



Cheshire East

TOGETHER for Children and Young People

Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report

April 2021 – March 2022



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Foreword

In Cheshire East, we believe caring for our cared for children and care leavers is one of the most important responsibilities we have. Elected members reviewed the new Cared for Children and Care Leaver's Strategy 2022 to 2026 at committee in June 2022 and agreed the 6 new pledges.

The pledges within the strategy are ambitious in respect of how we will support and guide our cared for children and young people and our care experienced adults to strive to reach their full potential.



We are committed to ensuring that our children and young people have permanent homes that meet their individual needs locally so that they can stay connected to their families and communities. We have pledged that our children and young people will have the very best educational experiences, be healthy, be safe and prepared for their onward journey to adulthood. We added a new pledge to focus solely on participation (working together with children and young people) to ensure that children and young people are always at the heart of everything we do. Children and young people have told us that the most important thing we can do is listen to them.

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 as we recover from the pandemic- Covid 19. 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 be at the heart of everything we do, and our Shadow Committee, My Voice, has continued to meet throughout the year. 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.

We continue to develop the 'One Plan' which is an action plan we use 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.

In November 2021, we had an Ofsted focussed visit which looked at our arrangements for children in need and those subject to a child protection plan. The feedback and letter from Ofsted recognises the improvements we have made in this area and

helpfully supports us in future developments. This is a great foundation for us to continue in our journey for improvement.

In July 2022, we had a 3-week joint targeted area inspection, this inspection looked at how the partnership worked together to help and protect children at risk of exploitation. We await the formal feedback letter. We do however know that the inspection identified some areas of strength but also some areas where we need improvement, some which will require swift action. These areas require us to look at how we can support our workforce as a single agency and together as a partnership too.

We have continued to develop and embed 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 2021-22. 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

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 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. The terms of reference are included within the [council's constitution](#).

The Corporate Parenting Committee is comprised of twelve cross-party members, currently with an additional associate non-voting member, and council officers in attendance to support agenda items as required. The committee is administered by officers from democratic services. The committee has met on four occasions in 2021-22.

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 includes information on how services are supporting cared for children, young people and care-experienced adults, and provides feedback from external scrutiny, so that members can evaluate the service that is being delivered to ensure we are effectively meeting children and young people's needs. Performance reporting and impact is scrutinised by the committee, along with issues and risks.

The committee oversees the delivery of our cared for children's and care experienced adult strategy and the pledges that we made in June 2022.

Corporate Parenting Strategy and Pledges

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018-21 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 in 2021/22 received a report on progress against the pledges from the strategy. **Four workstream groups** aligned to the pledges were in place to ensure that the strategy was delivered effectively.



The new **Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-26** is being co-produced with children and young people and will be launched in 2022, which will replace the current Corporate Parenting Strategy.

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.

Key achievements this year

- The new Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy for 2022-26 has been co-produced with children and young people which sets out our ambitions as corporate parents and what actions we will take to continue to develop our support.

- 99% children and young people participated in their reviews.
- My Voice (our Children in Care Council) and the shadow committee continued to meet and are focused on improving outcomes for children and young people. Our young people have been involved in a range of projects including making cards which were sent by post to all our cared for children to celebrate International Care Day 2022. We have also held an art exhibition where young people contributed a range of artwork, photographs and poems to share their experiences of being cared for. Currently young people are developing a ‘coming into care’ guide which will be given to children and young people when they become cared for. Our young people have also been involved in interviews for new staff. This is an important part of our recruitment strategy to ensure that we capture the views and opinions of our young people. This is also a good way of young people telling new staff what they want from their social worker.
- Children and young people’s views were sought and listened to through the cared for children’s survey and care leavers’ survey, which has informed our service development.
- The participation team visited more children in their placements to seek their views and wishes. The aim is that the participation team will visit all children and young people when they enter care and share with them all of the ways they can be involved in developing services.

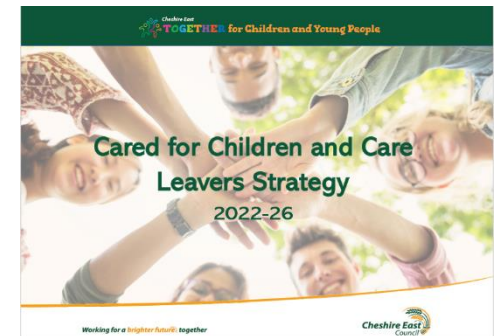
- Young people participated in frontline staff recruitment, particularly interviews.
- Councillors completed monthly visits with frontline safeguarding services which ensured there was councillor oversight of the issues that affect frontline teams.
- Several activities for November Children’s Rights Month were ran with the participation team and the care leavers’ service. These included photography competitions, a Crystal Maze activity day and a trip to Alton Towers. These activities were run in conjunction with Pure Insight and Just Drop In. Feedback from young people involved in these activities was positive. During the school holidays since February 2021, activity days have also taken place virtually led by a participation worker.

“Being in care has been amazing. My social worker who I have been with has made sure I live with people I can trust. I feel like people are making good decisions about my future.”

Feedback from a young person in the cared for survey

Next steps

- Continue to work together with children and young people and enable children to participate in a meaningful way to develop our services and inform practice.
- Stabilise the workforce so that children and young people benefit from enduring relationships with their social worker.
- Work together to ensure that the right children become cared for.
- Launch our Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy for 2022-26 and ensure there is effective governance in place for delivering this.
- Provide ongoing training and support to councillors, stakeholders and employees about being the best parents to our cared for children and care leavers.
- Regularly celebrate the achievements of our cared for children through events such as the Star Awards and national care leaver week.
- Continue to work with cared for children and care leavers to change the language we use.



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**.

Key achievements this year

- We have carefully monitored the impact of covid upon children and young people's education and attendance. At the beginning of December 2021, the overall attendance figures for our school-aged children was 91%. As at March 2022, primary attendance was 88%, secondary was 89% and Special schools 88% - we have dedicated specialist attendance officers who have robust systems in place to track and monitor attendance daily and are

able to ensure timely support is in place. Targeted and creative approaches have been delivered to prioritise educational outcomes of our children, including a survey to children and young people about their experiences during the pandemic.

- A new governing board for the virtual school has been established and is chaired by the director of children's social care to increase accountability for children's outcomes through multi-agency governance including representatives from across foster carers, residential care homes, adoption counts, schools and settings.
- 87% of cared for children are in good/outstanding schools
- 100% cared for children and young people had at least one personal education plan in place during the pandemic.
- We have had no permanent exclusions for the past three years.
- We have 18 young people at university, this is our highest number ever, and we are proud and want to ensure that as many of our young people have this opportunity as possible.
- We have supported 7 young people into apprenticeships: 6 external and one within the council.
- We delivered strong support for the Afghanistan resettlement scheme in securing places in schools for all families involved – this has been recognised as best practice by the Home Office.

- Elective home education (EHE) advisors worked with social workers to review the education provided to electively home educated children on child protection or child sexual exploitation plans, offering support to make school applications if home education was not deemed appropriate as part of the plan.



- In the care leavers survey in October and November 2021, 90% of young people told us they know how to access education, employment or training.
- There has been a strong offer of support for post 16 young people through a dedicated virtual school team. The Virtual School have a dedicated Post 16 education advisor that works

across the team with our young people from year 11 up to year 13 to ensure clear post 16 pathways are in place. We work closely with the care leavers team and meet monthly to ensure smooth transitions are in place for those young people from aged 18. We have a dedicated learning mentor and post 16 tutor that have a specific focus on those not in education, employment or training (NEET) to ensure support is in place for re-engagement back into EET.

- Our NEET figures are continuing to show improvement, despite the pandemic, and our current performance for young people aged 16 to 25 is 37% NEET. We are continuing to work to improve this further. The statutory return figures are 29% of 17-18 are NEET and 41% of 19-21 and have a range of targeted support in place to address this including a specialist role via the Journey First project and a dedicated Venture with Confidence programme. Feedback from the participants is extremely positive and the programme has been successful as a pathway to get young people involved in a range of activities and into education, employment, or training. Previous programmes have seen real successes for our young people.
- The Virtual School and Care Leavers' service attended an employer event in November 2021 – this was a virtual event with 46 employers attending. The event enabled those employers who have successfully offered employment and apprenticeship opportunities to care leavers to share their experience. The

impact of this event was that employers have since offered our young people work experience, apprenticeships and careers advice.

- National Apprenticeship Week was celebrated in February 2022, and we used a variety of methods to increase apprenticeship awareness for our care leavers across the council.
- We established a new role of apprenticeship coordinator to support care leavers.

Next steps

- Develop opportunities for apprenticeships within the council and local businesses. Offer support to care leavers in preparing for and undertaking apprenticeships from our apprenticeship coordinator role.
- Continue to improve the completion rate and quality of personal education plans across all ages from early years to post 16.
- 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 the use of pupil premium.

- Strengthen the voice of children and young people in supporting strategic development across all areas of the virtual school.
- Ensure that agencies providing opportunities for our children and young people are supported and equipped to understand and meet their needs.
- Ensure a robust action plan is in place to reduce NEET and encourage re-engagement opportunities for our care leavers.
- The Virtual School headteachers' report for 2021-22 will be presented in the November committee meeting, for approval. This will provide full details of this academic year with an outline of the impact and achievements of our children and young people.



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**.

Key achievements this year

- We have reduced our cared for population from 539 (end of Q3 2020-21) to 522 end Q4 2021-22 evidencing a whole system approach and shared vision to supporting children and young people to remain with their families where they are safe to do so. This equates to 67 cared for children per 10,000 of the child population within Cheshire East, which is slightly lower than last year. Latest statistical neighbour comparison is 60, the National figure is 67 and the Northwest region is 97.
- Children can remain within their family through bespoke packages of support. Additional resource into edge of care has supported more children to remain in their family where this is safe and appropriate.
- We are continuing to see progress in our vision for children and young people 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 Mockingbird constellations. We have increased the number of children living inside the borough: at the end of March 2021, 302 (58%) were placed within Cheshire East and at the end of March 2022 this figure was 321 (61%) of cared for children. Our latest data indicates that we have reduced the number of our children living outside of the boundary and over 20 miles away from 21% last year to 18.6% this year. Nationally the average is 16% and our statistical neighbours are 19%.
- 40% of our cared for children are living with Cheshire East Foster Carers, (this includes connected carers). We are looking to increase this and there has been an active fostering recruitment campaign.
- We are continuing to work to reduce the number of children who live in residential care. In March 2021, we had 40 children living in residential settings, but had reduced this to 31 at the end of March 2022.

- 11 new mainstream fostering households were approved between April 2021 and March 2022.
- The increase in foster carer contacts and referrals has created a net increase of placements of between 17 and 25 (if siblings placed together).
- We have now moved most of the court work from the Child in Need/Child Protection teams to the Cared for Children's teams. The aim of this transfer is to support effective early permanence planning. We have a continued focus on permanence through a weekly panel chaired by heads of service. In the 6 months to end of September 2021, 48% of children who entered care had their plans of permanence endorsed in their second review.
- We have worked in partnership with our regional adoption agency Adoption Counts to achieve permanence for 14 children in 2021/22 through adoption. Another 17 are living in their adoption placements.
- Flude House, one of our bespoke children's homes was inspected by Ofsted and was judged 'Good'.
- The number of children where care orders have been discharged is increasing; in 2020/21, we discharged care orders for eight children and in 2021/22 we have discharged care orders for 18. There are several applications currently before the court so we are hopeful that this number will

significantly increase. This means that children are able to live within their family without the intrusion of the Local Authority where this has been assessed to be in their best interests.

- We have launched 'Together for Fostering', our own fostering recruitment and assessment team.
- We have improved communications and engagement with foster carers with regular newsletters, forums, attendance at gatherings and surveys.
- Foster carers are involved in service developments, and a foster carer is a member of the virtual school governing body.



Next steps

- Continue to ensure that cared for children and young people can live in good, safe homes locally, as early as possible. Develop a discharge team for children that are already living with their family or parents to reduce the need for care orders and ongoing intervention.
- We will ensure children and young people have opportunities to stay connected to their families and friends in the least restrictive way possible.
- Review all residential placements monthly to ensure that children and young people can have the opportunity to live within a family.
- Develop the No Wrong Door model and principles within Cheshire East which will provide support to young people who are within, or on the edge of, care.
- Increase support to cases where there is a possibility of adoption disruption and prevent these children entering the care system again.
- Further strengthen our communication and engagement with foster carers and involve them in service development.

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**.

Key achievements this year

- In the cared for children's survey conducted in January – March 2021, 87% young people said they had someone to talk to if they had any health concerns.
- 79% care leavers said they feel well informed of how to make good choices regarding their health, and the local services to help them.
- 80% of cared for children have an up-to-date health assessment.
- 85% of cared for children in Cheshire East had an up-to-date review health assessment.
- 100% of young people have health passports by their 18th birthday.

- For children 5 and under 94% of developmental checks were completed within timescales.
- 97% of immunisations were completed.
- Our dedicated emotional wellbeing service delivers support for young people and their carers.
- As a result of multiple escalations made by the Designated Nurse to NHS England related to difficulties in Cheshire children being able to see a dentist, a dental access pilot was launched across Cheshire and Merseyside. This has been set up and run by NHS England's dental team and represents an opportunity for all our children and young people to access a dentist more easily. A number of dental practices across Cheshire and Merseyside were identified and agreed to see any looked after child referred to them. An electronic referral form was developed and the Designated Nurse acts as a gatekeeper of referrals made within Cheshire East.



Next steps

- Track and monitor the health needs of our children and young people, including those who are currently living outside of Cheshire East, ensuring their needs are met.
- We will support children and young people in care to have improving emotional mental health and wellbeing.
- We will ensure cared for children and care leavers have their health assessed in a timely way and that assessments are of a good quality and used to inform the care plan.
- Promote the new NHS England dental referral programme to ensure cared for children have access to timely dental health services.
- We will support timely and effective transitions from children's to adults' services.
- Develop an effective tool that can be used to measure health outcomes for cared for children.

Pledge Five

We will prepare young people for adulthood

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

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

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

Key achievements this year

- We are currently working with 315 young people in the Care Leavers' Service, of whom just over 30 are open to us formally under the 21+ Offer; a further 140 young adults know that they can also access support and advice from us at any time via this provision.
- We are very proud of Cheshire East Council's commitment to our care leavers. The council has covered the £20 cut to Universal Credit for six months from October 2021 for all young adults who receive the benefit and our 16- and 17-year-olds in supported accommodation, a total of 125 young people.

This has been exceptionally well received by our care leavers and Mark Riddell, National Advisor for Care Leavers.

- We have reviewed and enhanced the local offer to care leavers.
- Ignition Panel continues to meet monthly to offer young people choice and involvement in decision making around 16+ and supported accommodation. We continue to find that holding the meeting virtually over Teams has actually increased young people's participation and led to a greater sense of ownership in the decisions that are made.
- We have recommissioned our 16+ supported accommodation offer together with our young people.
- Our successful tenancy ready course has an average of two young people per month completing to secure their B status.
- 98% of our care leavers are in suitable accommodation and we are in touch with these young people. There are four young people who choose not to engage with the service, but we know where they live, and they know they can change their mind if they need support. Our use of emergency accommodation is at an all-time low and when we analysed the last nine cases, we found that in over half of them, the arrangement had suited the young person.
- We have strengthened our practice in relation to 16/17-year-old homeless young people.

- We have reduced our figure for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) to 34% with a further 3% involved in re-engagement work; these figures are lower than the national average and compare well with our neighbouring authorities. Over the past year, our Apprenticeship Coordinator has increased the number of young people in full-time schemes to 9 but is currently supporting another 28 to become 'apprenticeship ready', many of whom are on the verge of securing a position. We also have 18 Care Leavers at University, the highest figure in recent years.
- Our latest NEET course for young people who have experienced specific difficulties in accessing work or training has been another great success: Cal is starting an apprenticeship with the Youth Service; Allie has an apprenticeship with Motherwell, Will is starting a work placement/apprenticeship at a local Farm; Jack signed up for college and Kelly, who has never been able to engage on the course, is looking at volunteering and attending the next one; Gemma has passed her probation as a Teaching Assistant apprentice at a local school and is now considered 'an integral part of our team'. Finally, James, who has been receiving long term tier 4 treatment for mental health problems is attending college and looking to move into supported accommodation; the hospital have stated on many occasions that our involvement and James attending NEET course have been fundamental in improving his wellbeing and progression.
- We have successfully and proactively been involved in the National Transfer Scheme to bring asylum seeking young people to this area from the south coast. We have developed a music project with the Love Music Trust and a group of musicians from Manchester who were originally refugees themselves.
- Mentoring and wellbeing support to our care leavers has continued to be offered through our partnership with Pure Insight. 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. Feedback from young people around the support they receive from Pure Insight is overwhelmingly positive and we're incredibly proud of our 4+ year partnership. It represents an essential cornerstone of the Local Offer to our Care Leavers across emotional well-being and psychological support, mentoring and support to young parents. Pure Insight's amazing staff are passionate and authentic and never fail to go the extra mile, something that is so important in engaging young adults who may have good reason to be fearful of the involvement of statutory agencies. It's always hard to put a price on some of these softer outcomes but we're confident that the partnership delivers both outstanding outcomes, and outstanding value.
- Together with Pure Insight, we actively support our young people to become good parents themselves; Amy had a son in

January last year, she is still in a relationship with the father and they are doing well; she is living independently and working. Kathy, who has 2 children is at University and will complete her degree this year; she has a good bond and relationship with her children and has ongoing support with the counsellor. Megan had her daughter in December; both parents are coping really well and she is attending baby groups and is engaging with the health visitor, who has no concerns.



Next steps

- Involve children in care and care leavers in developing their plans for after care.
- Ensure care leavers are supported to make decisions that affect their lives.
- Understand how children and young people want us to communicate with them and look at ways to develop our digital offer in line with their views.
- Publish and publicise our offer to care leavers in accessible ways, in line with statutory guidance. Ensure that care leavers know what they are legally entitled to and are helped to access support after they leave care.
- Celebrate the achievements of our care leavers during National Care Leavers week and as a matter of routine. One of our Senior PAs regularly collates achievements by our young people during her supervision of team members. Here are just half of those recorded during only two months' work:
 - ❖ Carl has accepted a placement in Crewe with Emerging Futures and his PA has supported him to register with a recruitment agency and complete his CV
 - ❖ Mia has started on the Princes Trust, and she is really enjoying it
 - ❖ Hussein has moved into a shared house with another young person and is loving it!

- ❖ Caleb has done well in his mock exams in college.
- ❖ Jamie had completed his bronze and silver independence packs
- ❖ Ed has completed his Silver Independence packs
- ❖ Kathy has passed her driving test and bought a little Fiat!
- ❖ Nicola is happy working at the cat rescue
- ❖ Adele has just been taken on as an apprentice at a nursery where she was doing a placement.
- ❖ Jemma has completed the Tenancy Ready Course, is registered on Cheshire Home Choice and is now ready to move into her own property.
- ❖ Shameen has passed her theory test
- ❖ Emma finally has her provisional licence
- ❖ Davina has given birth to a daughter and has signed for her own property.
- ❖ Jill and Peter are being stepped down from pre-proceeding to CP.
- ❖ Mohammed has passed his driving test
- ❖ Chien has started his work placement at a nail bar
- ❖ Kevin has nearly finished his four-year apprenticeship and has just signed for his first tenancy.
- ❖ Shane is working with the drug and alcohol service in prison
- ❖ Jake has been engaging with Pure Insight and has been seeing his GP
- ❖ Mary has graduated from the Prince Trust