
Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting:	14 September 2021
Report Title:	Corporate Parenting Progress Report
Report of:	Ged Rowney, Director of Children's Services
Ward(s) Affected:	All

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report advises the Corporate Parenting Committee of how the service is delivering the priorities for cared for children and care leavers which are clearly set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- 1.2. This report provides the sixth update to the Corporate Parenting Committee since the restrictions of Covid-19 came into force. Services for cared for children and care leavers embraced new ways of working in the initial stages of the pandemic; this report outlines any existing variations to our statutory service delivery and also highlights the progress in planning for children and young people as restrictions are lifted.
- 1.3. The Corporate Parenting Scorecard for quarter 1 2021-22 is included within the Appendix.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to:
 - Note the contents of the report
 - Provide support and challenge to the local authority actions in respect of the report and the performance in the scorecard.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1. The Corporate Parenting Committee is an advisory group to the Children and Families Committee and, as such, needs to be aware of any national or local issues that are likely to impact on cared for children and care leavers.

- 3.2. The Corporate Parenting Committee needs to be able to scrutinise and challenge performance to improve outcomes for cared for children and young people and care leavers.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. None; this is an update report.

5. Background

- 5.1. This report provides an update to the Corporate Parenting Committee since the last report which was presented on the 30 March 2021. Frontline services, in line with the priorities set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy, continue to deliver our statutory duties and 18 months into the pandemic we continue to see evidence of permanence for children within the Court arena, including an increasing number of children achieving adoption compared to the previous year. 26 babies and children (over twice as many as last year) have been matched and permanently placed (as of March 2021). So far this year we have achieved five adoptions with many more before the Court. The tremendous efforts of our frontline colleagues, partners, and children and young people themselves, is testament to the resilience that exists within the services that we deliver and the children and families that we serve.
- 5.2. The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 for Children's Social Care Services continue to reflect the amendments authorised on the 25 September 2020. This ultimately means that frontline services have a statutory obligation to operate within 'a mainly business as usual' model. There remains a small number of regulations in place to assist social care services in responsibly managing their statutory safeguarding responsibilities to children and young people whilst managing the risks of the virus to frontline practitioners. These temporary regulations remain in place but will likely end on 30 September 2021, unless the Government decides to extend beyond this date. This will mean that all visits will need to be undertaken face to face and that 'virtual' visits are not permitted.
- 5.3. The service continues to use individual risk assessments to support a safe service delivered for children, young people, their parents, carers and family members and also our frontline colleagues. These risk assessments include the physical risk management and also the emotional impact of the prolonged period of alternative ways of working where there are many avenues available including mindfulness, the employee assistance programme and home-based risk assessments. Daily monitoring returns of staff are in place to ensure appropriate oversight of staff and their welfare. The corporate response to promoting diversity, equality and inclusion

throughout the pandemic for the families who access our services and the frontline colleagues who deliver them has been well received.

6. Pledge 1 - Being a Good Corporate Parent

- 6.1.** Annemarie Parker was appointed as permanent Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers and started with us on 1 March 2021. Cheshire East Council is committed to the pledges of the Corporate Parenting Strategy which were endorsed at full council on the 13 December 2018. We are keen to truly understand the lived experience of our children and young people and, like no other time before, we must ensure that their views, wishes and feelings are captured and shape the way forward in how we continue to prioritise their needs.
- 6.2.** The intention was to develop a new Corporate Parenting Strategy in 2020, ready to launch in 2021. However, due to the increased demands from the Covid-19 pandemic, this was put on hold. The current plan is to review and refresh the Corporate Parenting Strategy over the next few months, to be launched alongside the new Children and Young People's Plan in March/April 2022. An outline timescale for actions will be presented to Committee in a separate report.
- 6.3.** The participation and engagement survey was rolled out in early January 2021 with the intention of truly understanding the lived experiences of our cared for children and young people. 85 completed surveys were received in total. The survey was accessed by young people using a website link. This was promoted to young people via their social workers, IROs, by social media platforms and newsletters.
- 6.4.** The survey asked cared for children and young people to rate the support that they have received from their social worker. There was a total of 79 responses to this question. 34 young people (which is 43% of the total number of responses) rated the support as 10 out of 10 (10 being fantastic), 31 young people gave ratings of between 6 and 9 (39.3% of the responses), 14 young people gave a rating of 5 or below, which was 17.7% of the total number of responses.
- 6.5.** We also asked young people if they felt listened to by their social worker. There was a total of 80 responses, 54 young people stated that they "always" feel listened to, which is 67.5% of the responses. 21 young people stated that they "sometimes" feel listened to. 5 young people stated that they "never" feel listened to, which accounts for 6.3% of the total.
- 6.6.** The results of the survey were shared at a Practice and Performance session with our social work teams in July 2021. Frontline colleagues have

been asked to send pledges in response to the survey results and these will be shared with children and young people. Additionally, the results of the survey have been shared within the Corporate Parenting Operational Group workstreams with a view to improving the experiences of our children and young people.

- 6.7. We are ambitious corporate parents to our children, young people and care experienced adults. We made the commitment in 2017 to embrace the covenant and new statutory duties and the responsibility upon local authorities to extend their support to care experienced adults to 25. The Care Leavers' Service has continued to 'reach out' to our care experienced adults who had chosen not to continue to access a service pre-Covid. We saw an increase in care experienced adults accepting the support offered during the pandemic and this has included support provided in relation to emotional wellbeing, finances, and support with employment.
- 6.8. My Voice (our Children in Care Council) has continued throughout the pandemic through virtual sessions and has now reverted back to face-to-face meetings. During the school holidays, since February 2021, Activity Days have taken place virtually led by Sophie Cliffe, our Participation Worker. Additional sessions are on offer throughout the summer holidays.
- 6.9. Officers and members are keen to re-establish plans for frontline visits to take place across the service and the menu of options to support in the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy was presented to Members at committee in September 2020. These opportunities include attendance at our Corporate Parenting workstream groups, participating in the Fostering Panel and virtual visits to our commissioned children's homes. This has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and is a key part of current action planning. These observations and interactions will enable Members to gain an understanding of frontline service delivery and collectively, with officers, continue to influence the way that Cheshire East Council prioritises our cared for children and young people and care leavers, particularly during this challenging time. Feedback from interactions has already demonstrated impact as Members are reporting having a better understanding of the pressures faced by frontlines colleagues as well as a greater understanding of the complexity of need presented across the service. This feedback will continue to be used to develop participation and services.

7. Pledge 2 – We will improve education, employment and employment outcomes.

- 7.1. Throughout the pandemic, the Virtual School Advisors monitored and tracked each child/young person to ensure clear communication and support was in place. Children and young people were supported regarding

the return to school, in particular those from transition year groups and those moving to new schools.

- 7.2. Pupil Premium Funding has been used to support the purchase of ICT equipment to ensure that all children and young people were able to access remote learning. Funding is also in place for individual children to ensure they have had access to extra tuition and for carers to support continued access to education/activities whilst at home.
- 7.3. Support from the Post 16 Learning Mentor and Advisor has meant that no Year 11 pupils moving into post 16 have been unable to access the courses they identified. There has been a reduction in the number of young people aged 16-18 who are not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) at the start of the new academic year, and the Autumn term programme for post 16 young people identified as NEET was successfully implemented.
- 7.4. Early Years support has ensured all the carers of our 2-4-year-old children have received advice, guidance and support on learning activities and useful websites. All children transferring to school have had school places, and carers of 2-year olds have been supported to access nursery places when eligible.
- 7.5. During the March – July lockdown period the Virtual School requested that there was a specific focus on transition year groups to ensure that clear plans were in place to support our children/young people who would be having school/placement changes. A one-minute guide was developed to support schools and social care to have clear process/procedures of how to undertake PEPs virtually. The Virtual School team were able to attend more PEPs than usual while completing them online as they did not have any travel time restricting them and they were able to coordinate their diaries to attend more, which has been of significant benefit. The feedback from all parties, including Children's Social Care, has been positive and they agree that this could be a way for the Virtual School to be flexible with completing PEPs in the future, in particular for those living/educated out of borough.

8. Pledge 3 - Achieving Permanence and Keeping Children Safe

- 8.1. Achieving permanence for cared for children and care leavers is one of our service priorities and we have a clear plan to ensure that the children who require local authority care receive this in a timely way, that the care they receive is excellent, and for children who no longer need to be in care, that their plans are progressed without delay.
- 8.2. I am pleased to share that we are now seeing some of the delays caused by Covid-19 reducing, which means that children are achieving their

permanent plans by way of adoption, special guardianship, and discharges of care orders. There continues to be a reduced but still significant challenge of the cumulative backlog of Court progression work and we continue to work closely with the Local Family Justice Board to progress this.

- 8.3.** We remain committed to ensuring that we do not criminalise cared for children in placements, so we are actively contributing to a regional group of local authorities that has been established, working with Police and Youth Justice, to develop a protocol and guidance for our care establishments and commitment to support and engage our children placed to ensure consistent support and approach to our children and young people placed in care.
- 8.4.** Children who go missing from care continue to receive support from a commissioned service with the aim of responding to these risks in a timely way. The number of children missing can vary week by week however every child who experiences a missing episode will be offered a return home interview where in depth discussions take place to inform subsequent risk assessments from the social worker who can consider the bigger picture. We are examining the effectiveness of the commissioned service through audit activity; this is to ensure that our children and young people receive a quality service.
- 8.5.** Our vision for children and young people is focused on children living in the borough where we believe their needs will be best met and we continue to develop a range of sufficiency options including our Bespoke children's homes and our first Mockingbird constellation which was launched in November 2020. As a result of the great progress of this first constellation, a second constellation is now being established.
- 8.6.** We have de-commissioned two of our Bespoke homes as we were not satisfied with the quality of care provided to our children and young people. However, the demand for good quality residential placements remains a priority and we are now entering an accelerated procurement process to re-commission 2 further homes.
- 8.7.** This has been a busy quarter within the Fostering Service as we continue to embed our own marketing and recruitment functions. We have successfully recruited a team manager from within our own workforce who started leading the new team in May and is already having a positive impact on recruitment. During Foster Care Fortnight some of our foster carers helped produce [videos about their experiences as foster carers](#) for Cheshire East which was posted across all of our social media platforms.

- 8.8.** Since 1 April 2021, we have recruited 6 new mainstream foster carers, which keeps us on track with our aim to have recruited a total of 30 new foster carers before April 2022. In addition we have also approved 10 family and friends foster carers. This all means that we have a greater ability to keep our cared for children and young people closer to their local networks and communities.
- 8.9.** We have continued our social media presence throughout this period and have also been attending events across Cheshire East to promote recruitment of foster carers. We recently attended the Royal Cheshire Show, where we received 11 enquires from people wanting to be foster carers. We are due to attend the Geronimo festival in a few weeks and will also be launching a radio campaign with one of our partners Silk FM.
- 8.10.** As part of Cheshire East's commitment to developing our Corporate Parenting duties, the Director of Children's Social Care and the Head of Service for Children with Disabilities and Fostering recently attended the Cheshire East Business Forum to start a dialogue with local companies around supporting our recruitment of foster carers by allowing the recruitment team into their businesses. We have had commitments from several of the companies who are part of the Forum wanting to support this and introductory meetings have already been scheduled. We are confident that these links will prove to be beneficial for our children and young people
- 8.11.** Our first Mockingbird Hub is a success, despite being launched during the pandemic. We have satellite foster carers linked to the hub who are mainstream as well family and friends foster carers, we also have a child being supported on the 'edge of care' as their parent is terminally ill. We have recruited our second home hub carers and are currently developing the group of satellite carers with an aim to be launching the second hub during the autumn.
- 8.12.** We are currently recruiting a new chair for our fostering panel as our current panel chair retires in September of this year.
- 8.13.** Delivering support to our disabled children and their families during the pandemic has proved to be a challenge for both our Children with Disabilities Social Work Team and our Children with Disabilities Short Breaks Team. The efforts that they and our short break providers have gone to to ensure that the needs of our children have continued to be met are impressive. Whilst we and our support services could not deliver services at the same level as pre the pandemic, they have been able to be creative and imaginative in continuing to support our children and families, for example we have added flexibility into the way Early Help Individual Payments could be spent.

- 8.14.** During this quarter we have also recommissioned our short breaks local offer for another 2 years and have added some new providers to the list of support being offered to our disabled children, young people and their families. If you have not had the opportunity to have a look at our short breaks local offer yet, here is the link
<https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/livewell/local-offer-for-children-with-sen-and-disabilities/care/short-breaks-services.aspx>

9. Pledge 4 – We will Improve Health and Wellbeing Outcomes

- 9.1.** Performance in relation to requests for initial health assessments, completion of initial health assessments, and annual review health assessments, continues to show that health assessments for children and young people are delivered with a continued focus on timeliness.
- 9.2.** Challenges remain in relation to our children and young people accessing routine dental appointments. We are now part of a regional pilot for an E-referral pathway which will ensure that all cared for children and young people have access to a dentist. In the first instance it is recommend trying to get each child an appointment their regular dentist if they have one, however any difficulties will be escalated to a named nurse who will support in arranging access to a local dentist. In a situation where it is confirmed that a dental practice does not have capacity, or if the child is new to the area and their carer has been unable to access an appointment for them, the online referral and an appointment will be made at a dental practice participating in the pilot that is closest to where the child lives. We hope that this new initiative improves the outcomes for our children and young people and that we see an improved picture for dental checks taking place at least every 12 months.

10. Pledge 5 – We will prepare young people for Adulthood

- 10.1.** The Care Leavers' Service continues to be focused on supporting the needs of our care experienced adults in relation to accommodation, NEET, social isolation, emotional wellbeing, and relationships.
- 10.2.** An addendum report focuses on the actions and plan regarding the review of our Local Offer to care leavers and provides detail in respect of the service plan.
- 10.3.** We remain aspirational for our children and young people and want them to be able to make the most of their potential in whatever field they choose. We still have a dedicated NEET worker in the Leaving Care Team and a 16-18 NEET specialist within the virtual school. These two workers meet

regularly, identify our young people who are NEET and make plans to engage and support them. We are also working hard with colleagues across the Council and in other agencies to increase the number of young people who take up Apprenticeships and have a specific action plan in this regard.

10.4. We have continued to offer a range of support to care leavers through our partnership with Pure Insight who deliver mentoring and wellbeing support to our Care Leavers. It is an excellent service whose workers regularly go above and beyond any reasonable expectations to ensure that young people can access support in ways to which they feel able to respond, particularly when times are hard. In April 2021 we increased our funding to Pure Insight in response to demand from our young people. As a result of this additional funding, we were able to ensure that no young person was on a waiting list to access support.

10.5. RAGE fitness and wellbeing provision for care experienced young adults was launched during the pandemic and was initially offered on a remote/virtual basis. However, recent feedback from young people identified that they wanted face to face support and we are currently exploring how we can support RAGE Fitness to offer face to face sessions to our young people.

11. Consultation and Engagement

11.1. A participation and engagement survey has been carried out with cared for children and young people as detailed in section 6.3.

12. Implications

12.1. Legal

12.1.1. The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 were introduced to provide flexibility in the statutory obligations of local government relating to cared for children, adoption and fostering. These regulations were reviewed on the 25 September 2020 by government and significantly reduced the flexibilities initially introduced.

12.2. Finance

12.2.1. There are no financial implications or changes needed to the MTFS as a result of the recommendations of this report.

12.3. Policy

12.3.1. Cheshire East is ambitious and committed to ensuring it is a great place to be young and every child has the best start in life. This is demonstrated through the Council's core priorities that people live well and for longer and have the life skills and education they need to thrive. These priorities

are supported and driven through the Children and Young People's Plan and the Health and Wellbeing Strategic Plan. Our Corporate Parenting Strategy has a clear vision that our cared for children and care leavers are safe, happy, healthy and achieve their full potential.

12.4. Equality

- 12.4.1.** Cared for children and care leavers can be a vulnerable group because of their experiences and so the impact of Covid-19 could mean further marginalisation.

12.5. Human Resources

- 12.5.1.** HR and Public Health have been supportive of officers in ensuring that robust risk assessments are in place and available to staff in undertaking their duties.

12.6. Risk Management

- 12.6.1.** Cared for children and care leavers are a vulnerable group that are at risk of a number of factors, including poor education and training, health, safeguarding and transition into adulthood; the Corporate Parenting Strategy prioritises these areas.

12.7. Rural Communities

- 12.7.1.** There are no direct rural communities' implications of this report.

12.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

- 12.8.1.** The contents of this report have implications for cared for children and care leavers, who are some of Cheshire East's most vulnerable children.

12.9. Public Health

- 12.9.1.** The impact of Covid-19 is well documented within this report.

12.10. Climate Change

- 12.10.1.** There is a commitment to ensure that Cheshire East cared for children live as close to their home community as possible, wherever this is safe to do so. This will ensure that children can continue to feel connected to their families and local community. It also reduces the geographical footprint of children, families and staff as travel is reduced.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Annemarie Parker Annemarie.parker@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Corporate Parenting Scorecard Q1 2021-22
Background Papers:	None