

Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting:	2 November 2021
Report Title:	Children's Rights Annual Report 2020-21
Report of:	Kerry Birtles, Director of Children's Social Care
Ward(s) Affected:	All

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1.** The Children's Society delivers the Children's Rights Advocacy and Independent Visiting Service for Cheshire East. This Annual Report will advise the Corporate Parenting Committee of how The Children's Society has delivered the service over the year, providing an overview of the work undertaken from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.
- 1.2.** The report also provides information on how the service has been delivered during the Covid-19 restrictions, showing how we continued to offer both advocacy and Independent Visiting to children and young people.
- 1.3.** The Advocacy Service ensures that children and young people are aware of, and able to access, appropriate services, advice and information, which empowers them to ensure their views and wishes are heard and reflected in the decision making about their lives.
- 1.4.** The Independent Visitor provision provides a befriending service for children and young people who are cared for and have little or no meaningful contact with their parents, as provided for in the Children Act 1989.

2. Recommendation/s

- 2.1.** Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to:
 - Note the contents of the Annual Report.
 - Scrutinise the service delivery information from The Children's Society Annual Report as set out in the Appendix.

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.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1.** None; this is an update report.

5. Background

- 5.1.** The Annual Report provides an update to the Corporate Parenting Committee since the last report which was presented on the 14 July 2020. The Children's Society has delivered the service to children and young people in terms of Advocacy and Independent Visiting since December 2013.
- 5.2.** The Children Act 2004 gives local authorities a duty to ascertain children's wishes and feelings and give due consideration to them when decisions are being made about a child's care. The report gives data on the number of referrals made to the service, in terms of advocacy and which cohort of children and young people requested an advocate, and the reason for the request. The detail on the delivery and impact is given in the report in the Appendix. Referral data is further referenced in section 7.8.2 of this report.
- 5.3.** There is a statutory duty for all local authorities to provide advocacy services and Independent Visitors for vulnerable children and young people, the report gives data on the number of Independent Visitor referrals received and how many matches the service has where a young person is matched with one of the volunteers. The detail on the delivery and impact is given in the report in the Appendix.
- 5.4.** The Children and Young People Children and Young Persons Act 2008 extended the statutory requirement to provide an Independent Visitor service to any child or young person in care, not just those where communication between the child and a parent or person with parental responsibility has been infrequent, or where they have not visited the child in care in the preceding twelve months. The report shares the recruitment and training delivered to volunteers to ensure there are sufficient volunteers to be matched.
- 5.5.** Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires local authorities to have regard to seven corporate parenting principles when discharging their functions in relation to cared for children and care leavers. This report aligns with the all the Pledges within the Corporate Parenting Strategy. The service is on the local offer, so children and young people are aware of the service and how to access it.

6. Consultation and Engagement

- 6.1** Engagement and working together with stakeholders (particularly children and young people) are core principles within the service and are embedded within the service practice to ensure that children and young people feel valued and listened too. Encouraging co-design (e.g., Team Gold Social Media, Task & Finish Groups), co-evaluation (e.g., feedback, staff recruitment process) and co-delivery (e.g., champions, peers, ambassadors) continues to strengthen service development and improvement.
- 6.2** As an advocacy service we are continually listening to the voices of children and young people and are able to gather themes and issues that we feedback to the Local Authority on a regular basis to ensure any improvements can be discussed or made that will make it better for children and young people. In the report are two cases studies to share how we have worked alongside children and young people in both Advocacy (page 8) and Independent Visiting (page 13).

7. Implications

7.1. Legal

- 7.1.1. There are no direct legal implications of this report.

7.2. Finance

- 7.2.1. There are no direct financial implications of this report. The Local Authority commissions the service to provide the Children's Rights Service.

7.3. Policy

- 7.3.1. There are no direct policy implications of this report.

7.4. Equality

- 7.4.1. Children's individual needs, background and interests are considered when delivering the service.

7.5. Human Resources

- 7.5.1. Our HR department and senior leadership team were very supportive to staff during Covid-19, we had robust risk assessments for work with children, young people carers and colleagues. All staff were offered mental health support and how to keep themselves safe and well.

7.6. Risk Management

- 7.6.1. The Children's Society has robust risk assessments for our work and service delivery. 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.

7.7. Rural Communities

7.7.1. The service does work with a number of out of borough children and young people if they are the responsibility of the Local Authority. For the period April 2020 – March 2021 we had:

- 31 Advocacy cases
- 15 Independent Visitor matches

An Independent Visitor is especially important for children and young people who are placed in rural communities to ensure they are given the same social, health and resource opportunities.

7.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

7.8.1. The contents of this report have implications for cared for children and care leavers, who are some of Cheshire East's most vulnerable children. The report shares information on the many developments we carried out in 2020 to ensure the most vulnerable children and young people were given the opportunity to have an advocate or an Independent Visitor especially in terms of 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless and those children and young people who are in a Private Fostering arrangement. The impact of the service on outcomes for young people is demonstrated within the report in the Appendix.

7.8.2. Referral numbers have steadily and systematically increased over the past three years. There are currently no waiting lists for either service and referrals continue to be actioned promptly and in timescale. The table below reflects the historic and current dataset of the number of cared for children in Cheshire East and those subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP). It is imperative that children and young people continue to feel supported, empowered and their voice central to any decisions made about them. In terms of Independent Visiting, nationally numbers of referrals are low. To address this, in February 2021 a national campaign was launched to raise the profile of the Independent Visiting Service for cared for children.

Year	Number of cared for children	Number of children subject to a child protection plan	Number of children referred to Advocacy Service	Number of children referred to IV Service	Number of Open/Active Cases
April 2018 - March 2019	485	268	64	7	263
April 2019 - March 2020	534	253	77	10	234
April 2020 - March 2021	518	236	89	13	290

7.9. Public Health

7.9.1. The impact of Covid-19 is documented within the report.

7.10. Climate Change

7.10.1. Many of the children and young people supported during this period live outside of the borough; we ensured they had an advocate or an Independent Visitor and recruited for volunteers in their local area to ensure funding was allocated to the activities and not on mileage, and that volunteers know the local area.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Sue Preston, Service Manager, The Children’s Society sue.preston@childrenssociety.org.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Children’s Rights Annual Report 2020-21
Background Papers:	None