achieved adoption for children out of borough, thus achieving their permanency plan in a timely way

Plans for 2021 - 2023:

- Make significant strides in our recruitment and retention of internal foster carers through our new fostering brand and recruitment and marketing strategy
- Redesign our edge of care support structures / resources
- Relaunch our Neglect Strategy across the Partnership to support children remaining safely in their own families and receiving the right intervention at the right level.
- Establish a new Mother and Baby home in Crewe
- Mobilise our re-commission of supported accommodation and independent living (increased units of accommodation from 22 to 26 and build a stock of forever homes for our care leavers)
- Continue to market shape and undertake procurement activity to further develop local provision
- Put in place a Home-based Care Framework for children with a disability in order to strengthen the support at home rather than needs escalating and requiring more specialist services (sometimes out of borough)

Fostering

Cheshire East continues its drive to recruit and retain a diverse range of foster carers. We have recently undertaken an independent review of our fostering service.

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Following on from the independent review, we made the decision to leave the Foster4 collaboration (a fostering agency recruiting carers on behalf of the four Cheshire local



authorities: Cheshire East Council, Cheshire West and Chester Council, Halton Borough Council and Warrington Borough Council) and launched our own 'Together for Fostering' brand on the 1st September 2020.

Since the 1st September 2020 we have developed several marketing and advertising routes to encourage recruitment of foster carers for Cheshire East, this has included radio and bus service advertisement, a heightened online presence through Instagram and Facebook, the development of a new website and a to mail drop every household within Cheshire East.

We have already seen some encouraging developments as a result of this. We currently (Dec 2020) have 14 assessments underway and another 3 formal applications being progressed. We have 6 Initial Visits organized for new expressions of interest. From now through to Christmas 2020 we will be approving a further 6 fostering households. We really seem to be building on progress, with each month being better than the last and this will be taken through to 2021 - 23.

In ensuring that we provide permanency options for our cared for children within foster placements we do not differentiate between in-house and IFA provision within our Agency Decision Making. We currently have 52 children long-term matched with in-house foster carers, 55 children long-term matched with IFA foster carers and a further 28 long-term matched with family and friends / connected carers. Whilst this ensures positive permanency for those children and young people in matched homes, for some foster carers it means that the ability to place with them in the future is removed until such a time that the child their care for progresses through to independence.

In addition to the recruitment and marketing activity in November 2020 we launched our first Mockingbird constellation, having successfully recruited to the 'home hub carer' role and have identified the fostering households that will start the first constellation within Alsager. Over the next 12 months we will be developing our second

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constellation with a commitment to the ongoing sustainability of developing further constellations as we progress through the coming years.

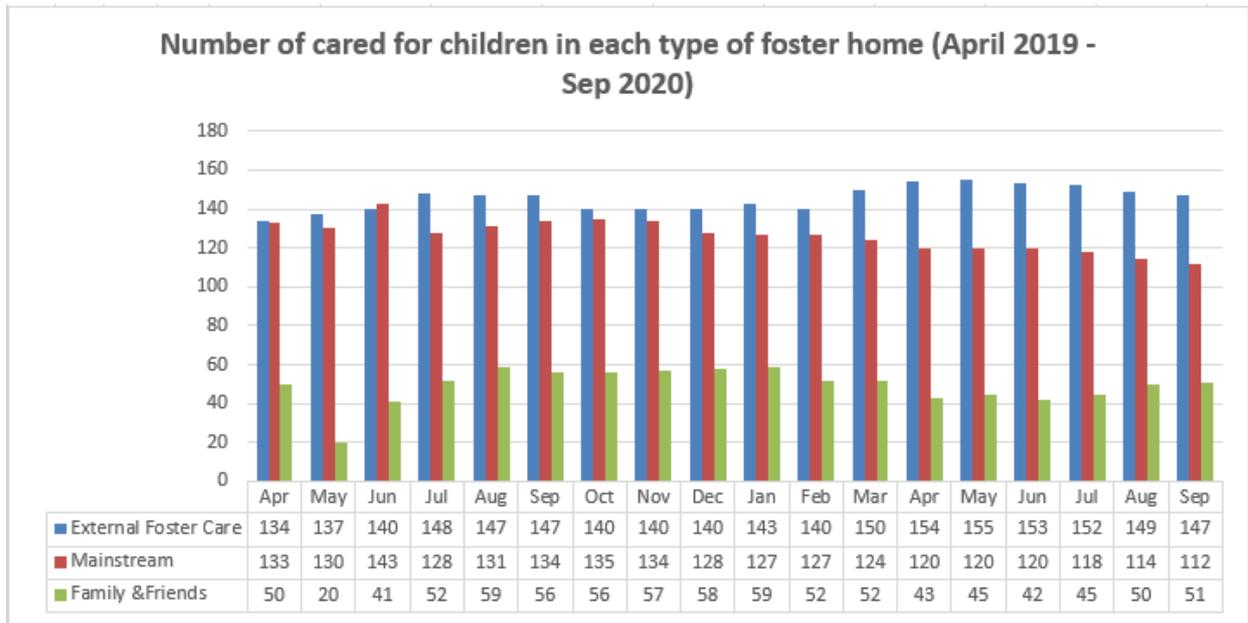
Over the next three years we will be developing and recruiting to a team of at least 6 specialist salaried foster carers who will care for our most complex children and young people. Whilst these specific carers will continue to be supervised and supported via the fostering service, it is our aim to align these foster carers with 'Bespoke' and specifically with the therapeutic interventions delivered through the Children and Families Support Team to focus on providing opportunity for children and young people to exit residential care or to support them to return to the care of their existing families, whether that be with their parent/s or wider family members.

Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) continue to provide care to high number of our cared for children and are an important resource in providing homes for our young people. As of 31st December 2019, we had 144 children living with IFA carers (30% of our cared for population); this is above the regional average of 18%. We maintain a close working relationship with IFAs and in 2019 we held a workshop with providers to discuss our young people waiting for long term families; this was helpful in securing a home for one of our young people. We plan to host the workshops regularly. Cheshire East accesses the North West Fostering framework; this provides greater value for money and core standards that are consistent across the region.

Having defined all we are going to do to increase our own numbers of mainstream and specialist foster carers, we acknowledge that there will be situations where we will need to place a child or young person within an IFA provision. To ensure that we have the best opportunity to keep those children and young people close to their local communities we will be looking to develop closer relationships and improved contacting arrangements with those IFA's situated closest to Cheshire East.

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As of March 2020, 10% of our children and young people were placed with family and friends foster carers; this has decreased from the previous year and is below the national average of 13%.

Achievements and plans

Achievements from 2018 - 2020:

- Forged relationships with new and existing providers
- Worked more closely with other local authorities across the region
- We consulted on and increased our foster carers fees and provided elements of future proofing fee increases by aligning this to the annual NJC awards
- We have developed a 'SharePoint' site for our foster carers to enable them to access all fostering based information and expense claims online
- Promotion of simpler payments scheme and guaranteed retainers for newly approved carers awaiting matching
- Launched our first Mockingbird constellation, having successfully recruited to the 'home hub carer' role and have identified the fostering households that will start the first constellation within Alsager.
- Reduction in assessment time between 16-18 weeks and further collaboration with our North West partners to consolidate the reduction in assessment time across NW and increase the numbers of inquiries translated to approvals

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- Comprehensive training and development for foster carers from pre-approval through to specialist skill development for particular needs of the child
- Development of our Fostering Plus Scheme to attract foster carers who can be supported to develop specialist skills
- Developed our own marketing and recruitment capacity
- Covid response

Plans for 2021 - 2023:

- Increase the net availability of internal foster carers (with a specific focus on parent and child foster carers, teenagers, siblings and children with a disability)
- Increase the number of in-house foster carers to a point where we achieve a net gain of 30 foster carers year on year over the coming years
- Increase the number of foster carers who can provide short break provision for children with disabilities by 6
- To develop and recruit a team of at least 6 specialist salaried foster carers to work with our most complex children and young people
- Develop a foster care program directly linked to 'Bespoke' to facilitate stepping out of residential provision
- Increase the emergency provision offer
- Develop remand foster care provision
- Launch second Mockingbird constellation and continue to build further constellations across the authority
- Reduce the number of children coming in to care by reviewing the Care at Home offer
- Continue to be ambitious corporate parents and provide care that achieves excellent outcomes

Residential

As of 31st March 2020, there were 533 children and young people who were cared for with around 9% placed in residential children's homes; this is on par with the regional average of 9%. Whilst this is an increase from the previous year it is evidence of the targeted work to ensure each young person is in a home that best meets their needs. RAPP ensures all homes for children decisions are made following a process of support and challenge, ensuring the home is working to meet the desired outcome – be that returning home or 'stepping down' to foster care provision. In addition to finding

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homes for children, it is within the Terms of Reference for RAPP to review existing homes for children.

Cheshire East now has four of its own commissioned children's homes located in the borough as an integral part of our Bespoke approach. There is still a requirement for children to be placed in external residential homes and we have access to the North West residential framework which is an excellent resource in providing homes for children and young people. We have a good working relationship with homes in the Cheshire East area and they are invited to our monthly CHAPS meetings with the police which discusses any issues in the area which may affect our young people.

Commissioners work in partnership with Placements Northwest, liaise with local providers and new providers seeking to establish provision within the Cheshire East boundary. Through ongoing work, we have been able to shape the market and will continue to do so to ensure we are meeting the needs of the population. By building good working relationships, as early as possible we can influence quality of care and seek to gain the most efficient offer, achieving best value for our cared for children and young people.

The Bespoke Project

By the time that Sir Martin Narey had published his independent review into children's residential care in 2016 we had already begun to consider what a recommissioned in-house service might look like and these thoughts were refined and developed following further research and visits by some of our senior team to the No Wrong Door Project in North Yorkshire. We are confident that this 'Care Hub' approach will not only see the return of some of our most complex and furthest placed children to their local communities but will ultimately provide us with a wide range of services that will have an impact on children beyond those who will actually live in the homes. For example, it will contribute to work in the Fostering Service to improve placement stability and support for carers, and will lead to the development of more specialised fostering to focus on 'step down' placements from our homes; we are also confident that it will enhance the excellent work that Ofsted has recognised in our 'Edge of Care' services. However, we always knew that none of these developments would be possible unless the homes themselves were mobilised properly, with time allowed for registered managers, staff teams and young people to settle into their new caring relationships and establish a baseline level of stability. In each case therefore as our homes have opened, we agreed with our partners that the first and second admissions to the homes

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would follow each other relatively quickly, and that there would then be a period of consolidation before a third young person was considered for any of the groups.

When looking at potential referrals to the Bespoke homes, it is important to remember that not all of our children in residential care can be considered. Of the 45/46 that we generally have at any one time perhaps 11 or 12 will be Children with Disabilities who are in specialist placements joint funded with Health; another group will be children with complex needs who have finally found some stability and whom it would be unwise to move; still others will have only recently been placed or are in Court proceedings and therefore to think about moving them again would not be reasonable. What this means in practice is it is likely that only around half of the children in residential placements can actively be considered for Bespoke, before any of the other multiple factors such as geography, matching and education arrangements start to be applied.

Fundamentally, moving children at all is difficult, and we have always acknowledged that moving specific ones into individually matched placements within tight timescales requires the most careful planning and engagement.

Detailed admission planning started as long ago as June 2019 when discussions with some of our young people, their social workers, team managers and IROs identified an initial group of fourteen children as potential admissions. In mid-January of this year we were able to welcome one of them, our furthest placed child, into Malbanc House in a well-planned move on the day after it was first registered, and by early June all four of our homes had been mobilised.

The Bespoke Therapeutic Team

Cheshire East Children's Services is fortunate in that at a time of severe financial pressure on the activity of local authorities, we have been able to retain a non-statutory but nevertheless essential therapeutic social work team, the Children & Families Support Team. This service comprises a highly experienced manager, three specially trained social workers, two family support workers and a seconded CAMHS worker, and exists to promote and support placement stability through enhanced emotional well-being and mental health. In the past two years, we have made significant changes to the operation of the service and in general terms, we have moved away from offering direct sessions of individual therapy to children to working with carers and residential workers in understanding behaviour and developing strategies to address it. Whilst there will always be a place for direct therapeutic work with children, there is a danger that the child can experience these interventions in terms of having to accept personal responsibility, both for their difficulties and in finding the solutions to them; in turn, the

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expectation that can be created from families (and indeed far too frequently from professionals) is that the child can be 'fixed'. The C&FST will become the base for a virtual therapeutic team around the Bespoke Project that will operate within the broad parameters of the team's Statement of Purpose and which has been recently updated and revised. At the present time, we have the following resources that can be deployed to work with the young people and staff in the Bespoke Homes:

- The Children and Families Support Team as above
- The in-house resources of the two providers
- Two Speech & Language Therapists working one day a week each north and south
- In time, it may be possible to bring in other disciplines, either on a sessional basis as required, by attracting additional funding if we can, or by using any opportunities created by turnover to recruit differently; in particular, the introduction of Sensory O/T would prove an invaluable addition to the project

The principle focus of the team will inevitably fall on the young people who live in our homes and include:

- Placement Stability, what we have previously described as the single most important Key Performance Indicator for our Cared For Children; if children are stable in their homes, it is likely that they will be doing well on any of the other measures that we might wish to apply.
- Potential admissions to residential care / Edge of Care work: we have a number of children who are living in residential care because at the point at which they required an urgent placement, we were unable to identify a suitably matched foster family for them. Our hope is that the expertise within the Bespoke Team can be used to support families in these circumstances for long enough to enable a successful search for a foster placement to be made. This work will involve working alongside @CT, our Edge of Care Team who will provide direct support and time out to young people and their families.
- Preparation for foster care: we will work with potential carers to provide a comprehensive understanding of the child's attachments and behaviours and developing strategies to address them; at Victoria Lodge in particular, which we envisage will be the principle home for this work, this may involve bringing carers in to work alongside staff in the same way as North Yorkshire's No Wrong Door Model.

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- Supporting agency transfers to Bespoke: staff will work directly with other providers where appropriate to bring young people back to placements in Cheshire East.
- Leaving care: young people leaving residential care are an especially vulnerable group who are often over-represented in too many of our adverse indicators. The Bespoke Therapeutic Team will play a key role in supporting young people in developing plans to move on, particularly where this involves rehabilitation to family members.

Children with disability residential short break

The level of good quality, value for money residential short break provision that is available within Cheshire East is limited and starting to cause a growing level of unmet need. The children with disability and short breaks teams have worked hard to spot purchase residential short breaks and this has required significant travel for children and families and spot purchase nightly rates (including transport costs) that are high. Cheshire East Children's Commissioning have started to re-engage with Cheshire West and Chester (CWAC) in order to resume access to their in-house residential short break facility (Pine Wood) that is in a central position for Cheshire East and only a couple of miles over the boarder.

Achievements and plans

Achievements from 2018 - 2020:

- Mobilisation of four Children's Homes achieved
- Bespoke- SALT support secured
- Homes in the borough for 8 young people

Plans for 2021 - 2023:

- Utilise four new Children's Homes as platform to develop Bespoke vision and wrap around support i.e. Sensory OT
- Stepdown to fostering – scheme established and carers recruited (including salaried carers)
- Establish a formal contract with CWAC to gain access for Cheshire East families to Pine Wood

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16+ accommodation and care leavers

Standards of excellence: Children's Trust partners, including housing, work together to secure a range of provision to meet the needs of those who become looked after at the age of 16 and 17, and support the continuity of accommodation beyond the age of 18

Standards of excellence: Services are available in adequate quantity to respond to children and young people, including predicted demand for a range of needs, and emergencies

Standards of excellence: Services are situated across the local authority area to reflect geographical distribution of need

We are extremely proud of our offer for Care Leavers; by working with all partners we have choice for young people and a process that provides them with a voice and ownership of their accommodation and future plan. Young people are allocated a personal advisor at 16 and they are there to support care leavers until they reach 25. Our collective actions to continually improve the sufficiency of cared for children's accommodation and support is set out within this statement and our key actions are captured at the end. These actions will be closely monitored to ensure the sufficiency duty is met. Central to our approach is the wishes and views of our young people who have quite clearly told us that what is important is being consulted on where they live and having a choice where to live when leaving care. Our local offer for care leavers has been created with the help of a group of young people and can be viewed here: <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/livewell/care-and-support-for-children/services-from-childrens-social-care/local-offer-for-care-leavers.aspx>.

We have a strong offer for our care leavers including taster flats, supported independent living, supported lodgings with host families', dispersed properties with the offer of floating support and staying put arrangements. Working with external providers we have helped shape the offer within Cheshire East by developing partnerships and encouraging establishment and growth in the areas in which we need more. By developing our block contract arrangements, not only do these contracts provide young people with a greater choice it also provides excellent value for money and less reliance on the external market.

Complimenting all of this growth is access to the Leaving Care (SaLLs) framework through Placements North West. In line with the commissioning cycle these

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developments have all been designed following analysis of data, feedback and good practice i.e. the taster flats.

Cheshire East hold a monthly Ignition Panel which is for young people aged 15½ plus who are thinking about where and how they would like to live when they begin their transition to adulthood (we think the earlier we can plan the better the experience!) Ignition is made up of a range of partners; Housing, Social Landlords, YMCA, P3 and Forum Housing Supported Lodgings, Young people attend Ignition and describe their current situation and where they would like to be in the future, partners listen and then describe what they have to offer or what they could develop to meet need. Young people are able to visit different provisions, so they are able to make a more informed choice. The taster flat provided by YMCA allows young people to experience independent living for a 2 week period with floating support to assist with budgeting, household skills, food shopping, cleaning, cooking etc. and it allows young people return home with an idea of whether they are ready to live independently and support to work on areas for development.

The panel also discuss young people who have been supported to move on; this helps ensure the home is still meeting their needs and also helps develop our learning and knowledge of available homes for children. This whole process is very important for commissioning as it helps identify any gaps to address and good practice that we can celebrate and build upon.

Ignition is evidence of our commitment to the approach of young people having a say about where they live, and it has seen greater stability for our young people. We have further developed our 16 + Ignition offer; and we have increased the number of taster properties to five in 2019 with two further dispersed properties in Crewe commissioned in 2020 in order to improve the accommodation offer and also provide some contingency arrangements during the pandemic. Our supported accommodation and independent living re-commission which starts January 2021 establishes dispersed properties in the Macclesfield area.

In March 2020 there were 33 cared for children living in semi-independent / supported living homes; which is 6% of the cared for population; these numbers have remained fairly consistent. We are witnessing more stability for children living in supported accommodation and independent living homes and more equipped and prepared young people who are ready to take their next independent steps.

In March 2019 Cheshire East supported 234 Care Leavers. In March 2020 we supported 269 young adults. This increase has come from more young people being

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accommodated and an increased number of Care Leavers returning for a service post 21yrs of age, under the new 21-25 duties from the Children & Social Work Act 2017. The service is agile and able to respond to the differing needs of this cohort.

Support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people

In the past 12 months the number of current and former relevant asylum-seeking children (UASC) and young people has remained at a relatively consistent number. As of the 6th March 2019 we supported 39 young people seeking asylum and at the 6th of March 2020 we supported 40 young people. This stable year followed two years of increasing UASC's arriving spontaneously via the M6 and surrounding roads. The offer to these young people is the same as any other cared for young person or Care Leaver however planning can be more difficult as the support we offer can change depending on the outcome and timeliness of their asylum claim with the Home Office. Some young people are granted leave to remain very quickly whereas others wait for their decision after turning 18yrs and beyond. This means that they cannot work or settle like their peers. In 2020 during the period of Covid-19 we continued to support the spontaneous arrival or identification of young people needing asylum and a further two young people via the National Transfer Scheme.

We have an excellent accommodation offer for our young people seeking asylum within Cheshire East with emergency provisions available for the day they arrive and then more independent shared accommodation options available once assessments of their needs and abilities have been completed. In the past 12 months we have had 3 of our young people who now have successfully got their own tenancy via Cheshire Home Choice and are making roots, connections and friendships in Crewe. This has followed a path of supported accommodation, advice and assistance from their Personal Advisors to make sure that their outcomes can be achieved.

In Cheshire East we are constantly thinking of creative ways to best support our young people into adulthood, one of these is the creation of a UASC Care Leaver Ambassador who has experienced the Immigration system and the support from the Local Authority. The young man who has taken this volunteer role will meet newly arrived young people to reassure them and explain his own journey and experiences. Another way to help is that in partnership with the YMCA we also run a UASC Social Evening each fortnight and a fortnightly game of football. It is a place where our young people can have fun, socialise, meet new friends and gather advice from keyworkers.

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Those in the group who are settled, working and have their own homes have inspired the younger and newly arrived young people to have aspirations for the future.

Other accommodation at 18

Staying Put and Staying Close allow young people to have the option and support in place to stay close to their Foster Carers or Residential home when they leave, or to reside with the Foster Care family past their 18th birthday. As of 31st March 2020, we had a total of 20 young people in staying put foster families. Staying Put has started to develop within CE, which is extremely positive, but this has had an impact upon the number of foster carers available. In 2020 we will be working with our bespoke children's homes to develop Staying Close.

Achievements and plans

Achievements from 2018 - 2020:

- Growth in the number of Ignition taster flats (currently 5 with plans for more)
- Increase in our commissioned block contract offer
- Greater stability in homes for children and a planned transition

Plans for 2021 - 2023:

- Taster Flat Provision in Macclesfield
- CE Quality Assurance Visits to all 16+ provision
- Increase the number of individual tenancies
- Re-design and re-locate the emergency bed provision delivered by the new Crewe YMCA commission
- Develop a stock of homes for life for our care leavers through the new commission
- Create a dedicated UASC worker
- Establish contingency plans for 18+ accommodation
- Develop staying close with residential providers

Adoption

Standards of excellence: All children with adoption recommendations are placed with an adoptive family within 12 months of that recommendation

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Cheshire East is transitioning into permanent arrangements with our regional adoption agency Adoption Counts which provides adoption services to Cheshire East, Stockport, Trafford, Manchester and Salford.

The working relationship between the LA and the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) has been fundamental to the success so far of the partnership working and has been embedded at all levels. The Director of Children's Social Care sits as a member of the Adoption Counts Board. The Head of Service with a link to adoption is invited to attend the quarterly operations group meetings. These provide an important opportunity for operational issues to be raised and shared with equivalent managers from the other partner LAs and with the senior managers in the RAA. There is a shared ownership of the agenda and a range of issues are discussed with very positive communication and outcomes as a result. The group has identified the need for input from the RAA to ensure that staff in the LAs maintain their knowledge and benefit from updates to practice and research. For example:

- The fostering team manager has been an active member of the moving to adoption transitions steering group. This is concentrating on standardising practice using recent research from the University of East Anglia about the transition from foster carers to an adoptive home.
- Colleagues from Cheshire East have attended a conference exploring practice developments adoption transitions.

The Operations Manager linked to Cheshire East is in regular contact with the Head of Service linked to adoption to discuss performance over the period and any issues or themes that may be arising. This is very much a two-way dialogue, with Cheshire East ensuring that the RAA is fulfilling its responsibilities as well as the RAA being able to offer feedback to the LA about any emerging themes or issues in care planning or working together.

The Head of Service for cared for children and care leavers and the Service Manager for cared for children and care leavers attend the monthly Adoption Counts tracking meetings and are active participants. The tracking meetings are an opportunity for scrutiny and performance management following the whole cohort of Cheshire East children where there is or may be a plan of adoption including:

- Children now adopted to ensure that life story books and later life letters are received

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- Children placed for adoption but not yet adopted to track the progress of placements and the timeliness of adoption order applications
- Children where a family has been identified to ensure that there is no avoidable delay in the shortlisting and matching process and throughout the planning of introductions and placement
- Children subject to a Placement Order where a family has not yet been identified. This cohort is rigorously discussed to ensure that the family finding strategy is being carried out effectively and is the forum for escalation of agreements regarding family finding within the RAA, other LAs or in the voluntary sector.
- Children in care proceedings where there may be a plan of adoption as their final care plan. These children are tracked closely both in the LA and the RAA to ensure that there is timely progression of the plan from Agency Decision that they Should Be Placed for Adoption, through profiling and the identification of a family.
- Children under the Public Law Outline where there may be a plan of adoption should care proceedings be initiated.
- Children requiring legal revocation of Placement Orders and “Should be placed for adoption” rescinds.

There is no doubt that the efficacy of these meetings is improved when care planning representatives from the local authority (LA) attends as this ensures a robust joint approach.

The team manager in the RAA linked to Cheshire East also attends the monthly tracking meetings and she, alongside the three dedicated Family Finders, regular work in Cheshire East office bases alongside the social work teams, attend legal gateway meetings and final care planning meetings to provide advice and a view where required. Links between Cheshire East and the RAA seem to be embedded well.

Performance

Children made Subject to Should be Placed for Adoption (SHOBPA) decisions

Number of children made subject to SHOBPA decisions per month 2019-20							
Cheshire East	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	
	1	1	1	5	1	3	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
	2	3	0	1	2	3	23

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Children subject to Placement Orders

Number of children made subject to Placement Orders per month 2019-20							
Cheshire East	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	
	3	2	1	0	1	5	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
	2	5	1	1	1	3	25

Out of the 25 Placement Orders granted within the period:

- Ten children have subsequently been placed for adoption with two of the children adopted by their foster carers.
- Six children have been linked with prospective adopters.
- There are nine children for whom a Placement Order has been granted within the last six months but are yet to be placed.

Number of Children Placed for Adoption during year

Number of children placed for adoption per month							
Cheshire East	April 2019	May 2019	June 2019	July 2019	August 2019	Sept 2019	
	1	1	2	1	2	1	
	Oct 2019	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Jan 2020	Feb 2020	Mar 2020	Total
	2	2	3	1	2	1	19

74% of the children placed for adoption were placed with prospective adopters approved by Adoption counts.

For sixteen of the children placed for adoption during this period, it has taken longer than the A2** measure of 121 days to achieve permanence. Whilst it has taken longer to achieve permanence for the children identified above, it has been important to ensure families are identified who possess the right skill sets and experiences to meet the needs of the children. Adoption Counts and Cheshire East continue to work together from an early stage in care planning to ensure adoption plans for children who may wait longer i.e. sibling groups and older children, are achievable and the right plans for those individual children.

***A2. Average time (in days) between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family, for children who have been adopted*

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Number of children adopted

Number of children made subject to Adoption Orders per month							
Cheshire East	April 2019	May 2019	June 2019	July 2019	August 2019	Sept 2019	
	1	2	2	2	0	3	
	Oct 2019	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Jan 2020	Feb 2020	Mar 2020	Total
	2	0	1	0	0	3	16

For this cohort, the average number of days for A1*** is 486 days, which is 60 days above the threshold of 426 days but within the overall average for England. From the 16 children adopted, 9 were within the A1 threshold. For the remaining 7 children outside of the threshold:

****A1. Average time (in days) between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted*

For A2, the average number of days for this cohort is 231 days which is 110 days over the threshold of 121 days. From the 16 children adopted, three were adopted within the A2 measure and a further five within 4 – 6 months. For the remaining 8 children it has taken over six months to find a permanent family. Whilst it has taken longer to place the majority of children with an adoption plan during this period, many of the children have had extremely complex health or developmental needs, are aged 4 years or over and / or part of a sibling group and therefore are children who are likely to wait longer in achieving permanence through adoption. It is a positive outcome for these children that whilst it has taken longer, permanence has been achieved within the right families.

Early Permanency

Two children were placed in early permanence placements during this period. The children were placed with carers temporarily approved by Cheshire East’s Agency Decision Maker as foster carers under regulation 25A of the care planning regulations.

Achievements and plans

Achievements from 2018 - 2020:

- evidenced base decision to move into permanent arrangements within Adoption Count agreed ‘in principal’ by the Council in September 2020

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- Timeliness of adoption for children continues to outlie national average meaning children are achieving permanency in a timely way
- Children with complex needs being matched and adopted providing permanence and stability for their future
- DEF recognition for services to children in adoption
- Establishment of the Centre of Excellent for post adoption services to adopted children and their families

Plans for 2021 - 2023:

- Continue to recruit and approve sufficient adopters to be able to meet demand and also bespoke homes for children in line with specific needs
- Transition into permanent arrangements within Adoption Counts to offer the stability to the service and the children we support

Other services available to children and young people

Standards of Excellence - There is a diverse range of universal, targeted and specialist services working together to meet children's needs, including children and young people who are already looked after as well as those at risk of becoming looked after or in custody

Cheshire East has a wide-ranging offer that is designed around evidenced need. Due to the size of the authority there is a locality approach to service delivery. Cheshire East's Consultation Service (ChECS) provides a holistic approach to advice, support and referring to appropriate services across the continuum of need.

The organisational structure in Cheshire East supports a multi-disciplinary approach to working with vulnerable children, young people and families across the whole spectrum of need. Children's Social Care sits in the "People Directorate" alongside Adult Social Care, Public Health, Commissioning and Communities. Strong leadership ensures a joined up strategic approach, facilitating good operational working relationships. Shared boards and working groups provide a platform for all teams to develop plans that align to the corporate and directorate specific priorities. Through this way of working, Children's Social Care is high on the agenda in partnership groups such as All Age Mental Health Partnership, Early Intervention and Prevention Board, Health and

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Wellbeing Board, All Age Autism Pathway working group and Health Services (0-19+, Emotionally Healthy Children). The strong relationship with commissioning ensures that Children's Social Care is well represented in service specification, development and quality assurance.

Our Early Help offer is delivered internally and through commissioned services and provides support at the earliest opportunity to help stop issues from escalating. This support may come from universal services, for example our Youth Engagement Service, Family Support, Early Years, Schools or from a more targeted provision such as @ct, CAMHS, Children in Need or Virtual School or Youth Offending Service. Services work together to support children and families and, where appropriate, provide a step-down approach to Early Help Plan's. For the Children and Young People who become Cared For, Cheshire East have developed the Bespoke model which offers targeted, wrap around support to the Young Person. Additional resource has been commissioned to ensure the holistic needs of the Young Person are met in a timely manner and through the Bespoke model, children and young people can access Speech and Language therapy, mental health support via dedicated CAMHS workers and plans are in place to recruit a Sensory Occupational Therapist.

Cheshire East continue to hold a weekly Resource and Permanence Panel (RAPP) meetings. RAPP was established in 2017 to support colleagues with both ideas and challenge for all moving home requests; encouraging more innovative and creative thinking. The approach used is in line with Signs of Safety. RAPP encourages Social Workers to think differently but it also challenges services to think and deliver differently too. Since October 2020, RAPP has been refreshed to consider cohorts of children to promote early permanence planning alongside the allocation of resource. This approach will strengthen a whole Social Care approach to achieving the best homes for children in a timely manner.

The role of the Children's Commissioning team

Standards of Excellence - In addition to meeting relevant National Minimum Standards, services are of a quality to secure the specific outcomes identified in the care planning process for children and young people

Once a search for a new home is undertaken any offers that the Children's Commissioning team receive are forwarded to the young person's social worker and

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social worker's manager. Attached to the offer will be information containing the residential home's Statement of Purpose, latest OFSTED inspection, Reg 44 and Young Person's Handbook. The provider will also provide the names of any other Local Authority whose children may be placed in that provision so references can be sought, and any matching considerations further checked out.

Where possible the Commissioning Team and the Social Worker should visit any new homes together prior to the young person visiting. A lot of effort is put into establishing the quality of the provision, ensuring the staff and manager of the home have the right skills and approach and, most importantly, have a warm, kind and inviting home.

Young people, wherever possible, visit the home to see if it is somewhere they would like to live and can buy into. It is important for young people to feel in control of their future and feel they have a say in the plan.

Residential settings and IFAs provide regular updates on how the home for the child is going. Residential homes also send their monthly Reg 44 reports. The greater the relationship is with providers the more we can support the home for the child by facilitating ongoing dialogue.

Quality Assurance visits take place across all residential and 16+ homes and certain Independent Fostering Agencies; this provides close scrutiny of the home for the child and the opportunity to develop relationships with our providers. Voice for Children (a Social Enterprise run by a Cheshire East care leaver utilising the lived experience of being in care) undertake the visits with us providing a genuine opportunity to capture the young person's views. The framework for quality assurance visits has been reviewed to ensure that its coverage is rigorous and joined up with the collaborative approach being led by Placements North West.

Prior to the QA visit information is collated from family, social workers, Independent Reviewing Officer, Virtual School and any other professionals who are linked to the young person to understand what is going well, concerns or any issues. This information is shared with the provider. Likewise, feedback is gathered from the provider and fed back to CE.

Information about Ofsted inspections is collated monthly and uploaded to Liquid Logic, any negative changes to ratings results in a visit to understand the reasons for the change and what plans are in place to address any issues raised.

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Independent Placement Agreements (IPA) are used for all external IFA, semi-independent and residential homes; they include details about agreed outcomes, review periods and costs. IPAs have been amended on Liquid Logic so that they are aligned with the outcomes detailed in the request for moving home form and are automated which ensures they reach the provider in a more timely manner; ensuring everyone is clear about the outcomes required, timescales and costs.

We have undertaken a review of the home and family finding process to look at ways in which we could improve our practice and processes. Following this a number of changes have been implemented which has provided a big impact. We now have a daily Huddle with commissioning, resources and fostering colleagues, this ensures clarity about home and family finding searches, that information and updates are shared on a daily basis and more teams are working together.

The review of home and family finding looked at the request for moving home form and working alongside Signs of Safety we were able to make this form more young person and strength focused. All of the work undertaken has resulted in more measured, clear and timely moving home requests which has helped with home and family finding searches and provided a choice.

Standards of Excellence - Universal services know when a child or young person is looked after and have good links with the range of targeted and specialist services which support them, including placement providers

Standards of Excellence - Placement providers (including private, voluntary and public sector providers) are linked into the wider network of services and work with these services to offer appropriate support to deliver identified outcomes for looked after children

When a young person enters care the details of their new home are entered into Liquid Logic and an automated notification is sent to our colleagues in Safeguarding, Health and Virtual School. Case notes are continually updated so information sharing is in place; each team is responsible for sharing information with the relevant services as appropriate.

Our residential providers are proactive in linking with other services in their local area. This requirement is set out in the IPA and is checked as part of the QA visit.

Sometimes young people do not want people to know they are cared for and we must always be fully respectful of that whilst keeping them safe.

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Locally we hold Provider Forums for all homes for children providers and facilitate a varied agenda that provides a range of updates; we invite speakers, share good practice from across the region and try to link services up. We also hold multi-agency CHAPs meetings (including the Police) with Cheshire East based children's home providers to ensure effective intelligence and support requirements are shared and acted upon.

Linking everything together is Children's Commissioning. The Commissioning Team works across the whole of children's services and have excellent links covering Early Help, SEN, Young Carers, Social Care and Adults Services.

Standards of Excellence - There are mechanisms in place to ensure that professionals involved in placement decisions have sufficient knowledge and information about the supply and quality of placements and availability of all specialist, targeted and universal support services within the local authority area

The Commissioning team is co-located with frontline social work teams which ensures strong knowledge re supply of homes for children (via internal provision, commissioned services, 4 frameworks, off contract providers, market shaping etc.) and strong evidence of quality prior to commencement and QA pre and post moving is shared effectively.

At 10am every morning the Commissioning team, Fostering Team and service managers gather round the white board to discuss home and family finding searches, where they are up to, any blockages, ideas or solutions; this practice has improved partnership working, has speeded up finding homes for children and has helped future planning as we have a board that also records internal foster care provision and respite requests. Social Workers can call in and contribute ideas and keep up to date with where the search is up to. Commissioning are able to share intelligence about specific homes and areas and there is a wealth of knowledge about IFA carers alongside our internal FC.

RAPP, Ignition and NEET Panel all provide young people and colleagues with knowledge about the local offer and support available. Ensuring homes for children are reviewed in a timely manner enables knowledge sharing about what is available in Cheshire East and the benefits of working more closely with local support.

Links with North West Commissioners enable good practice to be shared as we continually strive to do and be better.

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Standards of Excellence - The local authority and the Children's Partnership collaborate with neighboring Children's Trusts to plan the market for children in care and commission in regional or sub-regional arrangements

Cheshire East has strong partnerships in place with all neighboring authorities.

Adoption Counts is a new, collaborative adoption agency, bringing the professional expertise and specialist skills of five local authorities from across Greater Manchester and Cheshire together to deliver adoption services of the highest quality

We hold joint Provider Forums with Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington which has proved extremely valuable and promoted more joint working and problem solving. The ability to discuss issues on a footprint that aligns to that of Cheshire Police also brings its benefits.

Alongside other NW local authorities we fund a small but highly effective Placements North West team. We benefit from the co-ordination of a range of framework contracts, sharing good practice from others; IFA Quality Assurance pilots, training and procurement. Placements NW also produce regular scorecard information and an annual census across the range of homes for children activity which provides valuable intelligence and benchmarking.

Achievements and plans:

Having a good offer of local SEN school places is a key ingredient of being able to place cared for children locally. Cheshire East Council is leading the establishment of a new regional SEND Flexible Purchasing System that will go live early 2021.

Contingency Planning

This Sufficiency Statement has been written as we enter the eighth month of a Covid-19 pandemic. The Council and its partners have strengthened and adapted their support in response to COVID-19 which has supported sufficiency for our cared for children and care leavers in a rounded way. The following provides a summary of some of the actions taken that we will build on and take lessons learned into the coming years to manage to the end of this pandemic and any future crisis changes as a result of national restrictions.

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Fostering:

Under the strategic direction of the fostering development board Cheshire East are seeing positive results of a new brand and marketing and recruitment campaign. The additional capacity will ensure that we will be able to bridge the gap that exists between independent and internal homes for children. In order to be cited on sufficiency in times of uncertainty, the fostering service send out each week a list of all carers who are on standby for a potential new child to be placed with them.

Residential:

Our four commissioned Children's Homes became operational between February and July 2020 i.e. during the onset of the pandemic. This commissioned capacity provides good flexibility in order to respond to unexpected sufficiency requirements during the pandemic. We have been able to use the resource creatively during the pandemic when staffing within the homes has been a challenge and created an opportunity for an alternative way of working.

Supported Accommodation and Independent Living:

- The contract for the commission of Supported Accommodation and Independent Living was varied in July 2020 in order to add five additional units of accommodation in order to contingency plan for the pandemic.
- The Council currently commissions Pure Insights to deliver mentoring support to our care leavers. Pure Insights have been able to bring added value to this commission through establishing a Psychological Wellbeing Service and a trauma counsellor. This has provided excellent support to a vulnerable group of care leavers during the pandemic.
- A former Children's Home (Claremont – owned by Cheshire East Council) was not utilised in the recent re-commission and is being held in order to create a Mum & Baby home. The timing of the new home has been consciously delayed in order that Claremont can be used in emergency circumstances during the pandemic.
- At times during the pandemic when the council have been required to take on other responsibilities, weekly strategic meetings have taken place to ensure that the

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needs of the community are met and that cared for children and care leavers have been prioritized.

Placements North West co-ordination role:

Placements North West have played an integral part of coordinating the impact on cared for children accommodation (staff and young people) of Covid and summarizing the availability of placements across the region. They continue to support the region is sharing good practice and offer a quality assurance function over a broader footprint.

Stability of existing placements:

We recognized that the stability of our cared for children and care leavers could improve and so invested in a social work secondment of a placement stability lead who is an experience social worker. The role encompasses the values and principals of Cheshire East Vision for Children, young people and their families and early impact reports evidence that whilst we must continue to work on early intervention, the targeted support is enabling unplanned transitions to be smoother for children and young people where they understand what is happening far more than previously reported.

Under the revised SOP for the Children and Family Support Team we have also been able to strengthen our offer to foster carers, ensuring that they have access to a team of therapeutic social workers who can enhance the care experience of children and young people and support carers through some of the challenges that are faced.

Edge of care and Early Help

Cheshire East have a strong relationship and way of managing step up and step down to ensure that the right children are receiving the right support at the right time. When the needs within a family escalate the integrated front door are able to establish how best to meet the needs of the family. Later in children's journeys we have an experienced and passionate edge of care team who achieve real success in distracting behavior and preventing escalation to child protection and the need for care and support as a safeguarding measure.

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Mental health and emotional well being

- Main providers of mental health support to children and young people have adapted their ways of working in order to maintain effective support.
- A 24/7 All Age Crisis line has been in place since 3 April 2020.
- Emotionally Healthy Child Programme and complimentary CCG early help mental health services (including online support and counselling) have been enhanced during the pandemic. Our cared for children and care leavers are a priority group for access to this emotional and mental health support.
- Cheshire East Council prepared well in advance of children returning to school in September 2020 in order to promote a safe, healthy and effective transition back to school. A partnership approach (Back to School TOGETHER) was taken, which included Cheshire East Council Education leads, Commissioners, Cheshire CCG, CWP, voluntary sector, and input from the CE Parent Carer Forum. In September we recruited a coordinator who will directly support and guide schools to recognise and respond to children's emotional wellbeing and mental health in regard to Covid. Officers have also created a comprehensive children's mental health service directory covering all partners. This directory is a working document that will be updated regularly to ensure it is relevant, it gives an oversight of the provision and referral pathway for each listed organization.
- During the early part of the pandemic Cheshire East Council's Live Well site was refreshed and resources added in support of children's mental health.
- A short programme of targeted Summer Activities were delivered through the Early Prevention and Intervention teams in July and August 2020 in order to support our most vulnerable families with their emotional and mental health.
- The Youth Support Service has been undertaking detached sessions in various hot spot areas where young people have been gathering during the pandemic. One of the aims of the detached youth work is to information and advice to support young people's mental health.
- Teams across Children's Services and our Schools are all focused and vigilant on children's emotional and mental health as they undertake their day to day work.

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- Our Children with Disabilities Short breaks commissioned services have been adapting their resources to support the emotional wellbeing of our families with children with a disability whilst the usual face to face groups / activities were unable to be delivered.
- Our 0 – 19+ service has been enhanced to put in place mental health specialist health visitors and school nurses. This change in service delivery is expected to be implemented before Christmas.
- Other grant opportunities
- The Council's Covid-19 Community Response & Recovery Fund has ensured that a wide range of partners and in particular organisations from the voluntary and community sector have received small amounts of financial support to help children and families manage the strains on emotional and mental health. Appendix 1 attached provides a summary of the projects that have been funded to date during the pandemic.
- RAGE Fitness an emotional well-being service targeted at care leavers was implemented around fitness and well-being

The Council and its partners will continue to be agile in support of children's emotional and mental health as the course of the pandemic continues to unfold.

In Conclusion

In many respects, the sufficiency duty is being met and considerable improvements have been made over the last 12 months to the whole system that works to deliver excellent outcomes for our children in care through good quality / value for money homes for children that are close to home, however, as detailed plans are in place to further improve the position and increase the range of provision within Cheshire East.

It is important that the actions identified in this Sufficiency Statement are monitored on a quarterly basis to ensure the improvement journey continues and the changes to the number / profile of children in care and the internal / external accommodation market provide appropriate influence on future actions. This sufficiency statement is used dynamically, and the actions are monitored by leaders to ensure that they are implemented. Cheshire East CSC team recognize the value that the Sufficiency Statement brings to ongoing service developments and as such key performance

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indicators are agreed by senior managers and accountability is sought through CPOG and internal reviews.

The key to performance in this area is ensuring the levels and quality of accommodation for children in care across the market is maximised. The right home at the start and the stability for children is the key to performance against the sufficiency duty. All our actions should focus on high quality outcomes for our cared for children, their voice should be loud and influence the way we work towards good quality, stable homes for children that are value for money.

Decision making should reflect the importance of effective early help for children and families and this continuing across the whole life course. Continuous reflection and effective decision making that is sustainable across the lifetime will provide excellent outcomes for our children in care.

Proposed Actions

This action plan will be updated / added to on a quarterly basis and monitored at the Corporate Parenting Operational Group – workstream 3.

Standard of Excellence: All children are placed in the local authority area, except where this is not consistent with their needs and welfare.		
Action	Timeframe	Update
Review Resource Allocation Panel (RAP) and associated meetings	April 2021	
Further build our edge of care support structures / resources	Ongoing	
Continue to market shape and undertake activity to further develop local provision through work with external agency providers, other local authorities, Placements North West etc	Ongoing	
Re-commission the Children's Care at Home Framework for children with	October 2021	

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a disability and edge of care, in order to strengthen the support at home rather than needs escalating and requiring more specialist services		
Significantly improve the recruitment and retention of internal foster carers (see strategy and action plan)	Ongoing	
Mobilise the re-commission of the Supported Accommodation and Independent Living commission.	Jan / Feb 2021	
Standard of Excellence: All children with a plan of adoption are placed with an adoptive family within 12 months of that plan being approved.		
Action	Timeframe	Update
To increase the number of adopters for the children coming through the care planning process in each LA.	Ongoing	
To deliver a marketing campaign that will reach more adopters for BME children and sibling groups.	Ongoing	
Develop a tracking system that will ensure all children who potentially may be adopted are tracked through the process avoiding delays	Ongoing	
Adoption Counts puts in place approvals to sustain the adoption support Centre of Excellence, offering an improved support offer across the region to all adopters in need of professional advice/input	March 2021	

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Standard of Excellence: There is a diverse range of universal, targeted and specialist services working together to meet children’s needs, including children and young people who are already looked after as well as those at risk of becoming looked after or in custody.

Action	Timeframe	Update
Implement the priority actions from the Children’s Joint Commissioning Strategy	Jan 2021 – Dec 2022	
CYPP vision and priorities	Ongoing	
To strengthen and target @CT resource to support families on the edge of care or custody	Ongoing	
To deliver and strengthen the Bespoke model of delivery	Ongoing	

Standard of Excellence: Our Children’s Trust (including housing) work together to secure a range of provision to meet the needs of those who become looked after at the age of 16 and 17, and to support the continuity of education or accommodation beyond the age of 18.

Action	Timeframe	Update
Mobilise the re-commission of 16+ Supported Accommodation and Independent Living, including: Increased units of accommodation New dispersed properties in the North Re-configured and re-located emergency accommodation in the South Formal offer of work placements and apprenticeships for our care leavers Develop a small stock of homes for life for care leavers	February 2021 and throughout contract term	
Develop a robust contingency plan for emergency housing for 18+	January 2021	

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Develop our Supported Lodgings offer further to offer support to young people with more complex needs. Support and influence the establishment of a new supported lodgings Lot within the NW SaILS	April 2021	
Complete priority actions from the NEET Summit in order to improve access to EET for our vulnerable groups	Ongoing	
Mobilise ESF Journey First in order to support care leavers into routes to employment	October 2020 – February 2021	
Voice for Children / Care Leavers team – Dragons Den to support care leavers with their business / employment ideas	January 2021	
CE Quality Assurance Visits to all 16+ provision	Ongoing	
Independent living skills – targeted work with 15 & 16 year olds in residential and foster care	Ongoing	
<p>Standard of Excellence: Services are available in adequate quantity to respond to children and young people including predicted demand for a range of needs, and emergencies.</p> <p>Standard of Excellence: Services are situated across the local authority area to reflect geographical distribution of need</p>		
Action	Timeframe	Update
Implement the recruitment and retention strategy action plan to: Increase the net availability of internal foster carers by 30 foster carers year on year (with a specific	Ongoing	

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<p>focus on parent and child carers, teenagers, siblings and children with a disability) Increase the number of Foster Carers who can provide short break provision for children with disabilities by over 6. Develop a specialist foster care program (including salaried carers) directly linked to 'Bespoke' to facilitate stepping out of residential provision Increase the emergency provision offer Develop remand foster care provision Launch second Mockingbird constellation and continue to build further constellations across the authority Reduce the number of children coming in to care by reviewing the Care at Home offer.</p>		
<p>Develop the wrap around support offer in order to deliver our Bespoke vision.</p>	<p>2021</p>	
<p>Establish a formal contractual arrangement with CWAC in order to access Pine Wood (residential short break facility)</p>	<p>March 2021</p>	
<p>Establish a Mum and Baby home out of Claremont in Crewe</p>	<p>September 2021</p>	

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Standard of Excellence: In addition to meeting relevant National Minimum Standards, services are of a quality to secure the specific outcomes identified in the care planning process for children and young people.

Action	Timeframe	Update
Increase the number of pre moving home visits	Ongoing	
Review and refresh the Quality Assurance visit framework and timetable, giving thought to a virtual approach given business continuity impacts. Drop-in and un-announced visits being a feature of our approach.	Ongoing	
Report Quality Assurance themes to Social Care Leadership Team.	Quarterly	

Standard of Excellence: Universal services know when a child or young person is looked after and have good links with the range of targeted and specialist services which support them, including placement providers.

Standard of Excellence: Placement providers (including private, voluntary and public sector providers) are linked into the wider network of services and work with these services to offer appropriate support to deliver identified outcomes for looked after children.

Action	Timeframe	Update
To further develop the Provider Forums with Partners and promote and re-affirm the wider offer for children and young people.	Ongoing	
To review the membership of RAP on a regular basis and ensure scope and communication is effective.	Ongoing	
Review format and attendance at CHAPs	March 2021	

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<p>To ensure that all providers of accommodation and support are aware of the wide range of support captured on Live Well and that this is promoted at the range of partnership forums.</p>	<p>April 2021</p>	
<p>Standard of Excellence: There are mechanisms in place to ensure that professionals involved in placement decisions have sufficient knowledge and information about the supply and quality of placements and availability of all specialist, targeted and universal support services within the local authority area.</p>		
<p>Action</p>	<p>Timeframe</p>	<p>Update</p>
<p>Increase in the number of joint visits with Commissioning and Social Workers to homes for children prior to moving</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	
<p>Develop greater links between Early Help and Providers within Cheshire East</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	
<p>Develop partnerships and links with local providers through Provider Forums and extension of our Ignition approach.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	
<p>Standard of Excellence: The local authority and the Children’s Partnership collaborate with neighbouring Children’s Trusts to plan the market for children in care and commission in regional or sub-regional arrangements.</p>		
<p>Action</p>	<p>Timeframe</p>	<p>Update</p>
<p>To explore further opportunities to collaborate with neighbouring authorities in order to manage the market for independent fostering, residential care and Leaving Care more effectively</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	

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Performance Management Scorecard for Cared for Children's Accommodation

Key performance measures to supplement those included in service scorecards:

		2020-2021				Target	Comment
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
1	Actions in published sufficiency statement reviewed					Qtly review	
2	% of cared for children accommodated beyond 20 miles					20%	
3	% of cared for children in external agency homes that are rated good or outstanding					100%	
4	Number of cared for children in external agency homes rated inadequate					0	
5	Average weekly cost of external agency homes: Residential IFA					£3700 £800	
7	% occupancy level for commissioned residential					95%	
8	Contracts in place for external agency homes					100%	
9	Individual Placement Agreements for external agency homes for children which provide bespoke outcomes for cared for children					100%	
10	At least one compliance visit undertaken pa for each cared					100%	

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	for child in an external agency home						
11	Recruit and establish a team of 6 specialist salaried foster carers to care for our most complex children and young people.					6	
12	Increase the number of in-house mainstream Foster Carers by 30 over each of the coming 3 years, resulting in a net gain of 90.					90	
13	Increase the number of Specialist Mainstream Short Break Carers by 6 over three years. 1 in year 1, 2 in year 2 and 3 in year 3.					6	

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