

Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting:	01 November 2022
Report Title:	Children's Rights Annual Report 2021 - 2022
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 2021 to 31 March 2022.
- 1.2. The report also provides information on Advocacy and Independent Visiting for 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. Recommendations

- 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 report provides an update to the Corporate Parenting Committee since the last report which was presented on the 2nd November 2021. The Children's Society has delivered the service to children and young people in terms of Advocacy and Independent Visiting since December 2013, the contract went up for re commissioning in 2019 and The Children's Society won the contract again, it runs from 1st October 2019 – 30th September 2024.
- 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
- 5.3. Independent Visitors 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 we received and how many matches we have where a young person is matched with one of our volunteers. The contract target is 20 matches at any one time. The detail on the delivery and impact is given in the report.
- 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 we deliver to volunteers to ensure we have sufficient volunteers to be matched.

6. Consultation and Engagement

- Engagement and working together with stakeholders (particularly Service Users) 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. The service Manager was part of a Task and Finish group within The Children's Society to develop a definition and guide for **what Advocacy is in the Children's Society**, this was developed and all workers within The Children's Society have this as a framework (see page 5 of the annual report)
- 6.1.

- 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 LA on a regular basis to ensure any improvements can be discussed or made that will make it better for children and young people. From this came a task and finish group with colleagues from the LA to discuss how best we can work together, and we developed a webinar to share with colleagues.

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 commissioner 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. There are no direct equality implications of this report

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 LA. For the period April 2021-March 2022 we worked with:
- 32 Out of Borough Advocacy children & young people cases.
 - 15 Out of Borough Independent Visitor children & young people cases
 - 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 as all other cared for children in borough

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 2021 to ensure the most vulnerable children and young people were given the opportunity to have an advocate or an Independent visitor.
- 7.8.2. Referral numbers had steadily and systematically increased over the past 3 years but in 2021 was very slightly lower than the previous year. There are currently no waiting lists for the Advocacy service with referrals actioned promptly and in timescale. In terms of Independent Visiting during 2021 we did have a waiting list for children and young people waiting for a match with an Independent Visitor. 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). With numbers increasing, mainly due to abuse and long-term neglect, it is imperative that children and young people continue to feel supported, empowered and their voice central to any decisions made about them.
- 7.8.3. 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. Nationally in England there are only 3.3% of cared for children who have an Independent Visitor.

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
March 2018 - April 2019	485	268	64	7
March 2019 - April 2020	534	253	77	10
March 2020 - April 2021	518	236	89	13
March 2021- April 2022			87	11

7.9. Public Health

7.9.1. Many of the children and young people supported during this year have spoken to us about their mental health or their parents' mental health and how this is affecting them (see page 15 of the report) which we have shared with the LA.

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 the volunteers know the local area.

Access to Information	
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Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Children's Rights Annual Report 2021-2022
Background Papers:	None