



# Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2020-21

## Foreword

As Corporate Parents we made pledges as a council in December 2018 to be truly ambitious in supporting and guiding our cared for children and young people and our care experienced adults to strive to reach their full potential. We committed to ensuring that our children and young people had permanent homes that met their individual needs locally so that they could stay connected to their families and communities. We pledged that they would have the very best educational experiences, be healthy, be safe and prepared for their onward journey to adulthood.

The Corporate Parenting Committee have continued to support, challenge and scrutinise the outcomes for our children and young people in line with the pledges that we made. This year we have focused on supporting children and young people through the Covid-19 pandemic. We have ensured that children and young people have continued to receive the support they need despite the challenges the pandemic has brought. Children and young people have continued to receive face to face visits from their social worker. We have also prioritised and invested in the emotional support available to our children and young people, recognising that they needed some additional support through the pandemic.

Children and young people have continued to be at the heart of everything we do, and our Shadow Committee, My Voice, has continued to meet throughout the year albeit virtually when this was necessary. My Voice has subsequently returned to face to face meetings. Children and young people continue to raise awareness of pertinent issues that we as a Council have within our gift to influence. As ever my thanks are given to our children and young people in their efforts in bringing this perspective and challenge to the forefront.

Despite the pandemic, the participation team have offered children and young people a range of virtual activity days and this summer they have a wide range of activities planned to keep children and young people active during the school holidays.

Following the ILACS Ofsted Inspection in November 2019 there has been a focussed effort in addressing areas which required further improvement. We have particularly worked to strengthen our offer of accommodation to care leavers as well as working to ensure that all children and young people receive the very best support we can offer. The findings from the inspection have informed our onward journey in improving outcomes for children and young people in Cheshire East. We have subsequently developed an action plan we are using to improve the support we offer to children, young people, families and carers. Our continued focus is on achieving excellent outcomes for children and young people through establishing consistently good practice.

We have developed a clear vision for children, young people, and care experienced adults in Cheshire East, **Together for Children and Young People**. We want to ensure that across the Council and the partnership, everyone is clear on our shared ambition for children and young people, and we work together to achieve the best outcomes.

I am pleased to present the Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2020-21. This report highlights the successes achieved in delivering positive outcomes for children and young people and more crucially, the next steps in our journey to success.



*Cllr Kathryn Flavell – Lead Member for Children and Families*

## The Corporate Parenting Committee

We know that having the right values, beliefs and culture around prioritising and championing the needs of cared for children and young care experienced adults is essential to achieving excellent outcomes for children and young people. Our Corporate Parenting responsibility is a shared one that requires a high level of commitment from the leadership of the Council, as well as the support and ambition of all council employees and partners.

The Corporate Parenting Committee is comprised of eleven cross-party members with Council Officers in attendance to support agenda items, as required. The Committee is administered by Officers from Democratic Services.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Committee has met virtually, via Microsoft Teams, on five occasions in 2020-21:

- 14<sup>th</sup> July 2020
- 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020
- 17<sup>th</sup> November 2020
- 19<sup>th</sup> January 2021
- 30<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

In preparation for the discussion and challenge at Committee, our Shadow Committee of young people meets in advance with the Chair of the Committee and the Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers to comment on the matters that are to be presented to Committee. They share their lived experience of how services are designed and delivered and ultimately what it feels like to be a cared for child or care experienced adult in Cheshire East.

Officers and partners present information to the Committee. This can be themed in relation to key areas for children and young people, is responsive to changing times, or provides feedback from external scrutiny, so that members can scrutinise and challenge the service that is being delivered to ensure we are effectively meeting children and young people's needs.

The function of the Committee is to oversee the effective delivery of our Corporate Parenting responsibilities and the pledges that we made in December 2018. The Committee ensures that the statutory duties placed upon Cheshire East Council are met.

Officers support members in ensuring that they have the most up to date information available to them about local and national legislative changes. Induction training is also offered to new Members.

The Corporate Parenting Committee has reviewed its Terms of Reference for 2020-21 which is attached at Appendix 1.





## Corporate Parenting Strategy and Pledges

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018-20 sets out a number of pledges we are making to our cared for children and young people and those who are care experienced. These are based on what these children and young people have told us will make the most difference to their lives:

### Pledge One

**We will be a good corporate parent**

### Pledge Two

**We will improve education, training and employment outcomes**

### Pledge Three

**We will work to achieve permanence and keep children safe**

### Pledge Four

**We will improve health and wellbeing outcomes**

### Pledge Five

**We will prepare young people for adulthood**

Each Committee meeting receives a report on progress against the Pledges from the Strategy. Performance reporting and impact is scrutinised by the Committee, along with issues and risks.

**Four Workstream Groups**, aligned to the five pledge areas, are in place to ensure that this strategy is delivered effectively. Previously five workstreams were in place, and in January 2020 workstreams one and three agreed to merge to strengthen the shared focus.



## Service Delivery during Covid-19

Services for cared for children and care leavers embraced new ways of working in the initial stages of the pandemic, reports to Committee over the last 12 months have outlined any existing variations to our statutory service delivery and also highlighted the progress in planning for children and young people.

In response to the initial stages of pandemic, the government introduced the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 for Children's Social Care services. These regulations provided guidance for Local Authorities and Social Care providers in the alternative options for service delivery and were introduced to provide flexibility in the statutory obligations of local government relating to Cared for Children, Adoption and Fostering. These regulations were reviewed by Parliament on 25 September 2020 and the majority of the variations to service delivery were removed.

This ultimately meant 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 workers. Established weekly reporting systems are in place, which identify how and where we are applying the amended regulations, in the main in relation to some Covid-specific virtual visits. Quality assurance activity is regularly undertaken which provides reassurance around the appropriate use of the regulations. The temporary regulations were due to expire on

the 31 March 2021, although following a public consultation have been agreed to be extended.

Frontline services, in line with the priorities set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy, continue to deliver our statutory duties. Almost eighteen 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 than in the previous year. 26 babies and children (twice as many last year) have been matched and permanently placed (as of April 2021). 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.

The service continues to use individual risk assessments to support safe service delivery for children, young people, their parents/carers and family members, and also our frontline colleagues. These risk assessments include 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 assessment. 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 the service has been well received.

## Corporate Parenting Strategy Progress

### Pledge One

#### We will be a good corporate parent

Staff and elected members will understand their roles and responsibilities and be **ambitious corporate parents, who advocate and champion** the needs of cared for children and care leavers in everything they do.

We will **know ourselves and the needs of our children and young people well** and design and deliver services that meet these needs.

**Decisions** about children and young people's lives, and the services that support them, **will be made with them and for them**. We will always value their views.

### What the data tells us

- At the end of March 2021 there were 517 children and young people being cared for by Cheshire East. This is a decrease of 16 children and young people from March 2020.
- This equates to 67 cared for children per 10,000 of the child population within Cheshire East, which is slightly lower than last year.

### What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

- We have continued to monitor and scrutinise the progress and impact of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- We have received quarterly updates on our cared for children and care leavers through the Corporate Parenting Scorecard.
- We have had regular updates from the Participation Team.
- The Chair of the Committee and the Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers have attended 'My Voice' to develop a direct relationship with some of our cared for children and young people. Additionally, every Personal Advisor and Social Worker is on a rota to attend regularly to promote participation from our children and young people.
- Unfortunately, this year's annual Star Awards celebration event needed to be cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the teams did encourage our children and young people across the whole service in designing their own picture to be printed on a Tote Bag based on the theme of "Over the Rainbow". The bags were then filled with books and activities and sent to our children and young people to represent just how well they have managed during this challenging time. We continue to celebrate the achievements of our children and young people and ask everyone to ensure they highlight special achievements



no matter how big or unique so that we can look at ways to keep recognising these.

- My Voice 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.

**Merging of Workstream Groups 1 and 3** – The new workstream will focus on the following areas:

- Training, support and direct work tools to be developed around **placement stability, matching of placements and strengthening sibling assessments**.
- Embedding understanding of warning signs of **placement instability** to aid professionals in recognising signs of risk of placement instability, to prevent instability. In addition, support to prevent adoption breakdown and collaborative working with adoption counts and the front door.
- Continuation of the use of trajectories with an aim of all **children placed at home** having a Signs of Safety trajectory and safety plan in place to aid discharge of the care order.
- Strengthening **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire** resources to triangulate views and to develop a holistic picture of emotional health.

- Development of **life story work** and use of **words and pictures** to help children and young people understand their journey through care.
- **Corporate Parenting Induction Training** will be established with a rolling pattern of focussed thematic training through the year.
- **Corporate Parenting Update Training** will be established for all elected members.
- Developing resources for cared for children and for staff supporting around **LGBTQ+** and **understanding transgender needs**.



## Wellbeing of Our Cared For Children and Care Leavers

- The wellbeing of our Cared For Children And Care Leavers has been an absolute priority for officers throughout this pandemic, particularly where we know they are likely to have experienced the pandemic in a detrimental way. Some of these known areas are in relation to access to employment, education and training, mental health services and where they are experiencing social isolation. Officers and partners are focused on how we offer services creatively across the Council to ensure that these young people are prioritised as we move through the pandemic.
- We have ensured that, wherever a child or young person has been living, that we have remained in regular contact and offered support where needed. We have seen our parents, foster carers and residential children's homes providers support our children and young people tremendously well with a real reduction in placement instability.



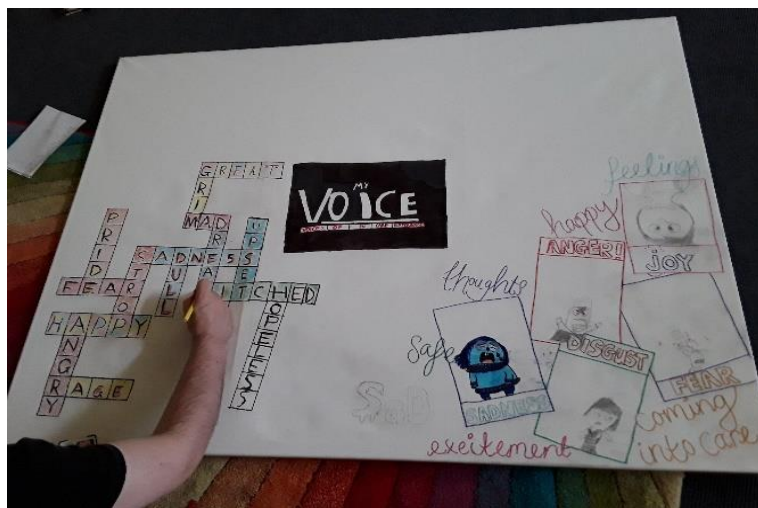
- In the early stages of the pandemic, virtual visits were undertaken to our cared for children and care leavers where this was assessed to be safe, however we very quickly returned to our statutory obligations. During this period all children and young people's needs were assessed individually, as were the risks to our frontline practitioners.
- In recognition of the impact of Covid and the wellbeing needs of our young people we have extended funding to Pure Insight to ensure that no young person was waiting for a service.
- An additional service was offered to young people through RAGE Fitness; Five Steps to Wellbeing, a structured programme focusing on wellbeing and mental health.
- Monthly meetings have also taken place with partners focusing on the emotional wellbeing and planning for any gaps in resources and identifying ways to work together to support the emotional wellbeing of our children and young people.

## My Voice and Participation Lead

My Voice are an established group of cared for children who support the service and the Committee to understand the lived experience of children and young people in Cheshire East. The support to My Voice was previously delivered via the Youth Service which is situated within Early Help and Prevention.



The decision was made to move the resource into the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Teams, and from early November 2020 a part-time Participation Lead has been working within the service. This is a fantastic opportunity to strengthen the voice of children and young people as we continue to drive improvements forward and we will see further developments in shaping services using the feedback that young people provide.



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. The participation and engagement survey was rolled out in early January 2021 with the intention of truly understanding the lived experiences of the broadest audience of children and young people. We also plan to subsequently shape our

participation and engagement offer as we take the very best bits of the pandemic and where alternative ways of working have been helpful for children and young people into new ways of working with our children, young people and care leavers, being led by My Voice.

### Engagement with Corporate Parenting Members

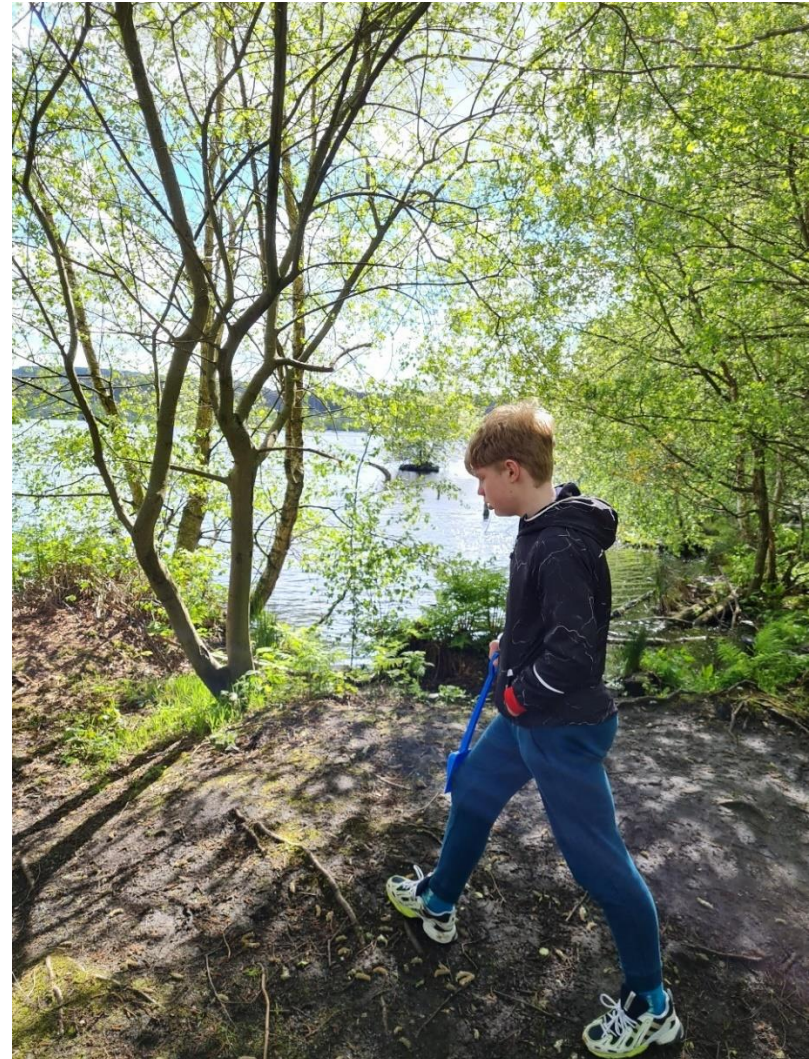
Officers and members are keen to re-establish plans for frontline visits to take place across the service and the menu of options to support in the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy was presented to Members at committee in September 2020. These opportunities include attendance at our Corporate 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.

## What impact has it made?

- Whilst we have not been able to facilitate a celebration day due to Covid restrictions, the continuation of participation activities has ensured a regular forum for young people to share experiences of care, an opportunity to meet with peers and to support service development.
- There has been a continued and increased offer to ensure that the impact of Covid-19 on emotional well-being and loneliness has been mitigated or reduced.

## Next steps

- To ensure the participation lead meets each child or young person when they enter care to provide key information regarding their status and services available.
- To increase attendance and engagement with My Voice.
- To consider areas of further need such as specific support for cared for children who are LGBTQ+ and more specifically those who are transgender and have issues of trauma and attachment.



## Pledge Two

### We will improve education, employment and training outcomes

We will have **high aspirations** for every child and young person and will **help them to achieve their ambitions**, using opportunities in the 'family business' and our contacts so that they can be **happy and successful** in their education, training and employment.

Every child and young person will have an **education plan that is targeted to enable them to reach their full potential**.

We will strive to that ensure that every child and young person will have **access to consistent, high quality, well matched, full time opportunities**.

### What the data tells us

- At the end of the 2019/20 academic year there were 546 cared for children on the Cheshire East Virtual School roll, this was an increase from 496 recorded for the same time in 2018/19, of these 407 were of school age.
- 72% of cared for children are in 'Good' or 'Outstanding' schools.
- From September 2020 to February half-term 2021, attendance had increased compared to last year with the average Primary attendance increasing from 90% to 93%

and the average Secondary attendance increasing from 90% to 94%.

- In addition to the 10 care leavers currently at university, a further four had places secured for September 2020.
- The completion rate of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) was over 85% as was the percentage completed to a good or better standard. This is due to the robust quality assurance process that is in place within the Virtual School Team and training offered to schools through the Designated Lead teachers network events which allows staff in all schools to access practical working sessions to look at outstanding PEPs, to allow self-evaluation and development of their own systems at the start of each year. However, the percentage was then impacted due to Covid-19 where we had requested that children within the transition cohort must be prioritised.
- All data with regards to attainment is based on Teacher Assessments as no formal baseline assessments, SATs or GCSEs were undertaken due to Covid-19. Full details regarding this can be found in the [Virtual School Head Teacher's Annual Report 2019/20](#).

### What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

- The **Post 16 Education Subgroup** is focusing on achieving apprenticeships for cared for children and care leavers in and out of the council. This is a measurable target within our Corporate Parenting Strategy and local offer. One of the key



focuses of this year is to develop council apprenticeships and further increase our offer for post 16 young people.

- The **School Age Children Subgroup** is also focusing on raising attainment for our cared for children and improving their outcomes. Cared for children can experience unplanned changes to their education when they come into care or during their time in care and therefore there is a greater challenge to ensure that they are supported above and beyond so that they achieve their potential. Areas to be addressed by this group have been identified as improving attendance, minimising the time between school moves, reducing exclusions and the development of PEPs content and quality.



- The Virtual School now has three full time learning mentors who were newly appointed in March 2020 and we are in the process of recruiting one more. The main aim is to work with school aged children to support social, emotional mental health and transition, when children have had a placement or school change or where children have high levels of anxiety. The learning mentors work alongside Designated Teachers and other agencies to support cared for children to overcome barriers to learning. This year we have one of our learning mentors specifically for supporting post 16 young people with a focus on increasing support for our NEET young people.
- During this year the Virtual School Team have had to adapt to new ways of working due to the national pandemic. Throughout this period, we have continued to develop new ways of working and we are continuing to deliver a good level of support to all of our children and schools.
- During lockdown, we contacted all the carers of our 2-4-year-old children at least once each month providing advice, guidance and support on learning activities and useful websites. We made sure that all children transferring to school had school places and had a handover of cases. We supported 2-year olds to access a nursery place when eligible.



- The educational and employment experiences of our cared for children and care leavers was significantly disrupted from March 2020 to the end of the school term in July 2020. Cheshire East Council took the approach to prioritise the reintegration of cared for children back into school where this was deemed necessary. This resulted in many children returning to school and having a positive experience, crucially preparing them for a more permanent return to school in September 2020.
- We have established and robust safeguarding measures in place to track and review vulnerable pupils not in education. Support is made available to children and families in this situation. We have established a partnership planning meeting to look at any such children and young people and worked closely between the school, Virtual School, and parents/foster carers to ensure education is being provided.
- The Virtual School and frontline teams continue to focus on frequency of Personal Education Plan (PEP) completion and quality related to targeted support to ensure that we continue to have high aspirations for our children and young people.
- The service and the broader Council continue to be focused on not in education, employment or training (NEET) for our 16-18-year-old cared for children and our care experienced adults. Our NEET figure for 16-18 years olds remains steady at around 4-6% on average. More targeted support is being put into supporting and prioritising our care experienced

adults and where opportunities for creative ways of furthering their skills and employment opportunities exist, that we action this for them.

- The service has participated in a Council-wide NEET summit to give the best opportunity for care leavers to have a strategic priority as we move forward and tackle the unemployment challenges resulting from Covid-19. Within the Care Leavers service, we have a dedicated NEET Lead who has coordinated for the second year a NEET programme which began in November 2020. This ran as two groups of four young people to reintroduce them to the world of education, training and employment. Young people choose a community initiative that not only re-establishes their aspiration for their own path to EET but also gives back to the community. Last year the programme focused on homelessness and had a significant social value impact for the young people attending the course and the broader community.
- The service is also targeting our most vulnerable young adults through the Journey First Programme, where keyworker capacity has increased to work with our most vulnerable care leavers in being creative in re-engaging them in education, training and employment. The funding will be available over a three-year period which will offer consistency in relationships, a key driver for care leavers.

- The Virtual School Governing Body was launched in February 2021. The Director of Children's Social Care is the Chair of Governors. Core members include representatives from across all partners including schools and carers. This governing body will allow the Virtual School to have the same level of support, scrutiny and challenge that would exist within mainstream and specialist provision and will provide an additional avenue to challenge our statutory responsibilities and outcomes for children and young people, as well as also monitor and support the longer term consequences of the pandemic.

### **What impact has it made?**

- 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.
- 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.
- There has been clear and robust planning for Education Recovery; the Virtual School Headteacher has worked closely with the Director of Education and the Heads of Service across both Education and Children's Social Care.
- Virtual training/network sessions for designated lead teachers focused on sharing good practice and how to further support children/young people's return to school. Resource guides for carers and children and young people have subsequently been created across all age groups (early years to post 16), these include advice and links to a wide variety of education, mental health and wellbeing resources.
- 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 at the start of the new academic year, and the Autumn term programme for post 16 young people identified as NEET was successfully implemented.
- 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.
- During March – July during the lockdown period we 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. We developed a one-minute guide to support schools and social care to have clear process/procedures of how to undertake PEPs virtually. The team were able to attend more PEPs than usual while completing them online as they don't have any travel time

restricting them and they are 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 we can be flexible with completing PEPs in the future, in particular for those living/educated out of borough.

### Next steps

- Continue to work with the new Governing Body for the Virtual School to ensure governance and scrutiny including core members from across key partners and stakeholders.
- Work with council leaders to ensure development of apprenticeship opportunities for our cared for children and care leavers.
- Development of a pupil voice to ensure our children and young people are fully involved with key developments across the service.
- Continue to work alongside Council Members as part of the Corporate Parenting Strategy to develop access to front line services including the Virtual School Governing Body, Priority 2 Workstream, and direct work with children and young people to improve access to education.
- Continue to provide support and interventions for schools and children to improve outcomes (narrow the gap and lost learning) and attendance, evaluating the impact of the intervention and use of Pupil Premium.
- Identify and implement changes resulting from the Social Care Act 2017 which includes the Virtual School Head Teacher to have responsibilities for previously cared for

children as well as currently cared for and to promote mental health and attachment awareness in schools.

- Monitor the impact of commissioned and front-line services through engagement, progress and outcomes.
- Implement the self-assessment tool for use with and by schools to improve their practice and support for cared for children.
- Continue to improve the completion rate and quality of PEPS and continue to develop to extend to Early Years and Post 16.



## Pledge Three

### We will work to achieve permanence and keep children safe

We will strive to ensure that every child and young person will have the **opportunity to live in a good, safe home locally**, either with their family or in another permanent home. All decisions will be made and reviewed with them without delay.

We will **respect those people who are important to our children and young people** and make sure that these safe relationships are sustained.

We will **keep children and young people safe**.

## What the data tells us

- 96% for cared for children reviews took place within statutory timescales, with 98% of children participating in their reviews.
- 272 cared for children live with foster families, 55 live with family and friend carers, 59 live with their parents, 11 children are placed for adoption and 41 live within residential care.
- 107 children are living in permanently matched homes with their foster carers and a further 20 have remained in 'staying put' arrangements with their foster carers after they became 18.

- Of the children who ceased to be cared for during the past year, 13 became subject to Special Guardianship Orders, 26 children were adopted, 6 Child Arrangement Orders were made, 11 Supervision Orders and 7 Care Orders were discharged.

## What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

- We considered the Annual Independent Review Officers Report and how the outcomes for our cared for children and care leavers are quality assured.
- We considered the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report.
- Permanency for children and young people is potentially the most significant thing that we can achieve in their lives once they become cared for and so we have remained focused during this period of continuing to achieve this for children wherever practicably possible.
- Committee has been made aware of the impact of Covid-19 in achieving permanence in permanence in a timely way and that the initial stages of the pandemic created a significant challenge. We are now seeing those delays reduce, with children achieving their permanent plans by way of adoption, special guardianship and discharges of care orders. We are faced with a smaller but still significant challenge of the cumulative backlog of Court progression work and continue to work closely with the Local Family Justice Board to progress this.
- We have been successful in funding a legal executive to work closely with team managers to address delays and



promote permanency for our children and young people and support rapid work with revocations on orders of care for children placed at home.

- Despite the delays in Court and the impact of the pandemic, the frontline service has continued to drive our priorities forward and three children have been discharged from care as they no longer require that level of safeguarding. Cheshire East Council are identified as an outlier in relation to the number of children living at home and subject to Care Orders, however, there is now clear evidence that the work that the service have been doing to make this cohort of children a priority is becoming evident and is fundamentally achieving positive outcomes for children and young people.
- Throughout the pandemic, our commissioned service to children who go missing from care has continued to operate and has been successful in maintaining an offer to children and young people that can respond in a timely way and disrupt this risky behaviour.
- Our children who are living out of borough or 'at a distance' represent around 40% of our cared for population and include children living with Cheshire East foster carers, children placed for adoption, with parents and family members, and also children in independent residential and foster care. Our last inspection offered reassurance that our children who live outside of Cheshire East are at no detriment and our statutory services delivered throughout the pandemic have continued to ensure that our children are seen and plans progress. We have undertaken random dip sampling to assure ourselves of consistent practice and service, irrespective of where our children live.

- 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. Our first Mockingbird constellation was launched in November 2020, this continues to make great progress and has impact with the children and carers directly involved.



### **Bespoke Children's Homes**

We developed 'Bespoke' and mobilised our new Children's Homes. Bespoke is a hub-based model similar to the North Yorkshire 'No Wrong Door' model which has received national recognition. This will provide wrap around support to children and young people who are in care or on the edge of care.

We have a variety of services linked to Bespoke such as Speech and Language Therapists, mental health services and

the Virtual School who are all supporting ambitious outcomes for the children in our care.

### **Fostering**

Cheshire East Council commissioned an independent review of the Fostering Service which made recommendations about how an alternative delivery structure may assist with recruitment and retention of foster carers, a key objective within our Action Plan to address the recommendations from the Ofsted Inspection in 2019. A decision was reached to depart from our collaborative relationship with Foster4, which took place in September 2020 and to engage on our own recruitment and assessment processes to recruit new foster carers to Cheshire East. We have developed our own marketing and recruitment capability in-house to maximise our local foster carers and with commitment from the Corporate Communications Team, a designated officer works with the service on our marketing, recruitment and communication. At the end of December 2020, figures showed our enquires have increased significantly and our expressions of interest have doubled compared with the same period last year under Foster4.

### **Foster Care Fortnight**

Foster Care Fortnight in May 2020 was a success in sharing our vision for Cheshire East children to live in Cheshire East. We were able to prepare and record our own fostering advert for a local radio station with lots of presence on social media. Foster Care Fortnight is not only about generating enquiries to become Cheshire East foster carers but in the time of a national

pandemic, was an opportunity to pay credit to all the hard work our foster carers do for our children on a daily basis.

### **Family Time**

During the initial lockdown restrictions, one of the most significantly affected areas was that of family time between cared for children and their parents, siblings and friends, however, we worked hard to enable virtual arrangements to happen, and by mid-May we were planning for recovery and offering many families safe face-to-face family time. By the second week of June, all cared for children had the opportunity for a face-to-face family time session with significant people in their lives.

A Family Time coordinator is now in post. She is currently reviewing all family time arrangements to ensure that they remain appropriate and to ensure that the service runs efficiently and that children are supported to see their family at an appropriate level and with the right level of support/supervision.

### **Adoption Counts**

Cheshire East have been in regional arrangements with Adoption Counts since 2017 where success in the partnerships is evident in children achieving permanence via adoption and the timeliness of achieving these plans. Officers have been working in partnership with Adoption Counts and are seeking an 'in principle' decision to move to permanent arrangements

within the year, subject to TUPE consultation and agreement of the Integrated Service Agreement.

### Resource and Accommodation Panel

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 do 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. The service has reviewed how we strategically link our priorities to the operational delivery of services and from the October 2020 we launched a new 'Resource And Permanence Panel' (RAPP) where Heads of Service are setting expectations about the timeliness of plans and the resource allocation across the service.

### What impact has it made?

- There is a greater understanding of the needs of our children. The Fostering Service and Commissioning are working together to ensure we have high quality placements to meet our children's needs.
- In addition, the redevelopment of RAPP and the creation of 'step down panel' has ensured that there is clear strategic oversight of placement quality, care planning, and cost. There is a renewed determination to ensure that children have the opportunity of living within a family and that fewer children live in residential placements.

- There is a robust system in place to ensure children who go missing are supported on a multi-agency basis and that safety planning to reduce risk occurs.
- There is a greater understanding of the development areas for social work practice and the workstream will enable practice tools and guidance to be developed.

### Next steps

- To continue to develop practice guidance and resources to ensure we achieve consistently good social work practice.
- To develop support around placement stability – particularly support targeted to adoption breakdowns and 16-17 year old's presenting as homeless.
- To continue to develop our offer of support around healthy relationships through commissioned services
- To continue to develop the Fostering Service to ensure placement stability and choice of placement options to meet children's individual needs.
- To ensure children that can be supported to step down from residential care and have the opportunity of living within a family.



## Pledge Four

### We will improve health and wellbeing outcomes

We are committed to **understanding the health needs** of our children and young people **as early as possible** and to ensure they are **given the highest priority** in every service.

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

### What the data tells us

- 85% of cared for children in Cheshire East had an up to date review health assessment.
- 94% of immunisations were completed.
- For children 5 and under 100% of developmental checks were completed.
- 38% of dental checks were completed in timescales.
- 100% of care leavers received a summary of their health at the time of their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

### What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

- We have considered the Annual Health Report for Cared for Children and Care Leavers.
- Following the **'Help me to be healthy' group**, the Cared for Children Specialist Nurses are now regularly attending service meetings to provide an update for social workers

around the health processes for cared for children. This includes discussion around the requirements for making a request for an initial health assessment, the role of the nurse specialists, and how the health needs of cared for children are identified and met, with the intention of impacting on timeliness for requests for health assessments.

- Timeliness and completion of our initial health assessments (IHAs) for our cared for children can be a challenge. We have a specific focus on this in the Help me to be Healthy corporate parenting workstream.
- Our cared for children and young people and care leavers have not received a 'lesser' or reduced IHA service as a result of Covid-19. Initial health assessments were prioritised throughout Covid-19 and continued to be delivered face to face by a consultant paediatrician throughout the pandemic, ensuring health needs were identified promptly.
- Review health assessments have been undertaken virtually where appropriate and currently assessment clinics are now operating face-to-face once again. The partnership is exploring how we can offer a varied service going forward as for some young people, having options about how we assess and meet their health needs has been of benefit to them.
- 85% of our cared for children had an up-to-date review health assessment where any health needs are identified within statutory timeframes and services put in place to respond to these needs. The Social Care service and the



Health service continue to work in partnership to understand the complexities for children and young people in accessing health screening and assessment.

- Overall, performance in relation to requests for initial health assessments, completion of initial health assessments and annual review health assessments, continues to deliver robust health assessments for children and young people, and this continues to be a priority for the help me be healthy workstream.
- The emotional wellbeing and mental health needs of our cared for children and care leavers has been an issue raised throughout the pandemic and is a current focus for our Designated Nurse for Cared for Children and Care Leavers. We seek to make the offer to children and young people much more visible to them as we continue in our recovery phase and challenge providers to ensure that cared for children and care leavers are prioritised in the delivery of their service.
- Accessing annual dental checks is a statutory requirement for all our children and young people and there have been challenges in relation to access to routine checks during the pandemic. This is due to the impact of enforced surgery closure and emergency care prioritisation during Covid-19.
- After raising concerns regarding the statutory Dental requirements with NHS England on behalf of our young people NHS Cheshire CCG were selected to take part in a dental access pilot which commenced late March and will continue into the next year.

- The objective of the pilot is to ensure cared for children have access to a dental check and any subsequent treatment which is identified. Dental practices across Cheshire have been identified to provide this service and a referral can be made via the Designated Nurse. NHS England are also providing support to access dental care at practices the children are already registered with wherever possible.



- A launch event was held and attended by the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children. The Cared for Children teams in Cheshire East have started to complete referrals. The pilot will be evaluated with a view to rolling this out across the NHS system, and the Designated Nurse will be tracking referrals and outcomes.

## What impact has it made?

- Cared for children new into care have had the opportunity to have a face to face comprehensive health assessment with a consultant paediatrician. This has ensured that health needs are identified in a timely way and an appropriate health plan is put in place.
- Positive feedback has been received from children in care regarding the use of technology to facilitate review health assessments. Young people have reported that they are not taken out of school, do not have to spend time in clinics and have felt more at ease and less intrusive. This blended approach will continue in response to individual needs.



## Next steps

- The main priority for the next year will be continuing to ensure that cared for children have access to appropriate healthcare as the Covid-19 restrictions ease. This includes the continued delivery of face to face services wherever possible, supported by platforms such as Attend Anywhere and Chat Health.
- We will continue to work with partners to support cared for children and care leavers who are living in semi-independent hostel residences who have been finding the restrictions of lockdown difficult. This will include liaison with mental health and substance misuse services.
- An audit of effectiveness will be completed to ensure that the help me to be healthy workstream is continuing to have a positive impact on children in care and care leavers' health and wellbeing.

## Pledge Five

### We will prepare young people for adulthood

We will **support young people early with the skills needed** to prepare for their future through access to a range of good quality services.

We will be a **consistent guide** for our young people. We will **celebrate their successes** and **support them when things don't go well**.

We will **respect our care leavers as young adults** and adapt our relationships to their needs.

### What the data tells us

- As of the end of March 2021, there were 291 care leavers eligible for services.
- 89% of Pathways Plans were completed within timescales.
- Pathway Plans are reviewed by an Independent Reviewing Officer, 97% of children and young people have been involved in their reviews.
- As of the end of March 2021, there were nine 16-18-year-old care leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET) and 51% of 19-21-year-old care leavers.

### What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

- In March, we met with some of our care leavers, Councillors, local employers and a whole range of

organisations who are in a position to offer advice, guidance and practical help to review our Local Offer. The event was a great success and focused on mental well-being and the impact of the pandemic, education, employment and training opportunities, money matters and housing. Our [updated Local Offer is available on our website](#).

- Care leavers have been provided with additional support in many ways such as agreeing extended staying put arrangements to enable them to remain in their family homes post 21 so that there were no unnecessary moves during the pandemic. Care leavers have also been provided with additional financial support on a weekly basis, and with access to technology and data so that they can stay connected.
- We are ambitious corporate parents to our children and young people and care experienced adults and 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 'reach out' to our care experienced adults who have chosen not to continue to access a service, and pre-Covid we saw a relatively low response to our extended offer of support. We have seen however an increase in care experienced adults accepting the support offered during the pandemic and this has seen additional support provided in relation to emotional

wellbeing, finances and support with employment. We have written to all care leavers to ensure they understand that support, help and advice is available to them. This is evidence of our corporate parenting commitment. We are now considering what the prolonged period of additional demand could mean for capacity with the service as well as potential recovery from the pandemic.

- Our care experienced adults are one of the cohorts of young people who have experienced the pandemic most severely because of social isolation and subsequent emotional wellbeing challenges. Frontline staff have worked hard to continue to keep in contact with young adults and we have seen positive examples of where this has worked well, for example two care leavers who were previously of no fixed abode sought support and accessed emergency housing and are now safer as a result of this.
- There have been challenges corporately around housing for care experienced adults being able to transition into social housing, the spontaneous arrivals of UASC young people, and the restrictions of lockdown for young people in supported accommodation. However we have had a clear sufficiency plan in place from the point at which we went into lockdown and identified ring fenced offers for care leavers within our current supported accommodation offer to ensure that they were not placed at any greater risk during this period and essentially had a home if they needed it in a crisis.



- 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.
- The sustainability of dedicated emotional wellbeing support has been explored with the CCG, provided by Pure Insight, as we continue to explore with the CCG psychological support to Adoption Services. The fitness and wellbeing provision (RAGE fitness) for care experienced young adults is now launched and we actively continue to engage young people with referrals to participate in this programme, offering therapy, advice, support; an offer that has been well received in different local authorities.





### Recommission of 16+ Accommodation

The accommodation needs of our care leavers also remain a priority. The service has worked closely with care leavers to coproduce a tender for the 16+ supported accommodation offer for cared for children aged 16-18 years old, including emergency accommodation. The tendering process has been successful, and we have identified two providers to deliver excellent support and accommodation services to our young people at a crucial part in their journey. The service is now in the mobilisation phase of the contract and has a very strong offer in place to support our young people. The recommission has embraced the feedback from the Ofsted inspection in the need to tailor the delivery model when young adults are accessing emergency accommodation.

### Care Leavers Service

The Care Leavers Service has in recent years experienced a higher demand as a result of the changes in legislation to support care-experienced adults from 21-25 years old. A service redesign has taken place and resulted in an internal restructure and Service Manager Steve Nevitt being appointed as the leader of the service. Steve and the team intend to reignite the Corporate Parenting challenge in Cheshire East and have plans to continue to drive the service forward, tackling some of the known challenges for care leavers such as NEET, and also reviewing the Local Offer for Care Leavers.

### What impact has it made?

- We are in touch with the vast majority of our Care Leavers, barring a couple of individuals who have specifically requested that we do not provide them with a service. Our care leavers know that we have been 'open for business' throughout the pandemic and who they can turn to when they need help, guidance and practical support.
- Our use of emergency accommodation has been at an all-time low in the past year and in only one case has a young person had to remain in this sort of temporary provision for any amount of time.
- Our NEET figures continue to fall as a consequence of the team's efforts in developing and delivering the NEET Programme, our engagement with employers and

education providers and the work of our new Journey First worker.

- Financial support to Care leavers has been responsive and proactive, particularly for those young people who have experienced difficult times or personal crises during the pandemic.
- Similarly, our 21+ Offer has provided an invaluable safety net for young adults in the early twenties who may not qualify for assistance from Adult Services but who nevertheless require some additional support from time to time.

### Next steps

- We believe that we have the foundations in place to deliver a genuinely outstanding service to our care leavers; we want to ensure that their voice is heard in everything we do and that there is a regular feedback loop into service development.
- We are particularly keen to increase the number of our care leavers who take up apprenticeships and have just advertised a 12-month coordinator post to particularly focus on this exciting development.
- We will also be working closely with colleagues in the Domestic Abuse Service and will be seconding one of our Personal Advisors to particularly focus on working with care

leavers who experience housing problems as a result of abusive relationships

- We will be taking part in the revised National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied migrant young people and will be developing a project with the 'I Love Music Trust' to build cohesion and integration for our UASC Care Leavers.
- The Service will once again be focusing on their successful Social Activity program now that restrictions have lifted. This includes care leaver holidays, parent and child trips, mental health walks and our weekly football engagement programme.



## Priorities for 2021-22

- To improve and develop participation between cared for children, care experienced adults and children's services with the aim of using children and young people's views to inform service development.
- To ensure there is a robust placement offer, sufficiency, and stability for cared for children, through the restructure of the Fostering Service, further development of Mockingbird and the Care at Home Strategy. This involves using a range of commissioned providers to support children to remain at home.
- To further extend the Stability Practice Lead post to support homeless 16-17-year olds to ensure they can remain at home or return home through family networking.
- To further extend the Stability Practice Lead post to support families at risk of adoption breakdown and prevent them returning to care.
- To consider and develop stronger links and resources to meet the emotional wellbeing needs of our cared for children and young people through Pure Insight and development of services for LGBTQ+.
- Creation and development of a dedicated Court Team within the Cared for Service – to ensure that children are provided permanence at the earliest opportunity. To develop good working relationships with the local Court, so that they are confident in the Local Authority's assessments and planning for children.
- Development of an Apprenticeship Coordinator for Care Leavers. The post holder will provide support for care leavers who are undertaking an apprenticeship and will also develop opportunities for further apprenticeships within the Council and with local businesses.



## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

### **Cheshire East Corporate Parenting Committee**

#### **Membership: 12 Councillors**

Additionally, the Committee is informed by representative young people from My Voice (Cheshire East's Children in Care Council) to advise the Committee.

The Chair is the Lead Member for Children and Families.

#### ***Functions***

1. The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Committee in its role as an advisory committee to the Children and Families Committee is to ensure that the Council effectively discharges its role as Corporate Parent for all children and young people in care and care leavers from 0- 25 years of age and holds partners to account for the discharge of their responsibilities.
2. The Committee's responsibilities include:
  - 2.1. acting as advocate for cared for children and care leavers, ensuring that their needs are addressed through key plans, policies and strategies throughout the Council and its commissioned services;
  - 2.2. ensuring key strategic plans relating to children in care and care leavers are in place and are delivered including the Corporate Parenting Strategy, Sufficiency Statement and Children and Young People's Plan;
  - 2.3. overseeing the implementation of Cheshire East's Corporate Parenting Strategy and action plan and monitoring the quality and effectiveness of services to ensure that they fulfil the Council's responsibilities;
  - 2.4. monitoring the quality of care delivered by Cheshire East's residential children's homes through visits and reports, including summary reports of Ofsted inspections;
  - 2.5. reviewing the performance of the Council in relation to outcomes for children and young people in care via the scrutiny of both quarterly performance reports and annual reports including the Health of Cared for Children and Care Leavers, the Virtual School, Fostering and the Independent Reviewing Service;
  - 2.6. establishing an environment whereby Councillors and young people work together to address the needs and aspirations of Cheshire East's children



- and young people in care and empower children and young people to participate in decision making with adults;
- 2.7. overseeing with the Children and Families Committee the implementation of best practice principles in all aspects of service delivery, with the aim of producing positive outcomes for children and young people in care;
  - 2.8. supporting the work of foster carers and adopters in making a difference to the care and support they provide;
  - 2.9. making sure that staff and partners commit to follow the pledges to cared for children and young people and care leavers set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

## **Governance**

- 3. The Committee will:
  - 3.1. meet bi-monthly;
  - 3.2. report to the Children and Families Committee on at least an annual basis; and
  - 3.3. review its terms of reference annually.
- 4. The Committee will be serviced by Democratic Services.
- 5. Minutes and agendas will be distributed and published no later than 5 clear working days prior to the meeting.