

Cared For Children and Care Leavers Committee

Agenda

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| Date: | Tuesday, 18th June, 2024 |
| Time: | 2.00 pm |
| Venue: | Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ |

The agenda is divided into 2 parts. Part 1 is taken in the presence of the public and press. Part 2 items will be considered in the absence of the public and press for the reasons indicated on the agenda and at the foot of each report.

It should be noted that Part 1 items of Cheshire East Council decision making meetings are audio recorded and the recordings will be uploaded to the Council's website

PART 1 – MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED WITH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS PRESENT

1. **Appointment of Chair**

To appoint a Chair of the committee for the municipal year 2024-25.

2. **Appointment of Vice-Chair**

To appoint a Vice-Chair of the committee for the municipal year 2024-25.

3. **Apologies for Absence**

To note any apologies for absence from Members.

4. **Declarations of Interest**

To provide an opportunity for Members and Officers to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests, other registerable interests, and non-registerable interests in any item on the agenda.

For requests for further information

Contact: Josie Lloyd

Tel: 01270 686466

E-Mail: josie.lloyd@cheshireeast.gov.uk with any apologies

5. **Minutes of Previous Meeting** (Pages 3 - 6)

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2023.

6. **Update from Shadow Committee (Verbal Update)**

To receive a verbal update on the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Shadow Committee.

7. **Ofsted Inspection Findings** (Pages 7 - 32)

To receive the report on the findings from the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS), conducted in February and March 2024, and the plans in place to improve services in relation to the findings.

8. **Children in Care Annual Report 2022-23 (NHS Cheshire and Merseyside)** (Pages 33 - 50)

To receive the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Children in Care Annual Report for 2022-23.

9. **Fostering Service Annual Report** (Pages 51 - 94)

To receive the Fostering Service Annual Report for 2022-23.

10. **Virtual School Head Teacher Annual Report 2022/23** (Pages 95 - 150)

To receive the Virtual School Head Teacher Annual Report for 2022-23.

11. **Review of the Terms of Reference** (Pages 151 - 156)

To review the committee's Terms of Reference, as is required on an annual basis.

12. **Cared for Children and Care Leavers Scorecard Q3 2023-24** (Pages 157 - 168)

To consider the performance of the Cared for Children and Care Leavers service for quarter 3 of 2023-24.

Membership: Councillors M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, J Bird, C Bulman, D Clark, E Gilman, G Hayes, S Holland, B Posnett, B Puddicombe and J Saunders

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cared For Children and Care Leaver Committee**

held on Tuesday, 5th December, 2023 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor C Bulman (Chair)
Councillor J Saunders (Vice-Chair)

Councillors L Anderson, M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, C Bulman, D Clark,
G Hayes, S Holland, B Posnett, J Saunders and B Puddicombe

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director Children's Services
Kerry Birtles, Director of Children's Social Care
Annemarie Parker, Head of Service: Cared for Children and Care Leavers
Angela Murney, Participation Worker - Youth Support Service
Josie Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer

ALSO PRESENT

Jenny Foulkes, Service Manager – The Children's Society
Nicola Booth, Operations Manager – Adoption Counts
Kristen Roberts, Operations Manager – Adoption Counts (joined remotely via Teams)

15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Gilman.

16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

17 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

18 UPDATE FROM THE SHADOW COMMITTEE (VERBAL UPDATE)

The committee received a presentation with an update from the shadow committee, My Voice, and feedback from the children and young people. Since the last committee meeting, there had been lots of conversations

with the shadow committee around education as a theme. Young people talked about their experiences and lots of them had felt positive about staying in the same school where possible; however it was recognised that, for some, it did mean extended travel time which could have an impact. Regarding the Virtual School, it was noted that not all had had 1:1 support from a learning mentor but those that did found it positive. Language within schools was also raised as an important topic and there was an opportunity to educate further on this subject.

The committee thanked the officers for the work involved.

19 ADOPTION COUNTS ANNUAL REPORT 1 APRIL 2022 - 31 MARCH 2023

The committee received the Adoption Service Annual Report 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023.

A number of queries were raised, including:

- Only 27% of stage 1 assessments were being completed within the target timescale, therefore how could interest be sustained
- A request for an update on the commissioning of the adoption psychology service
- What the impact was when a paediatrician was not in attendance as adoption panel meetings
- What progress was being made with delays in court proceedings

In response, the committee were advised that the adoption service were conscious of the delays in stage 1 timescales and that this was due to statutory checks being undertaken. A number of conversations had taken place with partner agencies and the current systems in place at Adoption Counts were being looked at to establish whether anything could be done differently.

The adoption psychology service was commissioned each year, with it currently being commissioned until March 2024. Consideration was being given to whether there would be funding available for it to continue after this.

A lack of a paediatrician attending the adoption panel consistently was something that continued to be escalated by the panel, however assurances were given that this was not detrimental to the panel being able to make decisions as up-to-date health information still had to be provided in writing.

There were improvements in court proceedings, both locally in Cheshire East and regionally. As a region, the average length of time for care proceedings was now under 50 weeks. Cheshire East had a strength in

reducing the number of hearings per case meaning quicker decisions could be made but there was still more work to be done.

A request was made for the Adoption Service Annual Report to be brought to committee as early as possible. Officers would take this request away and suggested that it may be possible to bring a mid-year update, for example a presentation with updates and highlights.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

20 CHESHIRE EAST ADVOCACY AND INDEPENDENT VISITOR SERVICE – THE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY ANNUAL REPORT

The committee received the Cheshire East Advocacy and Independent Visitor Service Annual Report for October 2022 to September 2023.

It was noted that the current commission was due to end in late 2024 and it was queried whether there was an update on where this was up to in the commissioning cycle. The committee were advised that there was a statutory requirement to provide an advocacy service and that due diligence was being done to ensure an advocacy service would continue to be provided.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

21 CARED FOR CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS SCORECARD Q2 2023-24

The committee received the Cared for Children and Care Leavers scorecard for quarter 2 of 2023-24.

Recruitment of social workers and dental checks for children and young people continued to be areas of concern for members. Social worker recruitment was improving with some agency workers applying for permanent roles. Dentistry remained a priority for improvement.

Reference was made to work streams which members had previously had the opportunity to be involved in directly. It was noted that members were not currently allocated to specific work streams and it was queried whether this could be started again. Officers agreed that it would be good for members to be involved and suggested that the new year would be a good opportunity to put out invitations for areas of interest.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

The meeting commenced at 14.00 and concluded at 15.50

Councillor C Bulman (Chair)

OPEN

**Cared for Children and Care Leavers
Committee**

18 June 2024

Ofsted Inspection Findings

**Report of: Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director Children's
Services**

Ward(s) Affected: All wards

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report briefs committee on the findings from the Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) conducted in February and March 2024, the plans in place to improve our services in relation to the findings, and monitoring arrangements from Ofsted and the DfE.
- 2 This report relates to the objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25 to be a council which empowers and cares about people; that works together with residents and partners to support people and communities to be resilient; protects and supports our communities and safeguards children, adults at risk and families from abuse, neglect and exploitation; to be the best corporate parents to our children in care; and ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential.

Executive Summary

- 3 Cheshire East Council received an Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) between 19 February – 8 March 2024. The inspection findings are set out in a [report](#) (appendix 1) which was published on 16 May 2024.
- 4 The inspection found that despite improvements identified in some areas of practice, services required improvement as the quality of services children experienced was too variable, and for care leavers services were inadequate.
- 5 Cheshire East's overall judgement is inadequate. When an authority receives a judgement of inadequate in any area, they can only receive an overall

judgement of inadequate. As care leavers was judged inadequate, the overall rating is inadequate.

- 6 As we are judged to be inadequate we are required to submit an action plan (to be referred to as an improvement plan thereafter) to Ofsted 70 working days after publication of the report.
- 7 We will then be subject to monitoring from Ofsted. Monitoring visits will focus on where improvement is needed the most. The first monitoring visit will take place 6 months after the publication of the report.
- 8 We will receive an improvement notice from the DfE, which will require an independently chaired improvement board. A DfE improvement advisor has been appointed to work with Cheshire East to support us to improve outcomes for children and young people and will chair the improvement board.
- 9 We currently have an improvement board to drive the improvements identified within previous inspection reports and other identified areas for improvement and this is chaired by the DfE improvement advisor appointed to support the JTAI improvement, which was signed off by the DfE in December 2023. This will continue to meet to scrutinise and support the development of the new improvement plan and to oversee immediate improvement activity. This meets monthly and membership includes senior officers, the lead member, and the chief executive. The new Improvement board will step up in July to ensure governance arrangements for the delivery of the plan are robust.
- 10 The leadership team have developed a first draft of a new improvement plan, in response to the inspection findings, and this will be discussed at the next improvement board on 30 May. This will then be discussed and developed with Ofsted and the DfE in an action planning meeting on 19 June as part of ILACS framework. The plan is due to be submitted to Ofsted by 23 August 2024. We propose to submit subject to committee and council's approval following full council on 17 July 2024.
- 11 The inspection found that improvements have been made since the last inspection in 2019, when services for children were judged to require improvement to be good.
- 12 The inspection also found that significant improvements had been made for children missing from home or at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation, addressing the findings from the joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) in July 2022.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the inspection findings, implications for monitoring from Ofsted and the DfE, and plans to improve services.
2. Note that a task and finish workshop for the Cared for Children and Care Leavers committee and Children and Families committee will take place on 2 July 2024 to review and scrutinise the draft improvement plan.

Background

- 13 Cheshire East Council received an Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) between 19 February – 8 March 2024. ILACS inspections review how effectively local authorities support and protect children and young people across early help, child in need and child protection, vulnerable pupils, cared for children and young people, and care leavers. The inspection reviews how well we work together as a partnership and evaluates the effectiveness of leaders and managers. ILACS inspections are focused on the impact we have on the lives of children and young people.
- 14 The inspection team consisted of four social care inspectors, and a social care regulatory inspector, and an education inspector. ILACS inspections are a rigorous process. The inspectors spent almost all their time reviewing children's files, understanding their stories, and shadowing and speaking to practitioners and managers. Inspectors spoke to some children, young people, and families (including care experienced young people and young adults, foster carers, and adopters), schools, and senior leaders (including the Chief Executive and Chair of the Children and Families Committee) to inform their findings. The inspection focused on practice within the last six months.
- 15 The full inspection findings are set out in a [report](#) which was published on 16 May 2024 (appendix 1).
- 16 Cheshire East received the following graded judgements:

| Judgement | Grade |
|--|---------------------------------|
| The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families | Requires improvement to be good |
| The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection | Requires improvement to be good |
| The experiences and progress of children in care | Requires improvement to be good |

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|--|------------|
| The experiences and progress of care leavers | Inadequate |
| Overall effectiveness | Inadequate |

- 17 The inspection found that despite improvements made in some areas, the quality of practice and the experience and progress of children and young people is too variable, and for care leavers it is inadequate. The inspection graded one of the four judgment areas as inadequate, it graded the other 3 as requires improvement to be good.
- 18 The inspection identified the following 7 key areas for improvement which are set out on page 2 of the report:
- Senior leaders' oversight of performance to ensure that there is a coherent approach to continuous improvement.
 - The quality, consistency and responsiveness of support, advice, and guidance for care leavers, including those who are homeless, with additional vulnerabilities, and those who are over 21 years of age.
 - The quality of management oversight and supervision to ensure that consistent, good social work practice is in place.
 - The quality of plans for children to ensure that they are more child-focused and drive forward positive change in a timely way.
 - The quality and frequency of visits to children so that they are purposeful and in line with assessed needs.
 - The sufficiency of suitable placements that can meet children and young people's assessed needs.
 - The effectiveness of child protection chairs and independent reviewing officers (IROs) to escalate, challenge and scrutinise plans for children.

Care Leavers Judgement

- 19 The care leavers judgement was introduced into the Ofsted ILACS framework as a standalone judgement in January 2023. This was the first time that Cheshire East Council received a graded judgement on the experiences and progress of care leavers.
- 20 The legal definition of a care leaver comes from The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 which states that a care leaver is someone who has been in the care

of the local authority for a period of 13 weeks or more spanning their 16th birthday.

- 21 There are currently 621 care leavers in Cheshire East:

| Age | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | Total |
|--------|----|----|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|
| Number | 55 | 93 | 112 | 69 | 71 | 65 | 61 | 55 | 40 | 621 |

- 22 When a child remains in care from 16 until their 18th birthday their support is provided by joint allocation of a statutory social worker and a personal advisor who work together with the young person and parent/carers to plan their transition to adulthood. At 18 the young adult is supported by the Care Leaving service up to the age of 25, dependant on circumstances and the wishes of the individual. The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers, sets out the requirements for this support.
- 23 The inspection found significant shortcomings in the quality of the practice with some young adults particularly those who were 21+. The inspection also found shortcomings in the accommodation provided for young people who were unable to secure or sustain permanent accommodation. These key areas for development will be covered in the improvement plan. The challenge in relation to suitable accommodation is a borough wide challenge and will require cross departmental collaboration to progress.
- 24 We have apologised to care leavers who have not received the service that they deserve and are committed to improve this at pace.

Improvement Planning

- 25 In addition to the key areas for improvement, the inspection identified other areas for improvement. A new improvement plan is being developed in response to all the inspection findings and is structured under the areas for improvement Ofsted highlight in their report. Immediate action was taken (starting during the inspection) to respond to the findings, and this is reflected in the plan alongside longer-term actions.
- 26 The new improvement plan and supporting arrangements follow the same model as the JTAI improvement which was shown to be successful. Progress against the plan will be scrutinised monthly by the independently chaired Improvement Board.
- 27 Each section of the improvement plan will have a dedicated lead who will be responsible for the delivery of that area of the plan, achieving and reporting on impact monthly. Actions and impact against the inspection findings will be

RAG rated monthly. The sources we will use to assess impact for each area of the plan will be outlined in each section.

- 28 The plan will be a live and responsive plan, so will adapt to incorporate new actions as needed. The plan covers the activity we will carry out over a 12-month period from April 2024 to March 2025. A new plan will be developed after this plan is completed for the period from April 2025 onwards.
- 29 At the action planning meeting with Ofsted, we will discuss the draft improvement plan to refine and develop this in relation to the inspection findings. The council is required to submit the improvement plan to Ofsted by 23 August 2024. However, we propose to complete the improvement plan before this date, with committee engagement in a task and finish workshop for the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee and the Children and Families Committee on 2 July and onward presentation to full council on 17 July for approval ahead of submission to Ofsted.
- 30 The inspection was a valuable source of detailed learning and immediate action was taken (starting during the inspection) to respond to the findings.

Activity to date

- 31 Key improvements that have already been put in place include:
- Contacting all 209 care leavers aged 21-25 who were not receiving a service to ensure they were aware of the support available to them and to offer them an allocated worker. 184 of these young adults are now being supported by the service. 25 young adults declined a service.
 - Our 21+ offer to care leavers has been reviewed and this is now an opt out offer rather than opt in. We will contact all young adults by phone on a quarterly basis to check if they want or need support.
 - Clear practice standards for the care leavers service.
 - A dedicated mandatory training plan for the care leavers service targeted around the inspection findings.
 - A new management structure for the care leavers service, ensuring frontline staff are supervised by qualified social workers. The planning for this was already in place pre-inspection and was a nil-cost process.
 - Delivering an in-house and bespoke leadership programme tailored to the inspection findings. This will support managers to embed a culture of high support, high challenge leading to improved outcomes for children and young people.

- The quality assurance framework has been revised following the inspection to include more thematic auditing to replicate the areas inspectors consider during inspections, to ensure that there is understanding of the outcomes of all our cohorts of young people. We have also strengthened arrangements to ensure the learning from audits improves practice.
- We will be opening two care leaver hubs in July 2024 at the Lifestyle Centre in Crewe and Macclesfield Youth Hub. These will provide safe spaces for care leavers to access support and advice. These hubs will be sited in existing premises used by children's services and will extend the use of these premises. The care leaver team and care leavers are enthusiastic about this development.

Monitoring

- 32 Due to the inadequate judgement, Cheshire East will be monitored by Ofsted, and we will receive an improvement notice from the DfE, which will require an independently chaired improvement board. A DfE improvement advisor has been appointed to work with Cheshire East to support us to improve outcomes for children and young people and will chair our improvement board. This is the same improvement advisor that supported our work on the JTAI findings, which is positive as we already have successfully established relationships, and our advisor has a strong understanding of our services, which will support us to make progress at pace.
- 33 Ofsted will carry out monitoring activity to assess progress. This includes:

| Monitoring Activity | Timescales |
|--|--|
| Action planning visit | Set for 19 June 2024 |
| Submission of the final action plan (improvement plan) | By 23 August 2024 |
| Monitoring visits | <p>First visit is 6 months after the inspection report is published, so this is expected to be in the autumn term.</p> <p>The timetable for monitoring visits will be agreed between Ofsted and the council. Ofsted will confirm the calendar month of each visit in advance.</p> <p>Up to 4 monitoring visits will take place per year.</p> |

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| | Between 4 and 6 monitoring visits will be carried out before a reinspection. |
| Reinspection | After between 4 and 6 monitoring visits have been completed. |

- 34 Ofsted monitoring visits will focus on where improvement is needed the most. We expect our first monitoring visit to be on care leavers. The focus of the first visit and the pattern of future visits will be agreed in the action planning meeting.
- 35 Monitoring visits will usually be carried out by two inspectors, with each visit lasting two days. Monitoring visits will involve the evaluation of case work to support children and young people. Feedback on the findings will be given at the end of the second day, and a report on the findings will be published on the Ofsted website. The first monitoring visit is not published.

Proposal for a Corporate Parent Working Group

- 36 The terms of reference for a proposed new partnership Corporate Parent Working Group are being developed to improve outcomes for Cheshire East's cared for children and care leavers. The LGA have indicated that this approach is recommended, with the Working Group as the strategic 'engine room' and the Committee as the scrutiny, particularly as we wish to raise the profile of corporate parenting. It is proposed to be chaired by the council's chief executive.
- 37 This group will ensure there is a joined up multi-agency and whole-council approach to supporting care experienced children, young people, and young adults, and will include cross-party members and care experienced young people. The group will be underpinned by workstreams on specific areas such as accommodation, health, preparation for adulthood and education, employment, and training. The working group will determine the workstreams that are required and will receive updates on workstream progress at each meeting. This will also include updates on the staying close project, which provides enhanced support to young people leaving care from children's homes. It is proposed that this will report to the Cared for and Care Leaver and the Children and Families Committees.

Consultation and Engagement

- 38 The views of children, young people and families, senior leaders, frontline practitioners and managers, and schools, were sought by inspectors during the inspection and have informed the inspection findings. We will continue to work together with children, young people, young adults, parents/carers, staff, and partners to develop, deliver and evaluate improvements.

- 39 A communications plan is in place to ensure the inspections findings are communicated to the relevant stakeholders at the appropriate times. A statement on the inspection findings was published on the Council website on the day the inspection report was published (16 May 2024). Communications will continue over the year on the improvement plan and progress to ensure stakeholders are informed and shape our improvements, including schools and partners.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 40 Cheshire East Council's children's services has received an inadequate judgement from the recent Ofsted inspection. The inspection demonstrated that there are areas we need to address at pace to improve outcomes for children. The council needs to ensure the findings from the inspection are addressed in a timely way to ensure we achieve good outcomes for children and young people and members need to be assured that the arrangements in place to address the shortcomings and make the necessary improvements are sufficiently robust and will deliver good or better outcomes for our children within a reasonable timeframe.

Other Options Considered

| Option | Impact | Risk |
|------------------------------------|---------------|--|
| Do not receive reports on progress | | There is a risk that committee will not have oversight of progress and will need to undertake this independently, for example by reviewing monitoring reports. |

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 41 The Office for Standards in Education Children's Services and Skills ('Ofsted') was created by the Education (Schools) Act 1992. It has a number of legislative powers focused on the inspection of services providing education and skills for learners of all ages and the inspection and regulation of services that care for children and young people. Ofsted is a separate and independent non-ministerial department, not part of the Department for Education (DfE) but it provides assurance to the DfE by monitoring educational and care standards and triggers intervention by the DfE where needed.
- 42 The committee report sets out the plans being put in place because of the Ofsted inspection and inadequate judgement in the report published on 16

May 2024. Members of the committee need to be assured that all requirements of the recommendations within the report and any improvement notice served upon the council by the DfE resulting from the Ofsted inspection findings, are complied with and that the plans in place deliver the improvements required within any timescales set by the DfE.

- 43 Any improvement notice serviced upon the Council by the DfE will have a number of requirements and is likely to require the creation of a focused improvement board. In addition, it will require the following.
- (a) Advisor requirements – the Secretary of State (DfE) will appoint an advisor to both the DfE and the Council who will continue to work with the Council until the DfE is satisfied they are no longer required.
 - (b) Improvement Plan – the plan must set out the actions to deliver appropriate and sustainable improvement covering the areas in the report and recommendation together with how this will be evidenced.
 - (c) DfE Reviews – these are likely to be at least every 6 months and
 - (d) Improvement Against Measures Set - the advisor will provide the regular reports on progress and areas of concerns.
- 44 The improvement notice will be published and failure to comply or poor progress can result in the imposition of directions to secure performance, which can include that the DfE can intervene and nominate a person to act on its behalf to secure performance.
- 45 The protection of vulnerable people is a council responsibility and oversight by members at council of the overall approach to improving service provision aligns with this obligation.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 46 We know from other areas that there may be financial implications for inadequate judgements, as additional funds can be required to support improvements. This can often be for external consultancy and/or expertise in supporting improvement, additional service capacity, an improved retention offer, and training. We expect that the financial implications for Cheshire East will not be as significant as in other areas as only one of our service areas was judged to be inadequate as opposed to widespread failures, and we have demonstrated that we already have effective processes in place to deliver improvements.
- 47 However, the challenges associated with sourcing suitable accommodation should not be underestimated and interdepartmental and partnership work will be required to ensure that the right solution is arrived at pace within the parameters of the challenging financial situation. There may be a strong case

for invest to save propositions which will need to be considered in year to avoid any drift in delivery. Any proposal, as required will be presented to the necessary committees.

- 48 External advice and support are provided through our DfE advisor, funded by the DfE. We are also accessing support at nil cost from other authorities through the DfE sector led improvement programme, including our roll out of the restorative practice model, and from the LGA who will provide corporate parenting support and training.
- 49 Improvement activity will be prioritised within services to ensure that improvements can be delivered by existing services and within our existing budgets wherever possible. Inadequate judgements often result in the loss of staff, and there are some areas where we may need to boost capacity, including leadership capacity to ensure that improvements can be delivered at pace. We will ensure that critical posts are covered which may incur additional costs. If any additional costs in 2024/25 can't be managed within the existing wider service budgets, then these pressures will be reported as soon as possible for inclusion in the services in year budget monitoring and reporting.
- 50 Any service improvements that would require ongoing additional funding will have business cases developed for inclusion within the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2025/26 onwards.

Policy

- 51 The draft terms of reference for the Improvement Board and the Corporate Parent Working Group are included in the appendices. Any policy implications will be reported to committee as part of updates on progress against the improvement plan or updates from the Corporate Parent Working Group.

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| | <p>A council which empowers and cares about people</p> <p>Work together with residents and partners to support people and communities to be strong and resilient.</p> <p>Protect and support our communities and safeguard children, adults at risk, and families</p> | |
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| | <p>from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.</p> <p>Be the best Corporate Parents to our children in care.</p> <p>Ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential</p> | |
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Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

- 52 Good quality practice with families ensures that all children and young people's needs are considered and supported.

Human Resources

- 53 Colleagues within children's services and across the partnerships work tirelessly to support children and families. The inspection found staff enjoy working in Cheshire East and feel well supported by managers, that there is a strengthened and stabilised workforce and that caseloads have been reduced to manageable and sustainable levels.
- 54 The outcome of the inspection is disappointing to all who work in the service. Leaders have worked closely with teams to focus on using the inspection findings to continue to improve our support to children, young people, and young adults. Staff have been offered support around their wellbeing and made aware of the different support options available should they need or want this.
- 55 The leadership team will be meeting with the unions as appropriate to discuss any staffing implications.
- 56 We are committed to support this workforce deliver good and better outcomes for children and young people in Cheshire East, however it is well documented that the challenges of scrutiny and intervention can prove onerous to staff groups, and it is vital that this does not cause the improvement journey any drift or delay. This will be monitored within the improvement board.

Risk Management

- 57 There are reputational and financial risks to not providing good quality services, as well as risks to individual children and young people. The council must continue to ensure that these risks are mitigated by ensuring effective plans are in place to improve and that these make an impact on children's outcomes. The risk of failing to deliver the improvement plan will be added to the council's corporate risk register and this risk will be monitored quarterly through the Corporate Policy Committee.

Rural Communities

- 58 Vulnerable children and young people are present in all communities in Cheshire East.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 59 The improvement plan and Corporate Parent Working Group aims to improve the outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people.

Public Health

- 60 Same as the implication above.

Climate Change

- 61 There are no implications for climate change because of this report.

| Access to Information | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Contact Officer: | Lauren Conway, Business Manager Lauren.conway@cheshireeast.gov.uk |
| Appendices: | Appendix 1: Ofsted report |
| Background Papers: | Ofsted ILACS Framework The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers DfE (publishing.service.gov.uk) |

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Inspection of Cheshire East local authority children's services

Inspection dates: 26 February 2024 to 8 March 2024

Lead inspector: Teresa Godfrey, His Majesty's Inspector

| Judgement | Grade |
|--|---------------------------------|
| The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families | Requires improvement to be good |
| The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection | Requires improvement to be good |
| The experiences and progress of children in care | Requires improvement to be good |
| The experiences and progress of care leavers | Inadequate |
| Overall effectiveness | Inadequate |

Since the last inspection of Cheshire East in 2019, when services for children were judged to be requires improvement to be good, improvements have been made in some areas of practice. However, the quality of practice and the experience and progress of children and young people are too variable, and for care leavers they are inadequate.

Following the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) in July 2022, when areas for priority action were identified for children at risk of child exploitation, practice shortfalls have been addressed effectively. The development and opening of family hubs have strengthened the early help offer, enabling more families to access timely and appropriate support.

Nevertheless, there is much more to do to improve the quality of practice to ensure a consistent response to the most vulnerable children and care leavers in Cheshire East. There have not been sufficient improvements made in relation to services for those children who are subject to child in need and child protection plans. Furthermore, management oversight and challenge are not fully embedded across all service areas. Senior leaders had not recognised, until this inspection, the extent of improvement required in services for care leavers.

What needs to improve?

- Senior leaders' oversight of performance to ensure that there is a coherent approach to continuous improvement.
- The quality, consistency and responsiveness of support, advice and guidance for care leavers, including those who are homeless, with additional vulnerabilities, and those who are over 21 years of age.
- The quality of management oversight and supervision to ensure that consistent, good social work practice is in place.
- The quality of plans for children to ensure that they are more child-focused and drive forward positive change in a timely way.
- The quality and frequency of visits to children so that the visits are purposeful and in line with assessed needs.
- The sufficiency of suitable placements that can meet children and young people's assessed needs.
- The effectiveness of child protection chairs and independent reviewing officers (IROs) to escalate, challenge and scrutinise plans for children.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: requires improvement to be good

1. Children and families benefit from a well-developed early help offer. Newly established family hubs deliver coordinated support in community localities, supported by the work of targeted youth services. This is helping to reduce harm across all age groups of children. The quality of support provided by staff in the family hubs helps build families' resilience and improves outcomes for children.
2. When children's circumstances change, thresholds of harm, risk and need are well understood by professionals, who make prompt referrals to the integrated front door (IFD). For some children and families, there is a delay in the step up from early help services to statutory services. The step-up process is not as streamlined as it should be.
3. The arrangements in the IFD are well embedded and thresholds are consistently applied. Most contacts are dealt with promptly and effectively. Children at immediate risk of significant harm are identified and timely action is taken to safeguard and protect them. Issues relating to parental consent are understood and managed appropriately, but are not always well recorded.
4. Experienced social workers in the IFD obtain information from partner agencies and the voice of the child informs their decision-making. For a small number of children, this can lead to a delay in decision-making when the threshold is clearly met. The multi-agency partnership is not routinely included in social care

decisions about next steps to help and protect children, or when managers make decisions to close referrals.

5. Strategy meetings are timely and include relevant partners. Nonetheless, these meetings do not consistently capture the discussion about risk, which means that the rationale for decisions made, and next steps, is not always clear. Section 47 child protection investigations are mostly thorough; they are informed by the child's history and incorporate previous agency involvement. Risks and strengths are identified and analysed well. A range of suitable practice tools are used during the investigation process to understand children's lived experiences.
6. Most assessments are now comprehensive and analytical. Most social workers know their children well and speak with genuine warmth about the families with whom they work. Increased capacity in the disabled children's service has led to improved child-centred assessments and plans for the most vulnerable children. This has resulted in some children receiving more effective support.
7. The quality of child protection plans is inconsistent. Some are outcome focused, although some lack purpose and urgency. For some children who have been known to services for several years, and have been the subject of repeat child protection and child in need plans, the quality of practice is too variable. Contingency thinking and planning are not strong enough for these children. This means that, for some children, plans are not effective in improving their outcomes.
8. Reviews take place regularly for children subject to child in need and child protection processes. These are well attended by partners, who share information. Child protection chairs are not consistently effective in driving forward plans for children.
9. Visits to children in need and those subject to child protection plans are not always carried out at a frequency reflecting assessed need. Some children are not visited often enough for social workers to build trusting relationships with them. Visits to children do not always have purpose and do not link to their plans clearly enough. Frequent changes in social workers impact on the quality of these relationships and the progress of plans for some children, leading to delay.
10. Since the JTAI, there have been significant improvements in safeguarding practice for children missing from home and for those at risk of, or affected by, criminal and sexual exploitation. Focused work by leaders, to integrate and align multi-agency strategic and operational groups, has resulted in a clearer understanding and shared approach to prioritising and meeting children's needs earlier. There are now effective multi-agency forums in place to share intelligence about risks to children. Persistent work by committed staff in children's social care, and across the partnership, engages many highly vulnerable children. This is effective in responding to, and reducing the risk of, further serious harm.
11. Recent action has been taken by senior leaders to improve the coordination of pre-proceedings work for vulnerable children. A wide range of services are commissioned, bespoke to children's needs, that are successfully diverting them from court. This is preventing drift and is leading to more timely decisions about

either an application to the family court or for children to remain safely at home with support.

12. An effective joint protocol between housing and children's social care has been developed since the previous inspection. This means that most children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless are now quickly assessed through a joint homeless assessment and accommodated where appropriate.
13. Arrangements to support and safeguard privately fostered children in Cheshire East are now robust. These children are visited frequently by social workers and their needs are appropriately monitored by a dedicated IRO. When children and young people are identified as young carers, they receive a comprehensive offer of support. Young carer assessments are suitably tailored to the needs of children across all age groups.
14. There are effective systems in place for tracking, assessing and safeguarding children missing from education, and for those who are electively home educated.
15. There are robust local authority designated officer arrangements. Succinct advice is available for professionals and parents. An online system ensures that progress is tracked and systematically reviewed. This means that themes are identified and awareness-raising and training are clearly targeted. Thresholds for referral are applied appropriately and investigations are well coordinated to ensure that children are protected.

The experiences and progress of children in care: requires improvement to be good

16. Children remain in the care of their family members, including through kinship arrangements, when it is safe for them to do so. Where there are immediate safeguarding concerns, suitable action is taken, and decisions for children to enter care are appropriate. Assessments and plans for these children are mostly robust and effective. When children return home from care, decisions are appropriate. Some children are subject to statutory intervention for longer than they need to be. This is due to delays in the discharge of care orders.
17. Most social workers know their children well, although visits to children in care are not always carried out in line with statutory visiting schedules or children's assessed need. Too many children have experienced changes in social worker, which means that they must retell their story, and this prevents them from being able to build trusting relationships. Social workers undertake creative direct work with some children, which helps them to understand their journey, but life-story work and later-life letters are not usually started in a timely way. This means that children have limited opportunities to understand their journey into care at a time that is right for them.
18. Most assessments are analytical, comprehensive and regularly updated. However, the quality of care plans for children is inconsistent. Children's views are usually captured in their care plans, which are regularly monitored at review meetings. IROs write sensitively worded letters to children, but do not always robustly challenge the appropriateness of plans, which are not always outcome focused.

The impact of multiple social workers and IROs on care planning has resulted in drift and delay for some children in achieving permanence.

19. When children cannot remain in the care of their birth parents, they are placed with extended family members in kinship arrangements, when appropriate. Most children in care live in settled and stable arrangements with carers who understand and meet their needs well. Some children with complex needs live in good-quality placements with committed carers, who are well supported to meet children's individual needs. Children are helped to keep in touch with important people in their lives.
20. Challenges to sufficiency impact on the choice of placements and the quality of children's experiences. Some children experience multiple placement moves, which are unsettling for them. A small number of young children who now live in children's homes have experienced frequent moves in foster care placements and too many changes in social worker. Although these placements are meeting children's current short-term needs, there have been significant delays in driving their care plans forward to secure long-term permanence. This is because there has not been effective management oversight and supervision of children's care plans, and IROs do not routinely challenge drift and delay.
21. Consideration is not routinely given to permanence planning for children from an early stage, although planning for children who are placed for adoption is timelier. New tracking systems have been recently introduced to address this, but it is too soon to evaluate the impact of this.
22. Children can access support from relevant health and well-being services. Children who have more complex health needs have effective and timely multi-agency plans to ensure that their health needs are met. Although there are emotional support services available for children in care, waiting lists result in some delay in children accessing these services. Children are supported to be healthy by their carers, but they do not always have their initial and review health assessments completed within appropriate timescales.
23. Senior leaders have appropriate oversight of the education of children in care. The virtual school provides targeted support to schools to ensure that staff understand how to meet the needs of children in care and how to support their well-being. Nevertheless, too many primary-aged children in care experience attendance issues as they move to secondary school. There is an appropriate focus on the attendance of children in care. Leaders have taken steps to address this through challenging and supporting schools to ensure that previously low rates of attendance for these children improve.
24. Personal education plans contain the required information, but outcomes for children in care overall are low. Many children in care are ill-prepared for adulthood and struggle to cope with the challenges that they face when they leave care. The identification of children and young people who are at risk of not being in education, employment, or training (NEET) does not begin early enough.
25. Most unaccompanied asylum-seeking children live in placements that meet their needs. They are encouraged to attend education and they have their physical

health needs met. However, a small number wait too long to access emotional support and counselling due to waiting lists.

26. Sufficiency of in-house foster carers is a challenge. Arrangements are in place for the local authority to join the regional consortium, which will provide additional resources in respect of recruitment and training to address some of the sufficiency challenges. Foster carers and kinship carers have access to a wide range of training, and there has been an improvement since the last inspection in the level of support that they receive.
27. The local authority is a member of a regional adoption agency (Adoption Counts). Prospective adopters are well prepared and supported. Adoption panel arrangements are effective, providing a strong quality assurance function. Agency decision-making is thorough and well considered.

The experiences and progress of care leavers: inadequate

28. The quality of practice for care leavers is inadequate. Risk of harm is not always recognised or responded to effectively. For care leavers over the age of 21, persistent efforts to engage them are not routinely made. Senior leaders recognised some of these shortfalls prior to inspection and had recently introduced a new management structure to support change. The extent of practice deficits was not fully understood by senior leaders until the inspection. As a result, too many vulnerable care leavers are not getting the right level of help, support or protection.
29. Not all children in care have the opportunity to get to know their personal advisers (PAs) to build a relationship with them before they are 18 years old. Planning for young people who transition to the leaving care service is not always robust. This means that there are some young people who leave care with too much uncertainty about how they will be supported.
30. Transition planning into adulthood for most care leavers is variable. There is some proactive planning for disabled care leavers with complex physical needs, and young people with neurodiverse needs. However, for other care leavers, proactive transition planning does not always take place. This means that these care leavers do not access the help and support that they need.
31. Some care leavers benefit from the support of highly committed, caring PAs. Most PAs are in touch with young people regularly; the frequency of contact is determined by how often young people need or want to see them. Despite this, not all PAs know their young people well enough to have trusted and meaningful relationships with them. For some young people, PAs do not know their stories of why, or when, they came into care.
32. Pathway plans do not consistently cover all the important elements of young people's lives. Plans do not consistently include other professionals. They are not sufficiently ambitious for young people, and they do not always capture young people's voices. Plans for unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers do not consistently acknowledge their unique cultural heritage, or identify how young people can access support for the trauma they have experienced. Plans are not

always effective in helping young people to make meaningful change in their lives. Support for care leavers is not effective enough, which means that many do not access employment, further education or training. Senior leaders are taking action to improve the format and quality of plans for care leavers, but there is still much more to do to improve this.

33. For some care leavers, risks are recognised and managed effectively. For other young people, there is a lack of professional curiosity about their day-to-day lives and living arrangements. This has resulted in a lack of understanding of risk, or a clear recognition of how best to support young people when they are at their most vulnerable. When potential risk of harm for care leavers is identified, it is difficult to see how this risk is managed or mitigated effectively. This means that some care leavers may be exposed to risky situations and people. This was not fully understood by senior leaders until this inspection.
34. Not all PAs spoken to by inspectors could describe the local offer to care leavers, or explain how care leavers could benefit from it. Not all young people are accessing the full range of entitlements or services available to them.
35. A localised approach with housing means that some young people can secure safe and suitable homes. This means that they are able to maintain local links and have access to important local services, employment and training opportunities. For care leavers who live out of the area, accessing suitable housing is challenging and some wait for extended periods in supported accommodation until suitable permanent accommodation becomes available. The local authority is taking steps to strengthen the over-18-years provision through revised commissioning arrangements, but these have yet to be put in place.
36. A small number of care leavers are homeless. This group includes some care leavers with the greatest needs, including those who struggle with their mental health, those who are NEET or those who are in unsuitable accommodation, or have no fixed abode. Information about where young people are living is not routinely updated. This means that the local authority cannot be assured that these vulnerable young people are safe and well cared for.
37. When young people become 21, unless they are in education or highly vulnerable, they are no longer provided with a PA or leaving care services unless they contact a duty worker and explicitly request help. At the time of this inspection, there were over 200 young people in this category, and this included very vulnerable disabled young people. Some of these care leavers have not been receiving the services they need, or are entitled to, and the local authority cannot be assured that they are safe.
38. Care leavers in custody are visited regularly and effective multi-agency planning takes place. For care leavers who are parents, PAs work persistently to engage and support them. When required, risk assessments are undertaken, and action is taken swiftly to safeguard the children of care leavers where there are concerns. All care leavers benefit from ongoing involvement from the IRO service, which maintains involvement with them up to the age of 21 years of age. This provides the opportunity for care leavers to retain trusted adults in their lives.

39. Care leavers can access community-based resources, but do not have a dedicated place they can go to which provides a safe space for them to receive support. The plan is for the newly opened family hubs to provide this in the coming months, but at present this is not available.
40. Care leavers' physical health needs are mostly met through health services. Young people are encouraged to seek support for their emotional well-being through their GP or specialist services. PAs make referrals to appropriate services for substance misuse and other specialist services. Care leavers with complex mental health difficulties are provided with effective support and planning by relevant agencies. Not all care leavers have access to their full health history.
41. Some young people are supported by their PAs to access apprenticeships either in the council or with local providers, which means that they have the opportunity to make a positive start in life. Too many care leavers, however, are NEET. They are not being encouraged and well supported to improve their life chances in order to achieve their aspirations for a better future.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: requires improvement to be good

42. Since the appointment of the director of children's services, shortly before the JTAI in 2022, action has been taken to restructure children's services to deliver significant practice improvements in a number of key areas.
43. Despite improvements, the quality of practice is still too variable, and the extent of shortfalls in practice in the care leaver service, particularly for vulnerable care leavers who are over 21, had not been fully understood until this inspection.
44. The development and opening of the family hubs have strengthened the early help offer. There has been an improvement in the quality of assessments. Stronger arrangements are now in place to track the progress of children in the Public Law Outline to reduce drift and delay. The response to children in private fostering arrangements is now robust and a joint protocol has been developed to underpin the response to homeless 16- and 17-year-old children. The response to children at risk of exploitation has been significantly strengthened and there is improved support for foster carers.
45. There is strong political and corporate commitment to children in Cheshire East and a strategic focus on improvement. The lead member is well sighted on issues impacting children. Despite the financial pressures the council faces, there has been further investment to strengthen services and increase staffing capacity. Throughout this inspection, leaders have been open and transparent about their improvement journey and they recognise that more work is required to address the remaining challenges to improve the lives of the most vulnerable children.
46. The local authority is aware of its corporate parenting responsibilities. A joint cared for children and care leavers' strategy has been co-produced with children and young people. The local offer is updated annually in consultation with a range of care leavers, partners and strategic leads. However, not all young people are informed of, or understand, the pledges contained within the strategy.

In addition, the local offer is not communicated effectively to all care leavers, which means that they are not all aware of, nor do they access, their full range of entitlements.

47. The sufficiency strategy is based on the projected continuation of the decrease in the number of children in care over several years. The local authority has been successful in securing funding to develop a 'staying close' initiative, although it is too soon to see the impact of this. Some children still live in homes that do not match their needs, due to a lack of choice. Despite the strategy, some care leavers are homeless and live in unsuitable accommodation for too long.
48. Senior leaders are open to external scrutiny and they respond positively to challenge. Leaders and managers are reflective and use learning from practice and feedback to improve the experiences and care of children. Throughout the inspection, they were responsive and acknowledged practice shortfalls promptly, making changes when necessary. This included contacting a proportion of care leavers aged over 21 years to establish their whereabouts and to clarify whether they required additional support.
49. The local authority undertakes regular audit activity. Changes have been made to the quality assurance framework following the engagement of external moderators. Leaders have recognised in their self-evaluation that more needs to be done to ensure that this activity is identifying all areas of poor practice and that it is consistently having an impact on outcomes for children.
50. The local authority's self-evaluation now recognises most of the strengths and areas for improvement. It provides a more realistic view on the quality of practice than it did a year ago. Performance information and activity is mostly used effectively to drive service improvement. More assessments and initial child protection conferences are now completed to timescale and the tracking of children in pre-proceedings is more robust. Recent arrangements to track permanence for children have been introduced, but it is too soon to see the impact of this, and some children continue to experience drift and delay. Systems to monitor and track groups of individual children have not been effective in identifying vulnerable care leavers who are not receiving the services they need.
51. Although most social workers receive regular supervision, this is not always sufficiently analytical or reflective. Management oversight across all service areas does not provide sufficient challenge or reflection to improve social work practice. For some children, this has led to their needs not being recognised or acted on in a timely way. Leaders have recognised this and there has been investment in a bespoke leadership development programme due to start in April 2024.
52. The recruitment and retention of social workers has been a priority for senior leaders since the last inspection. As a result, the workforce has been strengthened and stabilised in recent months. Senior leaders have taken steps to reduce the reliance on managed teams and increase social work salaries. Leaders have successfully converted some agency staff to permanent roles. Despite this, some children still experience too many changes in social worker.

53. The workloads of frontline staff are closely monitored by senior leaders, and have been successfully reduced to manageable and sustainable levels since August 2023. Staff enjoy working in Cheshire East and they describe a positive, open culture. Staff feel well supported by visible, available and approachable managers, and they have access to relevant training to assist them in their work.
54. Senior leaders express a tangible ambition to do the right thing to help, protect and care for the most vulnerable children in Cheshire East. Leaders recognise that more focused work is required to address the shortfalls and deliver the necessary improvements.

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NHS Cheshire and Merseyside System Oversight Board/Quality and Performance Committee

Date: 12 October 2023

Children in Care Annual Report 2022-23

| Agenda Item No | |
|---|---|
| Report author & contact details | Sharon Kelly (Designated Nurse Children in Care St Helens Place) Shân McParland (Designated Nurse Children in Care - Liverpool Place) With support from the NHS C&M ICB Designated Children in Care Network |
| Report approved by (sponsoring Director) | Sarah Martin (Head of Safeguarding) |
| Responsible Officer to take actions forward | Sarah Martin (Head of Safeguarding) |

Cheshire and Merseyside ICB System Oversight Board/ QPC

Children in Care Annual Report 2022-23

| | | | | |
|---|---|----------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Executive Summary | <p>The purpose of this report is to provide NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board (ICB) System Oversight Board and Quality and Performance Committee with an overview of the progress and challenges in supporting and improving the health of looked after children across the 9 Places within the ICB footprint. The ICB responsibility is for those children and young people who are in the care of Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens, Warrington, Knowsley, Halton, Wirral, Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester Local Authorities (LAs) and those who have been placed into these areas by other local authorities. The report is produced in line with duties and responsibilities outlined in the 'Statutory Guidance on Promoting the Health and well-being of Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and NHS England' (2015). This report sets out the range of activities, developments, achievements, and challenges that our cared for children team have been involved in across Cheshire and Merseyside and identifies key service priorities for 2023-24.</p> | | | |
| Key issues | <p><i>This report covers the period from 1st July 2022 to 31st March 2023. It is written to provide assurance to the ICB Executives and our partners that NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB is meeting the statutory requirements in commissioning services to identify and meet the health needs of the Cared for Children population across each Place across C&M. It is produced in line with duties and responsibilities outlined in the 'Statutory Guidance on Promoting the Health of Looked after Children (LAC): Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, Clinical Commission Groups and NHS England' (2015); The Children Act (1989) and The Children Act update (2004); and Looked After Children: knowledge, skills and competence of healthcare staff (Intercollegiate Role Framework, 2020).</i></p> | | | |
| Key risks | <p>NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB are committed to collaborating with partner agencies to ensure the safety, health, and well-being of all the cared for children and care leavers across Cheshire and Merseyside. Recognised as the most vulnerable in our society, it is essential that we ensure safe and effective services are delivered with a focus on quality and patient experience, and with the key priority of enabling every child to go on to achieve their full potential in adulthood.</p> | | | |
| Impact (x) (further detail to be provided in body of paper) | Financial | IM &T | Workforce | Estate |
| | X | X | X | |
| | Legal | Health Inequalities | EDI | Sustainability |
| | X | X | X | X |
| Management of Conflicts of Interest | N/A | | | |
| Patient and Public Engagement | <p>There is engagement with children in care at each Place via the children in care councils. Views from children in care and care leavers are actively sought through a variety of forums during and after their health assessments.</p> | | | |
| Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion | N/A | | | |

Cheshire and Merseyside ICB System Oversight Board/QPC

Cheshire and Merseyside

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Health inequalities | <p><i>“Children and young people who grow up in care are up to four times more likely to suffer poor health 30 years later than those who grew up with their parents.”</i></p> <p><i>The NHS Long Term Plan recognised the impact that the most vulnerable children, who need extra help from the state to safeguard their wellbeing, do not reliably get the support or access to the services that their needs demand. This results in poorer health outcomes, particularly for children in care and care leavers.</i></p> <p><i>This report supports the work our Designated Nurses for Children in Care have undertaken with partners across C&M to reduce health inequalities for this vulnerable cohort</i></p> |
| Next Steps | <p><i>Following ratification and approval at Safeguarding Oversight Group, this report will be presented to the ICB System Oversight Board. The report will also be shared at each C&M Place Corporate Parenting Board as per our children in care Statutory accountability</i></p> |
| Appendices | N/A |

| Glossary of Terms | Explanation or clarification of abbreviations used in this paper |
|-------------------|--|
| CiC | Children in Care |
| LAC | Looked After Children |
| C4C | Cared for Children |
| UASC | Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children |
| CICOLA's | Children in the care of other local authorities |
| CYP | Children and Young People |
| IHA | Initial Health Assessment |
| RHA | Review Health Assessment |
| CoramBAAF | Membership organisation for professionals working to improve outcomes for children and young people in care. |
| SDQ(s) | Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires |

Children in Care Annual Report (2022-23)

1. Introduction / Background

- 1.1** This is the first Children in Care (CiC) annual report for NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board (ICB) which was established on 1st July 2022. The purpose of the report is to provide assurance in relation to the ICB's statutory duties for Children in Care and an overview of the progress and challenges in supporting and improving their health outcomes.
- 1.2** The report covers the period from 1st July 2022 to 31st March 2023 and sets out the range of activities and developments that our children in care services across the ICB footprint have been involved in.
- 1.3** The report is produced in line with duties and responsibilities outlined in the 'Statutory Guidance on Promoting the Health and well-being of Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and NHS England' (2015).
- 1.4** The report provides detail for the 9 places within the ICB: Cheshire East, Cheshire West, Halton, Knowsley Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens, Warrington, and Wirral.
- 1.5** CiC are referred to in legal terms as 'Looked After Children'. In England and Wales, the term 'Looked After Children' is defined in law under the Children Act 1989. A child is Looked After by a Local Authority if he or she is in their care or is provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by the authority. Looked After Children into four main groups:
 - a. Children who are accommodated under voluntary agreement with their parents.
 - b. Children who are the subject of a care order or interim care order.
 - c. Children who are the subject of emergency orders for their protection.
 - d. Children who are compulsorily accommodated; this includes children remanded to the local authority or subject to a criminal justice supervision order with a residence requirement.
- 1.6** The term 'Looked After Children' includes unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), children in friends and family placements, and those children where the agency has authority to place the child for adoption. It does not include those children who have been permanently adopted or who are subject to a special guardianship, supervision, or child arrangement order.
- 1.7** Care leavers are young people aged 16-25 years old who have been in care at some point since they were 14-years old and were in care on or after their sixteenth birthday. These young people are statutorily entitled to some ongoing help and support from the local authority after they leave care but for the purpose of this report to avoid duplication care leavers numbers reported are aged 18-25 years.

Cheshire and Merseyside ICB System Oversight Board/QPC

- 1.8** Feedback from Looked After Children often indicates that they find it hard to relate to the term 'Looked After Children' and its abbreviated form of 'LAC'. Some have stated they find it derogatory to be defined in such a way, often saying that the phrase may be misinterpreted as one that infers they are 'lacking' as individuals. It has also been highlighted that every child should be 'looked after' by someone and as such the phrase does not define the uniqueness of their situation when being parented by the State. Although it is acknowledged that the 9 place areas use the terms Cared for Children, Children Looked After, Children We Look After and Children in Care, the remainder of this report will use the term Children in Care (CiC) for consistency; the term 'Looked After Children' will only be used in a legislative context.
- 1.9** CiC share many of the same health risks as their peers, although often, to a greater degree than their peers, with many CiC continuing to experience significant health inequalities once they have entered the care system. Meeting the health needs of these children and young people requires a clear focus on access to services. This approach can be assisted by commissioning effective health services, delivery through provider organisations and ensuring availability of individual practitioners to provide and co-ordinated care. It is also assisted by partnership working with children's social care. Under the Children Act 1989, we have a duty to comply with requests from a local authority to help them provide support and services to meet physical and mental health needs for children and young people experiencing care or leaving care and includes transition to adult services. To undertake this role effectively the team, collaborate closely with commissioned providers and the local authority.
- 1.10** NHS C&M ICB has a statutory responsibility to ensure that children in care have an initial health assessment and depending on age a six monthly or annual review health assessment. Services have been commissioned with our acute providers and community services to ensure this responsibility is met.
- 1.11** To gain assurance that health assessments are undertaken and effectively meet the needs of our children and young people, the Designated Nurse for children in care meets regularly with our Designated Doctors for Looked After Children, providers, and local authorities, providing a forum to proactively seek solutions where challenges within the system are identified. This is report back by exception through our Quality, Safeguarding and Performance Committee as well as both the Local Authority Corporate Parenting meetings.
- 1.12** Initial Health Assessments must be completed within 20 days of the child or young person entering care and be conducted by a suitable registered medical practitioner. The Initial Health Assessment identifies existing health problems and deficits in previous healthcare and provides a baseline for managing the child's future health needs.
- 1.13** The purpose of a Review Health Assessment is to promote children's physical and mental health and to inform the child's health action plan. Assessments are required to be completed twice yearly for children up to 5 years of age and annually for children aged 5 years and above. The timescale is measured from the Review Health Assessment being completed in the month it is due.

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Cheshire and Merseyside

2. Key Priorities for the Establishment of NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB

- 2.1** Prior to the establishment of NHS C&M ICB in July 2022, a benchmarking exercise took place to identify commissioning arrangements and service delivery models across the 9 Places. In addition, work was completed within the Safeguarding Steering Group work to identify key priorities to be addressed from July 2022 to March 2023. **Table 1** demonstrates the priorities, and we also provided an update in how we have achieved them.

Table 1 ICB CiC Priorities for 2022-23

| 2022-23 Priorities | Update |
|---|--|
| Ensure that the CiC Agenda is included in Policy Documents | On July 1st, 2022, statutory responsibilities previously held by the region's clinical commissioning groups regarding safeguarding children, safeguarding adults at risk, child death and children in care were transferred to NHS Cheshire and Merseyside. The Safeguarding Children, Adults at risk and Children in Care Policy was updated and approved in July 2022 and references Children in Care throughout. |
| Align the CiC Key Performance Indicators for 2023-24 | The KPI's for Children in Care have been reviewed and aligned across the 9 place areas. They have been shared with all providers and will be used from Q1 2023/24 |
| Establish a Mechanism for Collating CiC Performance Data | A mechanism for reporting Children in Care Performance Data has been established for Initial and Review Health assessments. This has been reported to the ICB and NHSE quarterly throughout 2022/2023. |
| Consider Viability of Commissioning a Dedicated Service for CiC Living Outside of Cheshire and Merseyside | This was considered through the safeguarding steering group and was not considered to be a viable option and therefore has not been progressed. |
| Re-establish the C&M Designated Professionals CiC Network | The C&M Designated Professionals Children in Care network was re-established in September 2022 and has representation from all Designated Professionals for Children in Care. The group considers best practice, learning from Place areas and Children in Care Policy and processes. |
| Contribute to the NHSE Children in Care Assurance Tracker Pilot | The Designated Nurse for Children in Care for Sefton Place contributed to the Children in Care Assurance Tracker and provided feedback to NHSE. It is anticipated that the feedback will be considered and reflected when the tracker becomes live. |
| Maintain Oversight of the NHSE Children in Care Dental Referral Pathway Pilot | The NHSE Children in Care Dental Referral Pathway Pilot has continued throughout 2022/23. There have been approximately 440 referrals made across the 9 |

Cheshire and Merseyside ICB System Oversight Board/QPC

Cheshire and Merseyside

| | |
|---|--|
| | place areas since the Pathway commenced in June 2021. The Designated Nurses have been represented at and contributed to the Pathway meetings to support improved dental outcomes for Children in Care. It has been confirmed that the Pathway will continue for 2023/24 to support our Children in Care. |
| Respond to National Guidance Related to Payment of Children in Care Healthcare | National guidance has been considered and the ICB have agreed that there will be no charging and recharging for statutory health assessments as per the guidance. There are exceptions to this (discussed within the guidance), all place areas are aware of the changes made and a letter has been drafted to share with Providers at Place. |
| Develop a Response to the NHS Universal Family (Care Leaver Covenant) Programme | On 27 October 2022 NHS Chief Executive Amanda Pritchard made a commitment to supporting care experienced young people announcing that NHSE would be signing the Care Leavers Covenant on behalf of all NHS organisations. ICBs and NHS Trusts do not have to wait for the national roll out of the NHS Universal Family (Care Leavers Covenant) Programme. A paper was approved by the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Executive Board in January 2023, that agreed to the progression of the NHS Universal Family (Care Leavers Covenant) Programme in 2023-24 although NHS Cheshire and Merseyside is not a pathfinder ICB. It is anticipated that our offer will be published on the Care Leaver Covenant website by October 2023 to coincide with Care Leaver week. |

3. Governance and Accountability Arrangements

- 3.1** Professionals responsible for ensuring the ICB effectively discharges its statutory duties are located within the Quality and Safety Improvement teams in each of the 9 Places across the ICB, under the central Nursing and Care Directorate. The safeguarding reporting and accountability structures for 2022/2023 are highlighted below in **Tables 2** and **Table 3**.
- 3.2** As clinical experts and strategic leaders, the Associate Director for Quality and Safety Improvement, Heads of Quality and Safety Improvement, Head of Safeguarding and the Designated Nurses and Doctors for Children in Care provide a vital source of advice for our organisation, NHS England, Local Authorities, Cheshire and Merseyside Constabularies and our Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships in each of the 9 Places. They also provide advice and support for health professionals in provider organisations and are available to independent providers within the area.

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- 3.3** The team provide advice to the organisations in the health economy in relation to planning, strategy and commissioning, including advising on performance indicators and quality measures specific to children in care and are part of the Designated Professionals and Named GP Network to provide leadership, accountability, and assurance.

Table 2: NHS C&M ICB Safeguarding reporting structure 22/23

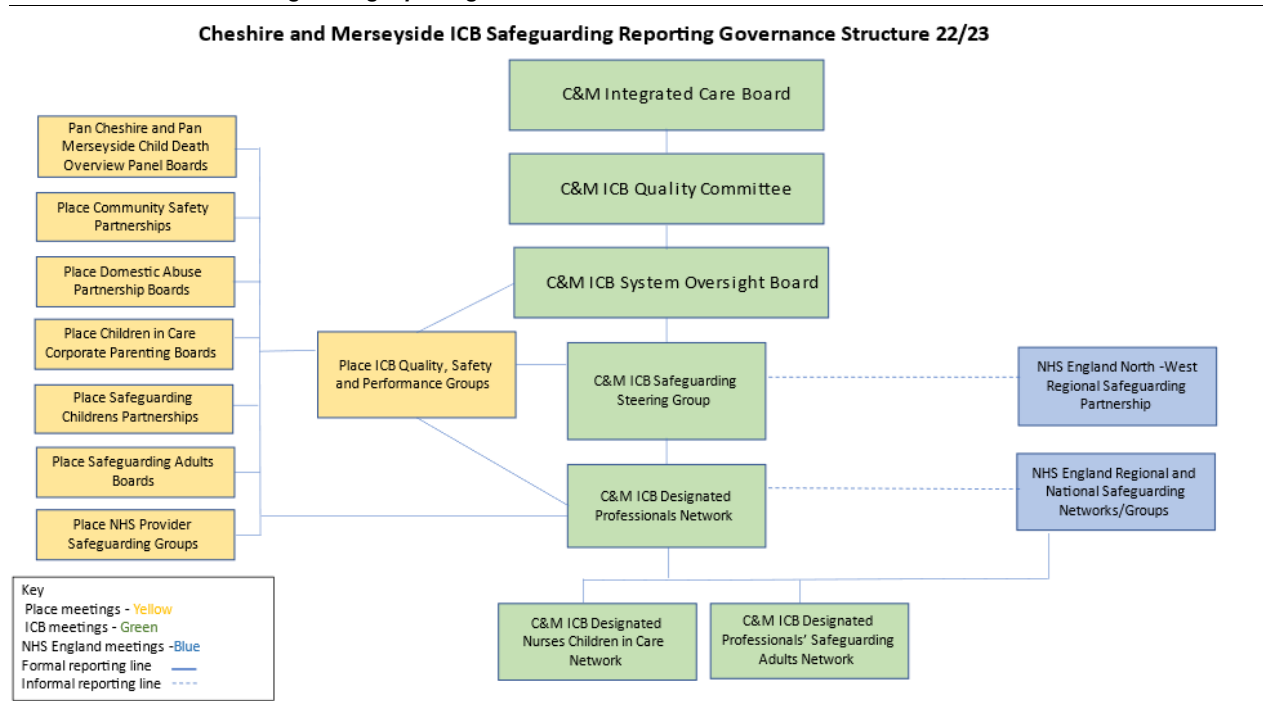
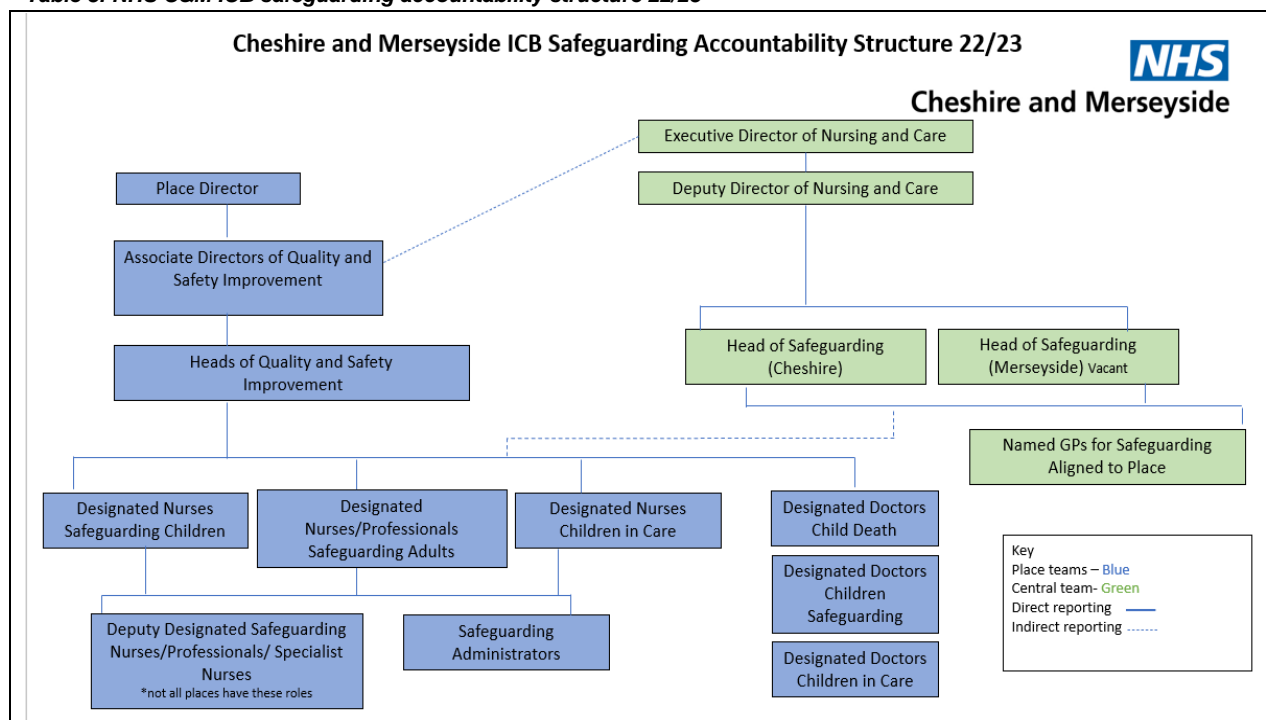


Table 3: NHS C&M ICB safeguarding accountability structure 22/23



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4. National Profile of Children in Care

- 4.1** The number of children in the care of local authorities in England has continued to increase year on year since 2008. Data regarding the national profile of children in care is released in December of each year therefore the figures for March 2023 are not available at the time of writing this report. The following information relates to data published for 31st March 2022:
- The number of children in the care of local authorities in England was 82,170 which was an increase of 2% from 2021.
 - The number of children who were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) was 5,570 which was an increase of 34% from 2021.
 - The number of children who entered care during that year was 31,010, an increase of 9% on the previous year.
 - The number of children who left care during that year was 30,070, an increase of 7% on the previous year.
 - The number of children who were adopted during that year was 2,950, an increase of 2% on the previous year.

5. Local Profile of Children in Care

- 5.1** **Table 4** shows the Cheshire and Merseyside local profile of the numbers of CiC, Care Leavers, Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and Children in Care of Other Local Authorities of across the 9 place areas as of 31st of March 2023.

Table 4: Local profile of children in care

| Place | Children in Care | Care Leavers | UASC | CICOLA's |
|---------------------------|------------------|--------------|------|----------|
| Halton | 387 | 94 | 19 | 141 |
| Cheshire East | 576 | 325 | 57 | 212 |
| Cheshire West and Chester | 607 | 206 | 25 | 189 |
| Knowsley | 342 | 50 | 20 | 164 |
| Liverpool | 1477 | 1016 | 178 | 298 |
| Sefton | 617 | 248 | 12 | 270 |
| St Helens | 469 | 150 | 12 | 150 |
| Warrington | 331 | 130 | 19 | 150 |

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| | | | | |
|-----------|------|------|-----|------|
| Wirral | 772 | 176 | 18 | 296 |
| C&M Total | 5578 | 2395 | 360 | 1720 |

6. Commissioning Arrangements

6.1 **Table 5** below provides detail on the commissioning arrangements for children in care health services in each of our 9 places. It is evidenced within the table that commissioning arrangements and service models vary across the ICB footprint.

Table 5: C&M Commissioning arrangements for children in care health services across NHS C&M ICB

| | Provider commissioned to undertake statutory Initial Health Assessments | Provider commissioned to undertake statutory Review Health Assessments and associated health activity |
|---------------|---|---|
| Liverpool | Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust – commissioned by Liverpool, Sefton, and Knowsley Places to complete IHAs for children placed in those areas. | Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust. Children in Care Health Team coordinate health assessments for all children in care. Specialist Children in Care Nurses within the team complete RHAs/health interventions for young people 16 and over. The 0-19 service completes RHAs/health interventions for preschool and school age children. |
| Cheshire East | East Cheshire NHS Trust and Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust | Wirral Community Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust. Cared for Children Health Team coordinate health assessments for all cared for children and complete RHAs/health interventions for young people 16 and over. The team includes a 1+ and Transitions Nurse who will support young people up to the age of 25 years. The 0-19 service completes RHAs/health interventions for preschool and school age children. |
| Cheshire West | Countess of Chester Hospital and Mid Cheshire Hospital | Cheshire and Wirral Partnership Trust. Children in Care Health Team coordinate health assessments for all cared for children and complete RHAs/health interventions for young people 16 and over. The 0-19 service completed RHAs/health interventions for preschool and school age children. |
| Warrington | Bridgewater Community Healthcare NHS Trust | Bridgewater Community Healthcare NHS Trust. |

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| | Provider commissioned to undertake statutory Initial Health Assessments | Provider commissioned to undertake statutory Review Health Assessments and associated health activity |
|-----------|---|--|
| | | An enhanced Children in Care Team undertake RHA and specific interventions for children aged 5-19. RHAs for children under 5 years are completed by the Health Visitors in the 0-19 service. |
| Halton | Bridgewater Community Healthcare NHS Trust | Bridgewater Community Healthcare NHS Trust. An enhanced Children in Care Team undertake RHA and specific interventions for children aged 5-19. RHAs for children under 5 years are completed by the Health Visitors in the 0-19 service. |
| St Helens | St Helens and Knowsley Hospital Teaching Trust | Mersey Care Foundation NHS Trust. An enhanced Children in Care Team undertake RHA and specific interventions for children aged 0-19. They are commissioned to review children and young people within a 20-mile radius. |
| Knowsley | Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust | Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust. An enhanced Children in Care Team undertake RHA and specific interventions for children aged 0-19. |
| Wirral | Wirral University Teaching Hospital (Arrowe Park) | Wirral Community Health Care NHS Trust. The Children Looked After Health Team coordinate health assessments for all children looked after, and Specialist Children Looked After Nurses within the team complete RHAs/health interventions for young people aged 16 and over. Health Assessments for children under 5 years are completed by the Health Visitor or Family Nurse and children aged 5-15 years health assessments are completed by the child's School Nurse or CLA Nurse. |
| Sefton | Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust | Mersey Care NHS Foundation NHS Trust. An enhanced Children in Care Team undertake RHA and specific interventions for children aged 4-18. The 0-19 service completes RHAs/health interventions for preschool children. |

7. The Difference and Impact We Have Made

- 7.1** Across our 9 Places there has been a strong focus on partnership working and quality improvement throughout the year. In addition, each Place has identified specific areas where they have been able to demonstrate the difference, they have made to health outcomes and services for children in care:

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7.2. Cheshire West

- a. Pathways for initial health assessments have been reviewed and work with multi agency colleagues to improve statutory timescale compliance has been successful. Guidance for Doctors completing the assessments has been produced and the Designated Doctor for Children in Care provides training and oversight/supervision. Liaison between providers and the local authority has been strengthened and clear escalation processes have been developed to address delays.
- b. A trauma informed review health assessment which is child focused and captures the voice of the child has been created and introduced across Cheshire West and Chester.
- c. Work with mental health and acute providers within Cheshire West and Chester has been completed to ensure that children in care and care leavers are identified within referrals. This has ensured that children are not disadvantaged by moving area and their care experiences are considered in the triage of referrals.
- d. A contribution from Health to the Cheshire West Corporate parenting strategy has been provided, partnership working has been strengthened to improve outcomes for children in care has continued.

7.3. Knowsley

- a. In collaboration with Knowsley Local Authority, Knowsley Children's Looked After service have developed a Care Leavers Offer as well as provision of Free Prescriptions for Care Leavers. Free Prescriptions are available for all Care Experienced Young People up to age 25 when registered to a Knowsley GP. We are seeking to ensure that as care experienced young people there is access to essential medications without financial burden. The exemption applies for all prescription charges, including those for long-term conditions, and is available regardless of income.
- b. The Care Leavers Offer includes providing a "health passport" for all care leavers (aged 16 to 18). Care Experienced young people will receive a final health assessment and be provided with a 'Health Passport' which will include a summary of all their health records including genetic background, details of illness and treatments, whether placed in or out of borough, information will be given to Care Leavers with an opportunity to discuss it with health professionals. The Health Passport will help care leavers understand their health needs.

7.4. Cheshire East

- a. Initial Health Assessment processes within local paediatric services have been reviewed and streamlined to improve the timeliness of the return of completed IHA reports to the local authority resulting in an improvement in statutory timescale compliance.
- b. Promotion of the annual dental checks and the NHS England dentistry scheme has resulted in a significant improvement in the number of children and young people accessing their annual dental review, now 74.5% up from 51% the previous year.

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7.5. Wirral

a. A Children

Looked After Nurse Specialist has been identified to maintain oversight of children placed out of area which promotes continuity of care for children and young people.

- b. Robust quality assurance processes for both Initial and Review Health Assessments have been established ensuring that assessments are child centred and evidence the voice of the child. There is a system in place to address issues if health assessment quality standards are not met and standards are now consistently high for both Initial Health Assessments and Review Health Assessments.
- c. A decliner pathway has been developed so that if a young person declines their health assessment the provider health team will work proactively and complete the Part C (summary and care plan). This ensures that the Local Authority and GP continue to be informed of the child's health status and advised of the plan to address any unmet health needs.
- d. The timeliness of providing health passports to care experienced young people transitioning into adulthood has been improved. A Wirral Place 'Improving Health Outcomes for CLA' group has been developed which includes membership of the commissioned health providers and Local Authority Leads - chaired by the Designated Nurse.

7.6. Sefton

- a. The funding into the community children in care health team has been increased meaning that there are now more children in care nurses in Sefton. This means that more review health assessments for our children are being completed in a timely way. In addition, review health assessments are written in a more child focused and child friendly way, meaning that children can better understand their health plans.
- b. The completion of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires has been audited. Assurance that children living in Sefton are having Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires completed alongside their review health assessments has been provided and that the analysis of them is informing their health care plans leading to better emotional health outcomes for our children.
- c. The health offer for those young people who are about to or have transitioned into adulthood has been strengthened by identifying a children in care nurse to lead on next steps and transitions. The timeliness of providing health passports to care experienced young people transitioning into adulthood has been improved.
- d. Support for the Sefton children's improvement journey has been provided which has helped to strengthen partnership working to improve outcomes for children in care.

7.7. Warrington

- a. The Children in Care Team have access to the LA Mosaic System which allows them to review information when needed and input specific data in relation to the 903 data returns i.e., SDQ, dental, health assessment and immunisations. This reduces time, waste, and enables information to be accessed in a timely manner across both the health and social care system.

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b. The Children in Care Nursing

Team visit all children in a place of their choice (usually home) when they come into care to commence the IHA. The child is then seen by a paediatrician who completes the assessment. This means that children are seen outside of the clinical setting and have their immediate needs assessed with a plan quickly put in place to address which is helpful if there are occasional delays in seeing a paediatrician. It also provides an opportunity to allay any fears or anxieties that the child may have related to the IHA and gives them the opportunity to ask questions.

- c. Pure Insight report back to corporate parenting on a regular basis. They extended their offer in 2022 to include a mentoring service to further support and prepare young people for independent living. The service is a trauma informed model of delivery, feedback from the young people is extremely positive and has made a significant impact on outcomes for this cohort.

7.8. St Helens

- a. Where a young person declines their health assessment the provider health team are working proactively to complete the Part C (summary and care plan) which ensures that the Local Authority and GP continue to be informed of the child's health status and advised of the plan to address any unmet health needs. All health assessments are written to the child/ young person, and they receive a copy of their health plan on request.
- b. The Designated Nurse has led the health and wellbeing workstream for the Corporate Parenting Forum to improve health outcomes for Children in Care.
- c. The team have received funding to recruit additional nurses to the team. This will increase capacity to allow greater oversight of children placed out of borough.

7.9. Liverpool

- a. Processes for improving the sharing of information and maintaining oversight of health plans have been developed within the Children in Care team for the children who are placed out of area. This has resulted in better communication between areas and early identification of issues accessing healthcare. Further development of this process is intended to improve timeliness of completion of health assessments.
- b. Funding has been made available to recruit an additional 3 specialist children in care nurses and 2 administrators which has increased team capacity and scope for further process development. This has also impacted on the delivery of training to health professionals and improved the quality assurance of health assessments.
- c. Relationships between health and local authority colleagues has been strengthened which has resulted in improved information sharing and access to relevant services.

8. Challenges

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8.1 There are challenges which

have affected all Places within the ICB, as well as on a both regional and national footprint. These include:

- Placement sufficiency
- increasing complexity of cases
- lack of placements within the secure estate, Tier 4 mental health services and specialist therapeutic provision.
- Compliance with statutory timescales for initial health assessments has been challenging due to multiple issues.
- Timeliness of review health assessments has been challenging for children placed out of their local authority area.

9. Performance

9.1. **Table 6** below highlights the Initial Health Assessments percentage overview of our CiC in area, placed out of area and children in the care of other local authorities completed within the 20-working day statutory timeframe during each quarter of 2022/2023

Table 6: Percentage of IHAs completed at each Place and returned to the Local Authority within 20 working days.

| Initial Health Assessments | | Quarter 1 22/23 | Quarter 2 22/23 | Quarter 3 22/23 | Quarter 4 22/23 |
|----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Cheshire West | CiC placed in area | 9% | 33% | 83% | 81% |
| | CiC placed out | | 18% | 6% | 15% |
| | CiCOLAs | 50% | 27% | 100% | 90% |
| Cheshire East | CiC placed in area | 23% | 25% | 73% | 71% |
| | CiC placed out | | 10% | 50% | 50% |
| | CiCOLAs | 50% | 25% | 20% | 0% |
| Wirral | CiC placed in area | 81% | 25% | 67% | 67% |
| | CiC placed out | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| | CiCOLAs | 60% | 0% | 45% | 0% |
| Liverpool | CiC placed in area | 16.6% | 7.5% | 30% | 4.9% |
| | CiC placed out | 8.7% | 8% | 9% | 9.5% |
| | CiCOLAs | 4.3% | 0% | 16% | 0% |
| Sefton | CiC placed in area | 21% | 17% | 24% | 21% |
| | CiC placed out | 0% | 12.5% | 40% | 0% |
| | CiCOLAs | 0% | 0% | 11% | 20% |

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| | | | | | |
|------------|--------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Warrington | CiC placed in area | 66.7% | 68% | 30% | 42% |
| | CiC placed out | | | | |
| | CiCOLAs | Not available | Not available | 50% | 33% |
| Halton | CiC placed in area | 40% | 36.4% | 27.3% | 51.5% |
| | CiC placed out | Not available | Not available | Not available | Not available |
| | CiCOLAs | 50% | 66.7% | 28.6% | 66.7% |
| Knowsley | CiC placed in area | 28.5% | 17% | 43% | 0% |
| | CiC placed out | N/A | 18% | 22% | N/A |
| | CiCOLAs | 0% | 21% | 0% | - |
| St Helens | CiC placed in area | 59% | 52% | 44% | 52% |
| | CiC placed out | 0% | 0% | 20% | 0% |
| | CiCOLAs | 44% | 0% | 29% | 30% |

9.2. Table 7 demonstrates each Place 2022/2023 quarterly completion percentages of review health assessments for our CiC in area, placed out of area and children in the care of other local authorities completed within the month they were due.

Table 7: Percentage of RHAs completed within the month that they were due.

| Review Health Assessments | | Quarter 1 22/23 | Quarter 2 22/23 | Quarter 3 22/23 | Quarter 4 22/23 | Year total |
|---------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Cheshire West | CiC placed in area | 86% | 95% | 95% | 90% | 91.5% |
| | CiC placed out | 48% | 52% | 51% | 56% | 51.8% |
| | CiCOLAs | 88% | 89% | 91% | 90% | 89.5% |
| Cheshire East | CiC placed in area | 82% | 87% | 90% | 90% | 87.3% |
| | CiC placed out | 68% | 72% | 47% | 61% | 62% |
| | CiCOLAs | 69% | 73% | 79% | 84% | 76.3% |
| Wirral | CiC placed in area | 79% | 65% | 69% | 80% | 73.3% |
| | CiC placed out | 57% | 61% | 100% | 48% | 66.5% |
| | CiCOLAs | 58% | 50% | 82% | 73% | 65.8% |
| Liverpool | CiC placed in area | 93.6% | 95% | 94% | 97% | 94.9% |
| | CiC placed out | 64% | 51% | 47% | 63.7% | 56.4% |
| | CiCOLAs | 91.8% | 91% | 86% | 89.4% | 89.6% |

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| Review Health Assessments | | Quarter 1 22/23 | Quarter 2 22/23 | Quarter 3 22/23 | Quarter 4 22/23 | Year total |
|---------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Sefton | CiC placed in area | 77% | 86% | 90% | 95% | 87.4% |
| | CiC placed out | 80% | 77% | 83% | 77.5% | 80% |
| | CiCOLAs | 67% | 64% | 91% | 98.5% | 83% |
| Warrington | CiC placed in area | 86.7% | 97.3% | 89.7% | 89.6% | 90% |
| | CiC | 69.4% | 75.6% | 71.4% | 80.6% | 74.8% |
| | CiCOLAs | 79.3% | 92.6% | 96.4% | 90.9% | 89.7% |
| Halton | CiC placed in area | 84.4% | 86.7% | 74% | 69% | 78.5% |
| | CiC placed out | 66.7% | 82.9% | 66.7% | - | 54% |
| | CiCOLAs | 90% | 95.2% | 94.9% | 75.9% | 89% |
| Knowsley | CiC placed in area | 50% | 88% | 81% | 100% | 79.6% |
| | CiC placed out | 74% | 0% | 53% | 100% | 56.8% |
| | CiCOLAs | 67% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 91.8% |
| St Helens | CiC placed in area | 97% | 96% | 100% | 97% | 98% |
| | CiC placed out | 67% | 87% | 69% | 82% | 76% |
| | CiCOLAs | 95% | 89% | 93% | 100% | 95% |

10. Contribution from Designated Doctors Children in Care

- 10.1** As Designated Doctors within the Cheshire and Merseyside region, we contribute to local and regional safeguarding and children in care meetings including the Cheshire and Merseyside designated professionals CiC network.
- 10.2** All are members of the Northwest Looked After Children medical advisors and designated Drs group which meets to provide essential teaching, sharing of information, standardisation of processes and case discussion. One of the Drs is the Northwest representative for the national CoramBAAF health specialist interest group, so contributes to the understanding of health matters, the development of training, national guidelines, and government policies.
- 10.3** We provide advice and training within the regional adoption agencies. We also offer training for paediatric colleagues as well as social care, GPs, and other health professionals on topics pertinent to children in care. We contribute to quality assurance for IHAs and provide a link within the individual departments to ensure that the needs of children in care are met and where appropriate prioritised.

11. Children in Care Key Priorities for 2023-24

- 11.1.** As a team we have developed a set of Cheshire and Merseyside ICB key priorities for

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priorities for
2023/2024. These

include:

- a. Improve Performance in relation to Initial and review health assessments.
- b. Evaluate the CiC Key Performance Indicators for 2023-24 and revise as required.
- c. Establish the NHS Universal Family (Care Leaver Covenant) Programme and advertise the offer on the Care Leaver Covenant by October 2023.
- d. To standardise the care leaver, offer across the ICB to include provision of pre-payment prescription certificates and Health Passports.
- e. To support the NHSE data collection for Children in Care to ascertain an ICB overview of children in care.
- f. To continue to support the Dental Pathway Pilot Program.
- g. To consider further standardisation of terminology i.e., Care Experienced.

12. Conclusion

- 12.1** This 2023-2023 annual report provides a summary of progress of work within the Children in Care services since the formation of the ICB. It demonstrates the contribution to multi agency partnerships across the 9 places and provides assurance that NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB is fully committed to meeting the statutory duties and responsibilities for Children in Care and Care Leavers. The information contained in this report demonstrates that we continued to ensure robust commissioning arrangements are in place for children in care and the important work with partners to support service development, delivery, and governance arrangements.



Cheshire East

**TOGETHER for Children
and Young People**

Together we will make Cheshire East a great place to be young

Cheshire East Fostering Service Annual Report

April 2022 – March 2023



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- Consultation and Involvement Plan
- Mainstream Fostering Household Recruitment

1. Cheshire East Fostering Service

Cheshire East is a busy, long-established local authority fostering service, which undertakes the full range of fostering work from mainstream recruitment and assessment to family and friends (connected persons) assessment and training, support, and supervision of all carers.

The staff teams which make up the fostering service have an offices base in Crewe and Macclesfield, although most staff continue to be able to work remotely with a recent return to a 40%/60% of office-based presence and continued remote working. It covers the whole of Cheshire East, which is a large geographical area.

The fostering service in Cheshire East recruits, trains and supports mainstream and connected carers so that we can place children and young people in high quality foster placements close to their family, friends, and school. It is a regulated service and is subject to inspection under the Care Standards Act 2000.

We aim to provide internal high quality, stable placements for children with mainstream and connected foster carers, who can meet their needs, and who have high quality support, supervision, and training.

The service is founded on good relationships with foster carers, with children and their social workers. We aim to work in partnership with foster carers, ensuring that foster carers have a voice and to be involved in the development of the service, and to this end we have significantly strengthened our consultations with foster carers and the ways in which we involve them in service development.

Where it is possible to do so, children will be supported within their own family with the provision of necessary services to ensure that children are safe and protected. If this is not possible, then they will whenever it is safe and appropriate be placed with extended family as connected carers in their own community.

The Head of Service is responsible for the strategic development of the fostering service and line management of the Fostering Service Manager who is responsible for ensuring that the Fostering Service meets the statutory duties and responsibilities required by the National Minimum Standards (NMS) and Fostering Regulations.



The NMS, together with Regulations relevant to the placement of children in foster care such as the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (the 2011 Regulations), form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 (CSA) for the conduct of fostering services.

The fostering Support workers provide support to the service in respect of ensuring that recruitment activity is undertaken, checks are completed and who provide general and targeted support, for example, running groups for Sons and Daughters, for new foster carers to complete their Training and Development Standards and some general support groups such as 'Walk and Talk'. Fostering support workers are loosely attached to each of the teams. This year we have welcomed 4 additional family support workers to focus on placement stability and provide out of hours emergency support to foster carers.

The Service Manager works closely with the Fostering Chair, panel members and Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO) who is line managed within the independent Safeguarding, Review and Quality Assurance Service.

The Business Administrative Support Team is line managed through a separate line of accountability but is also part of the fostering service.

1. Teams in the Fostering Service

We have four teams in the Fostering Service:

- **Mainstream Recruitment and Assessment Team** – is comprised of 2 full time and 1 part time equivalent supervising social workers, 1 Family Support Worker and a Team manager – involvement in and oversight of all mainstream recruitment activity, responding to initial enquiries, arranging, and undertaking initial visits and undertaking full fostering assessments and presenting these to the Fostering Panel.
- The training officer post is also located in this team, and this worker provides Skills to Foster training for both mainstream and connected carers prior to their full approval, as well as ensuring that mandatory training is undertaken by carers, and developing a training program for the year which is engaging and challenging for foster carers.

The team have been providing support and supervision to new carers following approval until the first review at 6 months. The supervising social worker will ensure that the carers have a good induction and complete the required training to start them off in their fostering journey.



Fostering support workers also provide support to this team by undertaking phone calls, initiating statutory checks on applicant carers, and providing necessary equipment to carers.

Connected Carer Assessment and Support Team – is currently comprised of 7.5 full time equivalent supervising social workers, 1 family support worker and a team manager.

- This team's primary function is the assessment, support and supervision of family and friends (connected foster carers). SWs from the team go out with children's social workers to see family and friends named by children's parents when a child needs to be looked after by someone other than a birth parent.
- Supervising SWs will advise and support the child's social worker in the application of fostering regulations and to assist in determining suitability of family and friends to be assessed under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Review Regulations to be given temporary approval as a foster care to provide emergency care to a child who is accommodated by the Local Authority.
- The team also undertake viability assessments and full fostering assessments of connected carers and provide support and supervision once children are placed and/or when full approval is given.
- Much of the work of this team is driven by court timescales and most assessments are filed within the care proceedings. Where the overall care plan is one of a Special Guardianship Order (SGO), this team will undertake the SGO assessment.
- Some SGO assessments are 'private' in the sense that the child is not a cared for child and there may only have been limited involvement from children's services for the child.
- There is a small sub-team in this team, consisting of a supervising social worker, a half time education support worker and 2 family support worker who is also part time. This sub team have oversight of all Special Guardians in Cheshire East and provide support groups and training to this group, as well as individual support where this is needed.
- The children in this group are generally not open cases to social care, and the input is to support the whole family rather than being on an allocated child basis. Fostering support workers also provide support to this team by undertaking phone



calls, initiating statutory checks on applicant carers and proving necessary equipment to carers.

- **Mainstream Support and Supervision Team** – this team is made up of 7.6 supervising social workers, 2 full time equivalent and 1 part time Family Support Workers and a team manager.
- This team provides support and supervision to mainstream, short breaks carers and some connected carers.
- One supervising social worker in this team takes the lead in urgent placement finding for children and in long term permanent placement finding for children, he works closely with the Placement Team in this regard, which has responsibility for the commissioning of external placements, both fostering and residential for children, he is assisted in this task by a part time fostering support worker.
- Another supervising social worker provides support and supervision to all the short break carers and works closely with the children with disabilities service in order to achieve this, she also has some mainstream and connected carers on her caseload too.
- Fostering support workers also provide support to this team by undertaking phone calls, initiating statutory checks on applicant carers, and proving necessary equipment to carers.
- Mockingbird (part of support and supervision team) has a liaison worker required by the Mockingbird model and this worker supervises the hub home carer for each constellation and also some of the constellation carers.
- There are significant reporting and fidelity requirements associated with Mockingbird, and this team collates this information which is fed back to the Fostering Network.

All the Team Manager of this in the service take turns in being the Duty Placements Manager to support the placement of children in urgent need of care. Fostering support workers also provide support to this team by undertaking phone calls, initiating statutory checks on applicant carers and proving necessary equipment to carers.



- **Business Administrative Support Team** – This team has one full time senior unit coordinator and 4-unit coordinators, one of whom is full time. They provide administrative support to the service in the conduct of fostering checks and data collection.
- This team will also ensure that office telephones are answered, messages are appropriately directed, and will send out communications as required to foster carers.
- A key element of this role is the support to the fostering panel by taking minutes, liaison with the panel chair to ensure that minutes are correct and approved, ensuring that the reports are placed on the SharePoint for panel members to have access to prior to panel, and that the reports and minutes are provided to the Agency Decision Maker in a timely way for the final decision to be made. They then ensure that this is placed on Liquid Logic and that the carer goes on the Register of Foster Carers.

2. Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel is critical to the business of the Fostering Service and is a legal requirement. The Panel meets approximately three times per month to consider panel business.

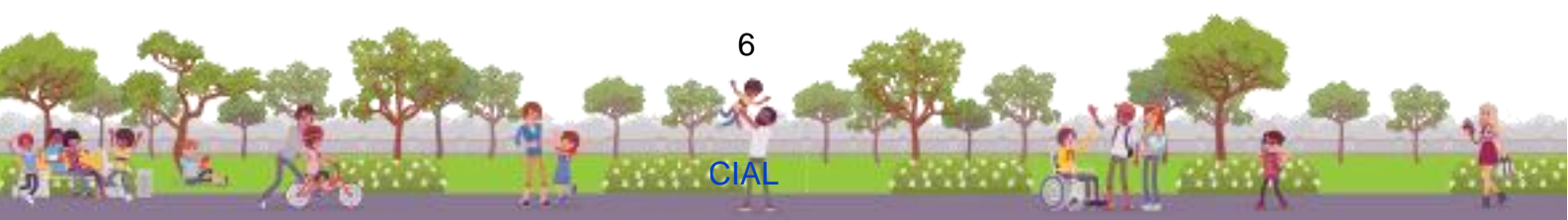
A new independent Fostering Panel Chair, Reshma Kodampur took over responsibility for chairing the Panel in January 2022. The Panel is assisted by the interim Panel Advisor, Richard Watts who is employed by Cheshire East. The service and Panel advisor undertakes the gatekeeping function for Panel to ensure that all matters placed before Panel meet the necessary minimum regulatory requirements. The service advisor has experience of chairing other local authority panels and independent fostering agencies (IFAs) and brings that experience and knowledge to the role.

There is also a vice chair of panel who takes the chair when the usual panel chair is unavailable for some reason. The central list consists of a further eight panel members aside from the chair and vice chair. The service advisor does not sit as a voting panel member, his role is to provide advice to panel and to the service.

3. Summary of 2022 – 2023

3.1 Mainstream Recruitment and Assessment Team

Enquiry numbers increased significantly; however, it soon became apparent that this would not be a normal year in terms of the expected ebbs and flows of fostering recruitment that usually happen. Most local authorities nationally and across the



Northwest were experiencing this, as well as IFAs. The number of new foster carers approved each year has fallen in each year for the last four years.

This has been a trend experienced within Cheshire East and 2022/23 has seen a sharp decline in the number of enquiries and applications from people who wish to foster. There has been increasing pressures and challenges in finding suitable placements for the children and young people who need a safe home.

Figure 4.2 Number of enquiries April 2022- March 2023

| | |
|---------------------------|------------|
| Events | 83 |
| Google | 46 |
| Leaflet/Poster | 2 |
| Word of Mouth | 27 |
| Through employer | 2 |
| Facebook | 6 |
| Previously fostered | 15 |
| Through own council | 17 |
| Twitter | 1 |
| Radio | 6 |
| Other | 20 |
| Did not say | 12 |
| Total number of enquiries | 237 |

Figure 4.3 Number of positive enquiries leading to Initial visits between April 2022 to March 2023

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Positive IV - application form sent | 18 |
| Not suitable | 3 |
| Need more time - date set to follow up | 3 |
| Following IV – decided not to proceed. | 14 |
| Change of mind before visit | 6 |
| Total number of Initial Visits | 44 |

There has been a downward trend nationally in the number of new foster carers approved over the past 5 years which has accelerated in the last year. Services varied in their recruitment success, with the number of new households ranging from 1 to 10 at the service level.

Figure 4.4 Number of foster care households approved between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023

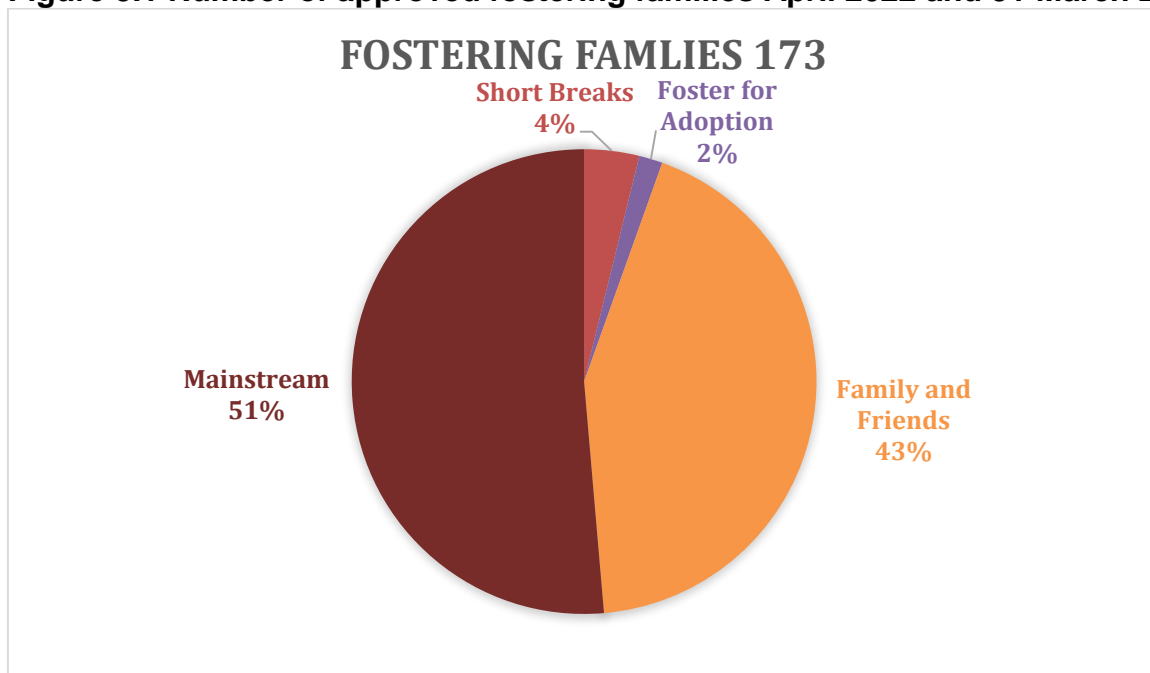
| Year | Total new carer households |
|------|----------------------------|
| | |



| | |
|-----------|---|
| 2022-2023 | 3 |
| 2021-2022 | 2 |
| 2020-2021 | |

5. Mainstream Support and Supervision

Figure 5.1 Number of approved fostering families April 2022 and 31 March 2023



This report is notably different to its predecessors. Mainstream and family and friends fostering are both important types of foster care provision. In 2022/2023, there were a total of 173 fostering families. These consisted of the following types/approval: 7 Short breaks, 3 Foster for Adoption, 79 Family and Friends and 94 Mainstream households.

The number of approved family and friends' households has increased nationally by 29% since 2018. The proportion of total approved fostering households that are family and friends' households has increased from 14% in 2021 to 18% in 2022.

Figure 5.1 Number of approved households, split by sector.

There were 286 foster carers, this consists of:

162 General Foster Carers

124 Friends and Family Foster Carers

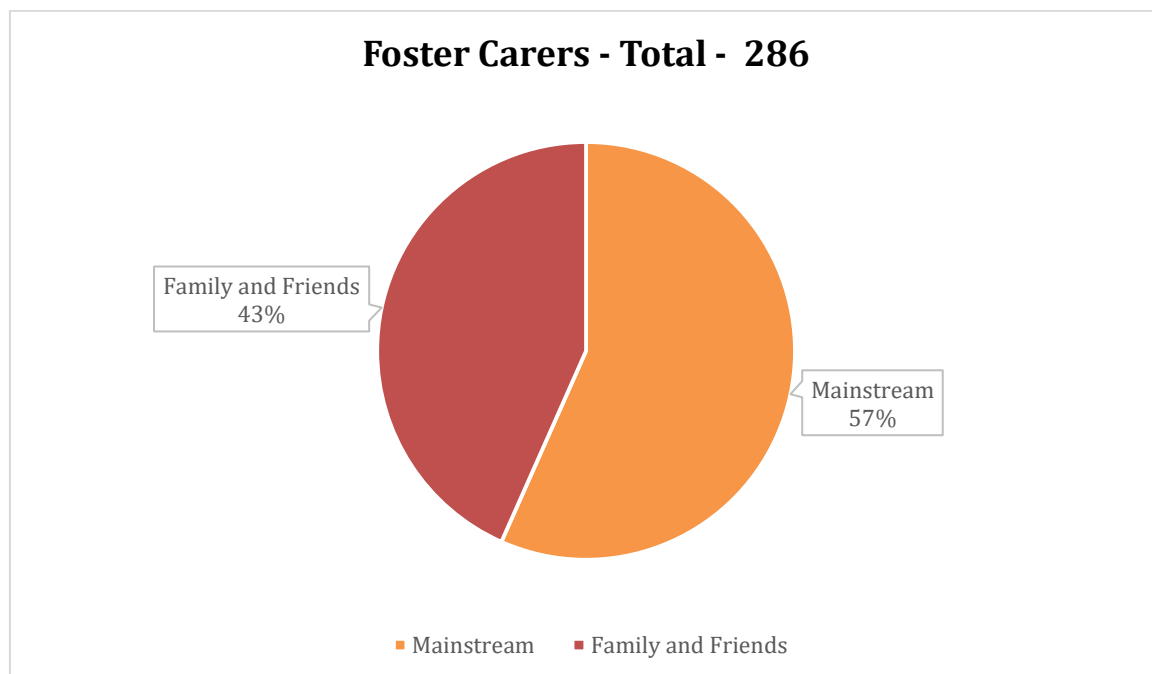
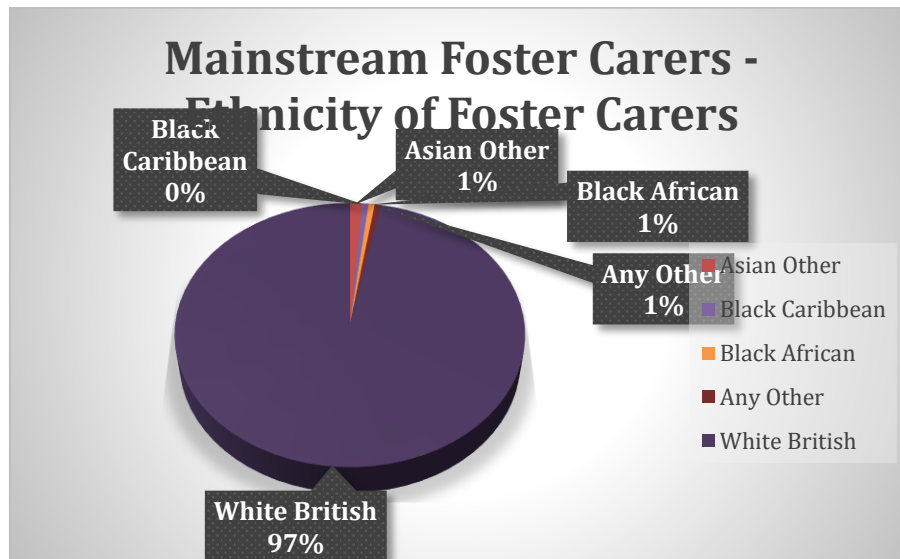


Figure 5.2 Ethnicity of Foster carers



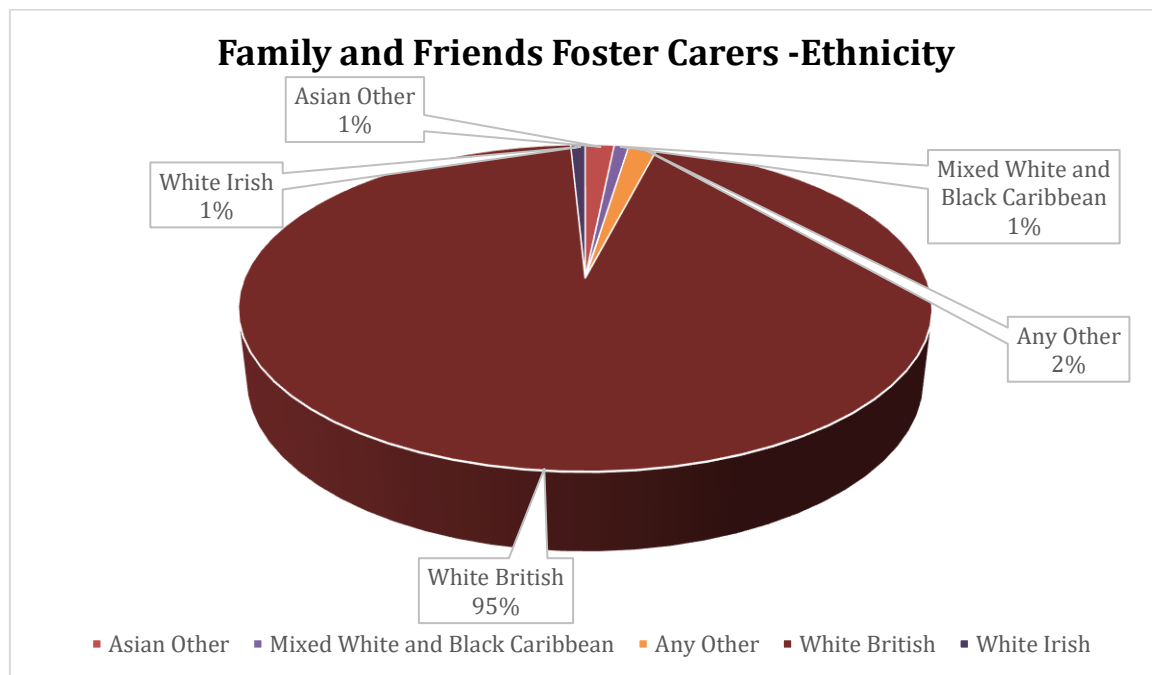


In line with previous years, 97% of foster carers were White. The remaining 3% were reported with the following ethnicity;

Asian Other – 2
 Black Caribbean – 1
 Black African – 1
 Any other – 1

Figure 5.3 Ethnicity of Family and Friend carers





Of approved family and friends' carers at 31 March 2023, 95% and the remaining 5% were reported with the following ethnicity;

Asian other – 2
 Mixed White and Black Caribbean – 1
 Any Other – 1
 White British – 118
 White Irish – 1

The use of family and friend's household is in line with the expectation that LA's will place children with family and friends where possible. The increase in their numbers has played a significant part in meeting the demands set by the rising number of children in care and reducing pool of available mainstream foster placements.

This is the first year we collected age data for foster carers (note that the discussion in this section relates to individual carers and not fostering households).

The largest group of our foster carers were in their 50s and 60s. Foster carers in their 20s and 30s accounted for (2%percentage) for mainstream as opposed to family and friends carers which accounted for 7% percentage

Figure 5.4 Age range of foster carers

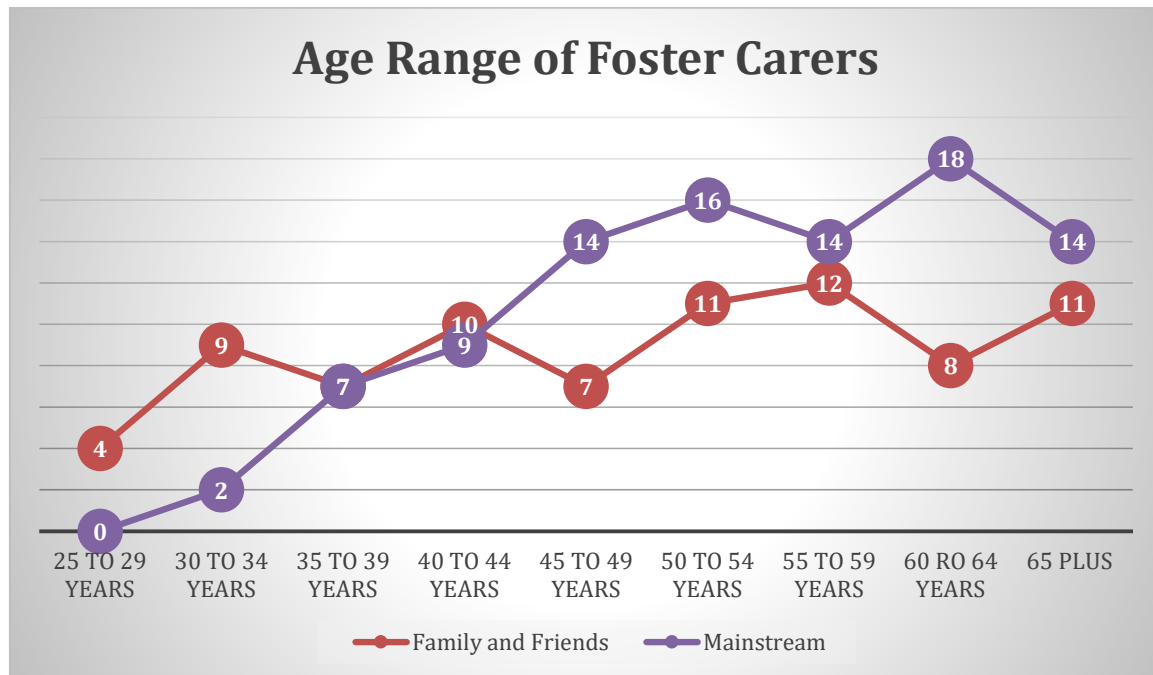
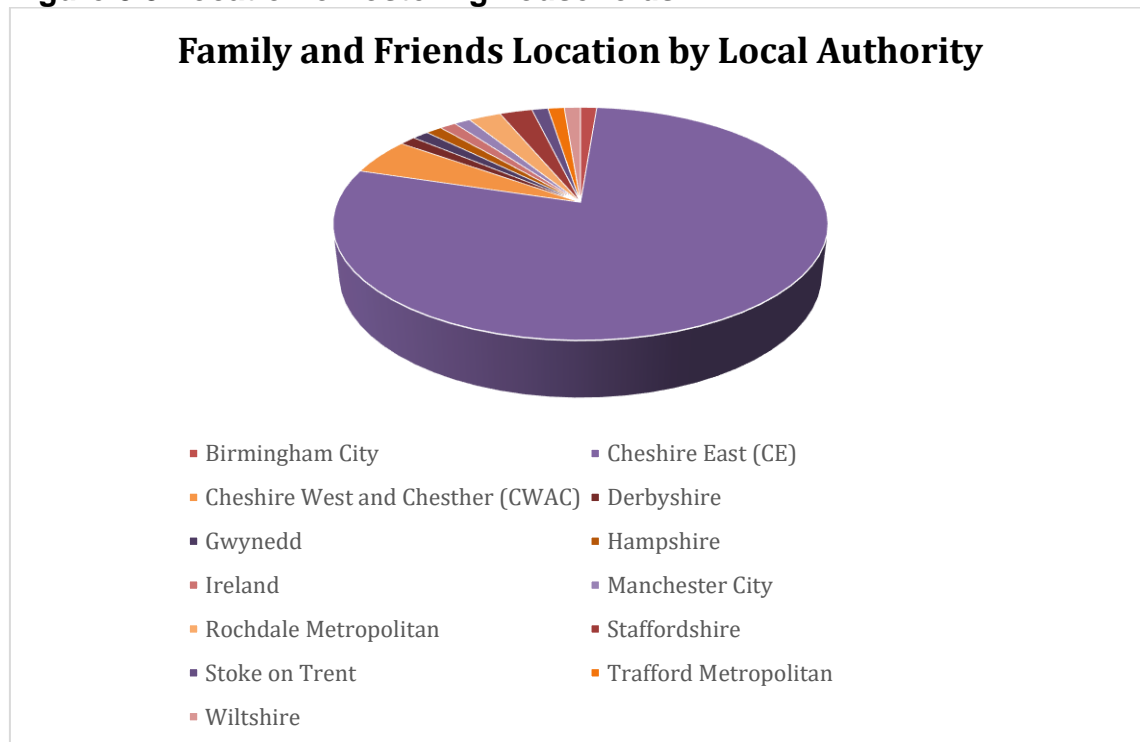


Figure 5.5 Location of fostering households



78% of our mainstream foster carers live in CE, the remaining 24% live;

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| CWAC | 4 |
| Shropshire | 2 |
| Staffordshire | 4 |
| Stockport Metropolitan | 2 |
| Stoke-on-Trent | 1 |

12

88% of our Family/Friends foster carers live in CE, the remaining 12% live:

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Birmingham City | 1 | |
| CWAC | | 4 |
| Derbyshire | 1 | |
| Gwynedd | 1 | |
| Hampshire | 1 | |
| IRELAND | 1 | |
| Manchester City | 1 | |
| Rochdale Metropolitan | 2 | |
| Staffordshire | 2 | |
| Stoke-on-Trent | | 1 |
| Trafford Metropolitan | | 1 |
| Wiltshire | 1 | |

Figure 5.6 Number of foster carer households that deregistered between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 Resignations

| Mainstream | Connected |
|------------|-----------|
| 14 | 30 |

Over the course of 2022 resignations from mainstream fostering household, resulted in a loss of 19 placements in total. Reasons for deregistration below;

- 3 FFA (Foster for Adoption) where the child had been adopted.
- 2 fostering families the service initiated the resignation, due to allegations or standards of care concerns. This had resulted in a loss of 3 placements.
- 8 fostering families, due to circumstances such as ill health, retirement and no longer wishing to foster. This had resulted in a loss of 12 placements.
- 1 resignation due to the carers moving home and becoming registered in a different Local Authority. This had resulted in a loss of 1 placement.
- 3 resignations within the first year, these had been FFA carers where the child was adopted, this had resulted in 3 children no longer being cared for.
- 2 fostering households were de-registered, both fostering families had been mainstream carers. 1 fostering family's approval had been terminated due to safeguarding concerns and contents of an updated medical assessment. 1 fostering family's approval had been terminated after significant concerns had been raised, in relation to patterns of allegations made by the children in placement, this had been taken to IRM and the final decision had agreed to de-register the foster carers.

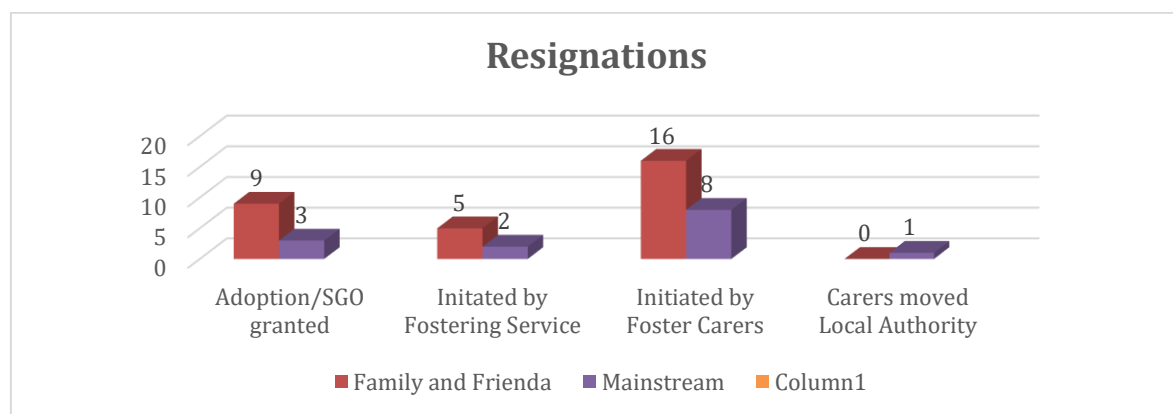
Nationally since 2018, the number of households de-registering from local authorities fostering services has fluctuated each year, but overall, more mainstream fostering households deregistered than were approved, leading to net decrease in fostering capacity.



The service received 50 resignations from connected/kinship foster carers. The reasons for these are;

- 5 fostering families where the service-initiated resignation due to allegation or where the child/young person is no longer cared for.
- 16 fostering families where the resignation had been initiated by foster carers, due to circumstances such as ill health, retirement and no longer wishing to foster.
- 9 fostering families, where an SGO had been granted and 9 children were no longer cared for.

Figure 5.7 Reasons for deregistration April 20220 to March 2023



6. Training and Development

Mainstream Carers

139 Currently Approved

30 (22 %) Never Completed after 12 months

6 Approved within the last 12 months 0 have completed the TSDS 1 is needed within the next 3 months.

Therefore 78% compliance rate as the 6 carers approved within the last 12 months would not affect the compliance as within the 12 months allowed. The national percentage for approved mainstream foster carers is 81%. Of those carers who has not completed their training the service is offering 1:1 TSD workshops and group workshops to support carers with completion of booklets.

Connected Carers

80 Currently approved

46 Carers (58 %) have completed or not due within 3 months.

28 Carers (35%) Outside of 18 months

6 Carers (7%) carers approved within the last 18 months are due within the next 3 months

Therefore 65% compliance as 7% of carers are not yet outside of timescale of 18 months.

7. Mocking Bird

We now have 2 Constellations within Cheshire East. Constellation 1 (C1) was launched in Jan 2021 and Constellation 2 (C2) in Jan 22.

Both Constellations have provided monthly carer support meetings and monthly social activities for children and carers. These have sometimes included speakers e.g., from Autism Alliance and Shared Lives and days out to Ninja Warrior and Tatton Park. C1 and C2 have occasionally joined together e.g., Christmas Party, Karaoke, and line dancing and jointly HHC's have led carer and young person walks and teenage walks, with satellite carers looking after younger children or those who do not enjoy walking.

In addition, individual support to carers and children has taken place. This has taken the form of emotional and practical support e.g., with contact arrangements, logistics, day care and sleepovers. We have also seen the development of support between satellite carers. Satellite carers have voiced their positivity about being part of Mockingbird and the support and companionship it has provided. Carers and young people have spoken about it feeling like a 'real extended family'.

Constellation 1

The membership has been mostly stable, with Hub Home Carer (HHC) continuing in post, and 7 satellite carers (7 households and 12 foster carers). The HHC is based in Alsager, and satellite carers are within a 15-mile radius, in the towns of Alsager, Crewe, Nantwich and Audlem. The number of Cared for Children has grown from 12 to 15 over the year.

Changes over the 12 months have included;

- **one resignation** – mainstream carer who resigned due to the health needs of her husband and father. It was the best decision for the family, but the main carer was reluctant because of losing Mockingbird;
- **4-year-old child with connected carer disrupted** with a cause for concern. The child was **placed with the HHC** in the emergency and has remained in placement. This was positive for the child as she was already familiar with the HHC, however it has had some impact on the capacity of the HHC. This impact has been mitigated by the support of the satellite carers.
- **1 mainstream carer and one connected carer** met through their membership of Mockingbird and **married** in September 2022. They became one household to the teenage grandson and they have continued to provide short term



placements to babies/young children. They are considering moving house to expand their capacity to provide placements.

- **Respite carers moved from C2 to C1 in October 2022.** They were new carers, who had never parented or spent much time with children. C1 was a better match for them, as it is less populated and has given opportunities to gain skill and confidence in a more protected manner. They have provided respite to children in C1, including the 5 yr old placed with the HHC, which has enabled the HHC to take breaks/holidays as expected within the Mockingbird model, and has hence prevented burnout.
- **New mainstream single carer joined** following approval in November 2022. She has been appreciative of the support and advice available from the HHC and the satellite carers.

Constellation 2

The Hub Home Carers are a very experienced and skilled foster carer couple. They have 2 Long Term teenagers in placement. On 7.4.22 two primary aged children were placed in an emergency and remained in placement until 30.6.23, when they were placed with Long Term carers. They have also provided a Short-Term placement (6 months in duration) to a teenager who they prevented from being placed in residential provision. She returned to birth family in March 2023.

- In April 2022 there were 8 satellite carers (8 households with 14 foster carers). The HHC is based in Crewe and satellite carers are within a 15-mile radius, in the towns of Crewe, Alsager, Buerton, Sandbach and Northwich.

•

Changes over the year have included;

- A birth mother with child in Care Proceedings stabilised and left the Constellation;
- A connected carer struggled to maintain the placement of their niece. We were able to transfer the placement in a planned way to a mainstream carer (new to CE from an IFA) who became part of the Constellation. This provided ongoing support for the child and the new carer.
- 2 connected carers left the Constellation in July 2022 as they came to the realisation that Mockingbird was not for them. Both placements were stable and moving towards SGO and they did not wish to take up support or join social activities.

It has been a challenging year for fostering, due to the staffing issues in the Fostering Service and Social Work teams. Due the lack of placements, pressure was put on Mockingbird to take emergency and sometimes poorly matched children. This put the fidelity of Mockingbird in some jeopardy, however steps have been taken to review processes and secure Mockingbird for now and the future.



Mockingbird has been successful in providing support and stability for the carers, children, and young people in its membership. It has been successful in its aim of stabilising and retaining foster carers.

Mockingbird is a fantastic model of providing support via a family network model. A third Constellation would be a positive development for Cheshire East, ideally in Macclesfield/Wilmslow, areas not currently served by Mockingbird.

8. Children and young people awaiting permanent placement.

In the period April 2022 – March 2023, in total Cheshire East approved 9 Long term matches. 5 of these were with in-house Cheshire East Foster Carers and 4 were with IFA foster carers.

While the number of fluctuates from year to year, relatively speaking overall proportion of children using fostering services and not in a permanent place is similar each year ranging from 5 % to 7%.

9. Children seeking asylum and refuge

There are children and young people placed in fostering households who have come to CE(England) without the support of an adult and have the status of being children seeking asylum and refuge.

In 2022, there were 13 placements for 10 young people 12 of the placements were for mainstream and one for family and friend using fostering services.

10. Connected Carer Assessment and Support and Special Guardianship Team

Figure 11.1 Referrals to the service, split by category.

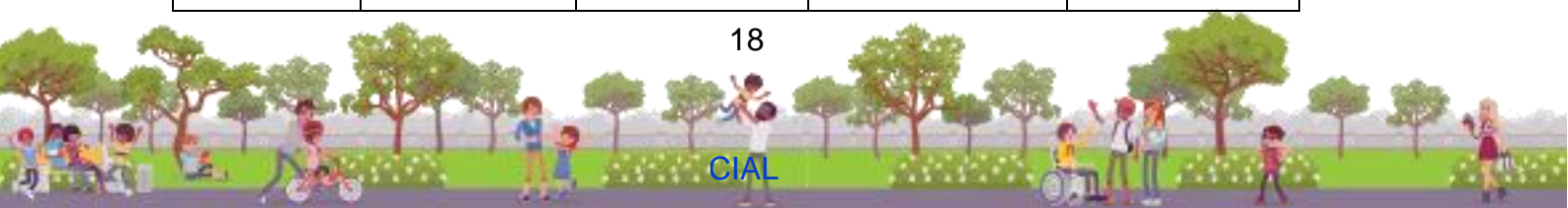


| <u>Month</u> | <u>Reg 24</u> | <u>Viability</u> | <u>SGO</u> |
|-----------------|---------------|------------------|------------|
| April | 2 | 13 | 1 |
| May | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| June | 2 | 18 | 0 |
| July | 7 | 2 | 0 |
| August | 0 | 9 | 2 |
| September | 8 | 14 | 2 |
| October | 3 | 13 | 1 |
| November | 2 | 7 | 0 |
| December | 4 | 10 | 1 |
| January | 3 | 19 | 1 |
| February | 4 | 17 | 2 |
| March | 6 | 13 | 2 |
| Total | 45 | 139 | 12 |
| Total referrals | 196 | | |

139 referrals 116 completed, which resulted in 74 full assessments.

Figure 11.2 Assessments completed by the team, number of carers approved and SGO assessments completed.

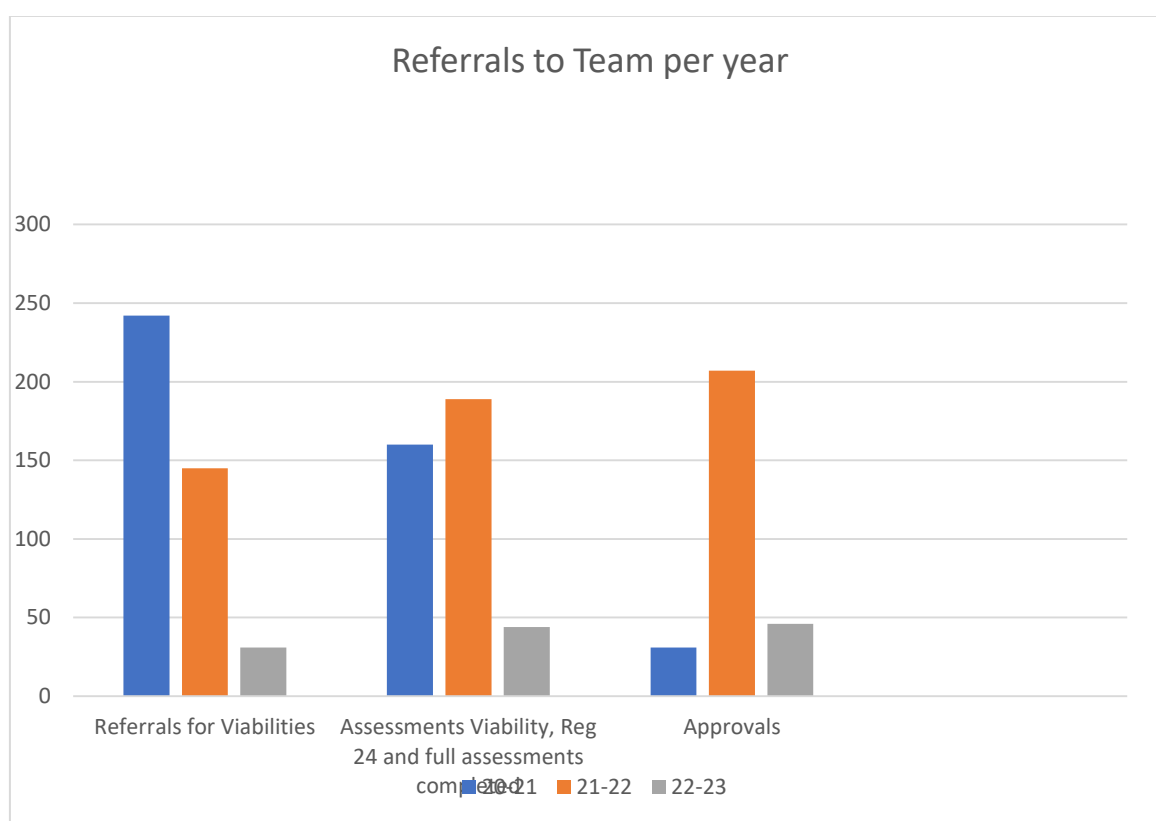
| <u>Month</u> | <u>Viability completed</u> | <u>Full Assessments completed</u> | <u>Approved at panel</u> | <u>SGO Assessments</u> |
|--------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| April | 14 | 8 | 4 | 0 |
| May | 8 | 13 | 4 | 2 |
| June | 14 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| July | 2 | 8 | 2 | 2 |
| August | 6 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| September | 8 | 11 | 5 | 0 |
| October | 10 | 5 | 4 | 2 |
| November | 14 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| December | 4 | 3 | 4 | 0 |



| | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|----|----|
| January | 19 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| February | 11 | 5 | 4 | 2 |
| March | 9 | 6 | 8 | 2 |
| totals | 116 | 74 | 46 | 17 |
| Total assessment completed by the team | | 207 | | |

Figure 11.3 Number of referrals to the team broken by year

| Year | Referrals for Viabilities | Assessments Viability, Reg 24 and full assessments completed | Approvals |
|-------|---------------------------|--|-----------|
| 20-21 | 242 | 160 | 31 |
| 21-22 | 145 | 189 | 44 |
| 22-23 | 196 | 207 | 46 |



The data on fostering shows reliance on family and friends to raise children is at an 'all time high'. Over the last few years there has been an increased reliance. It is becoming increasingly urgent that we recognise this significant part of the care system.

In 2022-23, 17 children left the care on special guardianship order (kinship care).

There are a total of 49 assessments open within the team currently. It is critical that all kinship carers have access to the right financial, emotional and practical support to give them the best possible chance of keeping children in loving, stable and permanent homes.

Unregulated Placements

There are currently 2 unregulated households. Both are regulation 24 placements that have gone over the 24-week time scale. One is due to outstanding checks (medical and DBS) and is currently upregulation for 6 weeks, this is now on panel and will be regulated within the next month. One is due to a route 4 DBS assessment needing to be completed and this is currently with the police as the person will need to attend the police station for finger printing This is currently unregulated for 8 weeks and there is no time scale from the police for when an appointment will be offered.

11.Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO)

Foster carer reviews have generally been held face to face, with some being held virtually. This year has been a challenging in respect of the process and timeliness of foster carers' fostering annual reviews one with the continued themes of: -

- Changes to the paperwork and workflow of the Annual Review process on Liquid Logic records managements system. Work has been completed to update the report format and the reporting of reviews, but some glitches have remained as this work is part of the overall modernization of the LCS workflows for fostering.
- The FIRO has completed work with the LADO to ensure that all allegations and standards of care concerns have timescales and action plans are attached so that when reviews are held foster carers are clear about the work needed and the evidence base that is required for continued approval. This is starting to be embedded into practice and therefore timescales and action are improved.
- There continues to be challenges in obtaining the views of the Cared for Children's Social Workers and children for Foster Carers Annual Reviews. This has been escalated to senior leadership team. Bottom lines for escalation have been put in place, this will continue to be part of the role of FIRO in encouraging the completion of these forms and escalating this where appropriate.
- There has been additional challenge in the reviewing service as the FIRO received increased feedback from foster carers that the Referral and Placement Planning Process and the completion of placement planning meetings and required paperwork including the medical and delegated consents is very variable and I am checking on the paperwork and foster carers being provided with sufficient good quality information about children at placement and their knowledge and understanding of



Care Plans moving forward. As part of the Liquid Logic update, we are requesting improved reporting and scrutiny of this element of the Cared for modules.

- A Northwest Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer Forum has been created to share good practice and develop common themes and standards for Fostering Reviews. We are group have created practice standards which will ensure that Local Authorities will have a more standardised format and standard for fostering reviews. This group also provides peer support and is developing a mutual information network.
- 85.9% of our foster carer annual reviews were held withing the statutory timescales of 12 months. This is an increase of 13.0% from the previous year. 14.1% were out of timescale, a reduction of 7.5% from last year's data. Reasons for being out of timescale usually related to staff sickness and staffing capacity.
- During reviews, if there are concerns, consistent effort is made to ensure that there is a plan developed that will support the carer through the necessary development and training to resolve the issues. Standard of Care Concerns process has been put in place and restorative practice techniques have been used successfully in this context with some carers.

12.Overall performance of the Service in 2021/22

(Key Performance Indicators)

Number of households and places at 31 March (and trend)

| Year | Number of households | Number of places |
|------|----------------------|------------------|
| 2017 | 160 | 289 |
| 2018 | 169 | 300 |
| 2019 | 144 | 230 |
| 2020 | 146 | 228 |
| 2021 | 162 | 264 |
| 2022 | 155 | 261 |

Number of households by primary care type offer (and trend)



| Year | Primary care type offer | Households number |
|------|--|-------------------|
| 2017 | Permanent | 40 |
| 2017 | Not permanent | 1 |
| 2017 | Short term | 68 |
| 2017 | Family and Friends | 36 |
| 2017 | Fostering to adopt | 1 |
| 2017 | Short breaks – for children who are also looked after | 10 |
| 2017 | Short breaks - for children who are not otherwise looked after | 4 |
| 2018 | Permanent | 36 |
| 2018 | Not permanent | 72 |
| 2018 | Family and Friends | 50 |
| 2018 | Short breaks – for children who are also looked after | 8 |
| 2018 | Short breaks - for children who are not otherwise looked after | 3 |
| 2019 | Permanent | 39 |
| 2019 | Not permanent | 57 |
| 2019 | Family and Friends | 35 |
| 2019 | Fostering to adopt | 1 |
| 2019 | Short breaks – for children who are also looked after | 9 |
| 2019 | Short breaks - for children who are not otherwise looked after | 3 |
| 2020 | Permanent | 37 |
| 2020 | Not permanent | 50 |
| 2020 | Family and Friends | 48 |
| 2020 | Fostering to adopt | 1 |
| 2020 | Short breaks – for children who are also looked after | 6 |
| 2020 | Short breaks - for children who are not otherwise looked after | 4 |
| 2021 | Permanent | 40 |
| 2021 | Not permanent | 53 |
| 2021 | Family and Friends | 62 |
| 2021 | Short breaks – for children who are also looked after | 2 |
| 2021 | Short breaks - for children who are not otherwise looked after | 5 |
| 2022 | Permanent | 38 |
| 2022 | Not permanent | 53 |
| 2022 | Family and Friends | 57 |
| 2022 | Short breaks – for children who are also looked after | 5 |



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| 2022 | Short breaks - for children who are not otherwise looked after | 2 |
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Update on progress of the Plans for 2022-23 and Plan / Target for 2023/24

The plans for 2022/23, *which should be read alongside this report.*



Fostering Panel Activity – 1/4/23 – 20/2/24

Membership of the Central List

Panel Chair - Reshma Kodampur – January 2022

Professional Advisor to the Panel – Richard Watts until 19/11/23: Belinda Greasby from 20/11/23

At the beginning of the period there were 12 members on the Central List (including the Panel Chair). During the year 2 Panel members have resigned (Medical Advisor and Vice Chair retired) and 5 new members have been recruited. Central List now has 14 members. 2 of the newly recruited members are “live” on Panel, the other 3 will be “live” from 15/3/24 having completed all their recruitment checks and induction. All 5 new members observed Panel as part of their induction.

Diversity of the Central List as at 20/2/24

12 women; 2 men

5 members are non agency registered SW's – one of whom is care experienced.
Chair is a SW

1 is an elected member

2 members are mainstream foster carers for another LA

5 are Independent members (1 previously elected member; 3 with education background; 1 with health background)

2 members have disclosed disabilities

3 members have minority heritage

Annual appraisals

9/5/24 – 4 appraisals completed

10/5/23 – 5 appraisals completed

5/6/23 – 2 appraisals completed

Panel Chairs appraisal was completed by ADM – 9/2/24

Panel Development

21/6/23 – Restorative Session – Service Audit feedback to members of the Central List alongside the Service

22/9/23 – Panel Development Day alongside representatives from the Service

Quarterly meetings between ADM/Panel Chair/Panel Advisor/Panel Administrator

9/2/24

Prior to this meeting they were called Panel Management meetings and took place

16/6/23 and 11/8/23

Panel meetings

To date 33 Panels have taken place. These were all held virtually via Microsoft Teams.

Breakdown of Items heard at Panel

| | | |
|--|--------------------------|--|
| Mainstream assessments | 7 | ADM supported positive Panel recommendations |
| Connected Carers assessments | 23 | ADM supported Panel recommendations. ADM sought additional information in respect of 1 item before making decision. Panel initially deferred 1 item for more information |
| Negative full connected carers assessments | 2 | |
| Brief reports | 1 | |
| Long term matches | 8 families (12 children) | 5 IFA carers– 3 inhouse carers Sibling groups – one of 3 children and 2 sibling groups of 2. ADM supported positive Panel recommendations |
| <u>Reviews</u> | | |
| Mainstream (inc: 2 Post Allegation) | 5 | ADM supported Panel recommendations. 1 item was initially deferred for further information 1 item has gone to IRM – hearing 15/3/24 |
| Connected Carers (inc: 1 change of approval; 1 deregistration) | 7 | |
| Reg 25 extensions | 25 | ADM supported Panel recommendations. 24 were positive recommendations one was negative. |

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| <u>Resignations</u> | | |
| Mainstream | 13 | 6 Personal circumstances (had children remain on Staying Put) 2 went to an IFA 2 resigned following placement breakdowns 3 resigned citing agency support issues |
| Connected Carers | 26 | 15 as a result of SGO 6 as child/ren returned to birth parents 1 due to personal circumstances 2 following placement breakdowns 2 retired when children turned 18 – Staying Put in place. |

Complaints

No formal complaints have been recorded during this period.

Belinda Greasby – Professional Adviser to the Fostering Panel

Reshma Kodampur – Independent Panel Chair

20/2/24

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Update on Plans for 2022-23

Service Development Plans 2022-2023

| What | By Whom | When | Progress |
|---|---------------------|--------------|---|
| Our training opportunities for foster carers will develop into a blended approach of face to face and webinars or online training | Training SSW | April 2023 | Completed - Mandatory training offer revised and annual training plan was launched April 2023. |
| Re – launch of Reflective Groups for foster carers, facilitated by staff and carers themselves | Training SSW & SSWS | August 2022, | Completed - The Reflective Support Groups run monthly. The group is run jointly by a foster carer and the training officer and is well attended. Foster carers feedback is very positive. |
| We will continue to promote placement stability and to match children into long-term placements where that is the right thing to do | All | Ongoing | <p>There has been a year-on-year increase in the numbers of children placed with family and friends foster carers.</p> <p>9 children were Long Term matched with their foster carers within this period.</p> <p>This is an ongoing area of work – to pull forward into 2023/4 targets</p> |
| We will continue to support special guardians and their children, and we note that there seems to be a more general acceptance and commitment nationally to the importance of this work | SGO Team | Ongoing | <p>In the last financial year April 22/March 23 £48,000 of ASF funds were spent on therapeutic support for children subject of an SGO to include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Therapeutic parenting courses • Specialist assessments |

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| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DDP informed interventions <p>Sensory attachment interventions.</p> <p>This area of work is increasing and is ongoing – to pull forward into 2023/4 targets</p> |
| We will launch our second Mockingbird constellation | Mockingbird Lead Team Manager | January 2022 | Completed |
| We will explore the use of concurrency placements with Adoption Counts, our regionalised adoption service | Service Manager | Ongoing | We have been working closely with Adoption Counts and Cared4 services and have successfully placed 3 babies with 3 FFA foster carers in April 2022 to March 2023 |
| We will continue to use Foster to Adopt where possible in order to promote early permanence for children | All | Ongoing | Ongoing |
| We will continually review our performance in key areas and make changes where they are needed in order to ensure that the service is self-critical and responsive | All | Ongoing | <p>The Service Manager and Team Managers have access to the Fostering Reports available within PowerBi and have been working with the LCS Team to ensure data accuracy.</p> <p>Meetings now take place monthly with the LCS Team and there will be monthly performance meetings with the Service Manager.</p> <p>Monthly Dip Sample Audits to continue</p> <p>The Fostering Panel have developed an Advice Tracker that is reviewed monthly by the Service Manager and Team Managers within the Foster Service.</p> |

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| | | October 2023 | Introduction of mid-point review meetings to identify any potential delays for connected assessments. |
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Diversity Plans 2022-2023

| What | By Whom | When | Progress |
|---|---------------------------------|--------------|--|
| Increase the diversity of the fostering panel central list to ensure that we have a wide variety of ages and cultural backgrounds and in particular, representation of people with an experience of having been cared for | Panel Advisor and Panel Chair | April 2022 | Ongoing recruitment for central list member. 1 new Panel member was recruited to join the Panel. |
| We will ensure that our recruitment materials, advertising, and methods of recruitment are accessible to all and are reflective of the diverse population that live in Cheshire East and will attract a wide range of people to become foster carers for Cheshire East. | Comms Lead, SM & Recruitment TM | Ongoing | The new marketing materials and methods are reflective of the diverse population within Cheshire East - This is a key priority that will pull forward into 2023/24 |
| We will undertake targeted recruitment to find warm and welcoming homes for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. | Comms Lead, SM & Recruitment TM | January 2022 | Completed A targeted recruitment campaign is planned to focus on nesting to be advertised by September 2023. |
| We will continue to ensure that all foster carers receive training in relation to diversity which encompasses ethnicity, social class, gender identity, sexuality and disability | Training SSW and SSW | Ongoing | Achieved |

Consultation and Involvement Plans 2022-2023

| What | By Whom | When | Progress |
|---|---|---------|--|
| We will continue to ensure that foster carers are routinely involved in the development of the service. | HOS, SM, TMs Training SSW, & FIRO | Ongoing | <p>The Foster Carer Survey (July 2021) highlighted that whilst 82% of foster carers feel proud of their role and 76% felt committed to what Cheshire East are trying to achieve, there were several areas where feedback was not as strong. Key feedback from foster carers which we would like to improve included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 63% agree they are treated fairly, 17% disagree. ○ 57% agree they would recommend to people that they should foster for Cheshire East, 24% disagree. ○ 53% agree the fostering service is improving, 19% disagree. ○ 50% agree they feel part of a team, 29% disagree. <p>57% agree their contribution is valued, respected, and appreciated, 25% disagree.</p> <p>A foster carers survey was completed in November 2022, this was led by Foster Carers Association.</p> <p>31 foster carers completed this survey. Of these carers 81% were mainstream and 9% family and friends' carers.</p> |

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| | | | <p>54% of carers wanted to see geographical based groups. Since August 2023 we have groups based in Crewe, Congleton, Macclesfield.</p> <p>22% of carers said they would like to see age related groups, e.g., babies/toddlers, teenagers. Since September 2023 we have introduced stay and lay groups, sons and daughter, walk and talk.</p> <p>2% have expressed the wish to see specialist groups, i.e., fetal alcohol and children with disabilities. Since September 2023, we have relaunched the fetal alcohol group and are looking to start children with disabilities group in the new year (January 2023).</p> <p>13% stated they would like to see arise in the fostering allowance. Since 01/06/2023, all foster carers received a 12.43% rise in foster allowance.</p> <p>7% wanted out of hours support. From 1 October 2023, the service has implemented a rota to provide support to carers in the evenings and weekends. This is ran by a foster carer and team manager.</p> <p>33% of carers said they would like to see a buddy scheme in place. A buddy scheme was put in place by the service July 2023.</p> |
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| | | | <p>Another survey will be completed by April 2024.</p> <p>Foster carers have participated in the FIRO review of the fostering policies and policy development.</p> <p>100% of Foster Carers have contributed to and have attended their Fostering Annual Reviews.</p> <p>4 Foster mainstream carers have taken part in the recruitment to the Service Manager post in February 2022.</p> <p>There is a foster carer representative on the Mockingbird Steering Group.</p> <p>Foster carers' Support Groups have met monthly.</p> <p>Several face-to-face events are planned for 2022/23 to include:</p> <p>Son's and daughters' event, Walk and talk group, Stay and play.</p> <p>Throughout the year various events for FCF including a celebration lunch, Line Dancing Event, Summer BBQ, long Service Awards Lunch and Christmas party.</p> <p>Seasonal newsletter has replaced monthly newsletter, this includes contributions from Foster Carers.</p> |
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| We will begin to work with carers to develop a Foster Carer Association with key foster carer representatives with whom the service can consult. | HOS, SM, TMs | April 2024 | Cheshire East Foster Carers Association – this action will pull forward into 2022/23 targets. Contact has been established with Fostering Network to seek support to re-establish the FCA. Unfortunately, the association was dispended April 2024. Plans to re-establish this by April 2024. |
| We will develop a year-long plan of quarterly catch ups with foster carers which will be undertaken either virtually and face to face to ensure that carers have the chance to meet and mix with each other and talk things through with service representatives | HOS, SM, TMs | December 2023 | The quarterly catch ups will start from offering a daytime and evening session for carers to attend virtually or in person at Delamere House. |
| We will continue to ensure that complaints are dealt with promptly and thoroughly and respond to all concerns raised | HOS, SM, TMs | Ongoing | Completed |

Mainstream Fostering Household Recruitment Plans 2022-2023

| What | By Whom | When | Progress |
|------|---------|------|----------|
|------|---------|------|----------|

| | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------------|---|
| Cheshire East intends to become a Fostering Friendly Employer | HOS | March 2022 | Not achieved – this action will pull forward to 2023/24 |
| We will get out and about to shows and other events in the Cheshire East area, such as The Cheshire Show and Geronimo and become involved in local networking events to promote the Cheshire East fostering service and enhance our foster carer recruitment | HOS, SM, TMs, SSWs, Comms Lead | January 2022 | A programme of events has been booked and planned for 2022/23. Recruitment Events resumed all over CE with good attendance. |
| We will undertake more community-based advertising and recruitment activities, developing links with local groups and organisations. | Comms Lead, Recruitment TM, SSW & FSW | April 2022 | Planning is underway to maximize the opportunity to build on the annual National Fostering Network Foster Care Fortnight campaign in May 2022 – Completed Face2Face Monthly Information Sessions have been booked and advertised to take place at Cledford House in Middlewich, but other venues are being explored. |
| We will develop and share a recruitment strategy 2022 - 2023, we want to be ambitious and regularly active to meet our sufficiency demands and attract new foster carers | Comms Lead, SM, & Recruitment TM | December 2022 | There were 13 placements for 10 young people 12 of the placements were for mainstream and one for family and friend. Recruitment of new carers who want to care for UASC, Not achieved – this action will pull forward to 2023/24 |
| We will start targeted recruitment to find homes for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children | Comms Lead, SM & Recruitment TM | December 2022 | See above |

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|--|---------------------------------|--------------|---|
| We will undertake targeted recruitment to find homes for young people who are in residential settings who want to live in a family, and to find homes for young people who may otherwise go into a residential setting | Comms Lead, SM & Recruitment TM | January 2023 | Not achieved – this action will pull forward to 2023/24 A draft policy has been completed; this needs to be costed alongside an analysis of the demand for this service – this action will pull through to 2022/23 |
| We will develop a Parent and Child Fostering Scheme to work with adult parents, and with young people under 18 who are to become parents | SM & Recruitment TM | March 2023 | Not achieved – this action will pull forward to 2023/24 |

Plan for 2023-24

Service Development Plans 2023-2024

| What | By Whom | When | How |
|--|--|-------------------------------|---|
| Our training opportunities for foster carers will develop into a blended approach of face to face and webinars or online training Staff will receive core training in Support and Supervision Skills and in Making Good Assessments | Training SSW / in Collaboration with Foster Carers | April 2023 By 30/09/22 | Completed - We have published a comprehensive training offer and annual training plan. Completed -We will include foster carers as part of the Skills 2 Foster Training and Skills to Care Training Completed |
| We will continue to embed and develop Reflective Groups for foster carers, facilitated by staff and carers themselves | Training SSW & SSWS | Ongoing 23/24 | We will develop a 2 nd group and expand the model into additional reflective groups for connected carers and other groups. |
| We will continue to promote placement stability and to match children into long-term placements where that is the right thing to do | All | Ongoing | We will identify and track the cohort of children living in foster care with a care plan of LT foster care who are not, yet LT matched to improve performance in this area |
| We will continue to support special guardians and their children, and we note that there seems to be a more general acceptance and commitment nationally to the importance of this work | SGO Team | Ongoing | |
| We will embed the Mockingbird Model and continue to work with the Foster Network | Mockingbird Lead Team Manager | Ongoing | Completed -We will review the TOR for the Mockingbird Steering Group. |

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| | | | We will consider the case for the development of a 3 rd Constellation – this action will pull forward 2023/24 |
| We will explore the use of concurrency placements with Adoption Counts, our regionalised adoption service | Service Manager | Ongoing | We have been working closely with Adoption Counts and Cared4 services and have successfully placed 3 babies with 3 FFA foster carers in April 2022 to March 2023 |
| We will continue to use Foster to Adopt where possible to promote early permanence for children | All | Ongoing | |
| Funding has been secured for a programme of optimization of the fostering areas of Liquid Logic, our case management system which will ensure that the processes and workflows for fostering are more closely synchronised with the way in which cases evolve, particularly for connected carers. This will mean in turn that we have accurate reporting of performance and timeliness for the fostering service and will be better positioned to understand and develop our own performance | All, in consultation with Project Manager for Optimization and ICS team | April 2024 | <p>We will focus of the following workstreams have been established which are overseen by officers and service users. These are (with timeline dates)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Portals (23/24) 2. Special Guardianship Workflow (22/23) 3. Private Fostering Workflow (22/23) 4. Staying Put Workflow (22/23) 5. Supported Accommodation / Lodgings Workflow (22/23) |
| We will continually review our performance in key areas and make changes where they are needed to ensure that the service is self-critical and responsive | All | Ongoing | <p>Meetings will continue to take place monthly with the LCS Team and there will be monthly performance meetings with the Service Manager.</p> <p>A programme of monthly Dip Sample Audits has been agreed.</p> |

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Diversity Plans 2023-2024

| What | By Whom | When | How |
|--|---------------------------------|-------------|-----|
| Increase the diversity of the fostering panel central list to ensure that we have a wide variety of ages and cultural backgrounds and in particular, representation of people with an experience of having been cared for | Service Manager and Panel Chair | Ongoing | |
| We will ensure that our recruitment materials, advertising and methods of recruitment are accessible to all and are reflective of the diverse population that live in Cheshire East and will attract a wide range of people to become foster carers for Cheshire East. | Comms Lead, SM & Recruitment TM | Ongoing | |
| We will undertake targeted recruitment to find warm and welcoming homes for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. | Comms Lead, SM & Recruitment TM | August 2024 | |
| We will continue to ensure that all foster carers receive training in relation to diversity which encompasses ethnicity, social class, gender identity, sexuality and disability | Training SSW and SSW | Ongoing | |

Consultation and Involvement Plans 2023-2024

| What | By Whom | When | |
|--|---|-----------|--|
| We will continue to ensure that foster carers are routinely involved in the development of the service. | HOS, SM, TMs Training SSW, & FIRO | Ongoing | |
| We will begin to work with carers to develop a Foster Carer Association with key foster carer representatives with whom the service can consult. | HOS, SM, TMs | July 2024 | |
| We will develop a year-long plan of foster carer forums which will be undertaken either virtually or in person (depending on Covid) to ensure that carers have the chance to meet and mix with each other and talk things through with service representatives | HOS, SM, TMs | Ongoing | |
| We will continue to ensure that complaints are dealt with promptly and thoroughly and respond to all concerns raised | HOS, SM, TMs | Ongoing | |

Mainstream Fostering Household Recruitment Plans 2022-2023

| What | By Whom | When | Progress |
|--|---------------------------------------|----------------|----------|
| Cheshire East intends to become a Fostering Friendly Employer | HOS | September 2024 | |
| We will get out and about to shows and other events in the Cheshire East area, such as The Cheshire Show and Geronimo and become involved in local networking events to promote the Cheshire East fostering service and enhance our foster carer recruitment | HOS, SM, TMs, SSWs, Comms Lead | Ongoing | |
| We will undertake more community-based advertising and recruitment activities, developing links with local groups and organisations | Comms Lead, Recruitment TM, SSW & FSW | Ongoing | |
| We will develop and share a recruitment strategy 2022 - 2024, we want to be ambitious and regularly active to meet our sufficiency demands and attract new foster carers | Comms Lead, SM, & Recruitment TM | June 2024 | |
| We will start targeted recruitment to find homes for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children | Comms Lead, SM & Recruitment TM | August 2024 | |
| We will undertake targeted recruitment to find homes for young people who are in residential settings who want to live in a family, and to find homes for young people who may otherwise go into a residential setting | Comms Lead, SM & Recruitment TM | July 2024 | |
| We will develop a Parent and Child Fostering Scheme to work with adult parents, and also with young people under 18 who are to become parents | SM & Recruitment TM | August 2024 | |

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OPEN

**Cared for Children and Care Leavers
Committee**

18 June 2024

**Virtual School Headteachers Annual
Report 2022/23**

**Report of: Claire Williamson, Director of Education, Strong Start
and Integration**

Ward(s) Affected: All Wards

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report presents an overview of the operation and impact of the virtual school during 2022/23. The role of the virtual school is clearly defined in Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children statutory guidance for local authorities 2018. The Virtual School supports all children in care regardless of their length of time in care, however the educational attainment data in the report relates to those who have been in continuous care from 31 March 2022 to 31 March 2023.
- 2 The Virtual School Headteacher's Annual Report details the progress and achievements throughout academic year 2022-23 for cared for children and care leavers' education. It relates to the delivery of pledge two of the cared for children and care leavers strategy, that 'We will improve education, training and employment outcomes.'

Executive Summary

- 3 During 2022/23, the virtual school has continued to support all cared for children/care leavers to ensure it is meeting its statutory duties while providing effective support to children and young people, families, carers, schools, and settings. Every child and young person has an allocated worker within the virtual school to ensure effective oversight and support is in place. The head of service for inclusion fulfils the role of head teacher at the virtual school and leads on special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

- 4 Most of our cared for children are educated in good or outstanding schools (77% in September 2023). 14% of schools are without an updated Ofsted rating due to academy conversion or results not being published yet.
- 5 Most cared for children have good attendance at school (94% in 2022/23 compared to 2021/22 figures of 92.2% for the eligible cohort in both the Northwest and national and 92.6% for all pupils in Cheshire East).
- 6 No Cheshire East cared for children have been permanently excluded for over four years.
- 7 40% of the eligible cohort in Reception have achieved a Good Level of Development (GLD).
- 8 The percentages of Cheshire East Cared for Children in the eligible cohort in Year 2 (Key Stage 1) who achieved the expected standard or higher are as follows. The comparison is the estimated national for eligible Cared for Children from the NCER2.
 - o 54% in Reading compared to estimated national 46%
 - o 38% in Writing compared to estimated national 36%
 - o 69% in Maths compared to estimated national 46%
- 9 The percentages of Cheshire East Cared for Children in the eligible cohort in Year 6 (Key Stage 2) who achieved the expected standard higher are as follows. The comparison is the estimated national for eligible Cared for Children from the NCER.
 - o 57% GPS which is above the estimated national of 50%
 - o 35% RWM which is just below the estimated national of 36%
- 10 Our unvalidated data for summer 2023 indicates that 25.6% of the eligible cohort achieved a grade 4+ in English and Maths, with 41% who were eligible and entered for GCSE examinations achieving grade 4+ in English and Maths. This is in line with national comparative data for cared for children in 2019 (pre-pandemic used as comparator data for 2023 is not available yet).
- 11 6% of our care leavers are in Higher Education, which is the same as the 2023 national average.
- 12 18 young people have achieved a Level 3 qualification with 11 offers of university places; We have 14 young people currently at university.

- 13 Most 16–18 year old cared for young people and care leavers are in education, employment or training (EET) (91.4% in September 2023). 16 and 17-year-old cared for young people are tracked monthly ensuring targeted support is in place, in particular for those at risk of becoming NEET. There is a bespoke offer for post-16 cared for children, including our ‘venture with confidence’ programme, to promote and prepare young people for EET. A partnership challenge panel considers the support we can offer young people to re-engage them in EET.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cared for Children and Care leavers Committee is recommended:

1. To endorse the Virtual Headteacher’s Annual Report 2022/23

Background

- 14 The annual headteachers report outlines the educational progress and update from academic year 2022/23, which has been subject to scrutiny through our recent inspection of local area childrens services (ILACS). The LA are required to develop an improvement plan following the outcome of our inspection which will include specific areas of focus and actions directly in relation to Education. The improvement plan sets out the actions we will take to improve services. What is most important is that what we do makes a difference, so each month we will assess progress and impact against the plan.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 15 The Cared for Children and Care levers 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. The Cared for Children and Care leavers Committee needs to be able to scrutinise and challenge performance to improve outcomes for cared for children and care leavers.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 16 The role of the Virtual School Head (VSH) is set out in the statutory guidance for local authorities Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked after children.
- 17 The statutory guidance must be followed unless there are exceptional circumstances that justify departing from it. The guidance sets out the framework through which local authorities discharge their statutory duty under s22 (3A) of the Children Act 1989 to promote the educational achievement of looked-after children. The guidance also sets the framework through which local authorities discharge their statutory duties under s23ZZA of the Children Act 1989 where a local authority must make available advice and information for the purposes of promoting the educational achievement of previously looked-after children.
- 18 It is the role of the VSH to report regularly on the attainment, progress and school attendance of looked after children through the authority's corporate parenting governance structure.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

There are no financial implications of the report. Finance advice will be sought, as appropriate, upon all relevant emerging issues

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 19 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 cared for children and care leavers strategy prioritises these areas, alongside our new improvement plan.

Human Resources

- 20 NA

Risk Management

- 21 NA

Rural Communities

22 NA

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

23 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, additional needs not being identified and met and transition/preparation into adulthood; the cared for children and care leavers strategy prioritises these areas, alongside our new improvement plan.

Public Health

24 NA

Climate Change

25 NA

| Access to Information | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Contact Officer: | Laura Rogerson Head of Service Inclusion |
| Appendices: | Virtual School annual headteacher report 2022/23 |
| Background Papers: | N/A |

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Together we will make Cheshire East a great place to be young

Virtual School for Cared for Children Head Teacher's Annual Report 2022/23



Introduction

This report presents an overview of the operation and impact of the virtual school during 2022/23. The role of the virtual school is clearly defined in *Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children statutory guidance for local authorities 2018*. The Virtual School (VS) supports all children in care regardless of their length of time in care, however the educational attainment data in the report relates to those who have been in continuous care from 31 March 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Data, including GCSE, attendance and suspension data is currently provisional/unvalidated. Once published, validated data will be provided with local and national comparisons.

During 2022/23, the virtual school has continued to support all cared for children/care leavers to ensure it is meeting its statutory duties while providing effective support to children and young people, families, carers, schools, and settings. Every child and young person has an allocated worker within the virtual school to ensure effective oversight and support is in place. The head of service for inclusion fulfils the role of head teacher at the virtual school and leads on special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). To ensure sufficient leadership capacity, a deputy headteacher of virtual school role has been developed to support with the operational running of the virtual school alongside the head of service for inclusion.

The overall number of cared for children has been relatively consistent at just over 500 for the past 12 months. Cared for children are making good progress overall. To continue to improve outcomes, targeted support is in place for all schools and settings to monitor and track attainment, progress and attendance of all children and young people.

All children have access to additional pupil premium funding, to put in place interventions which are additional to the normal school support and are linked to specific targets within personal education plans (PEPs), to ensure interventions are tracked and monitored for evidence of impact and accountability.

The virtual school has a duty to work with head teachers to try and avoid suspending or excluding a cared for child and to make sure that they have the support in place to thrive and make progress. In the case of repeat suspensions, additional PEPs will be held to check that all necessary support is being given. There have been no cases of a cared for child being permanently excluded in 2022/23.

The virtual school works closely with other services across the partnership such as social care, SEN, school admissions, medical needs, attendance, and youth support. The virtual school have delivered cross service training on how all services can support improving the educational outcomes of cared for children.

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Overview

- Most of our cared for children are educated in good or outstanding schools (77% in September 2023). 14% of schools are without an updated Ofsted rating due to academy conversion or results not being published yet.
- Most cared for children have good attendance at school (94% in 2022/23 compared to 2021/22 figures of 92.2% for the eligible cohort¹ in both the North West and national and 92.6% for all pupils in Cheshire East).
- No cared for children have been permanently excluded for over four years.
- 40% of the eligible cohort in Reception have achieved a Good Level of Development (GLD).
- The percentages of Cheshire East Cared for Children in the eligible cohort in Year 2 (Key Stage 1) who achieved the expected standard or higher are as follows. The comparison is the estimated national for eligible Cared for Children from the NCER².
 - 54% in Reading compared to estimated national 46%
 - 38% in Writing compared to estimated national 36%
 - 69% in Maths compared to estimated national 46%
- The percentages of Cheshire East Cared for Children in the eligible cohort in Year 6 (Key Stage 2) who achieved the expected standard higher are as follows. The comparison is the estimated national for eligible Cared for Children from the NCER.
 - 57% GPS which is above the estimated national of 50%
 - 35% RWM which is just below the estimated national of 36%
- Our unvalidated data for summer 2023 indicates that 25.6% of the eligible cohort achieved a grade 4+ in English and Maths, with 41% who were eligible and entered for GCSE examinations achieving grade 4+ in English and Maths. This is in line with national comparative data for cared for children in 2019 (pre-pandemic used as comparator data for 2023 is not available yet).
- 6% of our care leavers are in Higher Education, which is the same as the 2023 National Average.
- 10 students passed a Level 1 vocational course, including 3 of our separated migrant young people, one receiving 'Engineering Student of the Year'. 17 young people achieved their Level 2 vocational qualifications.
- 13 young people successfully finished the first year of a Level 3 course/ A Levels and will be progressing on to the second year from September 2023.
- 51 learners completed their course in English for speakers of other languages.
- 4 young people completed an apprenticeship with 3 others continuing their current apprenticeship, and another young person starting an apprenticeship.
- 18 young people have achieved a Level 3 qualification with 11 offers of university and 10 looking to start in the new academic year. One of these young people came into care with no English and is being supported to secure their place at university to study nursing.
- We have 14 young people currently at university.
- Most 16-18-year-old cared for young people and care leavers are in education, employment or training (EET) (91.4% in September 2023). 16 and 17-year-old cared for young people are tracked monthly ensuring targeted support is in place, in particular for those at risk of becoming NEET³. There is a bespoke offer for post-16 cared for children, including our 'venture with confidence' programme, to promote and prepare young people for EET. A partnership challenge panel considers the support we can offer young people to re-engage them in EET.

¹ The eligible cohort is children who have been in continuous care for 12 months or more as of 31 March.

² NCER is the National Consortium of Exam Results.

³ NEET is Not in Education, Employment or Training

- All cared for children have a designated virtual school advisor who monitors and tracks each child and ensures timely support is in place. We want to continue to improve the completion rate and quality of personal education plans (PEPs) across all years from early years to post-16.
- Children with social, emotional and mental health needs are supported by three learning mentors in the virtual school.

Making a difference to education outcomes for every child

Below outlines the key focus areas for the virtual school regarding promoting the educational achievement of cared for children, wherever they live or are educated.



Remit and operation of the Virtual School in Cheshire East Council

Local authorities have a duty under the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child looked after by them. This includes a particular duty to promote the child's educational achievement, wherever they live or are educated. The authority must therefore give particular attention to the educational implications of any decision about the welfare of those children. The local authority is required to appoint a virtual school head teacher (VSH) for the purpose of discharging this duty to promote the educational achievement of its looked after children, wherever they live or are educated. Our head of service for inclusion holds the role of the virtual school head teacher.

The virtual school operates using a locality model. This has helped significantly in the development of relationships with schools and other professionals resulting in better working practices.

The Government guidance, Promoting the Education of Looked After and Previously Looked After Children, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children> outlines the Statutory responsibilities of Local Authorities, including each Local Authority's Virtual School Head. The corresponding guidance, The Designated Teacher for Looked After and Previously Looked After Children, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-teacher-for-looked-after-children> outlines the statutory duties for education settings.

In 2021 the role of the Virtual School Head was extended by the Department for Education (DfE) to include a duty, as yet still non-statutory, to promote the education of children and young people, from birth to the age of 18 years, who have a social worker. These are children and young people who live with their parents and who are supported via a Child In Need (CiN) or Child Protection (CP) Plan. It is the young people's parents who retain parental responsibility for the children and young people and not the social worker. The information about these duties can be found in the DfE guidance document, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/virtual-school-head-role-extension-to-children-with-a-social-worker>

Staffing and Organisation

The make-up and nature of the virtual school team is kept under review to ensure that the skills available, match the needs of the cohort. We continue to work in localities to facilitate improving support to schools and develop working groups within locality areas to develop training and share best practice.

The deputy head teacher role has been introduced to support the team on a day-to-day basis to inspire and lead to facilitate the best outcomes for all.

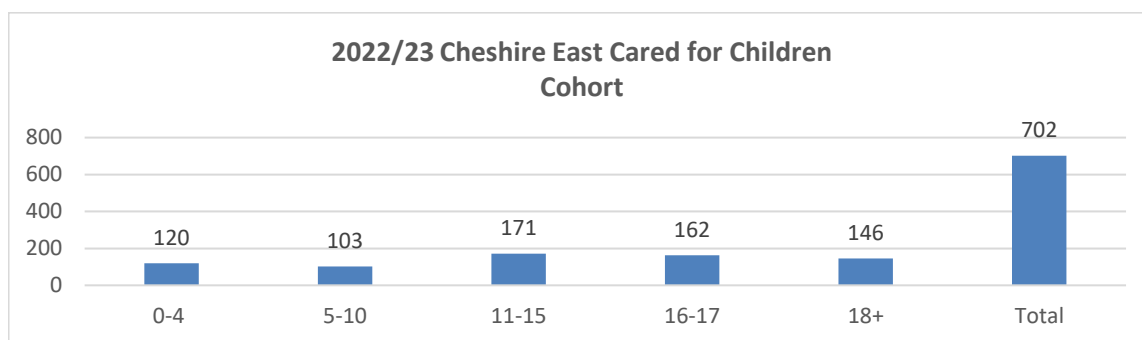
The team has evolved to provide more direct contact and support for children and young people so that the interventions can be more closely tailored to meet needs and monitored for individual impact.

Virtual School Team

- Head of Service for Inclusion (SEND and virtual school headteacher)
- Deputy headteacher
- Education advisors (North, Central, South)
- Education advisor (YJS)
- Learning mentors (North, Central, South)
- Post 16 education advisor
- Early years advisor
- Post 16 learning mentor
- Post 16 tutor
- Two specialist attendance officers (to cover across all areas, including children out of borough)
- Data and administration manager
- Team administrator
- PEP administrator

The virtual school head teacher and virtual school advisors are members of the northwest virtual school head group and network groups, alongside the national association of virtual school heads (NAVSH) and through this network the virtual school can keep abreast of current developments and to be updated on government guidance, attend workshops and training days, and share good practice.

Throughout academic year 2022/23 there were in total 702 cared for children up to the age of 21, of these, 541 were of school age 4 to 18. Cheshire East cared for children from reception to year 11, attended 175 different schools in 36 different local authorities. 57.3% of our children attended Cheshire East schools. Those children and young people that are attending schools out of authority is mainly due to placements being out of borough many of these placed within neighbouring authorities such as Cheshire West, Manchester, Stockport, Warrington, Staffordshire, and Stoke on Trent. The chart below shows a break-down of age/school groups.



*Some school age will fall in the 0-4 categories due to their birthdays.

Partnership working

Partnership working is crucial to the effectiveness of the virtual school, and we recognise our role in being part of a team with the child at the heart. We recognise that to be effective we need to have close working relationships with our partners.

Teams across the partnership that the virtual school works with are:

- Social care – social workers, care leavers team, fostering and cared for support therapeutic teams, attending all resource and accommodation panel meetings weekly to support sharing information on education when placements moves are being considered/sourced. Attending stability meetings with social workers and carers.
- Independent reviewing officers
- Educational psychology service (targeted support for individual CYP and schools)
- Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) team
- Youth justice service (YJS), with an YJS advisor who works part-time within the virtual school team.
- Youth Support Service – monthly meetings to support interventions to reduce young people who are not in education, employment, or training.
- Early years team
- Pure insight

The virtual school also works with the independent reviewing officers and foster carers, providing training and support as needed. Through membership of education, head teacher and virtual school head regional groups, the virtual school can keep abreast of all current events and news items both regionally and nationally to ensure best practice is shared and partners are aware of matters which influence their area to promote the educational outcomes of cared for and previously cared for children.

Our key priorities are outlined in the cared for children and care leavers Strategy; **Pledge Two: We will improve education, employment, and training outcomes are:**

We will have high aspirations for every child and young person and will help them to achieve their ambitions, including using opportunities in the 'family businesses 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, our ambition is to ensure they have the support in place 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 opportunities in education, training, and employment.

Training and Support

The virtual school provide training on education relating to children in care. Head teachers and governing bodies are required to appoint a designated teacher, to champion the needs and support of cared for children and to ensure that the teacher has access to training. Wider school training has continued to be offered to all schools/settings. In Cheshire East this is provided in a variety of ways:

- Update/network meetings open to all schools and led by the virtual school
- New designated teacher training
- Annual cross service designated lead training
- Bespoke training in individual schools which can be focused on a particular child or wider training for all staff (e.g attachment and trauma whole staff training)
- Arranging outside speakers to provide 'expert' input.
- Training for social care and new social workers on improving educational outcomes of cared for children, statutory responsibilities, and PEPs.
- Locality cluster sessions held regularly throughout the academic year for all schools and settings. Including targeted trainings sessions focusing on improving quality of PEPS, areas of development and sharing good practices

The sessions held in 2022 and 2023 were well attended by school/setting representatives and provided a range of workshops delivered by a range of services. Sessions provided support on pupil premium funding and improving the quality of the PEP. The sessions included a presentation by a Cheshire East care leaver sharing her voice on her educational journey.

Positive feedback was received following the various training days.

"Really helpful and informative, it was good to meet with Cheshire East staff face to face."

"Such an informative day. It was great to meet other professionals and share good practice."

"Good to meet other people."

"Thank you for the excellent training today, we all felt that this was enormously beneficial, and it has helped us to better understand the process as well as the best practice for supporting the students. Thanks also for coming along at such short notice; we really appreciate it.

I think we are better informed now to lead PEP meetings and we very much appreciate the support, ongoing.

The universal training programme offered by the virtual school for designated leads in schools

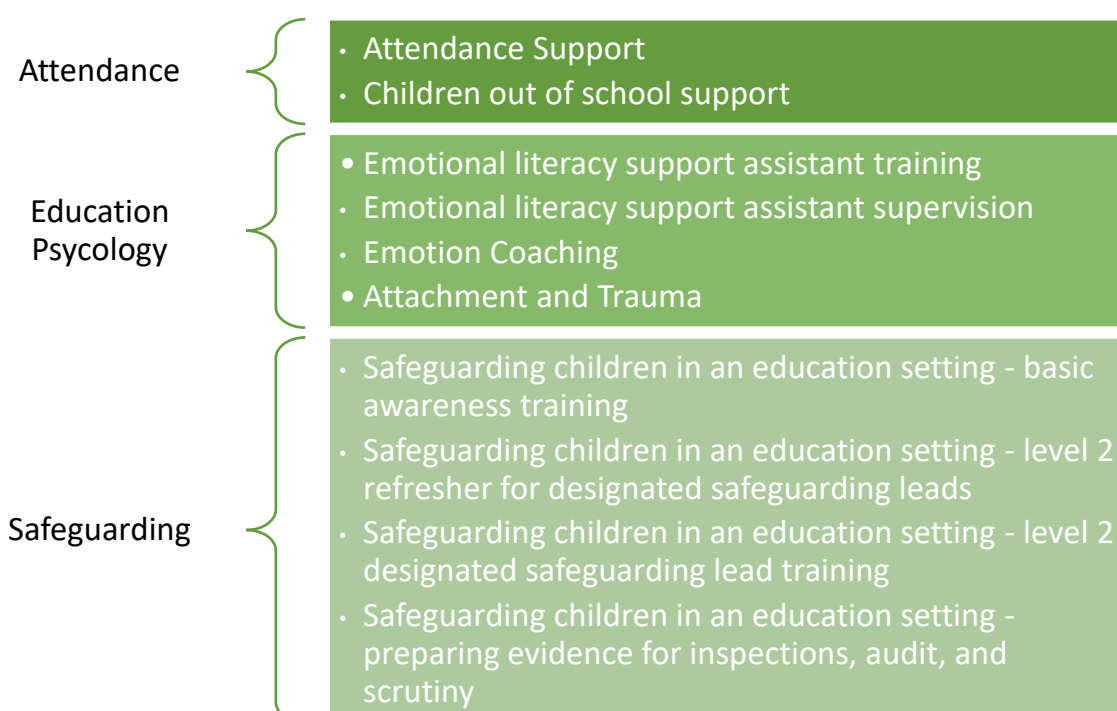
| Date | Title | Objectives |
|---------------|---|---|
| November 2022 | Three designated teachers cared for and | <p>The Locality sessions throughout the year presented:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions and meeting the team • The support the virtual school can provide to schools • Attendance monitoring lead by virtual school specialist attendance officer |

| | | |
|---------------|---|---|
| December 2022 | previously cared for conferences held in Cranage and Middlewich | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social care lead by cared for and care leavers service • Attachment and trauma lead by Education Psychology • Safeguarding children lead by SCIES Team (Safeguarding Children in Education) • Youth justice lead by virtual school advisor and youth justice link • Extended duties for Children with a Social Worker lead by virtual school advisor • Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children lead by UASC, 16/17 homelessness and care leavers team • Transitions, My Voice, one page profile lead by school advisors • Attendance and Transition timetables lead by attendance and out of school service • Opportunities for informal drop ins where all virtual school advisors were available to delegates. • Sharing good practice for improving the quality of PEPS, pupil premium and safeguarding in post 16 education. |
| July 2023 | | |
| June 2023 | Post 16 training day held in Macclesfield | |



Universal training offer for children with a social worker

The Department of Education announced an extension of the virtual school head teacher duties to include all children and young people with a social worker. This extension continues to be supported by grant funding. The guidance outlines this as a strategic role rather than direct working with our key responsibilities to offer support/advice and guidance indirectly. To be able to support as many schools as possible, we are using the funding to implement a universal training offer. This training will be available to all schools/settings with children with a social worker. We have also offered targeted support for those schools with high numbers of children with a social worker.



We worked with several schools to undertake some targeted work for those settings with a higher number of children with a social worker this included projects such as:



These duties have again been extended for 12 months to allow for the support to be extended; over the next 12 months we will be monitoring these programmes of support and reporting on the impact this has made in relation to the overall remit of work undertaken.

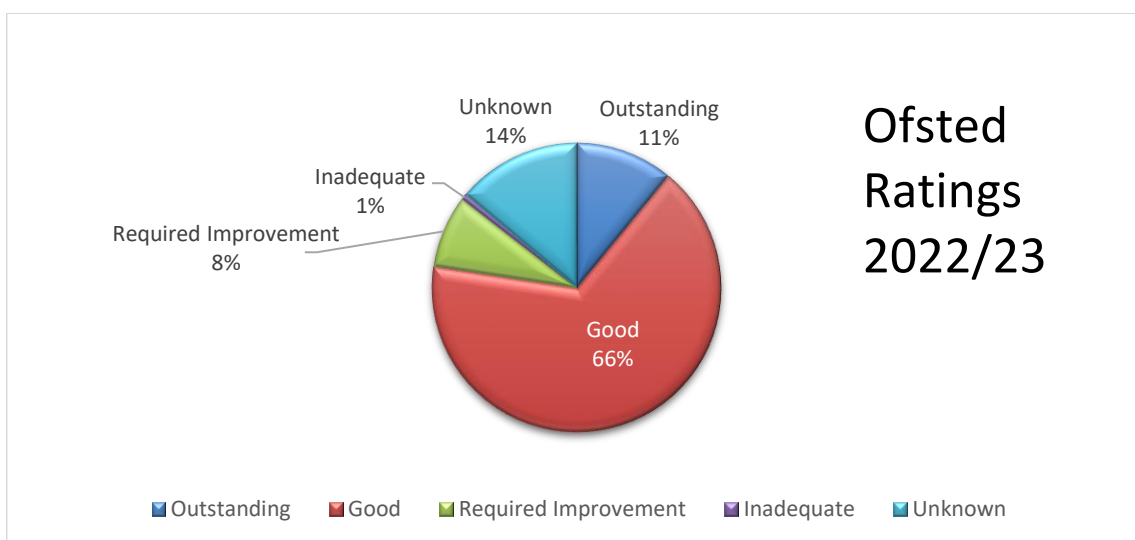
The support we have had from your team has been amazing! The team are wonderful human beings and have made such a difference to my work. I spoke to my CEO of our MAT this week to tell what a difference it has made.

Please pass on my positive feedback because having another professional involved for me, as senco/DSL/CFC teacher/teacher etc. has been so supportive - both team members are just brilliant and worth their weight in gold. (Feedback from a teacher sent to the attendance and children out of school team)

Ofsted Ratings

The statutory guidance states that schools judged by Ofsted to be 'good' or 'outstanding' should be prioritised for cared for children. If any Cheshire East child is placed in a school rated below 'good' then virtual school advisors will visit every school prior to any child being placed to ensure that pastoral and curriculum support is of a good standard. Advisors will attend PEPs and track progress each term throughout the year of all children in schools graded below 'good' to ensure that children are well supported and are making progress. PEPs are completed immediately when schools' grades are moved below 'good' following Ofsted inspection to ensure that the needs of the child are being met. The chart below shows the proportion of pupils attending schools with identified Ofsted ratings.

* 14% (28 schools) Unknown due to conversion to academy or new schools so they have not had their first inspection report.



Special Educational Needs

At the end of academic year 2022/23 there were:

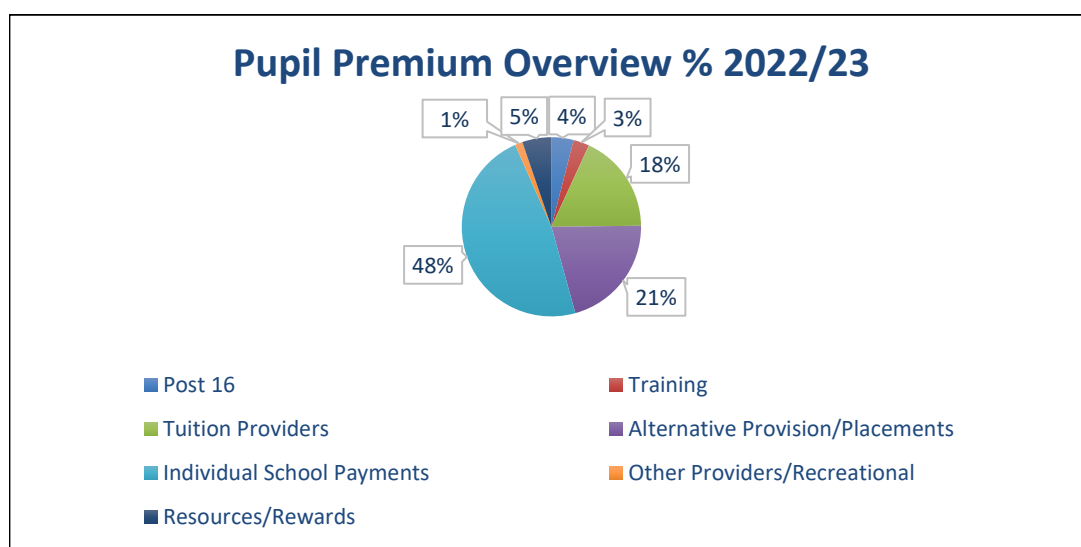
- 148 children and young people with an education, health, and care plan across all years (0-18)
- 1 early years child (0-4) with an education, health, and care plan
- 61 post 16 young people, (ages 17/18/19/20) with an education, health, and care plan
- A further 29 school age children (4-18) with either a school support plan or school focus plan.

The virtual school has an identified SEN lead advisor who meets with the senior key workers from the SEN team on a monthly basis. This is to review cases to ensure effective timeliness and interventions are in place, plans are finalised, and advice received. The primary focus for next year is to continue to improve timeliness within the needs assessment process, ensuring annual reviews are aligned with PEPs and that these annual reviews are taking place yearly and plans being updated and made available within time frame. We are working closely with the SEN to make sure school moves are timely and well planned, including those moves with a transition phase of education.

The virtual school has continued to embed cross-service working within the SEND team to ensure that children are in the correct school to meet their needs and making progress. Advisors are involved if an application for a needs assessment is made and are contacted by the SEND team to request any advice to be included in the assessment process. If a child has an education, health, and care plan (EHCP), we are working to ensure schools/settings are aligning the EHCP review alongside the PEP in order that the targets can be aligned to complement and reflect each other and support the holistic outcomes for children and young people. In cases where school moves are required for children with an EHCP there is support in place to ensure that all children have access to interim education whilst the consultation process takes place.

Pupil Premium Funding 2022/23

The virtual school's main budget is the pupil premium plus, which is devolved to the local authority and is to be used as seen appropriate by the virtual school head as to best promote achievement and progress of cared for children. The amount which is made available to the Local Authority for 2022/23 is £2,410 per child in care as reported on the March return. The guidance makes clear that while it is expected that the majority of this is used for direct support of children, it does not need to be allocated equally as some children will need less than £2,410 and some will need considerably more. The funding criteria also states that the pupil premium can be used to fund staff or central services such as training if they have a direct impact on improving the experience and outcomes for children.



The main use of pupil premium was to fund intervention work and provisions delivered directly through schools/settings and identified through individual PEPs. The remaining funds have been used to provide support for children which is above and over what is offered as part of the usual school curriculum/ offer. These may include attending alternative provision sessions, as part of bespoke timetable packages for children who require additional support within mainstream school. These provisions offer a series of off-site support such as animal therapy or forest schools, having a weekly work placement to add variety, help with preparing for adulthood or funding specialist support such as counselling. Funds were also allocated to schools to support with remote learning, access targeted support or to prepare for transition. The aim of this was to ensure that children were supported regarding increasing their skills and knowledge before the exams/assessments and to support improving their preparation and confidence.

School age children in care are allocated pupil premium when a PEP is returned with a funding request form which outlines how this would be spent and the intended outcomes and, in some cases, funding was allocated to children outside this age range if the need was evident. For example a post-16 young person not in education who wished to take up a work placement to gain skills and confidence.

Case study of a young person that has received pupil premium funding

Background:

Child X has been a cared for child since September 2018. Child X attended a high school from year 7 until part way through year 9 when they moved to a different high school.

Key Concerns during last academic year

Child X became unsettled in school.

The impact on attainment the time Child X spent out of school due to fixed term exclusions.

Type of Intervention:

Intensive support to school from the virtual school.

Support to explore therapeutic approaches to work with Child X in school.

Learning mentor support from virtual school.

How is PP being spent

Therapeutic consultations.

Learning mentor support to deliver ELSA sessions.

Tuition.

Impact of Intervention:

Child X settled well at the new school despite some initial challenges. School were provided with information to develop a clear PEP plan and pupil profile. Child X now has an EHCP, receiving SEMH intervention and provision, is supported and engages with virtual school learning mentor. Child X has improved attendance and reduced exclusions in both the spring and summer term, resulting in having the ability to access, engage and have improved progress in education. Attendance improved significantly from spring term at 60% to 100% in summer term.

Below is an outline of some of the interventions supporting our children and young people.



Emotional Literacy Support Assistant

Emotional Literacy for Support Assistants (ELSA) offers evidence-based training with ongoing supervision to support the emotional wellbeing of children and young people in their setting and to positively impact on social, emotional, and academic outcomes.

ELSA is designed to build the capacity of settings, to support the emotional needs of their pupils from within their own resources. This is achieved by training school staff (SENCOs, DSLs, HLTAs and TAs) to develop and deliver individualised support programmes to meet the emotional needs of children and young people in their care.

Virtual School has commissioned their Educational Psychology Service to deliver ELSA to learning mentors and designated teachers to offer enhanced support to cared for children and young people, and those with a social worker.

ELSAs will be able to plan, deliver and evaluate an effective range of individualised support interventions that cater for a wide range of needs, such as those aligned to the impact of trauma and attachment needs.

23 ELSA Virtual School delegates have secured full accreditation and are actively accessing supervision.

Feedback:

- 100% of ELSA's reported improvement in their knowledge base across all ELSA topics
- All ELSA's reported confidence in their ability to select and utilise ELSA resources purposefully.

As EP supervision is embedded and experience develops over time, confidence has shown to incrementally increase over time.

- ELSA yields positive outcomes on children's development with impact reported at short (3mths), medium (12mths) and longer term (18-24 mths) intervention periods.

"I act as an emotionally available adult for XX. He has now developed a secure attachment which has enabled him to build other relationships with peers and teachers. XX has been supported to develop confidence, name emotions and resolve conflict. He has also started to develop strategies to manage his emotions thanks to ELSA".

"I use the active listening all the time and this helps them feel that they are being heard and having their say. I use information on feelings, mindset, window of tolerance and look at their stresses and coping mechanisms. I have also supported with loss. I find that the skills learnt from the ELSA training just come naturally into our conversations now and my responses and advice to the students are far more effective than prior to the training".

It might be helpful for any reader who may be unfamiliar with understanding that a typical timeframe of response to intervention to promote some noticeable and sustainable social, emotional and mental wellbeing improvements for children and young people is around 12-18 months

The Educational Psychology Service maintains robust ELSA training programme tracking data for all

ELSA delegates related to their accreditation (working towards and maintenance) and access to the mandatory supervision requirements (minimum of 4 sessions per academic year)

Letterbox Book Trust



The virtual school are supporting our children to have access to books and reading through funding Letterbox parcels; each child receives their own colourful parcel of books, maths games, stationery, and other high-quality materials once every month for six months. This year we have had a specific focus on signing up all our children moving into reception, year 1 and year 5 to receive the Letterbox Book Trust parcels to support them with their transition into their assessment years.

Recreational Activities

The virtual school have also supported children to access recreational activities which they may not normally be open for them to access. We have supported with additional funding for horse riding lessons, music lessons for a number of instruments including piano, guitar, flute and clarinet, performing arts and forest school.



Our Space

Our Space activities are based on the principles of Forest School. Their ethos is an holistic and inclusive approach will empower individuals. Guided learning, review and reflection are key to their approach.

The private woodland site enables them to offer a wide range of activities for our young people. The aim is to boost their physical and emotional well being by spending more time in the great outdoors!

Sessions are led by a former teacher and level 3 forest school practitioner and all activities are fully insured and risk assessed. Activities on offer include: - Natural Art and Craft - Shelter and Den building - Investigating Flora and Fauna - Fire lighting and Campfire Cooking - Story Telling and Story Making - Camp Craft and Tool use - Music Making - Team Building and Problem Solving.



Britannica

Britannica Digital Learning has been working in partnership with virtual schools across the UK since 2014 to help support the challenges that cared for children and young people face when online. We know it is important for parents/ carers to feel assured that children are using a safe, reliable website and one that they can explore independently and unsupervised. For 250 years,



Encyclopaedia Britannica's editorial team have collaborated with experts, scholars, and specialists to produce trusted content. Through working closely with authorities, carers, parents, and educators, we have been able to adapt this for the new generation of digital learners. Cheshire East virtual school have funded this to ensure that all children, parents, and carers have access to Britannica online digital learning platform.

Work Based Learning Programmes

Within the virtual school we have supported to fund children and young people to have access to structured work-based learning programmes which supports children and young people with the transition from school to workplace. We ensure that all programmes are a structured employability pathway designed to ensure children are equipped with the tools they need to go into the world and become an independent employee, fully preparing them for adulthood. Alongside this the virtual school also has an additional budget to fund a targeted programme for post 16 to support increasing engagement into education, employment, and training. For some young people with an education health and care plan they have been able to access the step 16 programme which is work based learning alongside functional skills and other qualifications. This is a one year programme to support them in readiness for their transition to education, employment and training.

Learning Mentors

The virtual school has four ELSA (emotional literacy support assistant) trained learning mentors, who support children and young people with their wellbeing in education. Each of our mentors has a dedicated caseload of children and young people, who have been referred for support sessions primarily in their school or setting. Our mentors offer targeted sessions through linking with designated teachers, social care, virtual school advisors and additional partners, to best inform the support required for each child or young person

I know how positively Child C speaks of you and how much of a good relationship you have built with her. Your support is invaluable to Child C and she is super lucky to have had you supporting her the past few years, I imagine you have been the consistent support in her life when she needed it most. We certainly have noticed a huge improvement in her attitude and being much happier around school the past few months.

Feedback from a school designated teacher

I am really pleased that the sessions are working so well and that they are supporting Child D.

Feedback from a school designated teacher

I think they have really benefitted from their sessions with you, and they are comfortable with you and engage well.

Feedback from a school designated teacher



Case study of a young person that has received learning mentor support:

Background:

Child A became looked after two years ago after a long history of social care involvement and increased frequency of missing from home episodes. Child A had a series of adverse childhood experiences. Child A is now living in a foster placement. Child A is attending a local mainstream secondary school and is now starting year 11.

Key concerns identified in autumn term PEP 2022:

- Recent change in foster carer
- Managing emotions at school when challenging social situations arise
- School suspension
- Changes in linked professionals
- Reduced self-esteem and confidence in academic ability

Types of intervention provided by the learning mentor throughout the academic year 2022-2023:

- Weekly learning mentor sessions in school to provide an opportunity to talk through Child A's emotional wellbeing, weekly worries or concerns and incorporate activities to build her self-esteem
- Increased links with Child A's key person in school, providing weekly updates to best inform schools approach and strategies when Child A is feeling unsettled

Impact of the intervention as of summer 2023:

- Child A shared her views in her most recent care planning meeting and feels the learning mentor sessions are beneficial to her wellbeing. She has requested that these continue into her final year at school to support her transition into year 11 and the increased exam pressures this brings.
- Child A was supported by her learning mentor to complete an application for a student leadership role in school. Child A was successful in gaining this role. This confidence boost has since encouraged Child A, supported by her learning mentor, to make a further application in advance of the upcoming academic year to become a prefect.
- Child A applied for a weekend job. Child A was supported by her learning mentor to go through interview techniques and questions. Child A was successful in securing the job and worked there for a number of months.
- Child A attends her farm and stables placement each week. She has also now completed her Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award through the placement.
- Child A has not had any further instances of exclusions.
- Child A plays for her local rugby team and had the confidence to try out for a large regional under 16s team



Case study of a young person that has received learning mentor support:

Background:

Child B became looked after six years ago. Child B now lives in a foster placement, is long term matched. Child B attends a local mainstream primary school and has an EHCP for speech and language difficulties with additional focus on SEMH support. Child B is starting in year 6 this academic year.

Key concerns identified in autumn term PEP 2022:

- Lack of perception of the world and awareness of environment
- Reduced self esteem and inclination to attempt classroom tasks independently
- Memory and comprehension of class based activities
- Organisation and resilience skills

Types of intervention provided by the learning mentor throughout the academic year 2022-2023:

- Weekly 1:1 targeted sessions
- Link with school learning support assistant to advise of techniques used and helpful strategies
- The creation of a resource pack of useful activities for ongoing in-school support

Impact of the intervention as of summer 2023:

- Improved memory skills as recorded in summer term PEP.
- Child B has benefited from the independence and organization skills tasks as recorded in his PEP.
- School have an updated record of targets and suggested further areas of support in the future, from the mentor, which have been included in his school support plan.
- School have a set of appropriate child-specific resources they can tap into, to support Child B moving forward.

Virtual School Post 16 Tutor

1:1 tuition is offered to 16–18-year-olds. Most of the young people taking part are currently not in education, employment, and training and/or have no formal qualifications. If there is a need and there is a capacity within the caseload, 1:1 tuition is also offered to young people under-16 and over-18 years old to support clear transition planning. The purpose of 1:1 tuition is to gain qualifications, improve confidence, to engage in other positive activities and progress to education, employment, and training.

1:1 Tuition offer – functional skills maths and English

Every student has access to an online learning resource. Students take an initial assessment test to determine current level. An individual learning plan is created for the students to follow, using learning resources provided.

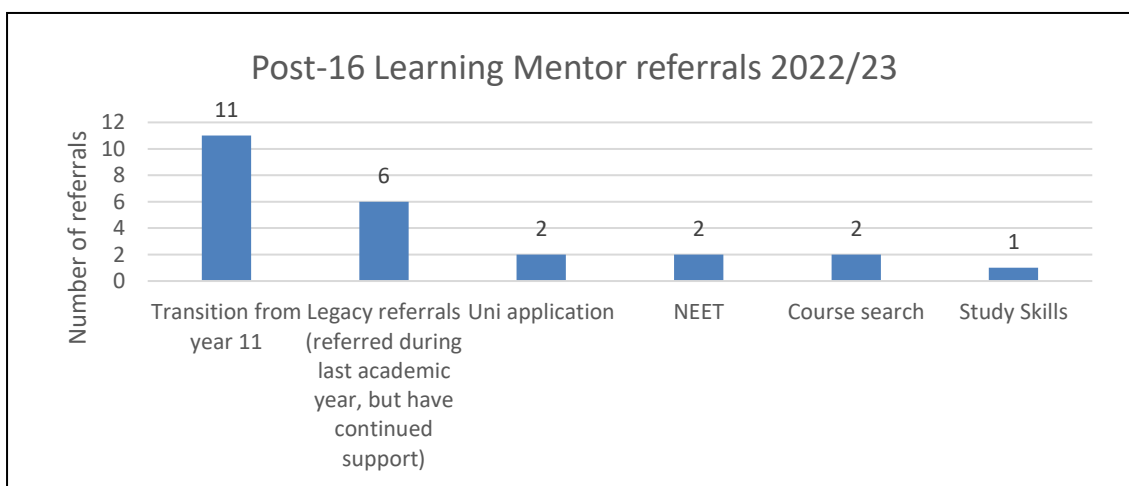
English speakers of other languages (ESOL)

Teaching ESOL to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people (UASC) who have just come into care and are waiting to enrol to an ESOL course. Students work at their individual pace and create a portfolio of activities covered in 16 topics of ESOL activities. The main aim is to introduce English to non- speakers (Pre-Entry Level) and to boost their language skills at entry level 1 and 2. The post 16 tutor offers 1:1 intervention for several ESOL learners. All of them will either continue their ESOL education at the college courses or are enrolled for September 2023.

Over the year, UASC students have been supported with tuition prior to gaining a place at college and in some cases, the tuition has continued to reinforce college learning.

Post 16 Learning Mentor

We have our post 16 learning mentor who offers specific support to our young people to support in re-engaging them back into education, employment, and training. Below is a chart showing the reasons for the referrals she has had this year:



Post 16 learning mentor case study

Case Study:

- Child A was in year 11, in their last year at school
- Was referred to Post 16 learning mentor for transition support

Key concerns:

- Sporadic attendance at school
- No clear post 16 plan

Type of intervention:

- Support from Post 16 learning mentor to explore Post 16 options and build a trusting relationship
- Referral to Post 16 tutor for functional skills English and Maths
- Child A was referred to targeted program to access support through the virtual school

Impact of intervention:

From the work that has been undertaken, Child A and the post 16 learning mentor built a positive relationship, which meant that Child A felt comfortable in sharing their thoughts, feelings and opinions. Due to all the external pressures around Child A, they did not complete all of their GCSEs and did not feel college was right for them at that point.

The Post 16 learning mentor continued to support through this positive interaction, Child A's confidence was building, and they began tuition with the post 16 tutor. They engaged very well, and completed the L1 functional skills Math's, and will be moving onto L2. Child A was referred to venture with confidence, a joint programme from the virtual school and care leavers service. As the learning mentor and tutor both support the programme, Child A already had that relationship, and felt comfortable to join. They completed the 12-week programme and were an integral part of the team.

They completed a large community project, developed valuable skills and built their confidence, and gained food safety and ASDAN certificates. During the programme, the learning mentor revisited the idea of college with Child A, and explained the outdoor sports courses available, as Child A has really enjoyed these through the programme. A visit to the college was organised, and Child A also had the opportunity to speak to another care leaver who had also studied the same course and was now completing an apprenticeship. With support from the learning mentor, Child A applied to college and was accepted. Further support was offered with enrolment, bursary and transport applications. Child A started college September 2023 and feels confident and excited.

Venture with Confidence Programme

This year we worked closely with our care leavers service to run a joint programme for children who are not in education, employment, Venture with Confidence which was decided by the young people themselves. The 12-week programme aims to help them into employment, further education, or training. The objective of the programme is to support our young people to:

- Recognise their skills
- Develop further skills
- Build their confidence
- Explore ideas of what they might like to do in the future; and
- Arrange work experience
- Build relationships with local groups and organisations



The young people also had the opportunity to achieve an ASDAN (Award scheme development and accreditation network) certificate in citizenship, and food safety Level 1.

The 'Venture with Confidence' scheme is run by members of virtual school team and care leaver service. The teams worked together with other services including our own Youth Support Service, pure insight, safe opportunities, and higher horizons.

During the 12-week course the young people took part in team building activities. They also enjoyed employability workshops and completed a community project. This year the young people renovated the garden of Belong in Crewe, which is a residential village for older people, as well as those living with Dementia. The team worked alongside one of the residents, who had great ideas for the garden, and really enjoyed working with the young people. He even went with them on their day trip to Keele University with Higher Horizons!

"I really enjoyed the programme and really appreciated that I was listened to"

"I wasn't sure that I wanted to take part in Venture With Confidence, but I am so glad that I did. It helped me to look at what I could do in September and they supported me with visits and applications"

"I felt much more confident by the end of the programme and I had the confidence to move on to the Prince's Trust"

Two programmes were run in the last academic year, one in the Autumn, and one in Spring/Summer. 25 young people were referred and took part in total. Following the completion of the programmes, of the 25 young people, 11 moved into education, 3 gained employment, 1 joined the Prince's Trust, 3 moved area, 2 turned 21 and are no longer receiving a service.



Early Years

Early years cared for children have been supported by three members of the early years team during the year 2022/23. We carry out early years PEPs from the term after a child turns 2 up to 4 years old. In 2022/3 the number of 0-4 year olds increased from 107 to 125, with the number of termly PEPs required increasing from 33 to 48 across the year.

An early year's consultant has overseen the early years support for cared for children including training for designated practitioners and PEPs, supported by two targeted support officers (TSO's) for 2-year-olds. As a team we support foster carers and parents to find nursery/ school places and support them to access 2 year old funding or 30-hour codes where needed. The TSO's have ensured our 2-year-old cared for children receive their statutory progress check at age two. As a team we signpost foster carers and parents at PEPs to the facilities and activities being run by the Children Centres (now Family hubs) and through the Parenting Journey Facebook pages.

In 2022/3 we provided all settings with access to our early years training free of charge to ensure settings were able to access up to date training. They had access to all our 2 year old training and networks and our What is my behaviour trying to tell you? course.

"I recently had a child in my setting under local authority care. The help and support that I received from my advisor and her team was exceptional. The advice was critical in helping us to provide a nurturing educational environment for this child. Julia and the team assisted us from the beginning, and supported us through the PEP process and cared for reviews. They were always there at each stage to guide and talk us through the different processes"

Quote from a setting



Once again, our 3 & 4 year olds had access to book trust letterbox parcels funded via the virtual school. The parcels contain books, games and/or resources. The children receive six parcels and a free, festive parcel at Christmas. The parcels help support literacy/ numeracy skills in a fun way, helping our children to explore and enjoy access to number, literacy and reading.

We have continued our roll out of electronic PEPs for our 2, 3 and 4-year-old early years children which helps to ensure we are able to fully support children of all ages to monitor and track attainment and progress.

Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

The PEP is the document which records the children's education provision, achievements and how the school or other provider will help to improve their outcomes. It is the joint responsibility of the local authority and school to ensure that there are PEPs in place and the virtual school has the duty to monitor these and provide advice and support as necessary. The PEP should be reviewed each term at a meeting between school, carers, young people, and social workers. The virtual school attends all initial PEPs for children and young people between the ages of two and eighteen years old.

We have continued to develop the PEP following feedback from schools to further enhance the quality and content, with almost all primary and secondary schools now effectively using the PEP portal system. This year we have focused on getting the post 16 and early years settings onto the portal system and we will continue to do so across all ages to ensure we are using our systems in the most efficient way.

Virtual school advisors attend all initial PEP meetings and complete the first PEP which will provide a template and standard for future support. This includes ensuring actions and targets are specific and measurable. These PEP meetings take place within 20 working days and are available for the first cared for review meeting. PEPs are subsequently reviewed each term with the education provider taking a lead alongside social care by reviewing the child's progress, the impact of the previous actions and updating the PEP targets where appropriate.

There is a quality assurance process in place within the virtual school team where each PEP is reviewed and categorised based on the level of support needs of the child. Those with the highest support needs are rated as red, in which case the advisor will attend all PEPs and will provide more frequent contact with the child, carer, school and social worker. Cases rated as amber may require less oversight from the advisor whilst those rated as green are monitored with attendance at one PEP per year. The virtual school criteria involvement in the PEP is:

- New into care
- School or placement move
- Moved out of Borough
- Red rated cases
- Repeat exclusions
- Attendance below 90%
- Need for an independent chair.

Exemplar PEPs are shared across localities during training sessions to share good practice.

- Autumn Term Reception to Year 11 there were 430 PEPS completed, 384 were graded as good/satisfactory.
- Spring Term Reception to Year 11 there were 447 PEPS were completed, 393 were graded as good/satisfactory
- Summer Term Reception to Year 11 there were 496 PEPS were completed, 471 were graded as good/satisfactory

The quality of the PEP is the joint responsibility of the local authority and the school. As well as updates on their attainment and progress this should include discussion of their attitude, emotional state, friendships etc. During next academic year we will be having specific focus on improving alignment of the EHCP annual review and PEP meetings.

There is a quality assurance (QA) process which has been developed jointly by the virtual school and the designated teachers, this has ensured that the quality of PEPs have increased and continues to support schools to develop their own practise, this is reviewed each year to ensure the process is robust. We will have a specific focus next academic year on further strengthening this process with the virtual school headteacher undertaking moderation and deep dive audits and supporting to feedback to schools/settings and social care to ensure we are sharing good practise and further improve the quality and completion rates of PEPs; this will be monitored and tracked to evidence impact throughout this year.

95% of school aged children aged 5-18 received at least one PEP within the school year. Early years PEP figures for children 2-4 are included in the Early Years Attainment section of the report.

Following the successful implementation of our integrated PEPs within Liquid Logic, we currently have 345 primary and secondary schools effectively using this system. We have further improved the content of the PEP following working with our schools and have developed a signs of safety approach with more emphasis on SMART targets ensuring pupil premium is reviewed in detail for impact. We have now continued with the development of our integrated PEP system to enable it to be used for post 16 and we have now 47 colleges using the system effectively. We are also continuing with the development to include early years to ensure consistency across all age ranges and currently have 35 nurseries using the PEP portal effectively. This year we will be further developing the PEP system to ensure that preparing for adulthood is included to support careers and aspirations for all children/young people.

| Number of PEPs in 22/23 school year | Age 5-11 Number in cohort = 132 | Age 12-16 Number in cohort = 203 | Age 16+ Number in cohort = 205 | All children 5+ Number in cohort = 540 |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| 4 | 0 | 3 | 7 | 10 |
| 3 | 94 | 124 | 106 | 323 |
| 2 | 22 | 42 | 39 | 103 |
| 1 | 13 | 29 | 39 | 81 |
| 0 | 3 | 5 | 14 | 22 |

Attendance

The virtual school monitors attendance of all cared for children by commissioning an independent company to contact schools to collect a record of attendance. This data is then used to track and monitor all children to ensure effective and timely support is in place. Within the virtual school we have two specialist attendance officers that monitor attendance daily and work with schools and partners to ensure timely support is in place.

| | 2020/2021 | 2021/2022 | 2022/2023 |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Primary attendance % | 92.8% | 86.2% | 94.18% |
| Secondary attendance % | 80.4% | 86.3% | 89.3% |
| Children with 100% Attendance | 8% (34 children) | 13% (39 children) | 7.4% (21 children) |
| Children with above 95% Attendance | 45% (153 children) | 55.4% (163 children) | 58% (164 Children) |

National Attendance data as in the table below for the academic 2022/23 has not been fully collected yet and as such comparative full year data will not be available until next year.

| % Attendance | | 2018/19 | 2020** | 2020/21 | 2021/22 |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| 895 | Cheshire East-LAC* Attendance | 95.4 | | 88.8 | 93.3 |
| 981 | Northwest-LAC Attendance | 94.6 | - | 90.0 | 92.2 |
| 970 | England-LAC Attendance | 94.9 | - | 90.9 | 92.2 |
| 895 | Cheshire East- All pupils Attendance | 95.6 | - | 95.7 | 92.6 |
| 981 | Northwest-All pupils Attendance | 95.3 | - | 95.3 | 92.5 |
| 970 | England-All pupils Attendance | 95.3 | - | 95.4 | 92.4 |

*LAC stands for looked after children which are known as cared for children in Cheshire East.

** No national data was published in 2020

The Virtual School have two specialist attendance officers. This year we were able to report and record accurate attendance data by working closely with the independent company to create an effective system that tracks the daily, weekly, and overall cumulative attendance for our Children individually and as a cohort.

During the next 12 months following analysis of data, we will be focusing on targeted work for all children below 90% attendance and those accessing alternative provision.

Multi- Disciplinary Team Meeting

At the end of this academic year, we started to pilot targeted MDT (Multi-disciplinary team) meetings focused specifically on improving attendance of identified children/young people. This is a new pilot and will be monitored throughout the year to show whether this is an effective way to support the individual child's attendance. MDT Meeting focus is initially to target children with below 50% attendance.

A meeting will be initiated by the specialist attendance officer to include school, social worker, foster carer/residential manager or key worker /parent and any other relevant professional involved with the child that could support attendance.

The meeting will run in 3 stages over a period of 6 weeks. Barriers are discussed and actions set to support the child.

- Initial meeting
- Update after 2 weeks
- Review after a further 4 weeks

Our main aims next year will be to:

- Strengthen the work with key staff in schools to identify and resolve attendance concerns to ensure timely interventions and support in place, working closely with social care team.
- Develop and align oversight and tracking of children accessing alternative provision.
- Meeting parents/carers and pupils at school or home to offer guidance and support.
- Ensure exclusion reports are obtained quickly, and advisors informed of the exclusion to ensure access to timely support and interventions.
- Attending reintegration meetings following fixed term exclusions to support with next steps and effective planning to help reduce further repeat exclusions.
- Developing communication with supervising social workers so that carers can be encouraged and supported to help improve attendance, offering support and guidance.
- Robust tracking and monitoring to ensure that direct intervention is quickly put in place for when attendance falls below 95%.
- Continue to support Year 11 and Year 6 transitions during the summer holidays to be key point of contact for support.
- Review weekly/monthly/yearly attendance data
- Deliver training and develop guidance to support improvement of attendance for schools and settings.
- Provide training and support to foster carers and social care
- Strengthen the monitoring systems in place to track post 16 college student's attendance

Exclusions/Suspensions

The virtual school has a duty to work with head teachers to try and avoid excluding a cared for child and to make sure that they have the support in place to thrive and make progress. During 2022/23 the virtual school has been quick in its response to exclusions so that a joint plan for the child can be implemented which identifies any key triggers and intervention required. If an exclusion was unavoidable then there were similar meetings held afterwards to try and avoid any repeat exclusions for children. Schools or carers are asked to inform the virtual school whenever an exclusion takes place. In the case of repeat exclusions, additional PEP meetings will be held to check that all necessary support is being given.

The virtual school has funded places at both the Fermain Academy and Cornerstones, and this has contributed to the reduction in some instances of repeat fixed term exclusions, and ensured that the children have received the right support at the right time. The staff have accessed training through the virtual school on understanding the needs of cared for children and how to support children with insecure attachment; pupil premium funding has been used to help provide a mentor/key worker to support our children as a cared for champion.

There have not been any cases of a cared for child being permanently excluded in the academic year 2022/23.

Last year there were two individual fixed term exclusions recorded (for two individual children) of primary school age. This academic year 2022/23 there were 8 fixed term exclusions recorded for a total of five children.

Last year there were 91 individual exclusions recorded (for 34 children) at secondary age. This academic year 2022/23 shows a decrease in numbers to 65 fixed term exclusions for 22 secondary age children.

The table below outlines fixed term exclusion data from 2018-2021 which shows Cheshire east and are below both North-West and national figures.

**Full national data for 2022/2023 will not be available until March 2024.*

| % Of pupils with at least one fixed term exclusion from school | | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|--|---|-------|-------|------|------|
| 895 | Cheshire East-% LAC fixed term exclusions | 7.69 | 7.46 | 6.25 | 8.43 |
| 981 | Northwest-% LAC fixed term exclusions | 10.17 | 10.58 | 8.56 | 9.25 |
| 970 | England-% LAC fixed term exclusions | 11.22 | 11.32 | 9.35 | 9.80 |

Participation of young people

The virtual school recognises that young people are at the heart of all its work and that to be effective in helping young people to succeed in education, their wishes and feelings must be listened to.

All young people are invited to contribute to their PEPs, either by attending the meeting or by sharing their thoughts on the 'my voice' form which can be presented at the meeting on their behalf. Specific interventions and plans are influenced by this input in a variety of ways such as:

- Deciding what subjects to have tutoring in and when/where this takes place based on aspirations
- Agreeing targets for improvement in attendance or behaviour
- Identifying any issues/concerns in school
- Deciding whether additional adult support, e.g., mentor is required

Where children are not attaining and are struggling in school the virtual school advisor works 1-1 to gain understanding from the child of what support can be put in place. The virtual school has dedicated learning mentors who work 1-1 with children, they work closely with schools to empower and train staff to continue to support children/young people.

To ensure the young people are able to share their voice with professionals to help develop understanding, share good practice and areas for development our young people have supported to deliver sessions as part of our network designated teacher training days and attend our cared for and cared leavers committee, alongside the virtual school.

I could honestly talk all day about our virtual school advisor and how much he had made a difference to the young persons life in such a short time.

From the first meeting, it was evident that he has a wealth of knowledge, warmth and commitment to his role and actually wants to help the young people in his care, from the first PEP meeting I was in quite an emotional state as I truly believed that he had listened to my concerns and validated them. The relief was overwhelming for me to know that we had support.

Over the last few months, our young person has drawn his advisor Pokemon pictures, talked about him often, mentioned what his hobbies are and was so excited that he came with us for a visit to high school. This man is an absolute gem!
(quote from foster carer)

The support through the venture with confidence programme has enabled the young person to successfully re-engage back into education and transition into college

I just wanted to thank you both for all your help and support over the years. You have always been at the end of the phone (or email) if I needed anything, and the support Cheshire East have offered us as an 'out of authority' school has been fantastic! (Quote from a designated teacher)

Child A's comments when talking about support from learning mentors and her transition to High School.

'The learning mentor came to visit me... This was important to me. The teacher from high school attended my PEP with my teacher from primary school and they put things in my PEP to support with my Transition, such as Extra Visits and a Key Worker. I had 3 extra transition days at High school and I had support on those days from learning mentor and my teacher from high school. They helped me move from Primary to High School. I was still scared but I had time to get used to the school so I was comfortable with the surroundings'

Attainment

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) assessments and PEPs

The EYFS profile is a statutory assessment of children's development at the end of the early years foundation stage (EYFS). A new EYFS was introduced in September 2021 with revised early learning goals (ELG's) making data comparison with last year possible.

The EYFS profile is intended to provide a reliable, valid, and accurate assessment of each child's development at the end of the EYFS. It is made up of an assessment of the child's outcomes in relation to the 17 early learning goal (ELG) descriptors.

For each ELG, teachers must judge whether a child is:

- meeting the level of development expected at the end of the EYFS (expected); or
- not yet reaching this level (emerging)

Children are defined as having reached a good level of development (GLD) at the end of the EYFS if they have achieved at least the expected level for the ELGs in the prime areas of learning and the specific areas of mathematics and literacy.

There were 9 cared for children in reception as of July 2023 with 5 in the eligible cohort (in care for 12 months as of 31 March). Of the 5 eligible Reception age children 2 reached a good level of development 40.0%, in line with estimated NCER National (CLA) average of 41.0%.

| Group | Pupils | % Of results received |
|---|--------|-----------------------|
| Full Cohort | 9 | |
| Out of area | 4 | |
| Out of Age Range | 0 | |
| Results received for eligible Reception C4C | 5 | |
| Achieving GLD | 2 | 40% |

PEPs

In addition, we tracked the number of completed Early Years PEPs by age group and whether the children were at or below the expected development.

Autumn 2022

107 children 33 Children 2-4 YO 20 Children 3 & 4 YO 13 Children 2YO

| Age group | Number of children | Completed PEPs | Percentage completed |
|-----------|--------------------|----------------|----------------------|
| 3 & 4 YO | 20 | 18 | 90% |
| 2 YO | 13 | 8 | 62% |
| Total | 33 | 26 | 79% |

| Age Group | Number of children | Completed PEPs | At Expected Of completed | Below expected Of completed |
|-----------|--------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 3 & 4 YO | 20 | 18 | 7 39% | 11 61% |
| 2 YO | 13 | 8 | 3 38% | 5 62% |
| Total | 33 | 26 | 10 38% | 16 62% |

Spring 2023

109 Children 35 children 2-4 YO 20 children 3&4 YO 15 children 2YO

| Age group | Number of children | Completed PEPs | Percentage completed |
|-----------|--------------------|----------------|----------------------|
| 3 & 4 YO | 20 | 19 | 95% |
| 2 YO | 15 | 14 | 93% |
| Total | 35 | 33 | 94% |

| Age Group | Number of children | Completed PEPs | At Expected of completed | Below expected of completed |
|-----------|--------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 3 & 4 YO | 20 | 19 | 8 42% | 11 58% |
| 2 YO | 15 | 14 | 9 64% | 5 36% |
| Total | 35 | 33 | 17 52% | 16 48% |

Summer 2023

125 Children 58 children 2-4 YO 29 children 3&4 YO 29 children 2YO (10 not eligible for nursery yet)

| Age group | Number of children | Completed PEPs | Percentage completed |
|-----------|--------------------|----------------|----------------------|
| 3 & 4 YO | 29 | 17 | 59% |
| 2 YO | 19 | 8 | 42% |
| Total | 48 | 25 | 52% |

| Age Group | Number of children | Completed PEPs | At Expected of completed | Below expected of completed |
|-----------|--------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 3 & 4 YO | 29 | 17 | 11 65% | 6 35% |
| 2 YO | 19 | 8 | 4 50% | 4 50% |
| Total | 48 | 25 | 15 60% | 10 40% |

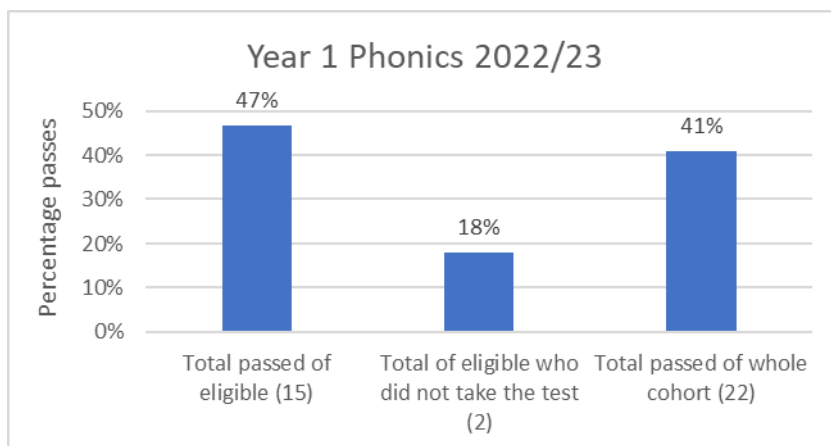
We used the information to target settings through our Early Years Training Offer to allow those settings with cared for children to access training for free to help ensure that best practice was being delivered. Settings with cared for children could access the 2-year-old training and all networks. This helped on Targeted Support Officers visits to challenge and support practice and also in the PEP meeting to support language/ PSED/ routines/ environment to ensure it was suitable for 2's. The behaviour training was also free to all cared for settings and we had very positive feedback- see below.

I just wanted to thank you for a great course. I found it encouraging, empowering, and enlightening. My main take away is to continue to “stay curious”, as a practitioner, I regularly reflect, so this is a simple task for me. I am very interested in ACEs, how trauma affects the brain and how we can help children heal from trauma. The changes I will make in my setting are to continue to encourage practitioners to look beyond the immediate behaviour.

Key Stage 1

Year 1 Phonics

As of July 2023, there were 22 cared for children in total and 15 were within the eligible cohort (in care for 12 months or more as of 31 March 2023). We have received results for all 22 children. Of the whole cohort of 22 cared for children, 9 passed the phonics test. Of the 15 eligible cohort, 7 of them passed the phonics test and 2 of them did not take the test.



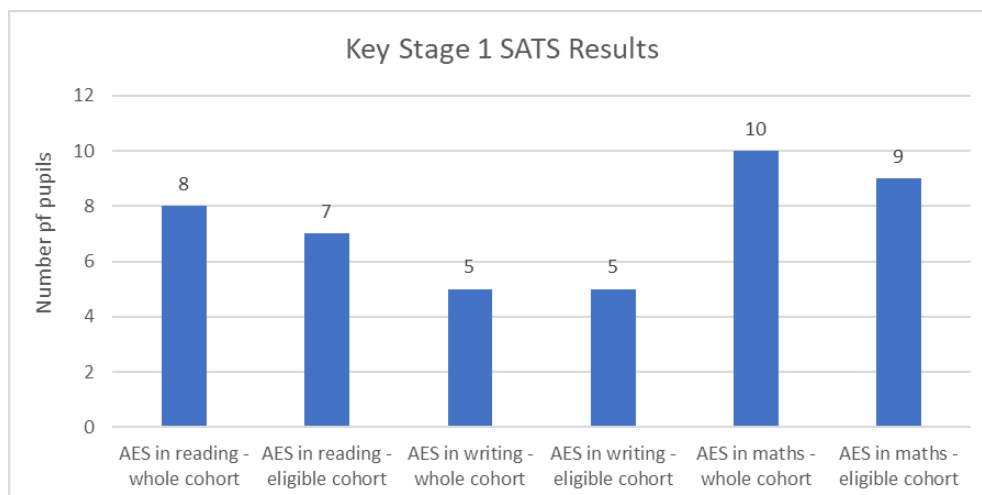
Year 2

As of July 2023, there were 18 cared for children in total and 13 were within the eligible cohort (in care for 12 months or more as of 31 March 2023). We have received results for 17 children.

Phonics

Of the whole cohort of 18, 10 passed phonics in 2022, a further 4 passed in 2023. Of the 13 eligible cohort, 10 passed in 2022, the remaining 3 passed in 2023.

SATS



8 pupils in the whole cohort and 7 pupils in the eligible cohort achieved the expected standard (AES) in reading for Key Stage 1 SATS. A further 5 were working towards the expected standard; all of them were in the eligible cohort.

Of the 5 whole cohort reaching the expected standard for writing, a further 8 were working towards the expected standard, 7 of these being in the eligible cohort.

Of the 10 whole cohort achieving the expected standard for maths, a further 5 were working towards the expected standard, 3 of these being in the eligible cohort.

Key Stage 2

As of July 2023, there were 31 cared for children with 23 within the eligible cohort (in care for 12 months or more as of 31 March 2023).

A total of 25 children (19 eligible children) were entered for the SATS tests.

Of the 6 remaining children, 2 attend schools who have confirmed to not sitting SATS, 3 did not sit as it was not appropriate for the child due to SEND needs, results for 1 child is not available due to moving schools.

| In whole cohort (total of 31 children) | All children (31) | Eligible cohort (23 children) | % Of eligible cohort (23 children) |
|--|-------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Achieved expected standard or Greater Depth in Writing | 13 | 11 | 48% |
| Achieved greater depth in Writing | 1 | 1 | 4% |
| Achieved standard in Reading | 18 | 13 | 57% |
| Achieved standard in Maths | 15 | 11 | 48% |
| Achieved standard in Reading, Writing and Maths | 10 | 8 | 35% |

Key Stage 4

At the end of the academic year July 2023, there were 60 Cheshire East cared for children.

Of the 60 there were 39 in the eligible cohort (in care for 12 months or more as of 31 March 2023).

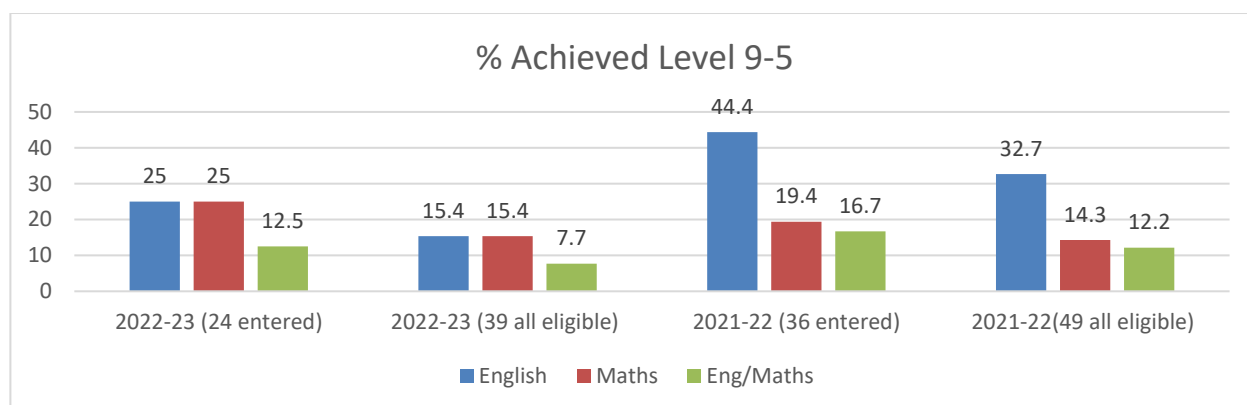
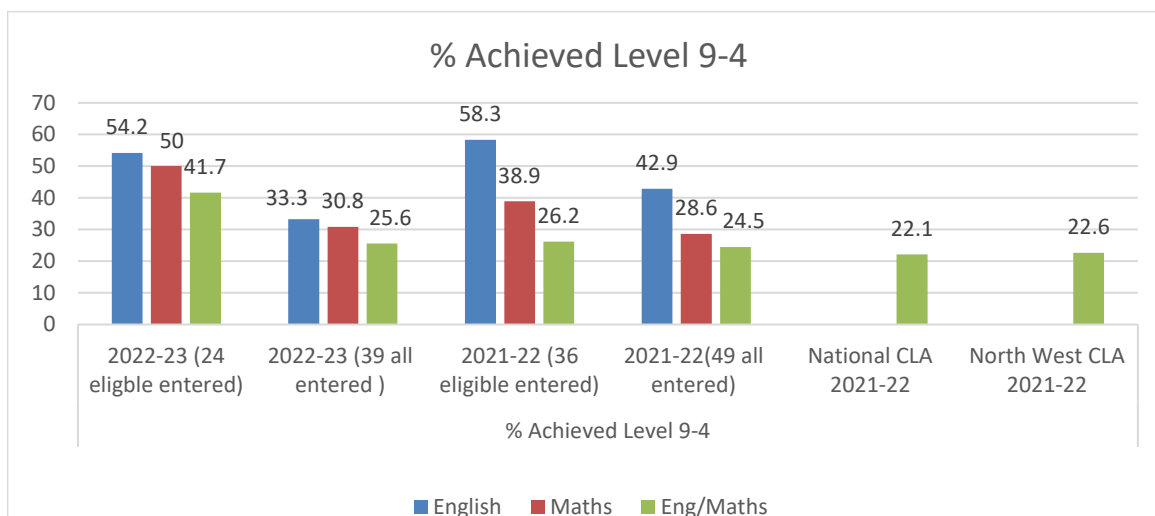
Of the 60 cared for children, 38 were entered for GCSE's.

Of the 39 in the eligible cohort, 24 of these were entered for GCSE's.

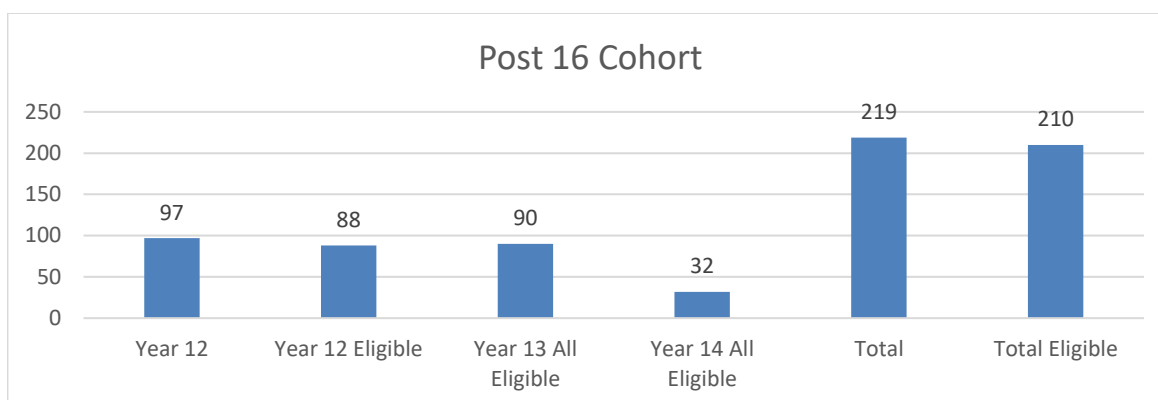
Of the children not entered for GCSE's, a number of these gained a range of other functional skills qualifications.

| | Number of eligible cohort (39 children) | Eligible cohort% | Number of entered eligible cohort (24) | Entered eligible cohort % |
|--|--|-------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Achieving Strong Pass (9-5) in English and mathematics | 3 | 7.7% | 3 | 12.5% (national CLA 10%) |
| Achieving Standard Pass (9-4) in English and mathematics | 10 | 25.6% | 10 | 41.7% |
| Achieving Strong Pass (9-5) in English | 6 | 15.4% | 6 | 25% (national CLA 18%) |
| Achieving Strong Pass (9 - 5) in mathematics | 6 | 15.4% | 6 | 25% (national CLA 13%) |
| Achieving Standard Pass (9 - 4) in English | 13 | 33.3% | 13 | 54.2% |
| Achieving Standard Pass (9 - 4) in mathematics | 12 | 30.8% | 12 | 50% |

*Although data below includes that of this year and national, as per DfE/OFQUAL guidance this year's data should not be published or compared to previous years'/national data.



Post-16 education, employment, and training



Year 12

At the end of the academic year 2022/2023, there were 97 students in total in year 12.

Of this, 19 were not in education, employment, or training (19.58%). 5 young people came into care over the summer (including 4 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children) and 2 are parents. 13 young people have clear next steps and pathways including, employment, an apprenticeship in CE and college. Of the 6 young people who remain NEET, 1 parent is being supported by the VS learning mentor to explore online A Levels. The 5 other young people are being supported to explore their EET options.

11 young people in Year 12 were taking part in re-engagement provision. This included, Post 16 tutor support, funded 1-1 or group tuition, online TUTE and The Prince's Trust Programme. Of the 11 young people in re-engagement provision, 9 have secured a place in further education in September. One young person is waiting to move area and remains on re-engagement provision and another remains re-engaged through volunteer work. Both will continue to receive support with their next steps.

90 young people have a clear post 16 pathway in place for September 2023 (92.78%). The virtual school are working alongside social care and wider services to ensure that all young people have access to local support and services.

Qualifications 2022/2023

All eligible Year 12 students who were entered for examinations achieved a pass in every subject as listed below.

| Bespoke Provision | Vocational Entry Level | Level 1: | Level 2: | Level 3 (first year): |
|-------------------|------------------------|----------|----------|-----------------------|
| | 1 | 11 | 10 | 5 |

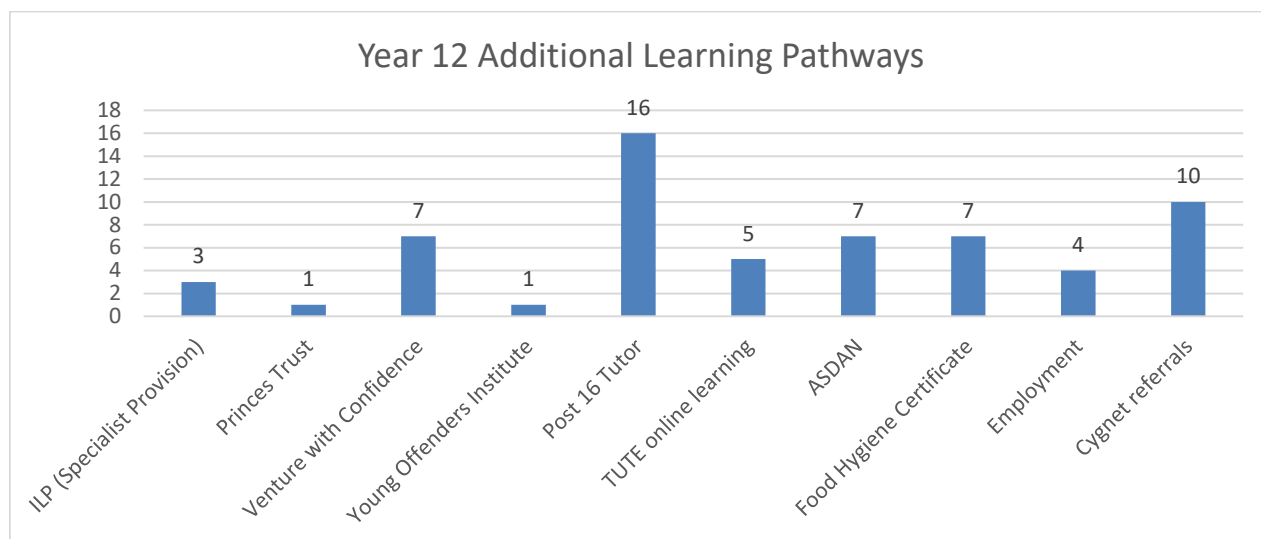
A Levels (1st year):

9

| ESOL | Pre Entry | Entry 1 | Entry 2 | Entry 3 | Level 1 | |
|-------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|------|
| 18 | 8 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 1 | |
| Maths | Pre Entry | Entry 1 | Entry 2 | Entry 3 | Level 1 | GCSE |
| 16 | 3 | 8 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 |

| GCSE | English | Maths |
|---------------------------|---------|-------|
| | | |
| 25 | 9 | 16 |
| Grade 4 or above achieved | 2 | 4 |

| English Functional Skills Entries | Pre Entry | Entry 1 | Entry 2 | Entry 3 | English Level 1 | English Level 2 |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 9 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Maths Functional Skills Entries | Pre-Entry | Entry 1 | Entry 2 | Entry 3 | Maths Level 1 | Maths Level 2 |
| 22 | 3 | 8 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 0 |



Year 13 Qualifications 2022/2023

All eligible Year 13 students entered for an examination passed at the levels below:

| Vocational Qualifications | Entry Level 1 | Entry Level 3 | Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 (first year) | Level 3 (Second Year) |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------|---------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| | 1 | 1 | 6 | 3 | | 6 |

A Level Results: (8 young people passed with following results:

Maths D

Psychology C

Biology D

Theatre Studies C

Criminology C

English x 2 C

History

2 ongoing apprenticeships

ESOL

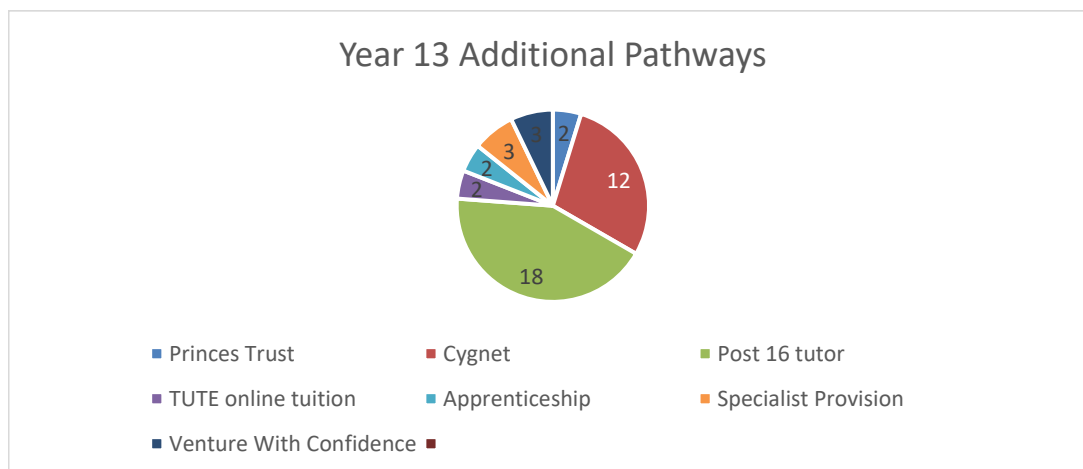
| Pre-entry | Entry 1 | Entry 2 | Entry 3 | Level 1 |
|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 7 | 10 | 2 | 0 | 1 |

GCSE

| Total taken | English | Maths |
|---------------------|---------|-------|
| 8 | 4 | 4 |
| Achieved 4 or above | | 1 |

Functional Skills

| English Functional Skills Entries | Pre Entry | Entry 1 | Entry 2 | Entry 3 | English Level 1 | English Level 2 |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 9 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Maths Functional Skills Entries | Pre-Entry | Entry 1 | Entry 2 | Entry 3 | Maths Level 1 | Maths Level 2 |
| 23 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 5 |



At the end of the academic year 2022/2023, there were 90 students in year 13.

76.6% of young people (69 students) have a pathway in place for September 2023. These pathways include university, college/training, work, and apprenticeships.

Of the 90 students in the overall cohort, 20 were not accessing education, employment, or training which equates 23.3%, this was a slight increase compared to the same time last year (2%).

All these young people will continue to be supported by the cared for and care leavers team working alongside the virtual school advisor and wider services to ensure all support is in place.

NEET Challenge panel takes places monthly, where young people who are NEET and able to work are discussed and appropriate actions of support agreed.

2 young people in year 13 are on an apprenticeship and will continue to be supported.

Year 14 and 14+ Students Qualifications 2022/2023

| Vocational Qualifications | Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 (First Year) | Level 3 (Second year) |
|---------------------------|---------|---------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| | 0 | 4 | 1 | 6 |

BTEC Level 3

L3 Art and Design practice (graphics) – MPP
L3 Music – MMP

L3 Performing Arts – DDD
L3 Performing Arts – D*D*D*
L3 NCFE CACHE Health and Social Care – B
L3 Art

| | |
|------------------|----------|
| A Levels: Year 2 | 1 passed |
| A Levels: Year 1 | 1 |

A Level Results:

Biology C
Art A
Psychology B

| ESOL | Entry 1 | Entry 2 | Entry 3 |
|------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |

Apprenticeships:

4 young people successfully completed apprenticeships this year: L2 early years practitioner, L2 CNC Machinist, L2 teaching assistant, L3 electrician.

2 young people continue with their apprenticeship and should complete at the end of next academic year.

University 2022

There are six students who have progressed to higher education this year, studying a variety of courses including art, and veterinary nursing. 2 students have graduated this year, gaining a 2:1 and another gaining a 1:1, the latter is now an accident and emergency nurse. 18 young people have achieved a Level 3 qualification with 11 offers of university and 10 looking to start in the new academic year. One of these young people came into care with no English and is being supported to secure their place at university to study nursing. We have 14 young people currently at university.

During the next academic year 2023/24 the key high level priorities for the virtual school are:

1. Work alongside partners in the development an education and inclusion strategy, supporting to further strengthen the inclusive practice across all schools and settings to ensure children have access to the right support at the right time. The strategy will have a key focus on improving the outcomes of the most disadvantaged children.
2. Work alongside our attendance and out of school to team to support to embed 'attendance is everybody's business' to ensure a key focus on improving attendance for all children.
3. Improve the overall attendance of all cared for children with a specific focus on those who are persistently and severely absent and post 16 learners.
4. Strengthen our processes and systems to ensure clear oversight and monitoring of children and young people accessing alternative provision.
5. Strengthen and monitor the offer for our extended duties for children with a social worker, monitor and track impact of both universal and targeted support.
6. Ensure a clear focus on early years and primary children to support to ensure improvements in overall progress and gaps in learning.
7. Ensure we continue to have a clear focus on tracking and monitoring attainment and progress regularly to ensure gaps in learning are identified early for access to support and interventions.
8. Develop and further strengthen our training offer across all schools and settings, enhancing the opportunity to share good practice and peer support.
9. Continue to work with schools and settings to further strengthen the quality of PEPs and ensuring clear focus on measuring impact and outcomes for our children and young people.
10. Continue to work closely with our care leavers and youth support team to ensure we have a clear focus on reduction of young people not in education, employment or training.
11. Continue to strengthen the work alongside SEND service to maintain a focus on our CYP with special educational needs, ensuring they have access to the right support at the right time.

OPEN

Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee

18 June 2024

Review of the Terms of Reference

**Report of: Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director Children's
Services**

Ward(s) Affected: All wards

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report requests that the committee's terms of reference are reviewed as this is required on an annual basis.
- 2 The Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee contributes to delivering the priority in the council's Corporate Plan 2021-25 to be the best corporate parents to cared for children and care leavers.

Executive Summary

- 3 This report requests that the committee's terms of reference are reviewed as this is required on an annual basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee is recommended to:

1. Review and approve the terms of reference for the committee (appendix 1)

Reasons for Recommendations

- 4 The constitution requires that the terms of reference (appendix 1) are reviewed on an annual basis.

Other Options Considered

| Option | Impact | Risk |
|---|---|---|
| Do not review or approve the terms of reference | Committee will not be compliant with its own terms of reference within the constitution | There is a risk that the committee is not fulfilling its terms of reference |

Implications and Comments*Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 5 The constitution requires that the terms of reference (appendix 1) are reviewed on an annual basis.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 6 There are no financial implications or changes required to the MTFS as a result of the recommendation in this report.

Policy

- 7 There are no policy implications.

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| | Be the best Corporate Parents to our children in care. | |
|--|---|--|

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

- 8 There are no implications for equality, diversity or inclusion.

Human Resources

- 9 There are no human resources implications.

Risk Management

- 10 The Committee has a role in overseeing and scrutinising the quality of services to cared for children and young people and care leavers, and ensuring that risks that could impact on the quality of services are prevented or effectively mitigated.

Rural Communities

- 11 Vulnerable children and young people are present in all communities in Cheshire East.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 12 The Committee aims to improve the outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people.

Public Health

- 13 Same as the implication above.

Climate Change

- 14 There are no implications for climate change because of this report.

| Access to Information | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Contact Officer: | Lauren Conway, Business Manager Lauren.conway@cheshireeast.gov.uk |
| Appendices: | Appendix 1: Terms of Reference |
| Background Papers: | None |

Appendix 1

Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee (formerly the 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 Cared for Children and Care Leavers 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 Cared for Children and Care Leavers' Strategy, Sufficiency Statement and Children and Young People's Plan;
 - 2.3 overseeing the implementation of Cheshire East's Cared for Children and Care Leavers' Strategy and action plan and monitoring the quality and effectiveness of services to ensure that they fulfil the Council's responsibilities;
 - 2.4 oversight and scrutiny of the quality of care delivered in residential children's homes for Cheshire East children and young people 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 Cared for Children and Care Leavers' Strategy.

Governance

- 3. The Committee will:
 - 3.1 meet quarterly;
 - 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.

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Working for a brighter future together

Corporate Parenting Committee

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Date of Meeting: | 18 June 2024 |
| Report Title: | Corporate Parenting update |
| Report of: | Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director of Children's Services |
| Ward(s) Affected: | All Wards |

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1.** This report would ordinarily accompany the score card and provide some analysis. However, for this Committee this report will provide an update in relation to Cared for Children and Care Leavers post ILACS inspection. The cared for children and care leavers committee is asked to note the information within this report in relation to cared for children and care leavers services.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1.** This report provides an update in relation to the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Services.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1.** The Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee is asked to:
- 3.2** note the report.
- 3.3** provide scrutiny in relation to actions being taken in relation to cared for children and care leavers.

4. Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1. One of the key areas of focus for the cared for children and care leavers committee is to review performance and scrutinise the effectiveness of services for cared for children and young people and care leavers.

5. Other Options Considered

- 5.1. Not applicable

6. Background

- 6.1. This quarterly report provides the committee with an overview of performance across cared for children and care leaver's service.

7. Briefing information

Members will be aware that in February 2024, Ofsted undertook an ILACS Inspection of Children's Services in Cheshire East.

The four areas inspected were:

1. The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families;
2. The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection;
3. The experiences and progress of children in care; and
4. The experiences and progress of care leavers.

HM Inspectors rated the first three areas of the inspection as requiring improvement to be good. This was due to variability in practice. Some children were found to be receiving good services and achieving good outcomes, but this was not the case for all children and young people.

Ofsted rated the experiences and progress of care leavers as inadequate.

Due to services to care leavers being rated as inadequate, the overall judgement for Cheshire East Children's Services was inadequate. Under the ILACS Inspection Framework, If any area of the inspection is deemed inadequate then the rating of overall effectiveness is graded as inadequate, irrespective of ratings in other areas.

Children's Services are committed to improving services and the recent ILACS Inspection is a catalyst for change, and we are using it as an opportunity to review our processes for performance, quality assurance and knowing ourselves well. Our focus continues to be on achieving excellent outcomes for children and young people through establishing the tools for consistently good practice.

- 7.1** In response to the inspection and the findings, a revised, Improvement and Impact Board has been created. The Board will include multi-agency partners, who will contribute to improvement activity. In addition, an Improvement Plan has been developed and will be shared with Ofsted by August 2024. The Improvement Plan will be supported by a Scorecard.
- 7.2** The Improvement and Impact Board will improve outcomes for Cheshire East's children, young people and families by:
- Scrutinising the quality of services and their impact on outcomes for children and young people.
 - Ensuring there are robust arrangements in place to support and deliver improvements swiftly, and there is focus and drive on continual improvement.
 - Monitoring the delivery and impact of the improvement plan to ensure that better outcomes are achieved and sustained for children and young people, and that the findings from the Ofsted inspection of Children's Services in February 2024 are addressed.
 - Ensuring that there is a joined up multi-agency and whole-council approach to improving support to children and young people.
 - Providing high support and high challenge, holding each other to account for improving outcomes for children and young people.
 - Ensuring the delivery of the improvement plan and evaluation of impact is informed by the views of children and young people, parents, carers, frontline practitioners and managers, and developments are communicated to them and other key stakeholders.
 - Supporting mitigation of risks and taking action to alleviate challenges and barriers to improvement.
- 7.3** Cheshire East Council is currently responsible for 518 cared for children. This is a decrease from 576 at the same time last year. The cared for children population changes daily as children enter and leave care. Children cease to be cared for due to several reasons, these include turning 18, returning to their birth family, adoption, and special guardianship.
- 7.4** Some of the decrease in numbers of cared for children relates to a reduction in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) becoming cared for. Although the number of small boats crossing the English Channel continues to rise, our population of cared for migrant young people has fallen significantly to the low 40s where we expect it to either stabilise or fall a little further. This is largely due to the closure of the four hotels that the Home Office had opened in the borough to house adult male asylum seekers; throughout the past 2 years. Cheshire East have received many age disputed referrals from these hotels and have accommodated a significant number as a result. Moving forwards, the only new young people

we should receive will either come via the National Transfer Scheme (at a rate of perhaps 4-6 per annum) and small numbers of spontaneous arrivals via the M6 corridor. Care Leaver UASC numbers are still in excess of 70 but these will decline as our young adults turn 21, gain their right to remain and move into independence.

- 7.5** We are continually monitoring the numbers of cared for children and looking at ways to ensure that we are reviewing plans for children to achieve permanence at the earliest opportunity. Positively, the number of children where care orders have been discharged is increasing. Since April 2024, 50 children have ceased to be cared for. 30 of these have turned 18 but positively 20 of these children have ceased to be cared for because they have been adopted, returned home, or become subject to Special Guardianship Orders. In addition to the work of discharging full Care Orders, the teams are working hard to ensure that where possible children have a plan of permanence where they do not remain Cared For, unless this is necessary. This means that when children become subject to Court Proceedings, we are whenever appropriate working towards a plan of permanence. The progress we are making demonstrates a commitment to not intervening in children's lives when this is not necessary.
- 7.6** Practice Standards have been developed for the cared for and care leavers service to ensure the expectations on practice are clear and to support consistently good practice. These include expectations on recording, visiting, transitions, and responsibilities when cases are jointly held. The practice standards will be available on the Centranet and included as part of staff inductions.
- 7.7** Specific mandatory training for the Care Leavers Service has been developed and rolled out through all service Away Days, to support practitioners to deliver consistently good practice. This will include planning, professional curiosity, adult safeguarding and culture/diversity.
- 7.8** Following a period of consultation, there is a change in the management structure of the care leavers service, removing the role of senior PAs, ensuring that all PAs receive direct oversight and supervision from a team manager (who are qualified social workers) to support good quality supervision and drive improved outcomes for care leavers.
- 7.9** The format of the Pathway Plans for care leavers has been revised collaboratively with young people to ensure it supports good practice. The new plan includes sections for multi-agency professionals' views, and contingency plans.

- 7.10** Since the inspection in February 2024, Care Leaver Hubs are now operational at the Youth Support Service building in Macclesfield on Mondays and Tuesdays and the Lifestyle Centre in Crewe on Wednesdays through Friday. We have deliberately adopted an initial policy of 'soft launches' as we accept that young people will take time to adapt to the new arrangements and feel comfortable in dropping in. However official launch events are scheduled for the first week of July and we have developed a programme of regular events and drop-in surgeries from partner organisations and our own teams. It is essential that free bus travel for Care Leavers (which was originally due for implementation on 1st April) is put in place, as per the new date of August 2024. Throughout the rest of the year, we will develop and expand our programmes and move to a 5-day operation at the main Hub in Crewe and at least a 3 day model in Macclesfield.
- 7.11** To tie in with the launch of our Hubs, Junction 16+, our Care Leaver App will be available to download from the App stores by the end of the first week of July.
- 7.12** One of the greatest areas of need for improvement is accommodation for our care leavers. The current arrangements were commissioned several years ago and do not reflect the growth in numbers or the complexity of need. This was also recognised as an area for improvement within the ILAC inspection which highlighted that a small number of young people were living in hotel accommodation. Hotel accommodation is not an acceptable option for our young people and should only ever be used in exceptional circumstances for very brief periods of time.
- 7.13** We have refreshed and relaunched the protocol for care leavers in emergency accommodation, with clear escalation requirements, to ensure all practitioners are clear on expected practice and there is senior manager oversight of young adults in emergency and unsuitable accommodation.
- 7.14** Work is underway with Strategic Housing, Adult Services and Children's Commissioning to develop sufficiency in this important area for care leavers. Project groups are focusing on developing an Emergency Bed, addition units with YMCA, 16-18 offer (including UASC) and the housing offer for 18+. Updates on this work will be fed into the Corporate Parenting Working Group and the Improvement and Impact Board. We have liaised with both Oxfordshire and Lincolnshire Local Authorities and would like to mirror their offer to our young people. In Oxfordshire young people have access to a range of options across 9 service levels (including emergency accommodation) with well over 200 placements offering accommodation until age 21 if necessary.

- 7.15** The offer of support to our care leavers aged 21 plus is being developed and refreshed. The inspection highlighted this as an area of concern. All young people aged 21 plus were contacted post inspection. Over half of the young people contacted indicated that they want a level of support. In the short-term additional staffing has been agreed to meet this need and ensure that appropriate support is provided. It is anticipated that the Care Leaver Hubs will provide ongoing support including access to partner agencies.
- 7.16** Work is ongoing to improve the number of young people who are in EET. All young adults who are NEET and able to work, will have a NEET plan to support them towards gaining EET. Plans will be reviewed every 12 weeks.
- 7.17** Flude House, the first Cheshire East Children's Home is now registered with Ofsted and operational. Work is underway to open 2 more homes within the coming months. This means that Cheshire East children can be provided with residential care within the borough and reduces the need to use external providers who are often very expensive.

8. Consultation and Engagement

- 8.1.** Not applicable.

9. Implications

10. Legal

- 10.1.** There are no direct legal implications.

11. Finance

- 11.1** There are no direct financial implications or changes to the MTFS because of this briefing paper.

11.2 Policy

- 12.1** There are no direct policy implications.

12. Equality

- 13.1** Members may want to use the information from the performance indicators to ensure that services are targeted at more vulnerable children and young people.

13. Human Resources

14.1 There are no direct human resources implications.

14. Risk Management

15.1 There are risks associated with some performance measures, e.g. increases in demand and timeliness of services.

15. Rural Communities

16.1 There are no direct implications for rural communities.

16. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

17.1 Performance reports enable members to identify areas of good performance and areas for improvement in relation to children and young people, including cared for children.

17. Public Health

18.1 There are no direct implications for public health.

18. Climate Change

19.1 This report does not impact on climate change.

| Access to Information | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Contact Officer: | Annemarie Parker |
| Appendices: | Corporate Parenting Score Card Q3 |
| Background Papers: | None |

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December 2023 - Cared for and Care Leavers Scorecard - This contains a rolling 4 quarters for comparison

Notes: The boxes that are grayed out are where national data is not applicable or data isn't available.

Notes: The column highlighted in blue reflects the most recent quarter being reported on

Notes: Rates are calculated using the 2020 ONS mid year population estimate 0-17 of 78,068 (Office of National Statistics) and are calculated as a rate per 10,000 children aged 0-17. This enables the local authority to be compared on a like for like basis with different local authorities or groups of authorities.

| Priority | Indicator | Indicator name | 22/23 outturn | Q4 22/23 | Q1 23/24 | Q2 23/24 | Q3 23/24 | 23/24 outturn | Benchmark National (most recent available) | Benchmark Stat N'bour (most recent available) | Corporate Plan Aim | Acronym |
|--|-----------|---|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|------------------|---|--|-----------------------|--|
| General | G1 | Number of cared for children | 580 | 580 | 576 | 566 | 533 | | | | Fair | |
| | G2 | Rate per 10,000 cared for children | 74 | 74 | 74 | 73 | 67 | | 70 | 60 | Fair | |
| | G3 | Number of care leavers (aged 16-21) | | 325 | 359 | 379 | 319 | | | | Fair | |
| Priority 1 - We will care for our Children and Young People as any good parent would | 1.1 | % cared for children reviews in timescales | 73% | 73% | 83% | 86% | 83% | | | | Fair | |
| | 1.2 | % of children and young people involved in their reviews | 96% | 96% | 96% | 95% | 94% | | | | Fair | |
| Priority 2 - Improved Education, Employment and Training outcomes | 2.1 | Number of 16-18 year old care leavers that are NEET | | 13 | 14 | 18 | 28 | | | | Fair | NEET - Not in Education, Employment or Training |
| | 2.2 | Number of care leavers accessing higher education (University) | | 18 | 20 | 23 | 26 | | | | Fair | |
| | 2.3 | Number of Cheshire East care leavers in apprenticeships (18+) | | 8 | 8 | 8 | 6 | | | | Fair | |
| | 2.4 | % 19-21 year care leavers that are NEET (as per national reporting) | 44% NEET at birthday | 44% | 46% | 47% | 47% | | 38% NEET at birthday | 37% NEET at birthday | Fair | NEET - Not in Education, Employment or Training. |
| Item safe | 3.1 | Number of cared for children in external foster care | | 138 | 130 | 129 | 118 | | | | Fair | |
| | 3.2 | Number of cared for children in internal foster care | | 122 | 124 | 117 | 125 | | | | Fair | |
| | 3.3 | Number of children in care living with relatives and friends (inc reg 24) | | 105 | 109 | 104 | 92 | | | | Fair | Reg 24 -Regulation 24 |
| | 3.4 | Number of children placed with parents | | 45 | 41 | 41 | 35 | | | | Fair | |
| | 3.5 | Number of children and young people in residential care | | 43 | 47 | 47 | 42 | | | | Fair | |

| Priority | Indicator | Indicator name | 22/23 outturn | Q4 22/23 | Q1 23/24 | Q2 23/24 | Q3 23/24 | 23/24 outturn | Benchmark National (most recent available) | Benchmark Stat N'bour (most recent available) | Corporate Plan Aim | Acronym |
|---|-----------|--|------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|---|--|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Priority 3 - We will work to give all children and young people a forever home and keep them safe | 3.6 | Number of individuals with 3 or more placements (rolling 12mth figure) | | 74 | 75 | 68 | 54 | | | | Fair | |
| | 3.7 | % cared for children in care for at least 2.5yrs at the end of the period and living in their current placement for at least 2 years | 70% | 70% | 71% | 70% | 68% | | 71% | 72% | Fair | #NAME? |
| | 3.8 | Number of cared for children placed over 20 miles from home address (Cheshire East and out of borough) | | 132 | 126 | 120 | 141 | | | | Fair | |
| | 3.9 | Number of children living out of borough | | 257 | 248 | 235 | 221 | | | | Fair | |
| | 3.10 | Number of cared for children who have been missing in the quarter | | 37 | 24 | 33 | 25 | | | | Fair | |
| | 3.11 | Number of children who have a long term matched placement | | 124 | 148 | 146 | 137 | | | | Fair | |
| | 3.12 | Number of placement moves in the quarter | | 81 (61 individuals) | 126 (107 individuals) | 89 (77 individuals) | 75 (66 individuals) | | | | Fair | |
| | 3.13 | % of currently cared for children who have had a C&F assessment in the last 12 mths | | 77% | 72% | 85% | 78% | | | | Fair | C&F - Children and Family |
| | 3.14 | % of Cared for Children in care for more that 1 mth who have had a review in the last 6 mths | | 89% | 96% | 97% | 94% | | | | Fair | |
| | 3.15 | % of children ceased to be looked after due to granting of special guardianship order (SGO) - year to date figure | 10% | 10% | 5% | 11% | 12% | | 13% | 12% | Fair | SGO - Special Guardianship Order |
| | 3.16 | % of children ceased to be looked after due to adoption - year to date figure | 7% | 8% | 7% | 8% | 8% | | 10% | 11% | Fair | |
| | 3.17 | Number of children with an adoption decision | | 24 | 37 | 35 | 38 | | | | Fair | |
| | 3.18 | Average number of days between entering care and moving in with adoptive family (A10 national indicator) - yearly figure | | 625 | 743 | 603 | 484 | | 376 | | Fair | |
| | 3.19 | Average number of days between placement order and match with adoptive family (A2 national indicator) - yearly figure | | 286 | 264 | 197 | 126 | | 185 | | Fair | |
| | 4.1 | Children looked after who had their annual health assessment (%) | 89% (OC2 cohort) | 89% | 79% | 87% | 86% | | 89% (OC2 cohort) | 86% (OC2 cohort) | Fair | |
| | 4.2 | Children looked after who had their teeth checked by a dentist in the last 12 months (%) | 75% (OC2 cohort) | 75% | 62% | 62% | 53% | | 70% (OC2 cohort) | 65% (OC2 cohort) | Fair | |

| Priority | Indicator | Indicator name | 22/23 outturn | Q4 22/23 | Q1 23/24 | Q2 23/24 | Q3 23/24 | 23/24 outturn | Benchmark National (most recent available) | Benchmark Stat N'bour (most recent available) | Corporate Plan Aim | Acronym |
|---|-----------|---|--------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------------|---|--|-----------------------|---|
| | 4.3 | % of 4-16 in care for 3 months or more with a completed SDQ score in the last 12 mths | 77% (OC2 cohort) | 77% | 63% | 73% | 56% | | 77% (OC2 cohort) | 75% (OC2 cohort) | Fair | SDQ - Strenghts and Difficulties Questionnaire. T |
| | 4.4 | % of young people with a SDQ score of 20 or above | 28% (OC2 cohort) | 28% | 29% | 29% | 32% | | 37% (OC2 cohort) | 40% (OC2 cohort) | Fair | SDQ - Strenghts and Difficulties Questionnaire. |
| | 4.5 | Number of care leavers with a health passport | | 9/15 60% | 28/29 97% | 27/28 93% | 23/23 100% | | | | Fair | |
| Priority 5 - We will prepare young people for Adulthood | 5.1 | % of care leavers aged 16-21 with an up to date pathway plan in the last 6 mths | | 74% | 69% | 73% | 90% | | | | Fair | |
| | 5.2 | % of pathway plan reviews completed in timescales in the quarter | | 66% | 77% | 81% | 85% | | | | Fair | |
| | 5.3 | % of pathway plan reviews completed in the quarter where Young persons view were not sent/ gained | | 9% | 12% | 11% | 8% | | | | Fair | |
| | 5.4 | % of former relevant care leaver aged 18-21 that we are in touch with | | 96% | 99% | 98% | 98% | | | | Fair | |
| | 5.5 | % of 16-17 years old currently cared for with a PA allocated | | 82% | 100% | 43% | 100% | | | | Fair | PA - Personal Advisor |
| | 5.6 | % of 17-18 former relevant care leavers in suitable accommodation | 93% at yp birthday | 93% | 98% | 86% | 95% | | 90% at yp birthday | 88% at yp birthday | Fair | |
| | 5.7 | % of 19-21 former relevant care leavers in suitable accommodation | 97% at yp birthday | 97% | 97% | 91% | 95% | | 88% at yp birthday | 88% at yp birthday | Fair | |
| | 5.8 | Number current UASC being cared for | 57 | 57 | 55 | 64 | 60 | | | | Fair | UASC - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker |
| | 5.9 | Number current/ former UASC care leavers (aged 18-24) | | 42 | 77 | 86 | 91 | | | | Fair | UASC - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker |
| | 5.10 | Number of individuals in staying put arrangement | | 29 | 37 | 34 | 27 | | | | Fair | |

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