

Children and Families Committee

Agenda

Date: **Monday, 19 January 2026**

Time: **10.30 a.m.**

Venue: **The Capesthorne Room - Town Hall, Macclesfield, SK10 1EA**

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.

Please Note: This meeting will be live streamed. This meeting will be broadcast live and a recording may be made available afterwards. The live stream will include both audio and video. Members of the public attending and/or speaking at the meeting should be aware that their image and voice may be captured and made publicly available. If you have any concerns or require further information, please contact Democratic Services in advance of the meeting.

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

1. Apologies for Absence

To note any apologies for absence from Members.

2. 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.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting (Pages 3 - 18)

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 November 2025.

For requests for further information

Contact: Chris Lunn

Tel: 01270 686466

E-Mail: CheshireEastDemocraticServices@cheshireeast.gov.uk

4. **Public Speaking/Open Session**

In accordance with paragraph 2.24 of the Council's Committee Procedure Rules and Appendix on Public Speaking, set out in the [Constitution](#), a total period of 15 minutes is allocated for members of the public to put questions to the committee on any matter relating to this agenda. Each member of the public will be allowed up to two minutes each to speak, and the Chair will have discretion to vary this where they consider it appropriate.

Members of the public wishing to speak are required to provide notice of this at least three clear working days' in advance of the meeting.

Petitions - To receive any petitions which have met the criteria - [Petitions Scheme Criteria](#), and falls within the remit of the Committee. Petition organisers will be allowed up to three minutes to speak.

5. **Formal Consideration of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Report** (Pages 19 - 30)

To present the findings of the Ombudsman's investigation and seek formal consideration and noting of the conclusions, including the Council's response and amended practices.

6. **Crisis and Resilience Fund 2026 - 2029 - Delivery Plan** (Pages 31 - 48)

To consider a report on the Crisis and Resilience Fund 2026 - 2029 - Delivery Plan.

7. **Renewing the Sufficiency Strategy and Expanding Specialist Provision in Cheshire East – Options Paper** (Pages 49 - 72)

To consider an options paper/report regarding Renewing the Sufficiency Strategy and Expanding Specialist Provision in Cheshire East.

8. **National House Project** (Pages 73 - 130)

To consider a report regarding the National House Project.

9. **Improvement Plan Progress Report** (Pages 131 - 202)

To consider a report which provides an update on progress made against the Children's Services Improvement Plan.

10. **Work Programme** (Pages 203 - 206)

To consider the Work Programme and determine any required amendments.

Membership: Councillors R Bailey, M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, L Crane (Chair), E Gilman (Vice-Chair), M Goldsmith, G Hayes, R Moreton, B Puddicombe, J Saunders, G Smith, L Wardlaw and B Wye

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Committee**
held on Monday, 10th November, 2025 in the Committee Suite 1, 2 and 3,
Delamere House, Delamere Street, Crewe, CW1 2JZ

PRESENT

Councillor L Crane (Chair)
Councillor E Gilman (Vice-Chair)

Councillors R Bailey, M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, D Clark, S Gardiner,
M Goldsmith, R Moreton, B Puddicombe, J Saunders, L Wardlaw and B Wye

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Gill Betton, Head of Service, Children's Development and Partnerships
Annie Britton, Lead Participation Worker
Tom Dooks, Senior Manager, Youth Justice Services
Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director, Children's Services
Vonni Gordon, Director of Commissioning, Quality Assurance and
Partnerships
Diane Green, Finance Manager (Children's Services)
Richard Hibbert, Head of Strategic Transport and Parking (Virtual)
Isabel Hodgkinson, Communications Business Partner
Douglas Hubbert, Business Development Manager
Chris Lunn, Democratic Services Officer
Angela Murney, Participation Worker
Katherine Oldacre, Head of Safeguarding and Quality
Iain Peel, Director for Education, Strong Start and Integration
Karen Shuker, Democratic Services Officer
Tracy Stephen, Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care
Jennie Summers, Acting Head of Legal Services
Nicola Wood-Hill, Finance Manager, Adults and Children's Services

34 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors G Hayes and G Smith.
Councillors D Clark and S Gardiner were present as substitutes.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Wardlaw, who had recently replaced
Councillor Posnett on the committee, and C Lunn, Democratic Services
Officer, to their first meeting.

35 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

36 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2025 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

37 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

There were no registered speakers.

38 CHESHIRE EAST YOUTH COUNCIL PRESENTATION

Prior to commencement of the Cheshire East Youth Council presentation, the Chair highlighted the following calendar events taking place during November 2025:

- Children's Rights Month
- World Children's Day on 20 November 2025
- Care Leavers' Month.

The committee received a presentation from the Cheshire East Youth Council, which focused on the following topics:

- An introduction to Cheshire East Youth Council
- Priority issues for the Youth Council
- Highlights from the last 12 months
- Aims of the 'Hate Stops Here' campaign
- Conclusions and recommendations
- Questions and how the committee could offer support.

The Youth Council put forward several recommendations for the committee's consideration: to provide continued opportunities for young people to contribute to service development; to maintain ongoing dialogue with the Youth Council on key issues; and to support the implementation of 'Safe Space Reminders' across relevant settings.

The committee asked questions and made comments in respect of:

- Councillor Gardiner requested that he be invited to discuss his role as Opposition Leader with the Youth Council.
- The committee commended the work of the Youth Council and their input, feedback and overall involvement in the various projects and activities.
- As Mental Health Champion, Councillor Clark requested that she be invited to discuss access to services with the Youth Council.
- Safe spaces and support provided both in-person and online.
- A White Ribbon Day walk would be taking place on 25 November 2025. White Ribbon Day was about taking positive action to end

violence against women and girls. The purpose was for young people to highlight locations on the route that they felt needed to be made safe. The Youth Council were invited to participate.

- The Youth Council Members' personal highlights from the previous 12 months. which included an opportunity to apply to become a Member of Youth Parliament (MYP) and attendance at the Children's Trust Board.

RESOLVED:

That the Cheshire East Youth Council Presentation update be received and noted.

39 YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN (2025-26 UPDATE)

The committee received a report which provided an update of the Youth Justice Plan 2025-26.

Officers explained that Local authorities had a statutory duty to submit an annual youth justice plan relating to their provision of Youth Justice Services (YJS). Section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 set out the youth justice partnership's responsibilities in producing a plan.

Officers highlighted key performance and statistical data, including offending and reoffending rates; the potential causes and motivation behind violent and criminal behaviour, including childhood adversity and trauma; progress on priorities; preventative work taking place with children and young people to develop pro-social behaviours; and the victims of crime.

Members asked questions and provided comments in respect of the following:

- Online-related harms and the impact on physical behaviour.
- Low offending but high reoffending rates among young people.
- The multi-agency approach and effective communication.
- Progress in tackling child exploitation and the apparent lack of a prevention-first approach.
- Hate crime among young people and related statistics.
- The number of young people in the system at any one time.
- Whether those young people receiving custodial sentences were previously known to services.
- How the needs of those entering the system were addressed.
- Wider factors, such as drug use and self-harm, and links to violent and criminal behaviour.
- Any child or young person that appeared to present a need for social care support would be referred for assessment.
- Gender and offending rates.
- The impact of youth homelessness and temporary accommodation on education and wellbeing.

- 'Self-medicating' terminology and the suggestion that this sanitises illegal behaviour.
- The issue of perception and fear of crime among young people.
- The need to consider county lines and the importance of communication and advocacy in safeguarding children and young people.
- The need for updated responses to modern challenges including online and media influence, and drug use in affluent areas.
- The role of Elected Members as Corporate Parents.
- Consideration that behaviour often reflects underlying issues, such as undiagnosed SEND, domestic violence and trauma. It was important to support children and young people in accessing assistance and resources appropriate to their needs.

In response officers reported that:

- There had been a shift in the typology of youth offending, with a move from physical contact offences to online-related behaviours. This was influenced by the content young people consumed and algorithm-driven exposure. YJS staff were well-trained on the issue of online perpetrators, though concerns remained about the nature of content being accessed.
- Youth reoffending rates had remained stable at around 30% over the past 20 years. Early intervention was key: 90% of those released from custody reoffended, compared to only 10% of those engaged early. The issue was linked to complex needs and adversity, rather than a new trend.
- The YJS operated as a multi-disciplinary service with strong communication between professionals.
- The sub-regional YJS, covering four local authorities, was funded to work from the point of arrest and did not provide targeted prevention. However, other local prevention services were in place. Officers acknowledged that while the current model brought benefits, there were trade-offs and so it was important to achieve a balance. Drug markets remained a significant exploitation risk, though communication between partners on this issue had improved. It was felt that the Families First programme would help strengthen early intervention.
- Very low levels of hate crime were reported among children and young people across Cheshire.
- Approximately 250 young people were in the Youth Justice System across Cheshire, with around 40 in Cheshire East at any one time. The 39 new entrants in 2024/25 were all first-time entrants by definition.
- Of the four young people sentenced to custody, officers would confirm whether they were previously known to services. These individuals were sentenced for the most serious violent or sexual offences.
- The Youth Justice Plan had been approved by the other three local authorities.

- Female offending was a priority area for the next 12 months. Nationally, there had been a general increase. Work needed to be undertaken to determine the reasons for this, as well as the treatment that females received in comparison to male offenders. No serious offences by females were recorded in the first quarter of this year in Cheshire East.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Note the update on performance and progress made against priority areas during the financial year April 2024 to March 2025 as set out in the refreshed and updated Youth Justice Strategic Plan for Cheshire (attached at Appendix 1 of the report).
2. Recommend that full Council approves the content of the 2025-2026 refreshed and updated Youth Justice Strategic Plan for Cheshire.
3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director Children's Services to approve the annual refresh of the Youth Justice Plan for 2026-27 and submission to the national Youth Justice Board in June 2026 prior to it being presented for formal approval, sign-off by members and subsequent publication.

40 UPDATE ON HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT TASK & FINISH GROUP

The Chair provided a verbal update on the progress of the task & finish group in relation to Home to School Transport.

It was explained that the group was currently mid-way through the review; the following progress had been made to date:

- The terms of reference had been agreed.
- Areas to be scrutinised had been planned over six monthly meetings, with three meetings already taking place.
- Areas of school transport scrutinised to date:
 - Legislative background and the national picture.
 - Impact of the transformation plans.
 - Statistics and comparative data.
 - Current challenges and opportunities.
 - School transport budget.
 - Sufficiency of school places.
 - The available walking routes programme.
 - The statutory framework for SEND placements.
 - Excluded pupils and school transport.
- A frequently asked questions (FAQ) document had been produced by officers in response to range of questions raised by members.
- Further planned scrutiny:

- Use of the ANSA fleet and potential expansion (November 2025).
- Procurement process (November 2025).
- Discretionary elements of the Home to School Transport Policy (December 2025).
- Legislative restrictions (December 2025).
- National and local developments (January 2026).
- Potential impact of devolution (January 2026).

The final report would be presented to the committee in April 2026.

The committee referred to the previous employment of consultants to review home to school transport and queried the assistance that the report produced by those consultants could bring to this review. In response, the Chair explained that that report formed part of the initial information provided to the group.

RESOLVED:

That the Home to School Transport Task & Finish Group update be received and noted.

41 SECOND FINANCIAL REVIEW 25/26

The committee adjourned for a short break during consideration of this item.

The committee considered the report which set out the Second Financial Review 2025/26 position based on income, expenditure and known commitments as at the end of August 2025. It also identified actions that were being taken to address adverse variances within the Children and Families services.

A forecast overspend of £8.862m reflected a reduction of £0.136m on the FR1 overspend position of £8.998m.

The key pressures continued to be increased costs in placements and staffing, with the main overspends occurring in the following areas: provider services and fostering; children in need, protection and disabilities; cared for children; children's services; education participation and pupil support; and education and 14-19 skills.

The committee asked questions and made comments in respect of:

- The savings target and reasons as to why this had not been achieved.
- The overspend of over £7m in Provider Services and Fostering.
- Delays in the Birth to Thrive project.
- Walking routes to school and these not being realised.
- The likelihood of achieving savings next year in respect of accommodation to support 18–25-year-olds.

- Staff recruited from overseas and new visa rules if a basic income is not achieved. It was felt that this could pose risk for the local authority, as it had been reported that other public sector organisations, such as the prison service, were at risk of losing staff.
- The cost of placements and the likelihood of commissioning changes being able to help achieve this.
- The provision of care homes and whether the Council could operate more of these in the future to help reduce the costs of placements and residential places.
- The authorisation of additional expenditure, over agreed budgets.
- The need to spend money to prevent financial incentives from being lost.
- Savings proposals, policies and health and other outcomes associated with implementing walking routes to schools.
- The importance of the public recognising the Council's statutory duties in providing social care support was highlighted; the Council could not turn people away once budgeted expenditure had been reached.
- The need for realistic budget setting within Children's Services.
- The Corporate Parenting role and responsibilities and the need to remind other Elected Members of these.
- An update regarding the Westfields project was requested, together with clarification as to how current financial obligations were being met.
- Concerns around the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) were felt to be a national issue.
- The impending government White Paper and the potential associated financial implications.
- There was a statutory obligation to provide support and costs had increased. Market forces determined pricing.

In response, officers reported that:

- Regarding the safe walking routes programme, work had previously stalled but resumed in 2024/25, with two routes implemented and £80,000 in savings achieved. A report to committee in April 2024 outlined the complexity of the programme. The previously proposed savings target of £250,000 was unrealistic due to the long lead-in time required before transport could be withdrawn. Four routes have progressed this year, with one fully implemented and the remaining three expected to deliver savings next year. It was emphasised that walking routes could not be introduced immediately in place of transport due to necessary lead-in times and ongoing transport costs. Reference was made to capital costs and the return on investment; a written paper could be provided regarding this if needed. Work was currently taking place in respect of planning the next six programmes. In terms of the legalities involved and not progressing with an intended walking route, it was

explained that no precedence would be set against any other routes if plans were abandoned. Business cases needed to be met; this was a complex area.

- In terms of the savings profile for Children's Services, it was recognised that the initial figures in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) lacked fully developed business cases that demonstrated how savings would be achieved in the context of an inadequate service rating. Over recent months, the savings profile had been reviewed in detail alongside the transformation and improvement plan, though delivery capacity did remain limited.
- The transformation programme had been reviewed to identify the most effective projects. The 'Right Child, Right Home' initiative was a key project expected to deliver MTFS savings, with four workstreams:
 1. Sufficiency - improving assessments and placement decisions.
 2. Edge of Care - providing early intervention and support to prevent escalation.
 3. Recurrent Care – this was very specific work that addressed repeat removals from the same parent.
 4. 16–25 Accommodation – costs had risen by 54% since 2024/25; a new strategy and block purchasing approach had been approved, with savings expected in future years.
- The 'Birth to Thrive' workstream was currently paused due to lack of a viable business case and limited officer capacity. A SEND inspection was due but had not yet taken place. It was recognised that improvement work was necessary and that this took priority alongside the DSG management plan.
- Work was ongoing to establish a dedicated Children's Services commissioning unit, separate from the joint Adults and Health unit, to improve strategic children's commissioning, brokerage and quality assurance.
- Regarding the employment of staff from abroad, the scheme the Council operated was fully underpinned by HR and legal agreement. Any national policy and visa requirement changes would be addressed as part of future planning.
- With regards to Children's Services budget setting, expenditure and overspends, it was explained that a written response to explain the process for the approval of budget and placement procurement would be provided to members of the committee.
- The overspend of £7.9m was confirmed to be placement overspend, impacted by increased complexity of need and market forces.
- In respect of the Westfields project, the committee was advised that work was underway to develop options. This would come to committee in January 2026. The costs for insurance, security and heating were currently being met by Estates and not Children's Services.
- Regarding the government White Paper, it was unclear as to what this would include at present. The DfE's policy direction remained focused on mainstream inclusive education. Content in relation to

EHCP was awaited; there were 490 more children on EHCP than the previous year. It was hoped that grant funding would be forthcoming to enable implementation of reforms, but details were not yet known.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Note the overall Council's Financial Position as described within the Executive Summary - Council Financial Position.
2. Note the latest revenue forecast for Children and Families Directorate, review progress on the delivery of the MTFS approved budget policy change items (Table 3 of the report), the RAG ratings and to understand the actions to be taken to address any adverse variances from the approved budget.
3. Note the overall in-year forecast capital spending for Children and Families Directorate of £24.556m against a revised MTFS budget of £56.131m in Tables 4 and 5 of the report.
4. Note the Capital Virement above £500,000 up to and including £5,000,000 as per Table 6 of the report to be approved in accordance with the Council's Constitution.
5. Note the latest DSG in year forecast and forecast cumulative year end position as described within paragraph 40 of the report.
6. Recommend to Council to approve the Supplementary Revenue Estimate Request for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding over £1,000,000 as per Table 7 of the report.
7. Note the reserves position as per Table 8 of the report.

42 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2026/27 - 2029/30

The committee considered the report which asked members to provide feedback, as consultees, on the development of the Cheshire East Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 to 2029/30. Feedback was requested in relation to the responsibilities of the Committee.

The report set out the latest budget position for 2026/27 to 2029/30 and the list of budget savings proposals relevant to the remit of the committee, which had been included in the public consultation launched in November 2025.

The committee asked questions and made comments in respect of:

- The potential inclusion of a current year outturn for comparison.
- Whether the proposed savings in table 4 of the report were achievable.
- The 5% vacancy factor on page 143 of the report: concerns were raised as to whether this was achievable; whether it should be applicable to Children's Services; the impact of agency and interim staff; whether this would be achieved through service redesign; and the impact on statutory work. Consideration was given to this being a nationally prescribed figure; a 100% staff rate could never be achieved at any one time due to the lag between employees leaving posts and replacements commencing in post.
- The rising trajectory of EHCPs and the potential implications on wider costs, such as transport and Council debt interest repayments.
- Accommodation provision and the committee's approval at the September meeting.
- The Chair of the Finance Sub-Committee indicated that all points raised during the engagement/consultation work would be used to produce final budgets and the MTFS going forward.
- Saving proposals needed to be realistic and have full business cases prepared.
- The overall current number of agency staff; the number of frontline social workers required for optimal service delivery and how many of those were agency workers; and whether any themes were appearing from exit interviews.

In response, officers reported that:

- DSG Interest and debt would be continually reviewed and included in the budget update.
- Service redesign was a live ongoing piece of work. Children's Services was rooted in the implementation of Families First and the intended establishment of a separate commissioning unit in Children's Services.
- Regarding the 5% vacancy factor, it was proposed that vacancies will not be held within frontline social care services, as this would hinder service improvement.
- Permanent recruitment was a priority, with a campaign for social workers due to launch shortly. The aim was to reduce reliance on agency staff and implement a comprehensive workforce strategy focused on recruitment, retention and career development. Training and development were highlighted as essential to retaining staff and offering career progression opportunities.
- Given the need to improve service quality following an Ofsted rating of 'inadequate', and the significant work that was ongoing to address this, the service could not commit to achieving the 5% vacancy factor target in full.

- It was indicated that approximately 30% of the workforce were agency staff; a more detailed written response regarding the statistics would be provided to the committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Note the updated budget position for the period 2026/27 to 2029/30 as set out in Table 3 of the report.
2. Note the proposals to invest significantly in Children and Families over a multi-year timeframe and the governance arrangements around the use of that investment.
3. Note and feedback on the list of Children and Families budget savings proposals that are contained in the budget consultation launched in November 2025 as contained in Annex 1 of the report.
4. Note the conditions for successful budget delivery, as approved by Corporate Policy Committee on 30 October 2025, which are set out in paragraph 11 of the report.

43 HOLIDAY ACTIVITY AND FOOD PROGRAMME 2026 TO 2029

The committee considered the report which sought approval of the Holiday and Activity Food Programme (HAF) to run an open procurement procedure to spend the total amount of the HAF grant, as allocated by the Department for Education (DfE) each financial year.

The committee asked questions and made comments in respect of:

- The extent of the reach of the scheme, for example into semi-rural and rural areas.
- Future procurement matters and providers of the scheme: it was queried whether various providers could be selected to ensure that a wide variety of young peoples' hobbies and interests could be met.
- Referrals and attendance and how 'no shows' were monitored/followed up.
- The importance of ensuring that those entitled to access the HAF and Food Programme were encouraged to do so.
- Whether an analysis regarding uptake in less urbanised areas had been carried out.
- Whether activities were available to those outside of FSM.
- Funding arrangements.
- The programme was a good example of preventative work, which had been referenced several times during the meeting.
- Service provision and ward analysis data.

In response, officers reported that:

- Appendix 1 of the report provided an evaluation of the HAF and Food Programme, which indicated that 30% of the FSM population attended. The authority ranked very high in that regard. Reference was made to the market providers and the significant push made to reach the target population.
- Regarding procurement and providers, it was the officers' ambition to retain the number of providers currently procured, as well as to introduce more over the next three years.
- 'No shows' were followed up with the referrers, for example social workers.
- A written response in respect of uptake in less urbanised areas would be provided.
- It was a requirement that the activities be targeted specifically to FSM recipients; however, there was some flexibility for referrals for others.
- The programme had received a three-year funding extension.
- Service provision had been similar over the years; appendix 2 illustrated the HAF LSOA Mapping data and ward information.

During debate on the item, a friendly amendment was proposed and seconded in respect of recommendation 3, which sought the inclusion of additional wording as follows:

'Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Families Committee, for the dispersal of funds and contract awards to providers for the delivery of the Holiday Activity and Food Programme up to the allocated HAF grant amount each financial year this to include a ward-based expenditure analysis on provisions for the years 24/25 and 25/26 for comparison purposes'

The amendment became part of the substantive motion.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Approve the Supplementary Revenue Estimate Request for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding over £500,000 up to £1,000,000 relating to the 2026/27 Holiday Activity and Food Programme. The estimated amount based on previous years is £900,000.
2. Approve the HAF to be delivered via open procedure from April 2026 to March 2029 plus optional extensions of 3 years.
3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Families

Committee, for the dispersal of funds and contract awards to providers for the delivery of the Holiday Activity and Food Programme up to the allocated HAF grant amount each financial year this to include a ward-based expenditure analysis on provisions for the years 24/ 25 and 25/26 for comparison purposes.

44 CHESHIRE EAST SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025

Councillor E Gilman left the meeting during consideration of this item and did not return

The committee received a report which evidenced the work undertaken by the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership throughout the reporting year and evaluated the effectiveness of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. It aimed to demonstrate the impact the partnership had had on improving outcomes for children, young people, and their families, while transparently sharing the lessons learned. The annual report also provided an opportunity to reflect on areas where the partnership would focus its efforts in the coming year.

Members asked questions and provided comments in respect of the following:

- Confirmation that all meetings within the governance structure had been held.
- Clarification of the acronym *NRM*.
- Effectiveness of cross-border information sharing under the Contextual Safeguarding Strategy
- Whether an Executive Summary could be added to the report to improve readability.
- Missing information relating to Section 175 audits (page 194).
- The need for wider understanding and engagement on Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements
- It was felt that there was a lot of narrative contained in the report, but few metrics.
- The specific areas that the partnership excelled in.

In response officers reported that:

- Assurance was provided that all partnership meetings had taken place, with rescheduling where necessary.
- The *NRM* acronym referred to the National Referral Mechanism.
- The Pan Cheshire footprint formed the basis of the partnership; it was explained that communication lines did require further work.
- Strategies were currently being developed in relation to child sexual abuse and exploitation.
- The suggestion to include an Executive Summary would be considered for future reports.

- A response to the enquiry regarding missing information on page 194 would be sought.
- The Working Together 2023 Implementation Plan had been revised to reflect new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements. Education was not a statutory safeguarding partner but was represented through a dedicated sub-group.

Practice observation for senior staff had strengthened independent scrutiny; the focus was now on service delivery.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Note the progress by Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership, and the impact for children and young people, recognising the achievements and progress made, and to seek assurance around ongoing areas for further development.

45 IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

The committee received a report which provided an update on the progress of the children's services improvement plan.

It was highlighted that the third Ofsted monitoring visit on cared for children, planning and achieving permanence was underway at the time of writing the report. The monitoring visit concluded on 15 October 2025, and the report of the findings was expected to be published on 13 November 2025.

Progress continued to be made in delivering the improvement plan; since the last report to committee in September 2025, the percentage of actions completed had increased from 49% to 56%.

Officers were currently revising the quality assurance framework.

Members asked questions and provided comments in respect of the following:

- Councillor Gardiner requested that he be invited to undertake a visit to frontline services, as it would be beneficial in his capacity as Opposition Leader.
- The committee felt that visits to a wide range of service areas were useful, informative, and provided opportunity of seeing how passionate staff were. Visits and other training opportunities would be provided to new and existing committee members in due course.
- Meeting arrangements for the Improvement Board and input from the Independent Chair.
- Budgetary requirements and the minimum investment needed to improve services.

In response officers reported that:

- Councillor Gardiner's request to undertake a visit to frontline services would be followed up.
- The Improvement Board continued to meet every six-weeks. It was felt that the Independent Chair could provide input to the committee, further consideration would be given as to how best achieve this under the Work Programme item. In conjunction with input from the Chair, the outcome of the recent Ofsted monitoring visit would be published shortly, and there would also be a Department for Education (DfE) review taking place in Spring 2026.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Note the progress against the improvement plan.
2. Note the findings from the councillor visits to the cared for IRO service, child protection chair and LADO service and family group conferencing team in September 2025.

46 WORK PROGRAMME

The committee considered the Work Programme.

The following was noted:

- Further consideration had been given to the topic of Special Guardianship Orders; a briefing session would be scheduled for Members.
- A briefing had been scheduled for Children and Families and Adults and Health committee members in respect of an update on the Tartan Rug and its implications.
- A briefing had been scheduled for Children and Families committee members regarding a social care Ombudsman case prior to the formal report being presented at the January committee.
- It was agreed that input from the Independent Chair of the Improvement Board should be included in future Improvement Plan Progress Reports, as opposed to having a specific Work Programme item.
- The Chair would have further discussions in respect of adding an item for prevention and reaching vulnerable young people.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be received and noted.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 1.57 pm

Councillor L Crane (Chair)

OPEN**Children and Families Committee****19 January 2026****Formal Consideration of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Report****Report of: Tracy Stephen - Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care****Report Reference No: CF/44/25-26****Ward(s) Affected: All****For Scrutiny****Purpose of Report**

1 To present the findings of the Ombudsman's investigation and seek formal consideration and noting of the conclusions, including the Council's response and amended practices.

Executive Summary

2 This report presents the findings of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, following an investigation into a complaint made by a resident, referred to as Miss X, regarding the Council's intervention after the premature birth of her child in 2022. The Ombudsman found multiple instances of fault in the Council's handling of the case, including unwarranted escalation to child protection status and legal proceedings, poor communication, and reliance on unevidenced assumptions, alongside a Breach of Human Rights as per Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1989; *respect for private and family life*. These actions created further distress to Miss X, at a time which was already highly distressing. There was a missed opportunity to provide meaningful support to Miss X as a result.

3 The Council has accepted the Ombudsman's findings and recommendations and has undertaken a learning review which has led to several suggested changes in practice and procedure. This report seeks formal noting of the conclusions and outlines the remedial actions and improvements made.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Formally consider the Ombudsman's report and recommendations in relation to Miss X.
2. Note the conclusion of the report and the Council's actions.

Background

- 4 The complaint concerned the Council's decision to place Miss X's 2 children on child protection plans and initiate the Public Law Outline (PLO) process without sufficient evidence.
- 5 The Ombudsman found that the Council acted on hints and assumptions about mental health and domestic abuse without proper finding of fact. These actions were based on statements made by professionals involved with the family and contributed to an overall uninformed sense of growing concern.
- 6 The council failed to properly assess the information given and acted without having proper evidence. Information gathered and shared by others was inaccurate and escalatory in language and was taken as fact rather than used as a platform from which to explore the true picture. A lack of professionally curiosity meant that little scrutiny was placed on the information at hand. This set off the direction for the Council in seeking a legal platform to enter into PLO, or pre-proceedings, with a lens of child protection.
- 7 Due to an absence of joint reflective conversation, professionals who raised an alternative, more accurate view of the situation went unheard. Those professionals did not use a formal escalation process to further progress their concerns.
- 8 Opportunities were missed to offer appropriate support to Miss X, who was dealing with a traumatic situation regarding the birth of her second child, whose labour came early and unexpected alongside delays in securing medical assistance during labour, which are believed to have caused lifelong medical issues for Miss X's child.
- 9 The Ombudsman recommendations were as follows;

The Council should:

- provide evidence that the learning review report was shared in the Child Safeguarding Practice review sub-group;
- provides evidence that the recommendations from the learning review report have been added to the action tracker for progress and monitoring through the sub-group; and,
- provides evidence that the recommendations from the learning review report have been tracked and monitored and, where appropriate, continue to be tracked and monitored so the learning is embedded in practice

- 10 The report by the Ombudsman in Appendix 1 was published on the 11th September 2025.
- 11 All above recommendations have subsequently been actioned.

12 A learning review was conducted by Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership (CESCP) in August 2024, resulting in a set of 7 recommendations, including:

- Improving communications with families and partners
- Understanding the support networks of families
- Increased understanding of multi-agency escalation processes
- Addressing issue of value-based language
- Sharing of information in a timely and accurate manner
- Ensuring actions are based on the consideration of evidence
- Assessments require consideration of all information from all sources

13 Oversight of the progress of the CESCP recommended actions sits with the Child Safeguarding Practice Review sub-group.

14 A payment to offer some level of remedy was offered to Miss X by Cheshire East Council.

15 A formal senior-level letter of apology was written and sent to Miss X.

16 The Council and its partners have welcomed the opportunity to learn from the complaint, to ensure practice is based in evidence with a view to considering the impact on Human Rights when there is intervention without due cause. There is a solid understanding of the need to bring professionals closer together to aid with clear communication and reflective, curious practice.

17 The Council understands that very sadly, Miss X has subsequently passed away following an unrelated health issue.

Reasons for Recommendations

18 That the Committee:

1. Notes the conclusions of the Ombudsman's report.
2. Endorses the actions taken by the Council.
3. Confirms that the report has been formally considered in accordance with statutory requirements.
4. These actions meet the Council's commitment to helping children and young people thrive and meet their potential.

Other Options Considered

19 The other option available for consideration was to reject the recommendations of the Ombudsman, which was discounted given the findings of the Ombudsman that the council acted erroneously.

| Option | Impact | Risk |
|--------------------|---|---|
| Do nothing | There would be no acknowledgement of errors or learning from mistakes | There would be a reputational risk with Ombudsman/ public, as well as risk of legal action. |
| To accept findings | Acknowledge learning that comes from Ombudsman report to ensure the practice is not repeated. | Risk of being unable to implement learning |

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance

20 This report fulfils the statutory requirement under Section 31(2) of the Local Government Act 1974 for the Council to formally consider the Ombudsman's findings and confirm the actions taken.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

21 The Council has made a symbolic payment of £4,000 and acknowledge the significant distress and uncertainty caused to Miss X.

The payment is made from the Children's Services revenue budget. This is authorised in the constitution Chapter 2 Part 5.

Human Resources

22 There are no human resource implications arising from this report.

Risk Management

23 The risks associated with this report are both legal and reputational. There is a risk of reputational damage and legal culpability related to the erroneous practices mentioned within the report. To reduce this risk, the findings of the report were fully accepted, and a related action plan has been devised to avoid a repeat of mistakes. An apology has been provided, and an offer of a symbolic payment has been made.

The risk of not accepting the findings of report would mean that there is a risk of further legal action to find the council culpable of the errors already accepted.

The Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership subgroup will ensure oversight and ongoing implementation of the recommendations to support staff in continuous improvement in the areas outlined in the Ombudsman's report.

Impact on other Committees

24 This report has no bearing on any other committees.

Policy

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Commitment 1: Unlocking prosperity for all | Commitment 2: Improving health and wellbeing Children and young people thrive and reach their potential with targeted support when and where they need it | Commitment 3: An effective and enabling council Effective and responsive governance, compliance and evidence-based decision making |
|---|--|---|

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

25 An EIA has been completed and is attached at Appendix 1.

Other Implications

26 None

Consultation

| Name of Consultee | Post held | Date sent | Date returned |
|---|---|------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Statutory Officer (or deputy):</i> | | | |
| Chris Benham | Director of Finance and Deputy S151 Officer | 19/12/25 | 22/12/25 |
| Kevin O'Keefe | Interim Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) | 19/12/25 | 22/12/25 |
| <i>Legal and Finance</i> | | | |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|----------|----------|
| Diane Green | Finance Manager – Children’s Services | 19/12/25 | 02/01/26 |
| Jennie Summers | Acting Head of Legal Services | 19/12/25 | 09/01/26 |
| <i>Other Consultees:</i> | | | |
| <i>Executive Directors/Directors</i> | | | |
| Dawn Godfrey | Executive Director, Children’s Services | 19/12/25 | 22/12/25 |

| Access to Information | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Contact Officer: | Tracy Stephen, Director Family Help and Children’s Social Care tracy.stephen@cheshireeast.gov.uk |
| Appendices: | Appendix 1: Equality Impact Assessment |
| Background Papers: | <u>Report by Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman: Investigation into a complaint about Cheshire East Council (reference number: 24 009 262)</u> |

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) and our equality duty

Section 1 – Details of the service, service change, decommissioning of a service, strategy, function or procedure

| | |
|---|---|
| Proposal Title | Formal Consideration of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Report - Complaint Reference 24 009 262 |
| Date of Assessment | 21 st October 2025 |
| Assessment Lead Officer Name and other officers involved | Tracy Stephen Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care |
| Directorate/ Service | Children and Families |
| Details of the service, service change, decommissioning of the service, strategy, function or procedure. | Actions arising from an upheld complaint, investigated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. These actions require improvements to practice, including better communication with the multi-agency team working with a family, evidenced based approaches to practice and use of escalation policy. |
| Who is impacted? | Children and families involved with children's social care and family help should be impacted positively by the actioned changes. |
| Links and impact on other services, strategies, functions or procedures. | It links with Cheshire East Children's Safeguarding Practice Review Subgroup following a Learning Review being completed on the same circumstances. It also links with Cheshire East Council's plan – 2.4 children and young people thrive and reach their potential with targeted support when and where they need it. |
| How does the service, service change, strategy, function or procedure help the Council meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty? | The service change supports the upholding of Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998; respect to a right for a private family life. |

Section 2 - Information – What do you know?

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| What do you know? | The LGSC Ombudsman has upheld a complaint made by Miss X and provided a set of recommendations to the Council. The |
|--------------------------|--|

| | |
|---|---|
| | findings of the Ombudsman report recommend an improvement in operational practices which would create improvements in people experiencing services, but would not affect one group more than another. These improvements include the use of evidence based practice approaches, communication with partners and the proper use of an escalation policy. |
| Information you used to arrive at the decision | The information provided by the Ombudsman, alongside the findings of a Learning Review undertaken by Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership. |
| Gaps in your Information | <i>N/a.</i> |

Section 3 - Information - What did people tell you?

| | |
|---|---|
| What did people tell you about your proposals? | None |
| Details and dates of the consultation/s and/or engagement activities | Given this is a response to the Ombudsman's report, it is not necessary to proceed with any external consultation |
| Are there any gaps in consultation and engagement feedback? | No consultation required |

Section 4 - Review of information, consultation feedback and equality analysis

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| Protected characteristics groups from the <u>Equality Act 2010</u> | What do you know? <i>Summary of information used to inform the proposal</i> <u>Refer to Section 2</u> | What did people tell you? <i>Summary of customer and/or staff feedback</i> <u>Refer to section 3</u> | What does this mean? <i>Impacts identified from the information and feedback (actual and potential).</i> <i>These can be either positive, negative or have no impact.</i> |
| Age | <i>The proposals affect all children and young people</i> | <i>The Ombudsman report outlines that due consideration to the needs and views of the children and parent was not sufficient,</i> | <i>The impact of improvements to practice should mean that situations such as that experienced by Miss X are avoided in future.</i> |

| | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| | | <i>as was claimed by Miss X.</i> | |
| Disability | | | |
| Gender reassignment | | | |
| Pregnancy and maternity | | | |
| Race/ethnicity | | | |
| Religion or belief | | | |
| Sex | | | |
| Sexual orientation | | | |
| Marriage and civil partnership | | | |

Section 5 - Review of information, consultation feedback and equality analysis

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Mitigation | What can you do to mitigate any negative impacts or further enhance positive impacts? |
|-------------------|--|

| | |
|---|--|
| <i>Please summarise the impacts listed in section 4 and what will be done to mitigate these impacts</i> | <p>Implementing the actions of the Learning Review and Ombudsman report will support Children's Services improvement journey and contribute to a number of improvement actions planned for the future.</p> |
|---|--|

Section 6 – Monitoring and review

| | |
|---|---|
| Details of monitoring activities | No monitoring required other than that of CESCP of the actions of the Learning Review |
| Date and responsible officer for the review of the EIA | Tracy Stephen Director Family Help and Children's Social Care |

Section 7 – Sign off

When you have completed your draft EIA, it should be sent to the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Mailbox](#) for review.

If your EIA is approved, it must then be signed off by a senior manager within your Department (Head of Service or above).

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Name | Tracy Stephen |
| Date | 21 st October |
| Signature |  |

Once the EIA has been signed off, please forward a copy to the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion mailbox](#) for it to be published on the website.

For Transparency, we are committed to publishing all Equality Impact Assessments relating to public engagement.

Help and support - For support and advice please contact the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion mailbox](#)

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OPEN**Children and Families Committee****19 January 2026****Crisis and Resilience Fund 2026 - 2029 -
Delivery Plan****Report of: Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director, Children's Services****Report Reference No: CF/35/25-26****Ward(s) Affected: All****For Decision****Purpose of Report**

- 1 Approval of the Crisis and Resilience Fund Delivery proposal for 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29.

Executive Summary

- 2 The Household Support Fund (HSF) has provided essential support to vulnerable households in Cheshire East since 2020, including food, utilities, housing assistance, and other necessities. As of April 2024, HSF transitioned from bulk payments to an enhanced referral system, aiming to reduce dependency and to promote sustainable impact, which continued until 31 March 2026, with over £6m being provided to over 20,000 members of the community.
- 3 The Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) was announced in the Spring Budget ([Spending Review 2025](#)), and is intended to replace the HSF and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). The CRF as described in the recent provisional settlement announcement is expected to provide £3.781m in 2026/27; £3.779m in 2027/28 and £3.816m in 2028/29 (£11.376m total) in funding for Cheshire East until 31st March 2029.
- 4 Cheshire East received the grant conditions from the DWP on the 19 December 2025, however they are currently embargoed, which prevent us from sharing more widely. We can confirm that the delivery plan

described within this paper meets grant conditions and the financial settlement aligns with the values as stated below.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Endorse the proposed delivery model of the Crisis and Resilience Fund for 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29.
2. Delegate authority of the grant to the Director of Children's Services (DCS) to deliver the grant in line with grant conditions.
3. Approval to commence procurement for the services as detailed within report.
4. Note that the funding is included within the medium-term financial strategy 2026/27 to 28/29 for an estimated total sum of approx. £11.4m.

Background

- 5 The HSF has been delivering food, utilities, white goods, housing support, and other household essentials since December 2020. During this time, the HSF programme, and its variants: Covid Winter Grant Scheme and Covid Support Grant, have provided over £20m of support and over 100,000 separate payments to high priority groups within Cheshire East.
- 6 As of March 2026, the Department for Work and Pensions has renamed and rolled in the HSF and DHP programmes into the Crisis and Resilience Fund.

Consultation and Engagement

- 7 The HSF programme routinely surveys grant recipients and referrers, as well as collecting case studies from grant recipients.
- 8 We are currently undergoing recipient and referrer consultation to identify possible improvements in the current delivery system. However, our most recent survey from earlier in the year showed that 97% of recipients described the grant as 'helping a lot' alongside 3% describing the grant as 'quite a lot of help'.
- 9 Further information on and engagement can be located in appendix 4.

CRF Proposal

- 10 The proposed model will include the following:

- (i) Provide targeted support to a range of highly targeted cohorts in the children and adults spheres - such as, children in need (CiN) and child protection (CP) care leavers, children with

disabilities (CWD), children open to early help services, and a range of vulnerable adults.

- (ii) Operate an online referral form for application-based support where a range of support can be accessed, expected to include essentials such food, energy, wider essentials, housing and exceptional cost payments can be accessed.
- (iii) Provide a portion of the funding as a third sector grant, targeting local voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) groups such as food banks and other third sector organisations who work with vulnerable residents.

11 CRF will retain the same target cohorts, focussing on Cheshire East's most vulnerable individuals. These cohorts include, care leavers, young carers, financially vulnerable individuals, individuals known to Cheshire East professionals, individuals known to third sector organisations and individuals with a financial vulnerability as deemed by a professional or practitioner.

12 Administration of the programme is managed by a team within Cheshire East's children's department. The team is responsible for the following:

- (i) Project Finances, contract management and procurement, payments, advertising, council governance, grant returns, management of inboxes, review and approval of all referrals, liaise DWP advisors and attend DWP national meetings, as well as other tasks inherent to running a project of this scale.

13 In addition to this core team, the programme will use a portion of the admin fund to allocate resource from the Financial Welfare team. This resource will allow for streamlined background checks on grant referrals and will enhance the sustainability capabilities of the programme by conducting full benefits and welfare checks for recipients, plus signposting onto other support organisations.

14 Governance is completed at a monthly multi-agency steering group, attended by all our key stakeholders and the triage network. The meeting provides an update on case work (financial, volumes and outcomes), a chance to share any developing risks, and for multi-agency reviews of cases. This is chaired by the Programme Head of Service.

15 To run the CRF programme, a series of contracts are required to be managed and procured to support successful implementation. As the CRF is a new programme, spanning 3 years, it will require a series of procurement activities. Including:

- (a) Re-procurement of the supermarket voucher service. This is expected to include spend of up to £1.5m per year.
- (b) Re-procurement of the white goods and household essential service. This is expected to include spend of up to £500,000 per year.

16 A breakdown of expected spend is available in table 1 for the full grant period.

17 Please note, the funding amounts proposed in table 1 are indicative and reflect the volumes the programme has received in prior iterations. The final spend may differ from this amount if demand for another area of support increases.

Other Options Considered

18 Two other options were considered to deliver the CRF programme, these are detailed below:

19 Targeted bulk delivery with basic referral routes and third sector grant.

- (i) Provide the majority of support via bulk release to targeted groups in the form of supermarket vouchers during key periods of need throughout the year.
- (ii) Operate an online referral form for application-based support for food, energy, wider essentials, and housing payments.
- (iii) Deliver to a large population of key groups such as income related free school meal, child in need and child protection, care leavers and SEND (list not exhaustive).
- (iv) Provide a portion of the funding as a third sector grant, targeting local VCFS groups, food banks and other third sector organisations who work with vulnerable residents.

20 Enhanced referral routes with VCFS grant.

- (i) Operate an online referral form for application-based support where support for food, energy, wider essentials, transport, housing adaptions and exceptional costs can be accessed.
- (ii) Provide a portion of the funding as a third sector grant, targeting local VCFS groups, food banks and other third sector organisations who work with vulnerable residents.
- (iii) This option would deliver the majority of the funding through the online referral form and replicate how we have delivered for the past 6 months.

21 The option selected combines the benefits for both above, whilst ensuring administrative efficient delivery.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

22 As set out in paragraph 4 above, the Council have been provided with the Grant Conditions at the time of this Committee in the Guidance.

23 Whilst the key aspects of the Guidance from a legal perspective are set out in paragraph 24 below, the Council needs to comply with all the requirements set out in the Guidance provided in order to avoid a potential repayment situation.

24 The CRF Grant Conditions are contained within the Guidance. The Guidance provides the following key provisions that the Council needs to be aware of:

(a) Clawback/repayment - paragraph 130 of the Guidance:

If the recipient Authority fails to comply with any of the conditions set out in this guidance or the Grant Determination, or if any overpayment is made under this grant, or any amount is paid in error, or any unspent funding at the end of Year 3 is not returned, the Minister may reduce, suspend or withhold grant payments, or require the repayment of the whole or any part of the CRF grant monies paid, as may be determined by the Minister and notified in writing to the recipient Authority. The list below contains examples of a breach of the grant conditions:

- *Inappropriate use of funding or no evidence of funding having been spent on the specified purpose.*
- *Failure to submit one or more of the documents as specified in the CRF Grant Determination.*

(b) Audit - paragraph 130 of the Guidance:

DWP retain the right to undertake audits at any time, should it be considered appropriate and necessary.

(c) Fraud – paragraph 149 of the Guidance:

The Authority must maintain a sound system of internal governance and financial controls in relation to the grant. If the Authority has any grounds for suspecting financial irregularity in the use of any grant paid under the determination, it must notify DWP immediately, explain what steps are being taken to investigate the suspicion and keep DWP informed about the progress of the investigation. For these purposes 'financial irregularity' includes fraud or other impropriety, mismanagement and the use of the grant for purposes other than those for which it was provided.

(d) Subsidy Control – paragraph 152 of the Guidance:

The Fund should not be used for any economic undertaking. Whichever way the Authority uses the funding, including work in partnership with others, all Subsidy rules (previously State Aid) issues should be considered. Check whether the 'de minimis' regulation exception applies. You should also follow Government procurement procedures where relevant.

(e) Reporting and MI – paragraph 177 of the Guidance:

*Authorities must comply with DWP's reporting and MI requirements. This includes submitting an **annual delivery plan** and providing MI returns on a **six-monthly basis**. Full details, including templates and deadlines, are set out in The Crisis and Resilience Fund (April 2026 to March 2029) MI Reporting Requirements.*

25 Pursuant to the contracts required as set out in paragraph 13 above, Legal will be able to work with the service to prepare these contracts and to include the required terms and conditions.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

26 The CRF as described in the recent provisional settlement announcement is expected to provide £3.781m in 2026/27; £3.779m in 2027/28 and £3.816m in 2028/29 (£11.376m total) in funding for Cheshire East until 31st March 2029.

27 The council will spend the grant in accordance with the conditions and not exceed the amount advised by the DWP.

28 The council is required to provide management information (MI) returns outlining their grant spend and the volume of awards.

29 The grant payments will be made in arrears on receipt of a fully completed and verified MI return.

30 If the council has not spent the grant in accordance with the conditions, then there is scope for clawback. The service will manage that risk.

Human Resources

31 The grant conditions enable Cheshire East to take a portion of the grant for administration. We have already taken steps to extend temporary contracts to ensure the programme is staffed going forward.

Risk Management

32 As with any welfare payment to vulnerable recipients there is a risk of fraud, as recipients might appear to be in financial need when they are not. We have tried to mitigate this risk by accepting funding requests via the panel by trusted practitioners and professionals who work directly with those in need.

33 Risks are routinely assessed and reported on at the monthly household support fund steering group, and remedial action is taken, as required.

Impact on other Committees

34 The CRF grant will support a broad spectrum of individuals affected by poverty in Cheshire East. This includes children, adults, and those of pension age, as well as other priority cohorts impacted by the complex and multi-dimensional effects of poverty - such as care leavers, individuals involved with social care, and those with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities).

Policy

35 The CRF grants are part of the government's package of support, targeted at those vulnerable families and adults who are most in need, to help them to cope with the cost of essentials.

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| Commitment 1: Unlocking prosperity for all | Commitment 2: Improving health and wellbeing | |
|---|---|--|

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

36 This scheme has an EIA in place which can be provided upon request.

Other Implications

- 37 Children, families, and adults in rural areas of the council will directly benefit from receipt of the new grant in line with financial need. There is no restriction on funding decisions dependent on where service users live.
- 38 Children and young people who suffer the greatest inequality in terms of lack of household income will directly benefit from both of these grants.
- 39 Poverty poses a threat to the public health of our residents as they are less likely to be able to access the conditions that promote a healthy physical and mental lifestyle. An adequate income can help people to avoid stress and feel in control, to access experiences and material resources, to adopt and maintain healthy behaviours, and to feel supported by a financial safety net.
- 40 There are not expected to be any climate change implications from the Crisis and Resilience Grant.

| Name of Consultee | Post held | Date sent | Date returned |
|--|---|------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Statutory Officer (or deputy) :</i> | | | |
| Chris Benham | Director of Finance and Deputy 151 Officer | 02/12/2025 | 22/12/2025 |
| Kevin O'Keefe | Interim Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) | 02/12/2025 | 02/12/2025 |
| <i>Legal and Finance</i> | | | |
| Diane Green | Finance Manager – Children's Services | 02/12/2025 | 03/12/2025 |
| Daniel O'Brien | Lawyer | 02/11/2025 | 02/11/2025 |
| <i>Other Consultees:</i> | | | |

| <i>Directors</i> | | | |
|------------------|---|------------|------------|
| Dawn Godfrey | Executive Director, Children's Services | 02/12/2025 | 04/12/2025 |

| Access to Information | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Contact Officer: | Douglas Hubbert, Business Development Manager Douglas.hubbert@cheshireeast.gov.uk |
| Appendices: | Appendix 1 – HSF7 Evaluation Appendix 2 - Table 1 – CRF Spend Proposal Appendix 3 - Table 2 – HSF Spend update Appendix 4 - Table 3 – Case studies |
| Background Papers: | DWP Grant Conditions – Currently embargoed and unable for publication. HSF7 paper - Decision - Delivery proposals for the Household Support Fund (HSF7) 2025/26 Cheshire East Council |

Appendix 1

HSF7 Outcomes and Impact update

- 41 An overview of HSF7 spend from 01 April 2025 to 21 September 2025 is shown below in table 2. The table demonstrates a total spend of £2.3m. When planned expenditure is included, the grant is on track to spend its entire allocation.
- 42 Since April the HSF programme has provided thousands of food vouchers to vulnerable members of the community (5021) as well as thousands of energy vouchers to help households keep the heating and the lights on (4614).
- 43 As well as food and energy, the programme has also been able to prevent many families from being going through lengthy and costly court cases and evictions (215), supported young people to get to school who otherwise would have missed their education (55), repaired heating in homes which would have been cold during the winter (11), provided care leavers with white goods so they have the best opportunity in their new homes (10), cleaned homes which were unsafe for children to live in, allowing families to return (34), and providing families with beds who otherwise would have had individuals sleeping on the floor or couch (95). This is just a snapshot of the impacts this money has had, for case studies which will illustrate the scope and impact of the programme please see the table 3.
- 44 Many of these activities have also had avoidant impact, keeping families together, young people in school and young people in placements.
- 45 The HSF programme awarded 175k to community organisations such as food banks, social supermarkets and debt and advise services to enhance their infrastructure and provide preventative interventions leaving long lasting impacts which will outlast the grant. A copy of the schemes funded by the community grant portion of the grant can be found on [Grant funded projects](#) under 'cost of living community response grants.'
- 46 The HSF team have been in contact with a wide range of the triage network, including internal colleagues, third sector referrers and NHS referrers. Their feedback has been gathered as part of the monthly HSF steering group.
- 47 As demonstrated in table 3, the programme has received very good feedback from the community, stating that the programme has been a critical lifeline and has averted major crisis. For further detail, please see table 3.

Appendix 2

Table 1 - CRF Spend Forecast

| Spend area | Volumes | Spend |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Food | 28,922 | £3,856,000 |
| Energy | 28,922 | £3,856,000 |
| Wider Essentials - Triage Network | 2,892 | £2,121,000 |
| Wider Essentials - Exceptional Costs | 145 | £97,000 |
| Prevention - 3rd Sector Grant | 0 | £723,000.00 |
| Admin | 0 | £723,000.00 |
| Total | 60,881 | £11,376,000 |

Appendix 3

Table 2 – HSF7 Spend Update

| Spend area | 21/09/2025 | volumes 21/09/2025 |
|------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Food | £617,987.20 | 5021 |
| Energy | £461,400.00 | 4614 |
| Triage Network | £688,957.61 | 832 |
| Exceptional Cost | £16,484.29 | 27 |
| adults bulk | £50,000.00 | 0 |
| childrens bulk | £50,000.00 | 0 |
| 3rd sec grant | £175,529.00 | 0 |
| admin | £200,000.00 | 0 |
| Total | £2,260,358.10 | 10494 |

Appendix 4

Table 3 – Case studies

| Team | Feedback |
|-------------------------|---|
| Housing Adoptions | <p>Miss X recently moved into a new home with her young daughter. Shortly after, the boiler failed, leaving them without heating or hot water and unable to bathe the child. Miss X was in receipt of Universal Credit and qualified for the Council's Affordable Warmth Grant of £1,531.87 (covering 75% of the cost) and a Gas Safe Grant of £200. However, this still left her with a contribution of £310.63, which she could not afford, placing her in a crisis situation.</p> <p>Through the Household Support Fund (HSF), the remaining £310.63 was covered, enabling Miss X to replace the boiler. She now has heating and hot water, ensuring her child's needs are met. Without the HSF intervention, the home would have remained cold and unsafe, posing serious risks to the child's health and pushing the family further into crisis.</p> |
| Homelessness Prevention | <p>X's life has been shaped by unimaginable trauma that has laid the foundation for a deeply troubled adulthood, marked by repeated victimisation at the hands of serial domestic abusers and sex offenders. Her vulnerability left her exposed to serious assaults and at high risk of sexual exploitation, including conversations around turning to prostitution as a means of survival.</p> <p>Compounded by significant substance and alcohol misuse, X also battled severe mental health challenges. Diagnosed with epilepsy and suffering from grand mal seizures, she was also living with Complex PTSD. Her history included frequent self-harm and threats to both herself and others, painting a picture of a life in constant crisis.</p> <p>Eventually, X's chaotic lifestyle led to street homelessness and a seven-month prison sentence. It was during this period of incarceration (at her lowest point) that she began to reflect deeply on her life. Determined to change, she engaged with substance and alcohol services and began attending peer support groups. Upon release, she stayed temporarily with family, but this arrangement was never sustainable long term. When her family could no longer accommodate her, she</p> |

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| | <p>faced the terrifying prospect of returning to homelessness and the cycle of abuse and exploitation.</p> <p>It was at this critical juncture that the Household Support Fund (HSF) stepped in. Through HSF, X was supported with a deposit which has allowed her to secure private sector accommodation, providing her with the safety, stability, and dignity she had long been denied. This intervention was not just about housing - it was about hope.</p> <p>Since moving into her new home, X has remained sober for an extended period, free from negative influences and actively engaging with support services. Her gratitude is palpable; she has expressed overwhelming joy and even joked about baking cookies for everyone who helped give her this second chance.</p> <p>X's story is a powerful testament to the transformative impact of targeted financial support. Without HSF, she would almost certainly have returned to street homelessness, facing renewed risks of sexual exploitation, substance abuse, abusive relationships, and self-harm. Instead, she now has a safe and settled home, a support network, and a future filled with possibility.</p> <p>This is not just a success story, it is a life reclaimed. It is a shining example of what can be achieved when funding is paired with the right teams who are capable of utilising the funding to transform vulnerable people's lives.</p> <p>X's journey underscores the urgent need for continued investment in HSF, ensuring that others like her are not left behind.</p> |
| White goods | <p>X is a partially sighted lady who lives with her adult son, who has autism and is currently awaiting support from the community team. X also experiences challenges related to an eating disorder and has been struggling with various aspects of daily life.</p> <p>X had been sleeping on a sofa for an extended period, which she described as "sleeping with my shadow." This situation had a significant impact on her physical health and emotional wellbeing.</p> |

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| | <p>Following assessment and support planning, a new bed was organised for X from the Household Support Fund. Following up on this support, X confirmed that she received her new bed and expressed immense gratitude and joy. X shared that she had never owned a new bed before, that she has had the best sleep that she has ever experienced, and that it has made a big difference to her life.</p> <p>X reflected on the positive impact this change has had, especially given the difficulties she has been facing. She was very appreciative of the support provided and stated, "All the times I have spoken to you, you have made my day."</p> <p>This small, low cost but timely, intervention has had a significant impact on this client's situation. Without the HSF support, this individual would have been continuing to sleep on her couch which was progressively worsening the individual's mental and physical health, which would have resulted in the case being escalated if not addressed.</p> |
| Wider Essentials | <p>X, a resident of Crewe, was referred by their Mental Health Nurse following a home visit prompted by concerns about their living conditions. X suffers from Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and prolapsed discs, which cause significant daily pain. Without access to prescribed pain relief, X had turned to self-medicating to manage symptoms - an approach that was both financially unsustainable and detrimental to their wellbeing.</p> <p>These physical health challenges were compounded by mental health issues, including depression, low mood, and low self-esteem. X had become socially isolated, avoiding visitors due to embarrassment about the state of their home.</p> <p>The condition of the home was described as one of the most drastic and severe ever encountered by the team. The property was cluttered, unsanitary, and posed a serious fire hazard. There was a real risk of death posed on the individual, as well as eviction or intervention by</p> |

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| | <p>services or the landlord if the situation was not addressed urgently.</p> <p>Without support, X faced not only a deterioration in physical and mental health but also the potential loss of their home - placing them at risk of homelessness and further crisis.</p> <p>Thanks to the Household Support Fund, X received support to declutter and clean the home, providing them with the urgent help they needed. The intervention not only improved the safety and cleanliness of the home but also restored dignity and gave X a renewed sense of hope.</p> <p>They have since been referred to a Pain Management Clinic and are actively working toward reducing their reliance on self-medication.</p> |
| Transport | <p>HSF7 has facilitated home-to-school transport for siblings who had to move to an emergency foster care placement, and the foster carer was unable to transport them to school due to having other children to take to a different school.</p> <p>This was a short-term arrangement for just over 2 months and allowed the foster care placement to remain stable and prevented the young people from being uprooted and moved to alternative accommodation.</p> <p>The impact of not supporting this family would have meant a foster care placement further away, or the siblings being unable to continue to be educated in their current school, where they have established friends and support of the staff at the school which was crucial at this time of instability.</p> <p>The HSF monies prevented a crisis in the young people's placement and an uprooting of their lives, both of which would have increased their likelihood of a deterioration of their circumstances.</p> |
| Adult's | <p>This individual was living in a 3-bedroom house. It was his childhood home; he had lived here with his parents</p> |

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| | <p>and his brother and now lived there alone. He is now 70, the house had become very run down, cluttered, very unkempt, where the fire risk was increasing and the conditions becoming dangerous for the inhabitant.</p> <p>Where he had initially always been unwilling to accept support, he was now experiencing health issues affecting his motivation, which were worsened by the conditions in the home.</p> <p>After a referral to the hoarding group and working with the Housing Association for his property, suitable accommodation was offered near his relative. However, it was stipulated that he would need to clear the house. He was supported to get quotes for specialist removals. There was very little he could take, due to its extremely poor condition, most was beyond repair and functional use.</p> <p>A request to HSF enabled this gentleman to remove and clear his house, as stipulated under his tenancy. For him to be able to move forward with his life in good living conditions, a safe environment, and remain in the area he has lived all his life.</p> <p>Without the HSF support, this individual would still be living in unsafe conditions, which were rapidly progressing towards crisis. The grant has been fundamental to the improvement and recovery of his circumstances.</p> |
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OPEN

Children and Families Committee

19 January 2026

Renewing the Sufficiency Strategy and Expanding Specialist Provision in Cheshire East – Options Paper

Report of: Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director, Children's Services

Report Reference No: CF/40/25-26

Ward(s) Affected: All

For Decision

Purpose of Report

- 1 To update the Children and Families Committee of the current pressures and challenges with the sufficiency of SEND placements across Cheshire East and provide a more detailed oversight of the data and information required to ensure decisions about how both capital and high needs spend are prioritised to ensure the highest impact on meeting the needs of all children and young people with SEND across Cheshire East.
- 2 To provide an update regarding the SEN Free School at Westfields, Sandbach, and to provide alternative options for consideration that may enable places to be brought forward for SEN pupils in a timelier way.
- 3 To request the Children and Families Committee's approval of the alternative proposal to self-deliver and fund the SEND 'All Through' school at the Westfields site, resulting in the pausing of the Springfield satellite school (Cledford, Middlewich), and declare that St Gregory's and Vernon Infant sites are surplus to requirements of Children and Families, enabling the sites to be added to the Council's disposal programme.
- 4 For Committee to delegate the authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to: -

- Enter into all necessary consultancy and ancillary agreements to undertake a detailed feasibility study
- Enter into a preconstruction services agreement and progress with the detailed design and development of costs to RIBA stage 4. This will enable the service to work towards obtaining a target cost and submission of a planning application to facilitate the delivery of the new SEND Free School on the Westfields site, together with any other agreements associated with or ancillary to the contract.

5 For the Children and Families Committee to consider and approve the proposal to progress with the free school presumption process to open a new SEN Free School at Westfields, Sandbach, including the process of attracting potential sponsors to run the new school.

6 To ensure Children and Families committee are well informed of the scope of this work in line with the definition of “high needs” which should include children and young people with SEND, both with statutory education, health and care plans (EHCP) and non-statutory SEN support, and those requiring additional inclusion support or alternative provision (AP).

Executive Summary

7 As the strategic commissioner of school places, Cheshire East Council has a statutory duty to ensure sufficient school places for local residents. Providing the right educational placement for all children, including those with special educational needs (SEN), is essential to helping them achieve their potential and develop skills for adulthood.

8 The out of borough placements have grown largely as a result of the separation during the Local Government Review in the area where the majority of Cheshire County Council special schools were located in what is now Cheshire West & Chester Council. Only four out of the nineteen special schools were transferred to Cheshire East Council, and the resulting imbalance has never been properly addressed. On top of this, there are 11 high cost Independent Non-maintained Special Schools within our border as an option for our families.

9 To date, capital investment has focused on expanding specialist places in special schools, SEND units, and resource bases—primarily for pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). For example, in the last three years, Cheshire East has created 224 new specialist places in special schools, SEND Units and resource bases, with a further 46 either in progress or being consulted on. While necessary, this approach has inadvertently driven demand for EHCPs

as a gateway to specialist support. A strategic shift is needed to strengthen inclusive practice in mainstream schools, reducing reliance on specialist placements and mitigating escalating EHCP requests.

- 10 The current plan involves the delivery of a SEND Secondary Free School (Westfields) through DfE funding. Unfortunately, the DfE is not committing this funding. If Cheshire East use existing SEND Capital funds to continue with the delivery of this project, this can only be achieved through virement of funds allocated to existing schemes (see Appendix 1) in the approved Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)/ 2025-26 Budget.
- 11 Cheshire East had also allocated £6m SEND capital to the development of Springfield satellite school (Cledford, Middlewich)
- 12 There is an urgent requirement to review the options to ensure SEND capital and other funding is allocated as efficiently and effectively as possible.
- 13 Progressing with the two currently proposed options of expanding special school places at Springfield satellite school (Cledford, Middlewich) and Westfields would consume all of the SEND Capital available and only attend to one pressure in the SEND system, therefore we are requesting approval to pause on the Springfield satellite school (Cledford, Middlewich) and progress with the Westfields scheme.
- 14 In Cheshire East, there is a requirement to invest in the system at all levels to ensure we are not just reacting to the seemingly highest levels of need, potentially escalating many needs through the system through a lack of investment lower down the system.
- 15 Investing in increasing places in just one or two special schools is a risk as it would leave no funding to invest in any other parts of the system to ensure needs are being met without the need for escalation, where appropriate.
- 16 Ensuring our strategy also invests in increasing mainstream capacity will improve educational outcomes, support social integration, reduce travel costs, and align with the council's statutory duty as well as reduce the pressure on both the High Needs Block spend as well as ensure SEND Capital is allocated as efficiently as possible.
- 17 Inclusive practice enables many pupils to have their needs met without costly specialist placements. This approach also builds parental confidence, ensuring children can thrive locally in familiar

environments. Please see appendix 2 for examples of how inclusive practice can have an impact on our High Needs block.

- 18 While previous programmes have expanded specialist provision, they have not sufficiently addressed early intervention or inclusive mainstream capacity.
- 19 Additionally, external pressures out of the council's control have continued to add to the pressure, creating a 'perfect storm' for the increased pressure to spend on high cost placements; namely the opening of 5 Independent Special Schools (ISS) and Non-Maintained Special Schools (NMSS) within the borders of Cheshire East – often the preferred option for parents and carers and also the most expensive options.
- 20 Future strategy must go beyond physical space planning and must include workforce development, stronger partnerships, improved commissioning, proactive transitions, more intelligent and responsive data use, and accurate identification of emerging needs.
- 21 Concurrently to this, robust data intelligence reporting and recording systems are being developed to enable the most efficient and effective decisions based on data and information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the funding and self-delivery of Westfields SEN school using existing capital allocations, see attached appendix 1 detailing how this would be funded. This would include the proposal to change this to an 'all through' special school rather than solely secondary.
2. Approve and delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to: -
 - Enter into all necessary consultancy and ancillary agreements to undertake a detailed feasibility study
 - Enter into a preconstruction services agreement and progress with the detailed design and development of costs to RIBA stage 4. This will enable the service to work towards obtaining a target cost and submission of a planning application to facilitate the delivery of the new SEND Free School on the Westfields site, together with any other agreements associated with or ancillary to the contract, where necessary in consultation with the Executive Director of Resources/S151 Officer, the Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer and the Executive Director of Place.

3. Recommend to Finance Sub Committee to approve the grant funded capital budget of circa £16m to progress with the Westfields proposal and approve a diversion of High Needs Capital Funding from the schemes as set out in Appendix 1.
4. Agree to progress with undertaking the free school presumption process to identify and obtain agreement for a new school sponsor under section 6A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. This will include undertaking a consultation with the local community, schools, councillors, town council and local MP. This is not the formal statutory consultation which sponsors are required to undertake.
5. Approve the pause of the primary aged proposals, including the additional Springfield satellite (Cledford, Middlewich) to ensure funds available to make further decisions as we work on developing the strategy in response to the emerging information and data of both SEND support and EHCP needs.
6. Approve the release of the former St Gregory's and Vernon Infant sites and declare the sites surplus to the requirements of Children and Families, enabling the sites to be added to the Council's disposal programme.
7. Approve the development of a renewed sufficiency strategy to ensure a strategic approach to SEND provision across the system.

Background

- 22 The DfE confirmed, in March 2023, that we had been successful in bidding for two new free special schools, which would provide for up to 120 additional places. It was proposed that the successful DfE bid would provide two 60 place 'all through' schools
- 23 In March 2024, a revised bid was submitted to the DfE that proposed one new SEND free school which would offer 120 secondary age places for pupils with broad range of SEND and complex needs, including autistic children and young people, those with moderate learning and speech language and communication needs. The proposed location for the new SEN free school is Westfields site in Sandbach. This free school was to be funded and delivered by the DfE. (Please note that the site could actually deliver additional places to a total of 144, but the revised bid had to reflect the numbers detailed in the original submission of 120).
- 24 Since the June 2025 general election, we have had no decision on whether the DfE will be progressing this scheme, and at a meeting on

11 November it was advised that this scheme is highly unlikely to be progressed by the DfE.

- 25 The Government announced details of the Spending review on the 11 June 2025, within this announcement the government has said it will set out its approach to SEND reform in a white paper in the autumn 2025. This publication has now also been delayed to early 2026. Due to the urgency of the need to progress our sufficiency strategy, we can no longer wait for a solution from the DfE and need to progress options based on the assumption we will not receive any funds from the DfE.
- 26 Correspondence, with support from the Leader, Deputy Leader, local Members of Parliament and local Members has been sent to the Department for Education requesting updates to the scheme.
- 27 At Children and Families committee on the 29 April 2024 approval was given to delegate authority to the Executive Director for Childrens Services to; -
 - i. Progress with detailed feasibility studies for the two x 60 place SEND primary schools from the Cledford site in Middlewich, and the other from either the Vernon site in Poynton or St Gregory's site in Bollington. This will include design development work, to be commissioned through the Estates Property Projects Team for RIBA Stages 0-2 to cover initial feasibility and survey work on the proposed sites.
 - ii. To initiate the process of developing proposals for the two satellite schools, these would be part of expansions to existing Cheshire East special schools, and further reports will be provided at Committee.
- 28 The Education Act 2011 changed the arrangements for establishing new schools and introduced section 6A (the 'free school presumption') of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 which requires that, where a local authority identifies the need for a new school in its area, it must seek proposals to establish an academy (free school). Section 6A came into effect on: 1 February 2012 for new mainstream and special schools.

Consultation and Engagement

- 29 If Cheshire East were to take forward the proposal, in accordance with DfE "Establishing a new academy: the free school presumption route, Guidance for local authorities and new school proposers (May 2024) in order to open a new school, the local authority must follow the free school presumption process. This guidance sets out the consultation process and timeline.

- 30 Before relaunching the competition to identify the sponsor to run the new school, we will undertake consultation and engagement sessions.
- 31 Information will be made available on the Cheshire East website and during the representation period notified to key stakeholders including Ward Members, MP's, Diocese, and Town Councils. Information will also be emailed to all schools.
- 32 It is proposed that a public drop-in session will be held (venue and dates to be confirmed), with representatives from the local authority in attendance to discuss the proposal and seek views from parents and the local community. Feedback gathered through consultation will be used to help formulate and finalise the local authority's specification for a new school before its publication inviting expressions of interest from sponsors.
- 33 This is not the formal statutory consultation which sponsors are required to undertake under section 10 of the Academies Act 2010, which takes place during the pre-opening phase i.e., after the sponsor has been selected.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 34 To ensure the most efficient and effective responses to the demand for specialist places and increasing pressure on the SEND system in Cheshire East.
- 35 To continue to support the key mitigation within our DSG management plan, to reduce the increasing reliance on ISS and NMSS through a systemic, strategic and proactive approach. This proposal incorporates elements of the Cheshire East Plan 2025 - 2029 in that it will support all children to have the best start in life and will increase opportunities for all children and young adults with additional needs ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential.
- 36 In line with DfE policy we would need to initiate the Free school presumption, this is the main route by which local authorities bring about the establishment of new schools to meet the need for additional places.

Other options considered

| Option | Impact | Risk |
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| Do nothing | This would result in a failure to meet our statutory duties as a commissioner of school places and incur increasing costs for out of borough SEN places. | High |
| Wait for DfE confirmation and delay all decision-making processes linked to SEND Capital spend | Continued increase of CYP without appropriate support and provision. Cost to Councils revenue budget of maintaining a vacant building with significant business rate value. | High |
| CEC fund and self-build Westfields SEN school using existing capital allocations, as detailed in appendix 1 but change this to an 'all through' special school rather than solely secondary, and ...continue with Springfield satellite using remaining funds available leaving no further funds to respond to the developing strategy. | This option would utilise all our High Needs Provision Capital allocation, whilst not addressing inclusive practice in mainstream schools. At this stage we are requesting approval to put Springfield satellite scheme on hold pending the outcome of the renewal of the sufficiency strategy. | High |

Implications

Monitoring Officer/Legal

37 The Council as a principle council has the power to acquire land for various statutory functions and also to dispose of land. However, if the land was acquired for a specific statutory function such as to build and maintain a school, if the land is no longer required for that purpose, it will be necessary for the Council to appropriate the land under section 122 of the Local Government Act 1972 ("LGA 1972"). Therefore, a principal council can only appropriate land under section 122(1) of the LGA 1972 if the land is no longer required for the

purpose for which it is currently held. In reaching this decision, the council must consider the public need within the area for the existing use.

- 38 It is for the principal council to determine whether the land is no longer required for the purpose for which it is held – the Council is the sole judge of this.
- 39 There is no statutory requirement to advertise or consult on a proposal or decision to appropriate land under the general power contained in section 122 of the LGA1972, unless the appropriation relates to special categories of land – open space land is one such category. It will be necessary to assess whether any land could be regarded as open space land. If there is land falling under this category it will be necessary for the Council to advertise its intention to appropriate the open space for 2 consecutive weeks in a newspaper circulating in the area and to consider any objections of the proposed appropriate (section 122 (2A) LGA 1972) . If a principle council appropriates open space land under section 122(2A) of the LGA 1972, it is released from any trust for the enjoyment of the public imposed by section 164 of the Public Health Act 1875 or section 10 of the Open Spaces Act 1996 (section 122(2B), LGA 1972).
- 40 All actions involving the disposal or acquisition of property assets must be taken in accordance with the Council's Constitution current at the time of taking the decision.
- 41 However, it will be necessary to seek the Finance Sub-committee approval to appropriate the land so that it can be used for an alternative purpose and placed on the disposal list. Therefore, approval is needed to be sought to dispose of the surplus schools. No approval is required to re-use the site of Westfields as this was purchased using general administrative powers.
- 42 Land can be appropriated for planning purposes pursuant to section 122 of the LGA 1972. The phrase – *“the appropriation of land for planning purposes”* – is defined by section 246(1) of the Town and County Planning Act 1990 (“TCPA 1990”) as a reference to the appropriation of land for purposes for which land can be (or, as the case may be, could have been) acquired under section 226 or section 227 of the TCPA 1990. Acquisition under these sections is permitted (whether by compulsion or by agreement) where such acquisition facilitates the carrying out of development, re-development or improvement on or in relation to the land, provided that such development, re-development or improvement is likely to contribute to the achievement of the promotion or improvement of the economic,

social or environmental well-being of the relevant local authority's area.

43 When considering appropriation, the Council needs to have regard to the same issues, and take the same approach, as if they were seeking to promote a compulsory purchase order. The same degree of "requirement" or "necessity" is to apply. Members need to be aware that under the Housing and Planning Act 2006, when easements or other rights are overridden, compensation is payable for the interference with the relevant right. It will be necessary to seek further legal advice at that time.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

44 The Council have made available Westfields building for the purpose of this free school. The Westfields building was fully vacated as of 31st December 2024 and holding costs of £276k per annum will need to be met from council budgets until the DfE progress with the build.

45 The delayed delivery of the free school will have a financial impact on the DSG management plan and consequently a significant impact on the DSG deficit position (detailed below).

46 Within the approved DSG management plan the opening of the free school at Westfields is scheduled for academic year 2027-2028. The savings/cost avoidance related to this key mitigation are:

- (a) Academic year 2027/28 based on occupancy of 46 circa £1.073m.
- (b) Academic year 2028/27 based on occupancy of 92 circa £2.913m.
- (c) Academic year 2029/28 based on occupancy of 140 circa £4.800m.
- (d) 2030/31 thereafter based on occupancy of 140 circa £5.600m.

Cost avoidance calculations are based on the cost avoided of placement within an ISS/NMSS less the cost of funding a placement (place and top up funding) within a CEC special school/academy.

47 In addition to the free school delay, the Government have announced a delay to white paper which sets out its approach to SEND reform. This was due to be released in autumn but is now expected in January 2026. This will impact mitigations within the DSG management plan. At this point in time the impact is unknown.

48 Due to the affordability and available capital resources, it is recommended to pause Springfield satellite (Cledford, Middlewich) and release Vernon/St Gregorys sites. These sites were creating a total of 100 specialist places and have been included in the DSG management plan. The DSG management plan will be amended to reflect this proposal. We intend to mitigate the impact on the DSG management plan and are working on alternative solutions which may include the potential option of housing temporary specialist provision within existing mainstream schools which have spare capacity. Alternative solutions will also support the inclusion agenda and anticipated white paper. This approach will require significantly less capital investment.

49 A stage 0 feasibility was completed on the Westfield proposals in 2023, for a SEN secondary school. The estimated cost was £12 to £15m. In order that the costs are robust, a detailed feasibility will be undertaken to enable the service to work towards a target cost for the 144 place all through school.

50 The delivery of SEN places will ultimately support the Council's ambitions to provide more in borough specialist school placements to support its residents whilst helping the Directorate with its management plan in reducing the overall deficit within its dedicated schools grant budget.

51 Given the current financial constraints of the Council, the intention would be for any future projects to be fully funded by the DfE and/or existing unallocated grant allocations already held by the Council. There is currently no scope within the Capital Financing Budget to afford additional Prudential Borrowing, unless other schemes are deferred, de-scoped or removed from the wider capital programme. The preference would therefore be that the DfE fully fund the scheme (i.e. remain with the project as is) or that funding is allocated from other areas of the programme.

52 However, as there are wider cost implications for the council due to an ongoing lack of SEN places within the borough. The build of the new school is intended to bring significant long-term savings to the council and consequently this is therefore an "invest to save" scheme. As such, if progress with the DfE continues to delay the project it is appropriate to fully review other options to try to meet the delivery target.

53 Appendix 1 details the proposals for funding the self-delivery of the Westfields SEN school, this includes pausing on Springfield satellite (Cledford, Middlewich) and removal of the other satellite school proposals from Children and Families Capital Programme.

- 54 Any costs relating to the running/operation of a Special school (school or academy) is managed within the school's budget. Special schools are funded from the high needs block of the DSG. Funding is provided for both places and pupil top up funding.
- 55 The local authority is also expected to meet the associated capital and pre/post-opening revenue costs if a free school is opened following a free school presumption process, the revenue costs will be funded from the high needs block of the DSG. High Needs Provision Capital Allocation funding is provided by the DfE on an unringfenced basis, so that local authorities can provide the places that they need, including through new presumption schools. If costs increase between the specification being drafted and the school opening, these should be covered by the local authority; the department will not provide any funding.
- 56 The Westfields site is centrally located and will support the reduction in transport time for learners and associated costs. The challenges of long journey times for our most vulnerable learners are a real concern and we know that too many learners are travelling more than two hours to and from school each day which impacts significantly to their emotional wellbeing and to our overall budget pressures.

Human Resources

- 57 There are no direct human resource implications for the council at this stage.

Risk Management

- 58 There is an overall risk that the council does not meet its statutory requirements to best support SEND learners due to a lack of specialist SEND placements.
- 59 Due to capacity constraints within our resource provision, SEND units and special schools, the reliance on placements within non-maintained special schools, independent special schools, and specialist post 16 institutes are growing considerably, creating an unsustainable position and urgent action is needed to manage this situation.
- 60 Force Majeure – the global Covid pandemic has identified that there can be some risks where impact cannot be mitigated against and will inevitably cause some delay, disruption, and any additional costs.
- 61 Once specific schemes are identified, approved to feasibility stage and then beyond, all risks will be monitored as part of the staged

process utilising the agreed Project Management Office (PMO) methodology.

Policy

- 62 Local authorities are under a duty to ensure sufficiency of school places in their area (section 14 of the Education Act 1996).
- 63 The provision of the new school will support the Council in meeting its statutory duty to provide sufficient school places.

| Commitment 1: Unlocking prosperity for all | Commitment 2: Improving health and wellbeing | Commitment 3: An effective and enabling council |
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| <p>1.3 Education, skills and life-long learning leads to employment and roles in the community</p> | <p>2.2 Improved independence, health and wellbeing through early intervention and prevention</p> <p>2.4 Children and young people thrive and reach their potential with targeted support when and where they need it</p> | <p>3.1 Financially sustainable council, enabled by council-wide service transformation and improvement.</p> |

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

- 64 Equality impact assessments (EIAs) are completed informally and formally to determine the varying needs of learners and their families to be able to access schools. Such factors are built into all stages of the progression of a scheme. The EEIA is to be completed once the detail of the schemes is agreed and will be available on the website.

Rural Communities

- 65 The creation of additional places across the borough will potentially bring benefits to rural communities by providing settings within more reasonable travel distances if a local school place cannot be met.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, Care Leavers and Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

- 66 It is essential that the council makes best use of resources to ensure that children and young people receive the services they need, and those services must be provided.

- 67 The Children and Families Together Vision includes a priority around children with additional needs.
- 68 The 0-25 SEND Partnership Strategy sets out the partnership vision for meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND. This strategy has been refreshed to include the delivering better value opportunities and mitigations within the DSG Management Plan.
- 69 Providing sufficient school places for all children and young people resident in our area is a statutory duty.

Public Health

- 70 Any increase in SEND provision will require strategic joint commissioning of specialist health services to ensure resources for such services as physiotherapy and speech language and communication therapy are sufficient to meet increased demand as more localised school places are generated. This will be done through the 0-25 SEND Partnership Board and associated workstreams.
- 71 *By providing local school places and reducing the distances which some children may have to travel to attend school will help to reduce congestion on the roads and therefore reduce emissions, improving the air quality and making a better environment to live in.*
- 72 *Providing sufficient places in their local community could improve a child's social and emotional wellbeing.*

Climate Change

- 73 Providing additional school places will enable Cheshire East children and young people the ability to secure a place at their local school, thus reducing the need to travel outside of the area which will reduce energy consumption.
- 74 Cheshire East Council are very aware of their environmental education and stewardship role and are very interested in promoting sustainability in general.
- 75 Cheshire East Council is committed to being carbon neutral and in future capital build schemes are required to align with this expectation.

76 Consultation

| Name of Consultee | Post held | Date sent | Date returned |
|---------------------------------------|---|-----------|---------------|
| <i>Statutory Officer (or deputy):</i> | | | |
| Chris Benham | Director of Finance and Deputy 151 Officer | 28/11/25 | 19/12/25 |
| Kevin O'Keefe | Interim Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) | 28/11/25 | 09/12/25 |
| <i>Legal and Finance</i> | | | |
| Mandy Withington | Principal Lawyer (Commercial Property and Projects) | 11/11/25 | 13/11/25 |
| Tracy Baldwin | Finance Manager – Strategic Finance and Accounting | 11/11/25 | 13/11/25 |
| Diane Green | Finance Manager – Children's Services | 11/11/25 | 11/11/25 |
| Kathy Oliver | Principal Accountant – Children's Services | 11/11/25 | 13/11/25 |
| <i>Other Consultees:</i> | | | |
| <i>Executive Directors/Directors</i> | | | |
| Peter Skates | Director of Growth and Enterprise - Place | 04/11/25 | 10/11/25 |
| Dawn Godfrey | Executive Director, Children's Services | 19/12/25 | 19/12/25 |

| Access to Information | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Contact Officer: | <p>Iain Peel Iain.peel@cheshireeast.gov.uk</p> <p>Helen Wallace Helen.wallace@cheshireeast.gov.uk</p> <p>Joanne Prophet Joanne.prophet@cheshireeast.gov.uk</p> |
| Appendices: | <p>Appendix 1 – Capital Funding Proposal.</p> <p>Appendix 2 - Impact of Inclusive Practice on the High Needs Block of Dedicated Schools Grant.</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Chronology of process and decision making</p> |
| Background Papers: | <p>1. Children and Families Committee 11 November 2024 https://moderngov.cheshireeast.gov.uk/ecminutes/documents/s120882/Springfield%20School%20Expansion%20Report.pdf</p> <p>2. MTFS 2025-2029 https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/council-and-democracy/budget-report/appendix-a-mtfs-2025-2029-final.pdf</p> <p>3. DfE guidance on establishing new schools through the free school presumption route https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/663dfcab993111924d9d324a/Free_school_presumption_guidance.pdf</p> |

Appendix 1

Capital Funding to support the proposal to self-deliver and fund the proposed Special Free School at Westfields site, Sandbach.

Within the MTFS 2025 – 2029 the following funding lines have been detailed: -

| Scheme Description in MTFS | Budget to be vired to fund Special Free School at Westfields site, Sandbach | Funding Type |
|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| New Satellite school - 2 | £8,950,000.00 | High Needs Provision Capital Fund |
| New SEN Free School | £990,000.00 | High Needs Provision Capital Fund |
| Springfield Satellite Site - Middlewich | £5,700,000.00 | High Needs Provision Capital Fund |
| Unallocated High Needs Capital | £360,000.00 | High Needs Provision Capital Fund |
| Available funds | £16,000,000.00 | |

It is proposed that this funding will be reallocated to fund the Westfields proposal. Any future section 106 developer contributions for SEN places will be attributed to the scheme and will be used replenish the High Needs Provision funding.

Children and Families committee are requested to approve this funding proposal and request Finance sub-committee to approve the virement of the funds within MTFS.

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Appendix 2**Impact of Inclusive Practice on the High Needs Block of Dedicated Schools Grant**

- Embedding inclusive practice in mainstream schools improves outcomes for children and young people with SEND and makes the High Needs Block more financially sustainable.
- When schools are more inclusive, more pupils can have their needs met locally, reducing reliance on costly specialist or independent placements. For example, avoiding ten independent specialist placements could save **£400,000–£500,000 a year.**
- Investing in early intervention, workforce development and targeted support helps manage the growth of EHCPs by meeting needs before formal assessment is required.
- Developing local, inclusive capacity can typically save **50–70% per pupil** compared to external specialist placements and also reduces transport costs.
- Over time, these savings offset the initial investment, creating a more sustainable financial model.
- Initial modelling based on current average spend on high-cost placements compared to access to local inclusive provision indicates that improvements could save between **£1 million and £4million** annually.
- Beyond financial benefits, inclusion supports better learning, emotional wellbeing, and smoother transitions, creating a fairer and more resilient SEND system for all learners.
- In Cheshire East, indicative average annual costs for an EHCP by setting type are:

| Setting type | Approximate average cost per year |
|---|--|
| Mainstream | £7,593 |
| Special school | £25,000 |
| Independent specialist provision | Over £60,000 |

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Appendix 3

1. Westfields decision making process

March 2023 - DfE confirmed that we had been successful in bidding for two new free special schools which would provide two x 60 places 'all through' schools. Both schools would be funded and delivered by the DfE. 2 sites were Cledford House and Giantswood at Congleton. The Giants wood site is a local Plan site, subject to a s106 agreement but not transferred to CEC, the proposal was that a new Primary school and SEN school would share the site.

Autumn 2023 - At the pre-engagement event potential sponsors advised that due to capacities and all through age range, these new SEND schools would not be viable. Also, the DfE raised concerns over the Giantswood site this included ownership, varying site levels and shared site with a mainstream primary setting. At this stage we commenced with looking for other options.

30 November 2023, Corporate Policy committee approved the recommendation to progress with the closure of Westfields but retain Macclesfield Town Hall and Delamere House. This decision was made to enable the reduction in the number of operational offices but maintain the office space needed to support the workforce.

January 2024 - A HLBC to repurpose Westfields as a SEN school was approved by CLT.

The HLBC evidenced that once the new school was full, at 120 places, there would be an estimated saving of £4.56m per year against the DSG management plan. Whereupon selling the building would generate a one-off capital receipt of between £3.3m and £4.95m (info from Jan 2024). The reuse of the site provides a long-term financial benefit.

March 2024, a revised bid was submitted and agreed by the DfE to change the 2 x 60 place SEN schools to one new SEND free school offering 120 secondary age places located at Westfield site. This would be funded and delivered by the DfE.

29 April 2024 – Children and Families Committee supported the proposal that Westfields is used as a SEN Free School to then enable the proposal to be presented at Economy and Growth Committee in June

3 June 2024 - Children and Families Committee agreed £1m of the High Needs Capital Grant funding could be vired to facilities, to support the transfer out of Westfields.

4 June 2024 - Economy and Growth Committee approved and supported the principle that Westfields be developed as a new SEND free school.

31 December 2024 - Westfields building was fully vacated.

2. Rational for using Westfields

We have worked closely with colleagues in Assets to identify alternative sites, and in terms of space, location and ownership, Westfields is the only viable site to enable the delivery of this number on places from 1 location and within the timescales required. The size of the school at 144 places will also make it financially viable to operate.

Site is in the ownership of CEC.

Based on initial feasibility the building will be refurbished and remodelled, there will not be a requirement to extend and there is sufficient space for external areas and car parking. We

are looking to develop the scheme to offer 144 places, this is based on a 12 pupils per year group with the same class size.

The scheme would support our children, families and communities across the borough in terms of providing additional SEN places for our most vulnerable pupils.

The scheme would provide additional jobs and support the local economy. For a school this size we would anticipate 100 + staff, plus visiting specialist staff and medical support teams.

Centrally located within the borough – this will support the reduction in travel time for learners and the associated transport costs.

The economic and financial case for the Westfield option is centred on reducing the existing pressure on the DSG and also revenue budget in terms of transport costs.

On average it currently costs the Council £64,000 is the average per pupil cost, for a SEND placement, per annum, at an independent special school (ISS) against an average per pupil cost of £25,000 at a Cheshire East Special School. This equates to a per placement/pupil cost benefit of £39,000 per annum plus an additional sum for transport (transport savings are difficult to quantify given each pupil's journey is different but this is also expected to be a considerable saving).

Assessing the benefits over 10 yr period, based on a fully occupied school of 144 places, then the proposal for the SEND School option would save the Council circa £56.160m.

$64,000 - 25,000 = £39,000$

$39,000 \times 144 = £5,616,000$

$5,616,000 \times 10 = £56,160,000$

Key Risks

Costs – Instruction to progress to RIBA stage 4 needs to be issued to Property and Assets Team as soon as approvals from committee is achieved. A detailed brief to be developed and the client/property team to work closely with the design team to achieve the budget of £16m.

Achieving approval for planning and any statutory processes – Start early engagement with planning to ensure that the planning application is robust

Appointment and approval of a sponsor – The Free school presumption process needs to commence as soon as approvals from committee is achieved.

Opening for September 2028/January 2029 – A realistic and detailed programme needs to be drawn up to assess viability of this and will need input from planning colleagues

1. Safety Valve Capital Funding/High Needs Provision Capital

Jan 2024 Cheshire East submitted its application for **Safety Valve Capital Funding**

May 2024 – Notified that the total approved funding was £16,574,250, this included: -

- 2 x 60 place primary special schools (satellite of an existing specialist school) – Cledford House (budget allocated £6,000,000) and reuse of the former Vernon Infant site or St Gregory's (budget allocated £9,000,000)
- 1 x 20 place expansion of Springfield, Wilmslow – Scheme due on site early 2026 (estimated £1,000,000)
- 1 x 14 place new SEN unit (Leighton Primary) - Unit is now operational and capacity is 20 pupils (cost £210,000)

3 June 2024 - Children and Families Committee agreed the inclusion of the above schemes in the Children and Families Capital Programme.

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OPEN**Children and Families Committee****19 January 2026****National House Project****Report of: Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director, Children's Services****Report Reference No: CF/47/25-26****Ward(s) Affected: All****For Decision****Purpose of Report**

- 1 The National House Project (NHP) is a targeted initiative aimed at providing stable, supportive, and long-term housing solutions for vulnerable children and young people, particularly those transitioning out of care.
- 2 This report outlines the project's purpose, intended outcomes, and business case for Cheshire East implementing a Local House Project as part of its leaving care offer.
- 3 It seeks approval for a total investment of £351,827 to be invested in the on-going base budget. This is on the basis that downstream **net** savings of between £95,270 and £294,472 (increasing to **£168,935** and **£368,637 from cohort 2**) can be achieved per annum per cohort, whilst also offering improved outcomes to our cared for children and care leavers.

Executive Summary

- 4 Cheshire East currently faces significant challenges in supporting care leavers, including limited housing options, long waiting times, and high costs for supported accommodation. The transition from care to independent living is often marked by instability, social isolation, and poor outcomes in education, employment, and health. The Local House Project (LHP) seeks to address these issues by providing a structured, community-based approach that equips young people with the skills, confidence, and support networks they need to thrive.

- 5 Appendix One / 1 is a full business case approved at Transformation Board on 26 November 2025 for the implementation of the NHP to be delivered locally in Cheshire East. The business case outlines the benefits both financial and non-financial of delivering this programme as one part of a wider Care Leaver accommodation offer for Cheshire East.
- 6 The project will be delivered through a dedicated team, working in partnership with local housing providers and care leaver ambassadors. A cross-departmental steering group will oversee implementation, ensuring alignment with the Council's improvement plan and wider strategic objectives. Appendix Two / 2 is a full offer pack from the NHP outlining the model and programme.
- 7 The proposed timeline includes establishing governance in February 2026, engaging housing providers, recruiting and training staff, and transitioning the first cohort of young people into their own homes from January 2027 onwards.
- 8 By investing in the Local House Project, Cheshire East can deliver a more effective, sustainable, and person-centred approach to supporting care leavers, achieving both immediate and long-term benefits for young people and the wider community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the implementation of the NHP to provide structured support for care leavers in Cheshire East.
2. Approve the investment to pump prime the costs of the first cohort and ensure projects sustainability at a cost of £351,827.
3. Take note of the proposed governance and oversight to ensure delivery and sustainability.

Background

- 9 The NHP is an initiative that supports young people leaving care and aims to ensure that they live connected and fulfilled lives. Working in partnership with Local Authorities to establish Local House Projects (LHP) it sees young people transitioning into their own homes successfully and in a planned and joined up way.
- 10 As of October 2025, Cheshire East has **520** cared for children. In the current year to date, **137** young people have left care, with the largest proportion (40% or 55) exiting due to them reaching the age of 18.

- 11 In the last 12 months, 34 Care Leavers have been rehoused with an average waiting time of seven months, but some have waited only two months, and this is dependent on where someone wishes to live and their accommodation choices.
- 12 Transitioning from the care system to independent living in Cheshire East presents numerous challenges for young people, often leading to adverse outcomes around housing instability, mental health challenges, education and employment barriers, financial instability, social isolation and low life satisfaction. Further detail can be found in the Full Business Case (Appendix 1).
- 13 Our Inspecting Local Authorities Children's Services (ILACS) inspection found that.
 - (a) Transition planning into adulthood for most care leavers is variable and not always robust.
 - (b) Some care leavers are homeless or in unsuitable accommodation, and that sufficiency of suitable placements is a challenge.
 - (c) Many care leavers are not accessing employment, further education, or training, and are ill-prepared for adulthood.
 - (d) Not all care leavers have meaningful relationships with their personal advisers, and that pathway plans do not always capture young people's voices or ambitions.
 - (e) Ofsted identified the lack of a dedicated safe space for care leavers to access support.
 - (f) Risk of harm is not always recognised or responded to effectively for care leavers, especially those over 21.
- 14 Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive support systems, including stable housing options, accessible mental health services, educational and employment guidance, financial literacy programmes, and robust social networks to ensure care leavers can successfully transition to independent living.
- 15 The NHP helps young people develop a range of essential skills to support their transition to independent living. These skills include:
 - (a) **Employment Skills:** guidance on job searching, to help young people secure employment
 - (b) **Educational Support:** support for continuing education
 - (c) **Practical Skills:** young people learn how to manage a household

- (d) **Emotional Skills:** helping young people build confidence, self-esteem, and the ability to cope with challenges
- (e) **Social Skills:** strong communication and relationship-building skills are developed

16 These skills are taught through a combination of workshops, mentoring, and hands-on experiences, ensuring that young people are well-prepared for independent living. Delivered by a dedicated team of professionals and giving Care Leavers access to a safe space during and after the programme.

Timeline and Milestones

17 It is proposed that a House Project cross-organisational Steering Group be established during the initial stages of the project implementation led by an appointed Strategic Lead and an appropriate operational/commissioning lead to oversee the delivery of the implementation plan (see appendix 1), ensure risks are appropriately managed and benefits are realised.

18 Should the project be mandated then the below are the proposed milestones for project delivery

- (a) Project Governance established – February 2026
- (b) Housing Provider engagement – February 2026
- (c) Recruitment of core staff – February - May 2026
- (d) Training core staff – May – July 2026
- (e) Recruit first cohort of Young People – May - August 2026
- (f) Identify Housing Options – October 2026 – February 2027
- (g) Young people transition into first homes – January 2027 – onwards

Consultation and Engagement

19 It is proposed that engagement and consultation takes place during the next stage of set up. The project will seek to engage with a group of Care Leavers, through the Care Leaver Ambassadors to determine how LHP can form a part of our offer to Care Leavers in Cheshire East. This group/individual will, alongside Senior Leaders undertake engagement with NHP to initiate membership. As part of the NHP approach, engagement and consultation with children in care and care leavers is central. They state the decision to proceed with a LHP must be informed by the views of young people.

20 Furthermore, for any young person who may subsequently join the programme extensive engagement will take place to ensure the appropriateness and success for that young person with the programme.

21 Engagement will also be required with the Housing Sector to ensure that early in projects delivery there is work undertaken to secure homes for young people. Cheshire East housing team are engaged through various work streams relating to accommodation for Children in Care and Care Leavers to ensure that this is actioned. The NHP attended a joint meeting with housing colleagues and our housing sector in late 2024 to give an overview of the project, this was well received by our social housing sector. It is proposed to re-engage this forum again in February when they next meet.

Reasons for Recommendations

22 The proposed project is fully aligned with Cheshire East's improvement journey and the ILAC improvement plan, directly addressing key priorities identified by Ofsted and local strategic objectives. By implementing this project, the Council will fill a critical gap in housing and support for care leavers, ensuring that vulnerable young people have access to safe, sustainable accommodation and the wraparound support they need to thrive as they transition to adulthood.

23 This initiative also supports national policy aims to reduce youth homelessness and improve outcomes for care leavers, while delivering cost-effective and sustainable social care solutions for the Local Authority. Importantly, the LHP will expand the range of choices available to young people leaving care, complementing ongoing work to commission supported accommodation for 18-to-25-year-olds and strengthening Cheshire East's overall offer to care-experienced young people.

Other Options Considered

| Option | Impact | Risk |
|--|--|--|
| Implement a LHP as part of a broader offer for Care Experienced young people | <p>Young people experience a varied offer from Cheshire East. A cohort of young people will benefit from the Hour Project Programme and move into their own home following completion.</p> <p>Improves accommodation and support offer to Care Experienced young people and Care Leavers following ILACs. Currently spending circa £99k per week on post 18-year-olds, this work complements the 16-</p> | <p>Investment The cost of establishing a LHP required pump prime investment for year one and two until years 2-3 when savings will start to be realised. We are currently also spending £99k per week on post-18 provision. There will need to be careful oversight of a benefits realisation plan to ensure the project is sustainable.</p> <p>Availability of Housing Stock Securing enough appropriate housing for care leavers is a key risk, as limited availability could delay young people's transition to independent living. The project team will work proactively with local housing</p> |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | <p>25 accommodation with support offer.</p> <p>Financial benefits are demonstrated in paragraph 27 to 29 and present a potential saving to the Placement Budget. Circa £169k to £368k from cohort 2.</p> <p>Broader benefits articulated in the report around the associated costs of homelessness, education and training and social inactivity.</p> | <p>providers to review current housing opportunities and establish a pipeline of suitable homes in line with the Housing policies. Early engagement and ongoing collaboration with housing partners will help ensure that accommodation needs are met in line with project milestones.</p> <p>Governance Cross organisational working will be key to delivery. A cross organisational steering group will be required to ensure the project's success and include housing, care leavers, adult-social care and commissioning.</p> <p>Capacity Cross organisational support will be required from Strategic Housing to ensure projects success with housing providers. Capacity should be identified to support the steering group.</p> <p>Recruitment There is a risk that the project may face challenges in recruiting and retaining the skilled staff required to deliver the National House Project. Delays or gaps in staffing could impact the project's ability to launch on time and provide consistent support to care leavers.</p> |
| Do nothing and do not implement NHP to enhance the offer to Care Leavers in CE. | | <p>There will continue to be a limited offer to Care Leavers in Cheshire East, with now more than 70 post-18 years in paid for Supported Accommodation beds the placement budget will continue to be a challenge.</p> <p>The outcomes associated with implementing LHPs will not be achieved.</p> |

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance

24 Section 22(3) of the Children Act 1989 establishes the general duty of the Local Authority who looks after a child to safeguard and promote the child's welfare. This duty underpins all Local Authority activity involving looked after children and extends to care leavers. The report outlines a project which could have advantages to the Council in terms of savings as outlined in paras 27 to 36 in the costs of discharging its duty to Care Leavers. With reference to dealings with NHP; the pack appended at Appendix 2 indicates that a membership agreement is to be entered into:

25 Once a decision is made to proceed a membership agreement will be signed. This outlines the obligations on both parties and the NHP provides

direct support and guidance and shares the tools and resources to establish a LHP (see offer document). NHP support the LA to recruit skilled staff and provide training related to the psychologically informed practice, the impact of trauma, social pedagogy, the ORCHIDS framework, and the House Project Programme.

26 This aspect needs to be considered with the procurement team and further advice sought from Legal to consider whether there are any issues posed to entering into such an agreement in terms of the Council's contract procedure rules and whether a WARN will be required to allow the membership to be proceeded with. It is thought at this stage that if the services to be delivered via the NHP can be considered to fall within the scope of the "light touch" provisions of the Procurement Act this would facilitate entry into the membership agreement on the basis of the making of a direct award.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

27 Implementing a LHP involves establishing a dedicated, permanent core delivery team within the Local Authority. This team typically consists of one full-time Project Lead (Grade 11) and two full-time Facilitators (Grade 7).

28 The NHP has estimated that key contributing elements will result in a first-year cost of approximately £308,148. This is projected to reduce to £277,662 in the second and third years. Then slightly lower again in year 4 due to the reduction in NHP membership fees. This is the minimum cost to run an LHP. The cost of Ofsted registration is at £3,600.

| Project Costs | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Project Manager (Grade 11 1.00 FTE) | £ 73,665 | | | |
| Project Lead (Grade 11 1.00 FTE) | £ 73,665 | £ 73,665 | £ 73,665 | £ 73,665 |
| Facilitators (Grade 7 2.00 FTE) | £ 92,318 | £ 92,318 | £ 92,318 | £ 92,318 |
| Expenses | £ 3,000 | £ 2,500 | £ 2,500 | £ 2,500 |
| Activities linked to NHP | £ 5,000 | £ 5,000 | £ 5,000 | £ 5,000 |
| NHP Membership Fee | £ 35,000 | £ 35,000 | £ 35,000 | £ 25,000 |
| Psychology Support | £ 11,900 | £ 11,900 | £ 11,900 | £ 11,900 |
| Ofsted | £ 3,600 | £ 3,600 | £ 3,600 | £ 3,600 |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Living Allowance | £ - | £ 15,000 | £ 15,000 | £ 15,000 |
| Housing Provider Costs | £ - | £ 28,679 | £ 28,679 | £ 28,679 |
| Project Specific Office Costs | £ 10,000 | £ 10,000 | £ 10,000 | £ 10,000 |
| | | | | |
| Total Project Costs Per Annum | £ 308,148 | £ 277,662 | £ 277,662 | £ 267,662 |

29 Each year, the team would recruit a cohort of 10 to 12 young people, offering them a structured pathway to independent living.

This table provides the yearly split of benefits and cost.

| Financial Summary | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Total |
|----------------------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| Total Financial Benefits (Gross) | (£ 0) | (£ 646,299) | (£ 646,299) | (£ 646,299) | (£ 646,299) | (£ 646,299) | (£ 3,231,495) |
| Total Cost of Change | £ 308,148 | £ 277,662 | £ 277,662 | £ 267,662 | £ 267,662 | 43,679 | £ 1,442,475 |
| Net Savings | £ 308,148 | (£ 368,637) | (£ 368,637) | (£ 378,637) | (£ 378,637) | (£ 602,620) | (£ 1,789,020) |

This table provides the cohort split of benefits and cost.

| Financial Summary | Cohort 1 (18 months programme, 6 months savings) | Cohort 2 (12 months programme, 6 months savings) | Cohort 3 (12 months programme, 6 months savings) | Cohort 4 (12 months programme, 6 months savings) | Cohort 5 (12 months programme, 6 months savings) | Total |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------|
| Total Financial Benefits (Gross) | (£ 646,299) | (£ 646,299) | (£ 646,299) | (£ 646,299) | (£ 646,299) | (£ 3,231,495) |
| Total Cost | £ 351,827 | £ 277,662 | £ 277,662 | £ 267,662 | £ 267,662 | £ 1,442,475 |
| Net Savings position | (£ 294,472) | (£ 368,637) | (£ 368,637) | (£ 378,637) | (£ 378,637) | (£ 1,789,020) |
| Payback | 22 months | 16 months | 16 months | 16 months | 16 months | |
| £ spent, received back | £ 1.84 | £ 2.33 | £ 2.33 | £ 2.41 | £ 2.41 | |

30 In Summary, the total costs and benefits approaches are set out in the tables above.

31 The project is expected to deliver £3.231m savings against costs of £1.442m leading to a net position of £1.789m over the 5 years and 5 cohorts.

32 The proposal provided in the report offers a saving to the revenue budget, however this level of saving is subject to:-

- (a) the combination of the 10 young people current placement costs which are represented in the two scenarios.
- (b) an assumed 100% occupancy, for six months of 10 young people, which may not be achieved. If this is reduced to 80%, 8 young people, the savings offered reduce to £5,851 for scenario A and £165,2132 for scenario B.

| | 10 Cohort Achieved Movement at Month 18 | | | 20% Cost Avoidance Unachievable | | |
|--|---|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| | Payback in 2 Years | Payback Period Months | Est Saving at 24 Months | Payback in 2 Years | Payback Period Months | Est Saving at 24 Months |
| National Housing Project - Payback Period/Anticipated Saving | | | | | | |
| Scenario A | YES | 23 | -£95,270 | YES | 22 | -£5,851 |
| Scenario B | YES | 22 | -£294,472 | YES | 21 | -£165,213 |

- (c) the level of staffing pay costs in the cohort 1 costs assumes a full year salary costs. It is recommended that these 3 fte are recruited on a permanent Cheshire East contract to reduce the risk of staff leaving due to temporary positions. There is a risk that staffing requirements may change once the programme is established, as it is assumed that 3 fte are geared to supporting 10 young people.
- (d) the modelling assumes that there is no effect of inflation on costs and cost avoidance. Pay increases will be covered in the pay and pensions line of the MTFS. Other inflation costs are difficult to predict and therefore none have been assumed, should we see inflation impact this will also impact on the savings (cost avoidance) achieved as a balance.
- (e) the model assumes that new cohorts will take place in future years as a rolling programme and staff will be able to continue to support earlier year cohorts as they transition if required. A longer lead in time of 18 months has been planned for the first cohort before moving into their own accommodation. As the programme will be more established in year 2 the second cohort will transition in 12 months.

33 The budget saving suggested in the report is not included within the current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) but is a new initiative connected to the 26T MTFS saving “New Accommodation with support for 16-25 Young People”

34 The request is for forward investment to support the project of £351,827 until savings start to be realised from the first cohort. The existing budget would then be able to support the ongoing programme.

35 Scenario A has a payback of 23 months for the first cohort (reducing to 17 months for the second cohort) and a return on investment of 27% (increasing to 61% for cohort 2). Scenario B has a payback of 22 months

for the first cohort (reducing to 15 months for the second cohort) and a return on investment of 84% (increasing to 133% for cohort 2).

36 The programme is expected to commence in 2026/27 with savings being achieved in the second year, 2027/28. Full year savings will be achieved in the third year, 2028/29.

Human Resources

37 The human resource implications are set out in the report and show the dedicated staff and associated costs outlined with establishing a LHP. It is proposed that recruitment to roles is permanent to attract the right candidates. A small amount of funding has been requested to ensure advertising of roles is optimised, to mitigate failed recruitment and also to highlight the positivity of this programme for Cheshire East as a recruiter.

Risk Management

38 Care Leavers are a vulnerable group that are at risk from factors including access to training and employment, health, secure accommodation and transition into adulthood.

Impact on other Committees

39 This project sees young people transition into their own tenancies at the end of the delivered work programme. Ongoing work to ensure Registered Providers are engaged will ensure that there is suitable properties for young people in suitable communities across Cheshire East.

Policy

40 This work will fall under commitment 2: Improving health and wellbeing in the Cheshire East Plan and particularly support the further commitment “Children and young people thrive and reach their potential with targeted support when and where they need it”.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

41 All public sector authorities are bound by the Public Sector Equality Duty as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) will be completed as part of service development. This proposal is not expected to discriminate or have negative impacts on people with protected characteristics. Some of those people affected will have learning disabilities or mental health needs and many will have additional needs, disabilities and/or other protected characteristics. An EIA has been completed to understand the impact.

Other Implications

- 42 There is a direct, lasting and significant impact for Cared for Children and Care Leavers with the establishment of a LHP. Good stable homes are central to our ambition for our cared experienced young people ensuring that they can thrive and live happy, independent lives.
- 43 Care Leavers are at risk of poor health particularly mental health and general wellbeing. A LHP focused specifically on health and wellbeing as a core part of the programme. The programme is a Psychologically informed approach to working with this cohort, with access to psychological support.
- 44 The project aims to ensure that young people get the right, help and the right time ensuring that young people are independent, financially aware and stable, and is good accommodation that is well maintained. These should all impact on reduced energy consumption.

Consultation

| Name of Consultee | Post held | Date sent | Date returned |
|---------------------------------------|---|------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Statutory Officer (or deputy):</i> | | | |
| Chris Benham | Director of Finance and Deputy S151 Officer | 15/12/25 | 22/12/25 |
| Kevin O'Keefe | Interim Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) | 15/12/25 | 19/12/25 |
| <i>Legal and Finance</i> | | | |
| Hilary Irving / Jennie Summers | Acting Head of Legal Services | 08/12/25 | 15/12/25 |
| Diane Green | Finance Manager | 08/12/25 | 16/12/25 |
| <i>Other Consultees:</i> | | | |

| <i>Directors</i> | | | |
|------------------|---|----------|----------|
| Dawn Godfrey | Executive Director, Children's Services | 15/12/25 | 19/12/25 |

| Access to Information | |
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| Appendices: | Appendix 1 - Full Business Case Appendix 2 – NHP Full Offer Pack |
| Background Papers: | N/A |



National House Project

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1. Executive Summary

The National House Project (NHP) is a targeted initiative designed to provide stable, supportive, and long-term housing solutions for vulnerable children and young people, particularly those transitioning out of care.

This business case proposes the implementation of a Local House Project (LHP) in Cheshire East, seeking approval for a total investment of **£351,827** that will become part of the on-going base budget. The project aims to deliver both significant financial net savings—estimated at between £95,270 and £294,472 (increasing to **£168,935** and **£368,637 from cohort 2**) per annum per cohort—and improved outcomes for cared for children and care leavers.

Cheshire East currently faces significant challenges in supporting care leavers, including limited housing options, long waiting times, and high costs for supported accommodation. The transition from care to independent living is often marked by instability, social isolation, and poor outcomes in education, employment, and health. The LHP seeks to address these issues by providing a structured, community-based approach that equips young people with the skills, confidence, and support networks they need to thrive.

The proposed project is fully aligned with Cheshire East's improvement journey and the ILAC improvement plan, directly addressing key priorities identified by Ofsted and local strategic objectives. By implementing this project, the Council will fill a critical gap in housing and support for care leavers, ensuring that vulnerable young people have access to safe, sustainable accommodation and the wraparound support they need to thrive as they transition to adulthood.

This initiative also supports national policy aims to reduce youth homelessness and improve outcomes for care leavers, while delivering cost-effective and sustainable social care solutions for the local authority. Importantly, the Local House Project will expand the range of choices available to young people leaving care, complementing ongoing work to commission supported housing for 18- to 25-year-olds and strengthening Cheshire East's overall offer to care-experienced young people.

The project will be delivered through a dedicated team, working in partnership with local housing providers and care leaver ambassadors. A cross-departmental steering group will oversee implementation, ensuring alignment with the council's improvement plan and wider strategic objectives.

The proposed timeline includes establishing governance in January 2026, engaging housing providers, recruiting and training staff, and transitioning the first cohort of young people into their own homes from January 2027 onwards.

By investing in the Local House Project, Cheshire East can deliver a more effective, sustainable, and person-centred approach to supporting care leavers, achieving both immediate and long-term benefits for young people and the wider community.

2. Rationale

The National House Project (NHP) is an initiative that supports young people leaving care and aims to ensure that they live connected and fulfilled lives. Working in partnership with Local Authorities to establish Local House Projects (LHP) it sees young people transitioning into their own homes successfully and in a planned and joined up way.

As of October 2025, Cheshire East has **520** cared for children. In the current year to date, **137** young people have left care, with the largest proportion (40% or 55) exiting due to them reaching the age of 18.

In the last 12 months 34 Care Leavers have been rehoused with an average waiting time of 7-months, but some have waited only 2-months, and this is dependent on where someone wishes to live and their accommodation choices. Transitioning from the care system to independent living in Cheshire East presents numerous challenges for young people, often leading to adverse outcomes.

Housing Instability - Approximately one in three care leavers in England and Wales experience homelessness within the first two years of leaving care. Discrimination in the private rental sector exacerbates this issue, with landlords often unwilling to rent to individuals with a care background.

Mental Health Challenges – Care experienced young people are four times more likely to face mental health difficulties compared to their peers. Factors such as past trauma and the absence of a support network contribute to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and loneliness.¹ Placing increased demand on Council and Health services into adulthood.

Educational and Employment Barriers - Care leavers often struggle with lower educational attainment, limiting employment opportunities. Financial constraints and lack of guidance hinder access to higher education, resulting in many securing low-paying jobs without prospects for advancement.²

Financial Instability - Nearly a fifth of care leavers find it challenging to cope financially, compared to just 7% of their peers. Limited experience in managing finances increases the risk of debt and poverty³.

Premature Transition - Over a third of care leavers feel they left the care system too early, often without adequate preparation. Delayed assignment of personal advisors and lack of awareness about available support contribute to feelings of unpreparedness.⁴

¹ National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) – Challenges Facing Care Leavers
<https://www.nyas.net/about-us/news/challenges-facing-care-leavers/>

² National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) – Challenges Facing Care Leavers
<https://www.nyas.net/about-us/news/challenges-facing-care-leavers/>

³ Coram Voice – Life Satisfaction of Care Leavers
<https://coramvoice.org.uk/news/young-people-leaving-care-are-seven-times-more-likely-to-have-low-life-satisfaction-than-their-peers/>

⁴ UK Government – Care Leavers Feeling Unprepared
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/care-leavers-feel-they-left-care-too-early-ofsted-finds>

Social Isolation - Approximately 19% of care leavers report frequent loneliness, a rate higher than their non-care-experienced peers. The absence of family connections and difficulty in building new relationships contribute to this isolation.⁵

Low Life Satisfaction - Nearly one in four (23%) care leavers aged 16-25 report low life satisfaction, compared to just 3% of their peers. This disparity highlights the profound impact of the challenges faced during the transition from care.⁶

Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive support systems, including stable housing options, accessible mental health services, educational and employment guidance, financial literacy programmes, and robust social networks to ensure care leavers can successfully transition to independent living.

Value of implementing the National House Project in Cheshire East

Improving Transition Planning and Support- Ofsted found that transition planning into adulthood for most care leavers is variable and not always robust, with some young people leaving care with uncertainty about their support. The NHP's structured programme, which includes early engagement, life skills development, and ongoing support, would provide a clear, planned pathway into independence—addressing the lack of proactive transition planning and ensuring care leavers are better prepared for adulthood.

Reducing Homelessness and Housing Instability- The report highlights that some care leavers are homeless or in unsuitable accommodation, and that sufficiency of suitable placements is a challenge. The NHP's focus on securing safe, sustainable housing and supporting young people into their own tenancies would directly reduce homelessness and provide the stability that Ofsted identified as lacking for some care leavers.

Enhancing Life Skills and Employment/Education Outcomes- Ofsted noted at our last inspection that many care leavers are not accessing employment, further education, or training, and are ill-prepared for adulthood. The NHP's emphasis on equipping young people with practical, social, and employment skills would help address these gaps, supporting care leavers to achieve better educational and employment outcomes.

Strengthening Relationships and Support Networks- The report found that not all care leavers have meaningful relationships with their personal advisers, and that pathway plans do not always capture young people's voices or ambitions. The NHP's community-based, peer-support approach would foster stronger relationships, provide ongoing mentoring, and ensure that care leavers' voices are central to their plans.

⁵ Coram Voice – Life Satisfaction of Care Leavers

<https://coramvoice.org.uk/news/young-people-leaving-care-are-seven-times-more-likely-to-have-low-life-satisfaction-than-their-peers/>

⁶ Coram Voice – Life Satisfaction of Care Leavers

<https://coramvoice.org.uk/news/young-people-leaving-care-are-seven-times-more-likely-to-have-low-life-satisfaction-than-their-peers/>

Providing a Dedicated Safe Space and Ongoing Engagement- Ofsted identified the lack of a dedicated safe space for care leavers to access support. The NHP model, with its regular group meetings and ongoing engagement, would fill this gap—offering a consistent, supportive environment where care leavers can access help, build community, and develop resilience.

Addressing Risks and Vulnerabilities- The inspection found that risk of harm is not always recognised or responded to effectively for care leavers, especially those over 21. The NHP's structured support, regular contact, and focus on emotional wellbeing would help ensure that risks are identified and managed, and that vulnerable young people do not fall through the gaps.

The project emphasises a community approach, where young people work together to create homes they can live in for as long as they choose. This peer support system helps them build strong relationships and provides a stable foundation for their future. Overall, the Project would provide the right support for children in Cheshire East in line with our direction of travel.

3. Business Options

| No | Option | Summary description |
|----|---|--|
| 1 | Do not implement the National House Project | No changes to the approach to support care leavers and to retain the existing models in place across Cheshire East |
| 2 | Adopt the National House Project across Cheshire East | Implement a local Cheshire East model for the National House Project |

Option 1 – Do not implement the National House Project

Choosing to do nothing would mean continuing with the current arrangements for care leavers in Cheshire East, relying on existing housing pathways and support mechanisms. While this approach avoids the need for upfront investment and organisational change, it fails to address the significant challenges faced by young people transitioning out of care.

The current system is characterised by limited housing options, long waiting times for suitable accommodation, and a lack of coordinated support to develop the life skills necessary for independent living. As a result, care leavers remain at heightened risk of homelessness, social isolation, poor mental health, and financial instability.

Maintaining the status quo does not align with the council's improvement plan or wider strategic objectives. The improvement plan specifically calls for enhanced outcomes for care leavers, including improved access to stable housing, better support for wellbeing, and increased opportunities for education and employment. By not implementing a Local House Project, the council would miss the opportunity to deliver a more holistic, preventative, and cost-effective solution that has been shown to improve outcomes in other local authorities.

Furthermore, the “do nothing” option would perpetuate high ongoing costs for supported accommodation and fail to realise the potential financial savings and cost avoidance identified in the business case. In summary, this option does not support the council’s ambition to provide the best possible start for care leavers and does not contribute to the delivery of its corporate priorities or statutory responsibilities.

Option 2- Adopt the National House Project across Cheshire East

The NHP model has demonstrated success nationally, supporting over 500 young people into their own tenancies since 2015. Peer evaluation in 2023 highlighted positive impacts on mental health and wellbeing, with 78% of participants reporting improvements, and 91% stating that the project was crucial to their sense of community and personal responsibility. The LHP will add choice to Cheshire East’s care leaver offer, helping to reduce homelessness, promote sustainable independent living, and develop broader life skills such as employment readiness and wellbeing.

4. Expected Benefits

The following benefits have been identified as part of the NHP project for delivery in Cheshire East. This includes a range of financial and non-financial benefits for the Project.

| Benefit | Measure | Baseline 24/25 | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Total |
|---|---|----------------|------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|------------|
| Financial Benefits | Savings per annum | Not Applicable | - £308,148 | £368,637 | £368,637 | £378,637 | £378,637 | £602,620 | £1,789,020 |
| Improved Education, Employment and Training engagement | % of young people engaged in EET | 13% in 2023 | 13% | 15% | 15% | 16% | 19% | 19% | 19% |
| Independent Living Skills and reduced homelessness risk | % successfully maintaining tenancy post service | Not Applicable | N/A | 70% | 75% | 75% | 75% | 75% | 75% |
| Improved Wellbeing of Children in Care and Care Leavers | % registered with GP, dentist Access to mental health support Self-reported wellbeing improvement | Not Applicable | N/A | 65% | 65% | 65% | 70% | 70% | 70% |

Calculating Financial Benefits on Cohorts of children in NHP

Potential savings will vary depending on the young person's initial placement type. The figures below illustrate the savings that could be achieved within the placements budget by transitioning young people into LHP properties six months after their 17th birthday, which aligns with month 18 of the project timeline.

Two projections of financial benefits have been calculated and Scenario B savings have been agreed to be put forward to profile the financial, benefits for the project.

The current make-up of placement types for which young people may join the LHP cohort aged 16 plus are:

| | 16-17 Cohort | Annual Average Cost Per Placement |
|--------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| Internal Foster Care | 18 | £32,641 |
| External Foster Care | 20 | £54,720 |
| Independent Home | 13 | £401,711 |
| Supported Accommodation | 49 | £78,614 |

Scenario A – Assumption 1 young person from Independent Residential and 9 from Independent Fostering into House Project tenancies.

| SCENARIO A | 6 Months Cost Avoidance | Investment Cost | Net Impact |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1 Movement from Independent Residential to NHP | -£200,855 | £0 | -£200,855 |
| 9 Movement from independent Fostering to NHP | -£246,242 | £0 | -£246,242 |
| Initial Implementation Costs | £0 | £308,148 | £308,148 |
| Housing Provider and Living Costs | £0 | £43,679 | £43,679 |
| Scenario A–Net Placement Cost Avoidance | | | -£95,270 |

Scenario A results in net cost avoidance of £95,270 (increasing to £169,435 from cohort 2) per year.

Scenario B – Assumption 2 Internal Foster Care, 2 Independent Foster Care, 2 Independent Residential and 4 Supported Accommodation

| SCENARIO B | 6 Months Cost Avoidance | Investment Cost | Net Impact |
|---|-------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 2 Movement from Independent Residential to NHP | -£401,711 | £0 | -£401,711 |
| 2 Movement from independent Fostering to NHP | -£54,720 | £0 | -£54,720 |
| 4 Movement from Supported Accommodation (Spot) to NHP | -£157,227 | £0 | -£157,227 |
| 2 Movement from Internal Fostering to NHP | -£32,641 | £0 | -£32,641 |
| Initial Implementation Costs | £0 | £308,148 | £308,148 |
| | | | |
| Housing Provider and Living Costs | £0 | £43,679 | £43,679 |
| Scenario B–Net Placement Cost Avoidance | | | -£294,472 |

Scenario B results in net cost avoidance of £294,472 (increasing to £368,638 from cohort 2) per year.

Savings associated with LHP are derived from supporting young people out of regulated placements and into LHP properties. The upfront costs are off set when young people move into their own properties which can be 9-12 months after they start the programme.

As LHP work with young people aged 16 and over, many from the cohort will be ready to move into properties around their 17th birthday. NHP have shared that on average young people transition into their own properties at 17.5. Therefore, we have used this in the scenarios above.

In Cheshire East we also know that we are supporting young people past their 18th birthday in supported accommodation, the average cost of this support is circa £99k per week for the current cohort, any LHP success in moving young people into their own tenancies at or before 18 avoids these costs too for that individual.

In addition to the financial benefits associated with implementing a Local House Project there are large benefits associated with the young people themselves

The proposal provided in the report offers a saving to the revenue budget; however this level of saving is subject to:- The combination of the ten young people current placement costs which are represented in the two scenarios. An assumed 100% occupancy, for six months of 10 young people may not be achieved. If this is reduced to 80%, 8 young people the savings offered reduce to £5,851 for scenario A and £165,213 for scenario B.

| | 10 Cohort Achieved Movement at Month 18 | | | 20% Cost Avoidance Unachievable | | |
|--|---|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| | Payback in 2 Years | Payback Period Months | Est Saving at 24 Months | Payback in 2 Years | Payback Period Months | Est Saving at 24 Months |
| National Housing Project - Payback Period/Anticipated Saving | | | | | | |
| Scenario A | YES | 23 | £95,270 | YES | 22 | £5,851 |
| Scenario B | YES | 22 | £294,472 | YES | 21 | £165,213 |

The level of staffing pay costs in the cohort 1 costs assume a full year salary costs. It is recommended that these 3 FTE are recruited on a permanent Cheshire East contract to reduce the risk of staff leaving due to temporary positions. There is a risk that staffing requirements may change once the programme is established, as it is assumed that 3 FTE are geared to supporting 10 young people.

The modelling assumes that there is no effects of inflation on costs and cost avoidance. the model assumes that new cohorts will take place in future years as a rolling programme and staff will be able to continue to support earlier year cohorts as they transition if required.

A longer lead in time of 18 months has been planned for the first cohort before moving into their own accommodation. As the programme will be more established in year 2 the second cohort will transition in 12 months. The budget saving suggested in the report is not included within the current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) but is a new initiative connected to the 26T MTFS saving “New Accommodation with support for 16-25 Young People”.

The request is for forward investment to support the project of £351,827 to be added to the base budget.

5. Expected Dis-benefits

Based on national evaluation and the experience of other local authorities, there are no known significant disbenefits associated with the implementation of the National House Project. The model has been positively received in multiple regions, with evidence consistently demonstrating improved outcomes for care leavers and no reported adverse impacts on participants or stakeholders.

The approach is designed to be flexible and responsive to local needs, and ongoing evaluation has not identified any negative consequences for young people, the council, or partner organisations. As such, the project is considered a low-risk intervention with a strong track record of delivering positive results.

6. Timescales

Set out the milestones to deliver the recommended option. If a diagram has been produced to illustrate timeframes for delivering core activities, include it under this section. This can include a Gantt chart or similar timeline.

A dedicated Project Steering Group will be established in January 2026 to provide strategic oversight and operational leadership for the Local House Project. This group will include representatives from key departments such as Children's Services, Commissioning, Finance, Virtual School, and Strategic Housing. The Steering Group will be responsible for driving the implementation plan, managing risks, ensuring alignment with corporate priorities, and reporting progress to the Corporate Parenting Board.

Engagement with local housing providers will commence in February 2026 to secure the necessary social rented properties for the project's first cohort. Early collaboration with Registered Providers is essential to ensure that suitable homes are identified and made available in line with the project's timeline. This engagement will build on existing relationships and ensure that the housing sector is fully involved in supporting care leavers' transition to independent living.

The recruitment process for the core delivery team will begin in December 2025 and continue through May 2026. The team will consist of a Project Lead and two Facilitators, whose permanent appointments are critical to the programme's success. Attracting the right talent will ensure that the project is delivered effectively and that young people receive consistent, high-quality support throughout their journey.

Once recruited, the core staff will undergo comprehensive training from May to July 2026. This will include workforce development, psychologically informed practice, and access to accredited training provided by the National House Project. The training will equip staff with the skills and knowledge required to deliver the programme's modules and provide tailored support to care leavers.

Recruitment of the first cohort of young people will take place between May and August 2026. The process will involve identifying suitable candidates, engaging with Care Leaver Ambassadors, and ensuring that the views and needs of young people are central to the selection process. The aim is to form a group of 10–12 care-experienced young people who are ready to benefit from the programme.

Between October 2026 and February 2027, the project will work closely with housing providers and the council's housing team to match young people with appropriate properties. This phase will ensure that each participant has a clear pathway to their own tenancy, with properties allocated in accordance with the council's Common Allocations Policy and the young people's preferences.

The final milestone will see young people transitioning into their new homes between January and March 2027. This move will be carefully planned and supported, with ongoing engagement from the project team to ensure a smooth transition. Young people will continue to receive support as they settle into independent living, helping to secure positive long-term outcomes.

Children's Programme Right Child , Right Home Project / PMO Key Timelines

| Workstream | Overarching Project Start and End Dates | Oct 25 | Nov 25 | Dec 25 | Jan 26 | Feb 26 | Mar 26 | Apr 26 | May 26 | Jun 26 | Jul 26 | Aug 26 | Sept - Dec 26 | Jan - Feb 27 | Mar 27 |
|------------------------|---|-----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------------|--------------|--------|
| National House Project | Project Governance Established | | | | | 7/1 | | | | | | | | | |
| | Housing Provider engagement | | | | | 1/2 | | | | | | | | | |
| | Recruitment of core staff | | | | | | | | 28/5 | | | | | | |
| | Training core staff | | | | | | | | | | 29/7 | | | | |
| | Recruit first cohort of Young People | | | | | | | | | | 31/8 | | | | |
| | Identify Housing Options | | | | | | | | | | | 28/2 | | | |
| PMO Lifecycle | Gateway Reviews | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Feasibility | Gateway 1 | | | | 30/11 | | | | | | | | | |
| | Foundation | Gateway 2 | | | | | | 28/2 | | | | | | | |
| | Delivery | Gateway 3 | | | | | | | | | | 22/12 | | | |
| | Closure | Gateway 4 | | | | | | | | | | | Apr 27 | | |

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7. Investment Appraisal

Implementing a Local House Project involves establishing a dedicated, permanent core delivery team within the Local Authority. This team typically consists of one full-time Project Lead (Grade 11) and two full-time Facilitators (Grade 7), ensuring the right expertise and continuity for Cheshire East.

The National House Project has estimated that key contributing elements will result in a first-year cost of approximately £308,148. This is projected to reduce to £277,662 in the second

and third years. Then slightly lower again in year 4 due to the reduction in NHP membership fees. This is the minimum cost to run an LHP. The cost of Ofsted registration is at £3,600.

| Project Costs | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 |
|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Project Manager Commissioning (Grade 11 1.00 FTE) | £ 73,665 | | | |
| Project Lead (Grade 11 1.00 FTE) | £ 73,665 | £ 73,665 | £ 73,665 | £ 73,665 |
| Facilitators (Grade 7 2.00 FTE) | £ 92,318 | £ 92,318 | £ 92,318 | £ 92,318 |
| Expenses | £ 3,000 | £ 2,500 | £ 2,500 | £ 2,500 |
| Activities linked to NHP | £ 5,000 | £ 5,000 | £ 5,000 | £ 5,000 |
| NHP Membership Fee | £ 35,000 | £ 35,000 | £ 35,000 | £ 25,000 |
| Psychology Support | £ 11,900 | £ 11,900 | £ 11,900 | £ 11,900 |
| Ofsted | £ 3,600 | £ 3,600 | £ 3,600 | £ 3,600 |
| Living Allowance | £ - | £ 15,000 | £ 15,000 | £ 15,000 |
| Housing Provider Costs | £ - | £ 28,679 | £ 28,679 | £ 28,679 |
| Project Specific Office Costs | £ 10,000 | £ 10,000 | £ 10,000 | £ 10,000 |
| Total Project Costs Per Annum | £ 308,148 | £ 277,662 | £ 277,662 | £ 267,662 |

Each year, the team would recruit a cohort of 10 to 12 young people, offering them a structured pathway to independent living.

A key element of the LHP is securing 10 social rented properties through partnerships with local Registered Providers. These homes become available to the cohort once they have completed the programme, which generally takes 9 to 12 months. The work programme itself is delivered over 6 to 9 months (or up to 12 months in the first year to allow for initial setup), and covers essential life skills, employment readiness, and wellbeing modules.

Weekly group meetings are held at a base identified by the Local Authority—currently proposed to be linked to the development of a Care Leavers Hub in Crewe, or, in the interim, at the Lifestyle Centre in Crewe. Associated costs for these venues are factored into the project budget. After moving into their own tenancies, young people can continue to engage with the project for as long as they wish, ensuring ongoing support.

The Local Authority is required to register as a Supported Accommodation provider with Ofsted, a process for which it already has relevant experience from children's homes registration. The registration cost is £3,600. If young people move into their tenancy before turning 18, the Local Authority acts as guarantor until the tenancy is formally transferred to the young person.

In Summary, the total costs and benefits approaches are set out in the table below. The project is expected to deliver £3.231m savings against costs of £1.442m leading to a net position of £1.789m.

| Financial Summary | Cohort 1 (18 months programme, 6 months savings) | Cohort 2 (12 months programme, 6 months savings) | Cohort 3 (12 months programme, 6 months savings) | Cohort 4 (12 months programme, 6 months savings) | Cohort 5 (12 months programme, 6 months savings) | Total |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---|---|---|-------------|
| Total Financial Benefits (Gross) | £ 646,299 | £ 646,299 | £ 646,299 | £ 646,299 | £ 646,299 | £ 3,231,495 |
| Total Cost | £ 351,827 | £ 277,662 | £ 277,662 | £ 267,662 | £ 267,662 | £ 1,442,475 |
| Net Savings position | £ 294,472 | £ 368,637 | £ 368,637 | £ 378,637 | £ 378,637 | £ 1,789,020 |
| Payback | 22 months | 16 months | 16 months | 16 months | 16 months | |
| £ spent, received back | £1.84 | £2.33 | £2.33 | £2.41 | £2.41 | |

8. Major Risks

Recruitment and retention of staff to support National House Project

There is a risk that the project may face challenges in recruiting and retaining the skilled staff required to deliver the National House Project. Delays or gaps in staffing could impact the project's ability to launch on time and provide consistent support to care leavers. To mitigate this, the project team will ensure that recruitment processes are initiated early and that roles are made attractive to suitable candidates, including additional advertisement (costed at £500), with a focus on timely appointments and ongoing support for staff retention.

Availability of suitable housing stock for care leavers

Securing enough appropriate housing for care leavers is a key risk, as limited availability could delay young people's transition to independent living. The project team will work proactively with local housing providers to review current housing opportunities and establish a pipeline of suitable homes in line with the Housing policies. Early engagement and ongoing collaboration with housing partners will help ensure that accommodation needs are met in line with project milestones.

Assumptions on cost avoidance and inflation

The financial case for the project is based on certain assumptions about cost avoidance and inflation. If these assumptions prove inaccurate, the anticipated savings may not be fully realised. To address this, the cross-functional project group will closely monitor financial performance, regularly review assumptions, and adjust plans as necessary to ensure that care leavers are supported into the right housing options and that savings targets remain achievable.

Timescales are not realised across the project timeline due to lack of capacity

There is a risk that the project may not meet its planned timescales if there is insufficient capacity across the council and partner organisations. Strategic Housing for example being a critical stakeholder in engaging the social housing sector. Delays could affect the delivery of key milestones and the overall success of the project. To mitigate this, the project will be delivered cross-functionally, with clear roles and responsibilities assigned through working

groups and the project board, ensuring that sufficient resources are in place to keep the project on track.

| Risk | Type | Mitigating Actions | Likelihood | Impact | Risk Score |
|---|-----------|---|------------|--------|------------|
| Recruitment and retention of staff to support National House Project | Resources | Project team to ensure staff are recruited to timescales to get project up and running | 3 | 4 | 12 |
| Availability of suitable housing stock for care leavers | Resources | Project team to work with local housing providers to review existing housing opportunities and establish a pipeline for homes for care leavers. | 3 | 4 | 12 |
| Assumptions on cost avoidance and inflation. | Finance | Work between the cross functional group will support local care leavers and support those young people to access the right housing options supporting savings in the project. | 4 | 4 | 16 |
| Timescales are not realised across the project timeline due to lack of capacity | Resources | Work across the Council and with partners will be identified to deliver the project cross functionally through the working groups and project board. | 3 | 4 | 12 |

9. Stakeholders and Engagement

Engagement with care leavers (via Care Leaver Ambassadors):

Care leavers will be actively engaged throughout the project via the Care Leaver Ambassadors group. Their insights and lived experience will help shape the design and delivery of the Local House Project, ensuring that the offer is responsive to the real needs and aspirations of young people transitioning from care. Their involvement will also support recruitment to the first cohort and ongoing evaluation of the project's effectiveness.

Engagement with housing sector and social housing providers:

The project will work closely with local housing providers and registered social landlords to secure suitable properties for care leavers. Early and ongoing engagement will ensure that the right types of accommodation are available when needed, and that housing partners are fully involved in supporting the transition to independent living in line with Housing Policies. This collaboration is essential for the timely allocation of homes and for building sustainable pathways for young people.

Cross-departmental steering group (Children's Services, Housing, Commissioning, Finance, Virtual School):

A cross-departmental steering group will oversee the implementation and governance of the project. This group will bring together expertise from Children's Services, Strategic Housing, Commissioning, Finance, and the Virtual School to coordinate resources, manage risks, and ensure that the project aligns with strategic priorities. The steering group will monitor progress, resolve issues, and provide leadership to drive successful delivery.

| Groups | Stakeholder Activity | Approaches / Needs | Activities Required |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Care Leavers | Engagement with Care Leavers through ambassadors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings and engagement with Care Leavers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement through trusted professionals with care leavers on our future offer. Engagement with wider families on care leaver offer |
| Housing Providers and Housing Sector | Engage with suitable support for Housing options for Care Leavers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific support and reviews around housing options for Care Leavers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement on suitable and future offer for support for care leavers. |
| Virtual School | Suitable engagement on suitability of care leaver offers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Join professional cross working group on educational input for care leavers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement and direct support to future offer for care leavers. |
| Social Work Teams | Staff Engagement Activities on supported accommodation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement sessions on how models may change practice for care leavers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care Leaver needs input and support future offer development as part of National House Project. |
| Commissioning | Engagement on future shape of offer and relationship with housing commission and services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement on how model impacts commission for Housing services for Care Leavers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commissioning input into National House Project model |
| Finance | Provide support to financial modelling and affordability/ benefits | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated Project Support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finance engagement on savings and financial activity |

10. Conclusion and Approval

The Business Case recommends Option B to implement the National House Project.



NHP
Living connected
and fulfilling lives

Overview



NHP

Living connected and fulfilling lives

VISION:

Young people leaving care live connected
and fulfilling lives

MISSION:

To establish Local House Projects
to work with young people using a
psychologically informed practice framework
to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence
to grow their community, make their first home
and have a positive future

What is the National House Project (NHP)?

NHP is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), established in August 2018. It provides the knowledge, resources and support to establish and maintain Local House Projects (LHPs) and believes that joining a LHP should be an option for all young people leaving care.

NHP takes a ground-breaking approach through its commitment to young people leaving care to take ownership and to live connected and fulfilling lives. The work began by asking young people 'what makes a house a home' and was co-designed with young people from the start. It works on a relational approach through which young people in and leaving care work together with staff to create their first home and build a long-term community of support. In 2015 young people in the first Local House Project (LHP) [shared their views](#) with Edward Timpson, Children's and Families Minister and young people have subsequently met with Ministers in both England and Scotland. They talked about how living a happy life needs more than a physical property. It requires; skills, knowledge and confidence to manage a home, positive relationships that make you feel valued and a connection to your community that you contribute to and are supported by.

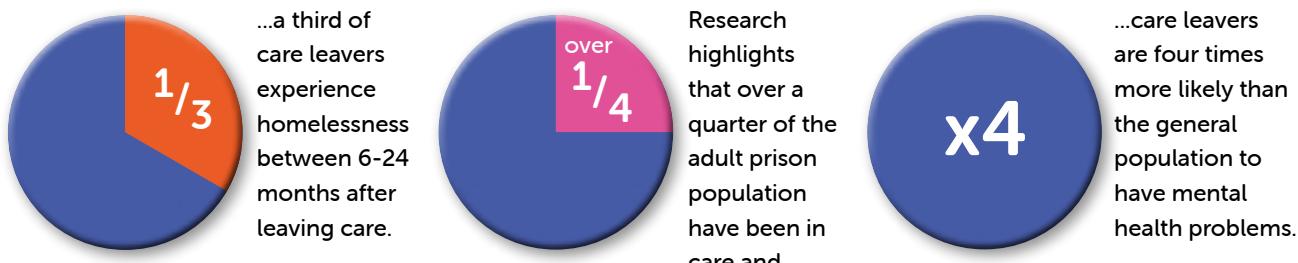
Why are we doing this?

Every year around 10,000 young people in England leave local authority (LA) care and around 1000 young people become eligible for continuing or after care services in Scotland. The poor outcomes that occur during transition and beyond are hugely influenced by the traumatic experiences that brought them into care which can then be compounded by experiences within the care system.

Moving to live on your own from 17 onwards is daunting. Doing this without the support of close family and at a much earlier age than the general population (average age of leaving home is 25) does not work for many young people. They have described to us their loneliness, fear and the feeling that they have been 'dropped off a cliff'.

Against all the key indicators in education, employment, health, offending and accommodation, outcomes for care leavers are unacceptable.

The National Audit Office report 'Care Leavers Transition to Adulthood' notes that:



We recognised the energy, creativity and will to thrive of our young people and it was a shared ambition to improve outcomes for all young people that led to the establishment of the first LHP in Stoke-on-Trent. The process focuses on maximising young people's ownership, so they can feel proud of what they have developed and have confidence in themselves and their futures.



What have we done so far?

In its successful first phase, funded in 2015 by the DfE, young people aged 16 plus worked on void properties in Stoke-on-Trent, which they have moved into, and which became their homes for as long as they wanted.

A second phase of DfE Innovation funding in 2017 enabled the development of new LHPs in five LAs and the establishment of 'The National House Project' as a National Charity which has developed the practice framework and provides the expertise and support to enable any group of young people and the adults working with them to set up an LHP in their own LA.

A third phase of DfE innovation funding was awarded in 2020 to ensure sustainability and create the infrastructure to scale, securing the establishment of new LHPs across the country.

New LHPs have since been established in England and Scotland with a collaborative arrangement being established across Greater Manchester. The community of young people continues to grow as more LHPs are established and LAs scale the approach within their leaving care services.

Young people have been successfully transitioning into permanent tenancies since 2017 giving them the secure base that we all need when starting to make our way in the world. Strong and supportive relationships within their LHP community provides an informal source of support that lasts as long as it needs to. Young people are supported by staff and other young people, and many describe having made friends for life. The approach provides young people with the confidence to get jobs and stay in college. Over 450 young people have moved into their own home and there have been no evictions or tenancy breakdowns.

Our theory of change – the ORCHIDS framework

The ORCHIDS framework defines our approach and makes it different to other leaving care and accommodation options. It provides a clear practice framework that uses the energy, experience and creativity of young people and develops a supportive and safe base from which to explore the world and build a positive future. The ORCHIDS framework is based on young people:

1. Taking **Ownership** for decisions affecting their lives, their home and the development of their project
2. Taking **Responsibility** for keeping themselves safe, looking after others and the project
3. Building a **Community** of support for as long as they need it
4. Having their own **Homes**
5. Becoming **Interdependent** and developing the skills to cope emotionally & financially through accessing support when needed
6. Gaining a sense of purpose and **Direction**
7. Having a positive **Sense** of wellbeing

ORCHIDS is underpinned by the psychological theory of self-determination (Deci and Ryan 2000) which says that psychological health requires three basic needs to be met:



We know that pride in doing things for yourself is key to unlocking young people's potential. The framework enables young people to be the authors of their own futures and develop control and responsibility for their own lives. They work closely with staff who know them well and LHPs are supported by a psychologist and NHP Practice Lead so that the approach is delivered safely.

Staff in LHPs use the framework to plan and deliver direct work with their young people in a positive, energised and respectful way. It provides a safe context for supporting young people into their first home and a set of standards to recognise, celebrate and build on success. Working to a framework rather than a model ensures fidelity but allows for difference.

Fidelity

With support of the Innovation Unit and DfE, much of our early work focused on developing the approach and codifying key fidelity elements that had to be in place for the approach to work. The following are required for all LHPs, but a flexible framework approach recognising the uniqueness of individual young people and local authorities, ensures that the approach can be delivered in a way that fits the local context.



Co-production
with young people



Dedicated staff team



A base



Relational psychologically
informed practice framework



A groupwork approach to
complete the House Project
Programme



Their own home



CARE LEAVERS NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Care Leavers National Movement (CLNM)

To maximise the ownership of young people and ensure that their collective voice is heard, amplified and acted on we established CLNM. It has representation from all LHPs at a regional level with these meetings feeding in to the more strategic function of CLNM. The regional and national meetings are assisted by NHP staff who support the chairs/vice chairs to set the agenda, chair the meeting itself and carry out any follow up actions which includes attendance at staff community of practice meetings to drive best practice. The chairs and vice chairs from CLNM form an advisory group and are supported to sit as expert advisors to the NHP Board of Trustees.

Young People's feedback

Our approach is driven by the views of young people at every stage of the process. Initially we needed to 'do' leaving care better and differently. Young people described being placed in flats with no choice about where they lived or how the 'moving in' budget was spent.

But it was not enough simply to provide a nice flat in a nice area, because this did not get to the heart of the issues. Our young people did not want to be 'done to' or 'done for', they wanted to be able to take back control and not be alone - particularly powerful from people who have experienced neglect and abuse. Young people told us that:

'We need pride. Coming from the care system it's difficult to find something to be proud of.'

'I want to be standing up and people feeling proud of me.'

'You're with other people so you don't feel alone.'

The results of the pilot phases were powerful. Nothing exemplified this power more than the visit of Edward Timpson, former Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families (to view the visit [click here](#)). During the visit one young person explained:

'I'd compare the House Project to a tree; we've planted it and we're growing up. We're all together and we're all going up.'

Jason's film shows a young man who had lived in residential care and become homeless. He was able to find a new home and new hope through the project. To view his story [click here](#).

'I feel like I am not going out there alone now. That is different to how I felt before the House Project started.'

'We need pride. Coming from the care system it's difficult to find something to be proud of.'



'You're with other people so you don't feel alone.'

'I want to be standing up and people feeling proud of me.'

How does a local authority set up a House Project and how does it work?

Interested LA's have an initial discussion with NHP and both parties agree that establishing an LHP is right for them. A self-assessment tool assists LAs to think about what needs to be in place to support a successful LHP. Integral to this is a relationship with a Housing Provider who will be involved at the outset and work with the LA to secure properties for young people leaving care on an annual basis.

The decision to proceed must be informed by the views of young people and they, with senior officers, 'pitch' to NHP as to why an LHP is right for them and how it would work.

Once a decision is made to proceed a membership agreement will be signed. This outlines the obligations on both parties and NHP provides direct support and guidance and shares the tools and resources to establish an LHP (see the 'Offer' document). NHP support the LA to recruit skilled staff and provide training related to psychologically informed practice, the impact of trauma, social pedagogy, the ORCHIDS framework, and the House Project Programme (HPP).

The LHP works alongside young people to access Education, Employment and Training (EET). Completing HPP requires links to be made with local companies and training providers who will offer a range of opportunities including taster days, work experience, apprenticeships, and permanent employment.

Whilst working through HPP, young people engage with the housing provider so that they have some choice in where they live and are involved in getting their property ready to become their home. Young people initially move in on an introductory tenancy and transition to a secure tenancy, ensuring that this is their home for as long as they want to live there. They continue to be a member of their LHP community for as long as they wish.

Housing providers get good tenants and LAs have a long-term, sustainable housing solution to meet the needs of young people leaving the care system.

House Project Programme (HPP)

Young people complete a range of activities and these experiences provide the knowledge, skills and confidence to be successful. The programme was developed with young people and is delivered via regular groupwork sessions. It takes a social pedagogical approach whereby staff work alongside young people to support the recognition and promotion of an individual potential. The approach is modular and web-based and is certificated by AQA and SQA. Young people can access resources either from their phones or computer enabling them to add uploads to showcase their journey and demonstrate what they have achieved. HPP is classed as a reintegration programme and young people are recorded as being in EET. HPP is linked to the psychologically informed practice framework ORCHIDS.

Evaluations

As a learning organisation we are keen to understand how we can continue to improve our 'offer'. We have internal feedback loops from LHP staff and young people and have also commissioned a number of independent evaluations. This growing body of practice based evidence demonstrates that not only are young people worth investing in but the approach works for young people, LAs and society.

- [York University \(2017, 2020\)](#) reported that the approach was showing positive outcomes in its first year and that NHP had achieved its service level outcomes and provided a holistic and coordinated support package for young people, and advice and training for LHP staff in the second evaluation. LAs recognised the expertise provided by NHP, the involvement of young people as a 'best practice' exemplar and the innovative ways of working were recognised by LAs as stimulating developments across wider service provision. Young people had developed

friendships, social skills, confidence and the ability to make up their own mind which contributed to a significant change in satisfaction with life as a whole.

- **Care Leavers National Movement Peer Evaluation (2021)** reported that young people were positive about their LHP (94.2%) and reported that the approach had a positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing (78%). Young people reported that their opinions mattered to how decisions were made (88.4%) and the majority (91.3%) reported that their LHP had been hugely important to their sense of community with the trust between young people and staff being key. Young people reported (97.1%) that they had been supported to take responsibility, and the majority (97%) reported that they had a goal and aspirations for the future.
- **Care Leavers National Movement Peer Evaluation (2023)** reported that young people were positive about their LHP (89.6%) and that the approach had a positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing (75.6%). Young people reported that their opinions mattered to how decisions were made (88.7%) and young people (86%) reported that the HPP had helped them prepare to live in their own home.
- **Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum (Staf) Evaluation 2022** looked specifically at LHPs in Scotland and reported that the approach has had a positive impact on young people which is likely to have lasting benefits. It also informed and engaged corporate parents enabling improved inter agency working and relationship-based practice, generated shared insights, pooled resources, and sparked changes at practice levels. Trust and rapport enable staff to truly understand and support young people who in turn developed important skills that underpinned managing their home, accessing support in the community and building enduring communities of support with each other. **Braw Talent** were commissioned to coproduce with young people a creative telling of their House Project experience. East Dunbartonshire produced the following animation of **Cinderella**.
- **Cambridge University 2023** reported on the psychological framework which underpins our approach. Young people made progress in their individual developmental journeys and key findings which are grouped under thematic headings. The evaluation describes their journeys, and the significant 'extra-ordinary' moments that constituted them, as evidence of ORCHIDS in action which led young people to develop a sense of belonging and a sense of feeling competent and autonomous (having a sense of agency rather than 'doing it alone'). They reported that such developmental experiences are essential for broader outcomes of maintaining stable accommodation, improved physical and mental health, education, training and employment, and relational stability.
- **The Exit (Exploring Innovation in Transition) Evaluation 2021-24** led by Warwick Business School (WBS), Bedfordshire University focuses on identifying the key ingredients to developing and sustaining innovation at a practice and policy level for care leavers. The evaluation highlighted the six fidelity elements (co-production, base, relationship practice, learning programme, house and LHP professional team), the three outcome domains (young people, organisation and innovation journey) and the five ingredients for establishing and sustaining innovation (co-production, adaption and learning, shared leadership, receptivity of contexts and outcome measures).

We are committed to bi-annual Peer Evaluations and will use future evaluations to inform and develop our approach.

Inspections by Ofsted and the Care Inspectorate in Scotland report positively on the impact and outcomes for young people who are part of a LHP. Ofsted's report about Islington (2020) recorded:

'The House Project is an innovative and highly valued service that is making a significant difference for care leavers. The service helps young people to build confidence and to make friends for life, through preparation for managing their first home & the provision of secure and affordable accommodation. Young people said to inspectors that being involved in the project makes them feel like they have a family'.

Financial Modelling

LA's have a statutory duty to provide accommodation and care until 18 years in England and 21 years in Scotland and support to care leavers up until 25 and 26 respectively. The cost of accommodation represents one of the highest challenges to LA budgets and often with little evidence of achieving good outcomes.

The House Project approach provides the support needed to transition well and with ongoing support and the development of a community of peer support it replicates the principles of 'staying close'. With skilled and experienced staff, the approach provides a safe step down from residential/foster care, allowing support to be provided at lower costs. Furthermore, the improved outcomes reduce the demand on wider LA and partner agency budgets with fewer tenancy breakdowns, improved emotional, physical and mental health and less contact with criminal justice services.

A Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) in the Evaluation Report (York 2020) showed a positive return on investment of 1.4 from year 2 (a saving of £1.40 for each £1 invested in the House Project) which increases to 2.0 in year 3. Since this evaluation LA's have evidenced yearly savings in excess of £1.5M and we therefore intend to undertake an economic benefit (value) evaluation to understand the savings to the wider public purse.

How does the LHP save money?

Moving young people in a planned and supported way from regulated provision provides savings to LA placement budget expenditure. Moving one young person from an independent residential unit at an annual average cost of £260,269 (Personal Social Services Research Unit 2020) more than covers the annual running costs for the project.

We have a financial modelling paper (available on request) that sets out the costs associated with NHP membership and the savings that can be achieved. With local information on placement and staffing costs this can be written specifically for an individual LA.

Fundraising

As a charity we are not full cost recovery from membership fees and income generated from our fundraising activities funds both core costs and 'additionality' (eg, white goods to young people as they move in to their first home, fuel vouchers, [Aspirational Awards](#)). We collaborate with businesses and organisations to continually improve the offer to young people.

Want to know more?

We can be contacted on the details below to discuss any element of House Project.

Please also see links below:

- [An introduction to NHP](#)
- [Local authorities looking for a solution](#)
- [Organisations looking to build a partnership](#)
- [Housing providers looking to join an ever-growing community](#)

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NHP
Living connected
and fulfilling lives

Psychologically Informed Framework



NHP

Living connected and fulfilling lives



The National House Project (NHP) works with young people in care to help them to develop as a group, learn together and support each other to move in to their first homes in a positive way.

Children in care will, by the very nature of having entered and lived in the care system, have complex histories of survival, attachment disruption and experience of adversity. Whole systems can often become challenged as to how to effectively meet the needs of some of these young people with the most complex of presentations. They often get passed between and within systems, each one with a different 'treatment' and ethos (social care/education/CAMHS/CJS). The intra and inter-system conflict that arises from this approach also impacts on workers and organisations as well as young people. As a result, inconsistency in approach can reinforce behaviours and beliefs and young people's needs are not met effectively. It is not unusual to see a deterioration in wellbeing, increasing problems in emotional regulation and a breakdown in relationships within the support systems.

Young people can present with complexity. Young people's lived experience and presentation cannot (and should not) be explained by a single 'label', and we believe that this is an unhelpful (and sometimes harmful) way of working with young people. NHP aims to accept the complexity of working with young people and work with them, in a proactive way, that recognises their unique lived experience to support them to live connected and fulfilling lives.

Our starting point is that thoughts, feelings and behaviours are all interlinked and that all behaviour has meaning and is understandable in its context and in the context of the lived experience of the young person.

The framework which underpins the project is psychologically informed and draws on several theories to help build a safe and robust practice framework (ORCHIDS). It uses multiple and developmental 'meta' perspectives, with the aim of integrating theories and operationalising them into practice.

Work with young people draws from the theories of attachment, trauma, adolescent development, resilience and self-determination.

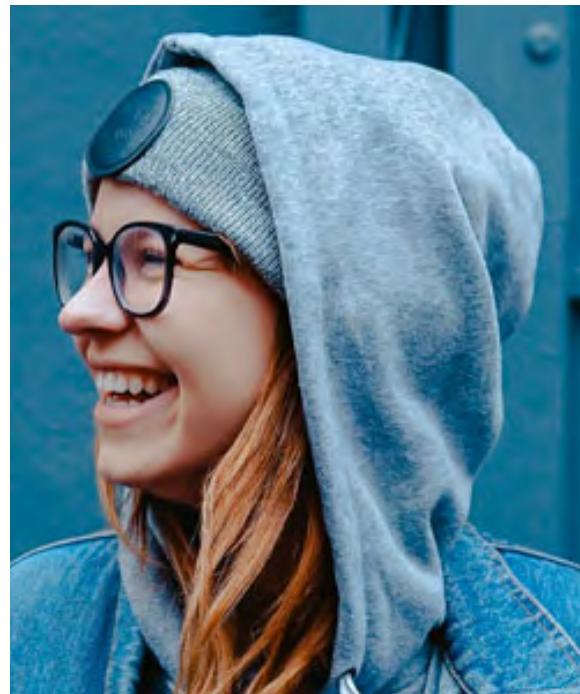


Attachment and Trauma

Attachment theory is a concept in developmental psychology that deals with the importance of "attachment" in relation to personal development. Psychologist John Bowlby (1969) was the first to coin the term. His work in the late 60s established the precedent that childhood development depended heavily upon a child's ability to form a strong relationship with 'at least one primary caregiver'. Generally speaking, this is one of the parents.

Mary Ainsworth (1973) developed many of Bowlby's ideas. In particular, she identified the existence of what she calls 'attachment behaviour' examples of behaviour that are demonstrated by children experiencing distress in an attempt at establishing or re-establishing an attachment to a presently absent caregiver. Since this behaviour occurs uniformly in children, it is a compelling argument for the existence of "innate" or instinctual behaviour.

An understanding of attachment styles and the resulting behaviours is important in order to understand the most effective way to support the children and young people we are working with.



In very general terms attachment styles fall into three categories – avoidant, secure and ambivalent. Much has been written in this area. The work of Dan Hughes and Kim Golding (2012) has enhanced our understanding and they provide a rich platform on which to base our work. This includes the PACE Model. PACE (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy) is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to make the young person feel safe.

We recognise that young people within the care system will have experienced trauma within their own families, followed by the potential trauma of living in new settings, with the likelihood of several moves added to this. Reactions to trauma vary from person to person. Across the continuum, people will have experienced disrupted attachments and may experience anxiety, shame, emotional numbness, disconnection, intrusive thoughts, helplessness and powerlessness. Early trauma can have especially negative consequences and impact on developmental progression. Memory can sometimes be affected— people may not remember parts of what happened, but at the same time may be overwhelmed by sporadic memories that return in flashbacks. Nightmares, low mood and anxiety, irritability, and jumpiness are common. Any of these responses can interfere with an individual's sense of safety, self, and self-efficacy, as well as the ability to regulate emotions and navigate relationships.

Local House Project (LHP) staff receive training from a Psychologist to help them understand young people's attachment strategies and explore the most appropriate ways to respond, enabling staff to be consistent in their approach. We work from a basis of not 'what is wrong with each young person' but rather understanding them and their behaviours in relation to what has happened to them. The psychologist supports the team in exploring their own experiences and understanding to develop a 'formulation' (or 'shared understanding') of each young person and their context. This recognises the dynamic, multi-systemic and multi-factorial complexity of each individual's presentation. Monthly consultations are then offered to ensure clinical oversight of the support that is being offered for each young person and the staff team as a whole.

NHP works on the basis that 'every intervention matters' and staff are encouraged to model relationally sensitive, trauma-informed and emotionally attuned behaviour accordingly. The stability of relationships is paramount and LHP staff aim to build honest and trusting relationships with young people, enabling them to support each young person in the most appropriate way. We have high aspirations for young people, but these are based on realistic expectations and we recognise that each young person's route to moving to their first home will be different.

Self Determination Theory (SDT)

The House Project approach has its roots in the theory of self-determination (Ryan and Deci 2000). This is a motivational theory that has been shown to correlate positively with self-worth and wellbeing. SDT proposes that human beings require three core needs to be met in order to promote motivation and psychological health:

The House Project approach aims to address these core needs via the **ORCHIDS** practice framework:

- **Ownership (Autonomy)** - I have control over my life; As part of a team I help to shape my LHP; I can make up my mind about things.
- **Responsibility (Autonomy and Competence)** - I take responsibility for getting things done; I can ask for help when I need to; I can take responsibility for sorting things out when they go wrong; I've been dealing with problems well.
- **Community (Relatedness)** - I feel I am part of a group that supports and cares for each other; I've been feeling close to other people; I am involved in group decision making and co-production of the project.
- **Home (Autonomy)** - I have my own personal space that I can call home; I feel safe in my own home; I can relax in my own home.
- **Interdependence (Competence and Autonomy)** - I can sort out practical stuff (cooking, money, travel, getting help); I have been thinking clearly; I've been feeling useful.
- **Developmental Direction (Competence and Autonomy)** - I have goals, a plan and the skills and confidence to get there; I've been feeling optimistic about my future.
- **Sense of Well Being (Competence, autonomy and relatedness)** - I wanted to do 'this' and I did it; I go to work/education/training, I do my best and people recognise this; I am able to do the things I need to do in my life and when things don't go according to plan I know what to do or where to get help; I get on well with my neighbours and the rest of the House Project and I have a role to play; I have plans for what I want to do with my life.

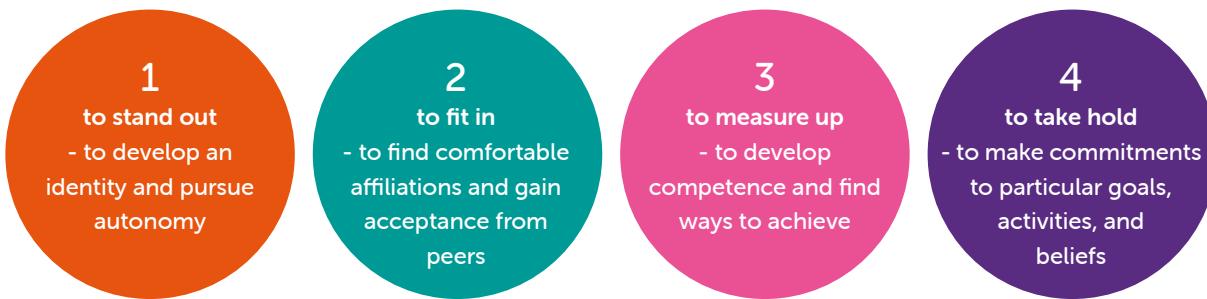


Adolescent Development

The ORCHIDS framework also promotes the notion that support should be developmentally aligned. As such, young people are met 'where they are at'. This support is informed by an understanding of child and adolescent development.

The neurobiological processes that define adolescence and influence risk-taking are complex, and the role they play is emerging as a key factor in adolescent behaviour. These processes must be understood in the context of psychological development and social influences.

There are four key tasks of adolescence:



The drive for affiliation and acceptance at this stage makes adolescents more open to peer influence and also tends to promote the rapid development of new relationships—with less time spent on negotiation of the basis for the friendship than at other stages of life. Researchers (e.g. [Berndt, 1979](#); [Brown et al., 1986](#)) have identified a linear pattern that associates age and openness to peer influence, with a peak of openness to antisocial influences at 14/15yrs.

Adolescents are not mini adults and to treat them as such is unhelpful. For adults, various parts of the brain work together to evaluate choices, make decisions and act accordingly in each situation. The prefrontal cortex is a section of the brain that weighs outcomes, forms judgments, controls impulses and emotions, helps people understand one another and communicates with the other sections of the brain. The prefrontal cortex in particular is immature in teenagers as compared to adults and does not fully develop until the mid-20s. Trauma can also have a particularly unhelpful impact on the development of the brain. LHP staff receive training in this area so that they can align their expectations and support accordingly.

Resilience

Finally, our practice framework also considers the nature of resilience. We define resilience as the ability to work through periods of challenge and grow and develop through this process. It is the ability to 'bounce back' from setbacks. Resilience develops when we feel supported, purposeful, confident and are adaptable to change. Our view is that resilience is a dynamic process and that it is context specific. Resilience is therefore not a fixed characteristic that we either have or don't have, it is an everchanging process of harnessing and adapting resources to sustain wellbeing. We need therefore to support young people with the resources that facilitate their ability to develop resilience, construct meaning in life and maximise their future opportunities.

In order to develop resilience, young people need to:

- **FEEL SUPPORTED.** They need relationships around them that are positive and supportive and learn how to ask for help. Relationships provide emotional security and form the basis of young people being able to develop a sense of resilience.
- **FEEL PURPOSEFUL.** They need to have a purpose and over time understand their higher purpose – not just knowing that they want to do something, but also understanding why they want to do something
- **FEEL CONFIDENT.** They need to feel competent and have belief in their ability to achieve their purpose. They need to know that people have faith in them.
- **BE ABLE TO ADAPT.** They need to be able to take what they have learnt in one situation and apply what they have learnt somewhere else. They need to be able to respond if things go wrong and know that they can change things.
- **HAVE HOPE.** They need to see that their lives make sense, despite what may have happened and a belief that they can achieve.

What is a team formulation for a young person?

The point of a team formulation is to start to increase our understanding and empathy for a young person and to develop a proactive approach to supporting and building a relationship with the young person.

It is called a team formulation meeting because we bring together key professionals who work with the young person (the team) to come up with ideas about how to help the young person day-to-day. A team formulation meeting is about starting to make sense of:

- **what** we are seeing that we need to understand and support;
- **why** the young person is having these experiences; and
- **how** we can help and what is the basis of a consistent approach.

We won't come up with all the answers during this meeting, but that's OK.

It's a starting point in thinking about a young person's strengths and needs, and how best to support them. Indeed, the formulation is a tentative understanding of a young person's strengths and needs, based on historic and current information. It draws on psychological constructs such as attachment, trauma, the developing brain and contextual or systemic factors. The team formulation is also a chance to understand and process the team's feelings (such as feeling stuck or worried) and their hopes for the young person. When we bring professionals together, to share their understanding of the young person compassionately, the aim is to strengthen our understanding of the young person, so that we can strengthen our connection with them.

How we support staff to deliver the House Project approach

Everything we do centres on relationships. Young people tell us that strong, positive, enduring, relationships are the thing that makes the biggest difference to them. Having knowledge of the theories that underpin our work is important but unless you can work relationally you will not be able to put these into practice or deliver the House Project approach. We recognise that working in this way can be emotionally demanding and we are keen to ensure that staff are supported well by providing psychological support and training.

Psychological support

Each LHP works collaboratively with an applied psychologist or systemic therapist. The aim of the psychologist is to support the staff in their connections with young people. They use a framework called 'nested mentalisation', where the psychologist 'holds the team in mind' (understands the team and helps the team to reflect), and this in turn helps the team 'hold the young people in mind' (understand the young people and help the young people to reflect). So, the psychologist doesn't meet directly with each young person; instead, the psychologist supports the team who have a direct connection and relationship with the young people in the House Project.

Each LHP has the following psychological support:

- **Consultation**
LHPs receive monthly psychological consultation. These meetings take place with individual staff members and the team as a whole. The consultation gives space to reflect on how the team are currently managing, how individuals on the team are managing, and how to help the team to continue to support young people.
- **Team Formulation**
As on page 6 of Psychologically Informed Framework document.

- **Learning Workshops**

The learning workshops are offered to all staff in the House Project community. The workshops focus on making links between theory and practice and offer staff a chance to think and learn together. It is an opportunity for staff to share good practice, talk about challenging situations and think about how they might do things differently.

Suggested bibliography and reading

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NHP
Living connected
and fulfilling lives

The Offer



NHP

Living connected and fulfilling lives

This document sets out the NHP offer to Local Authorities (LAs) which supports the establishment and ongoing running of a Local House Project (LHP). We provide a framework that accommodates both local arrangements and input from young people. Fidelity elements define what an LHP is and differentiate it from other leaving care options.

The 'offer' document forms the basis of the Membership Agreement between NHP and the LA.

VISION:

Young people leaving care live connected
and fulfilling lives

MISSION:

To establish Local House Projects
to work with young people using a
psychologically informed practice framework
to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence
to grow their community, make their first home
and have a positive future

1. READINESS

1.1 LA readiness to start a Local House Project (LHP)

When an LA is considering the establishment of a LHP, NHP will attend stakeholder meetings to share information about the Charity and the NHP framework. Background papers and links to resources will be provided.

A self-assessment document is made available to enable the LA to determine whether they are able to effectively support an LHP and a financial modelling paper that details costings and potential savings is provided. This can be updated specifically for each LA when NHP has received placement costs and salary data.

2. SET UP AND SUPPORT FOR YEAR ONE

INFRASTRUCTURE

2.1 Project Plan

NHP have developed a project plan which will support LAs in the planning, initial set up and operational delivery for an LHP.

Online resources

LAs will have access to online resources via a single login to support the establishment and management of your LHP. You will receive training and support on how to access the system.

2.2 Staff Recruitment

The success of LHPs is heavily influenced by the appointment of skilled and experienced staff who have the right value base and are driven by the principle that with the right support, young people can own the solutions to the challenges they face.

NHP has Job Descriptions and Person Specifications for LAs to use for the roles of Project Lead and Facilitators and NHP will form part of the recruitment process for staff appointments. Advertisement and recruitment costs will be borne by the LA.

If LAs experience staff turnover, NHP will support the recruitment and appointment of new staff.

2.3 Website and Branding Strategy

The NHP website provides an overview of the Charity and its support to LHPs. Each LHP will have its own subsite which will be hosted under the NHP site domain. LHP staff will be trained to maintain and update with local content.

NHP has Branding and Marketing Strategies that will support and guide LHPs. LHPs will have access to marketing and advertising materials to develop and support local activity.

2.4 Outcomes and Learning framework

NHP has commissioned a bespoke Outcomes and Learning (OLF) enables an LHP to track the progress of their young people. LHPs will be responsible for inputting data into the system, and this will be available in

an anonymised format to NHP who will aggregate findings. All GDPR issues relating to data are covered in the membership agreement. In addition, we are [Cyber Essentials Certified](#).

LHPs can run management reports from the system at any time. Staff will be trained on how to use the system.

2.6 Film documentary

NHP develops films that showcase our work and document the journey of our approach. These films can be found on our [YouTube channel](#).

A documentary film maker will join your first residential activity and work with the young people to make their own film which will follow their journey in establishing a LHP. They will then work with your young people to develop a second film of their choice. Young people can get involved as much as they want but the experience of developing a storyboard, preparing scripts and talking to camera enables young people to build confidence and be proud of their achievements.

2.7 Recruitment of young people

The House Project approach enables any young person to be supported within an LHP. We regularly see young people who have struggled in previous settings thrive and achieve good outcomes and go on to sustain their home. NHP will support staff in identifying young people. An information pack for young people which considers all aspects of the House Project approach will be available to download and will include referral information and the application process.

2.8 Annual conference

The LA will be invited to an annual conference where you will hear directly from young people, NHP and LHP staff and sector experts on topics such as; lessons learned, best practice, service developments and future direction.

Free places for:

- LHP Young people (current cohort)
- LHP Staff – Project Lead and two Facilitators (3)
- Senior Manager (1)
- Politician (1)

2.9 Care Leavers National Movement (CLNM)

Each LHP elects two young people to represent them at CLNM. Their role is central to the fluid communication process between young people in LHPs, NHP and Trustees and both ensure young people are consulted on all aspects of the work and that co-design with young people is at the heart of what we do.

They have regular meetings and an annual residential event, together with their own conference. As the number of LHPs have increased, regional arrangements have been introduced, which feed into the National Movement. Young people are supported by their LHP to attend meetings equipped with updates from their House Project community. CLNM attend Trustee meetings as expert advisers, identify beneficial partners, and campaign for better services for care leavers when appropriate. CLNM have their own [website](#) providing updates on work, useful resources, and a digital platform to share advice and best practice identified through the House Project community.

CLNM is chaired by young people who are elected by the group. All representatives have responsibilities, enabling them to have a real sense of ownership over their role as representatives.

CLNM have developed relationships with partners who provide added value to the House Project community. For example they have developed relationships with [Madlug](#) (a luggage company who provide a pack away travel bag to a child in care for every bag that is sold) who will provide backpacks to CLNM members and a travel bag to all children in care in the LAs that have LHPs and [Suited & Booted](#) (a charity who provide clothing and preparation support for interviews) who initially provided suits to CLNM members but who now provide clothing to all young people in the House Project community.

2.10 CLNM Event

Peer Evaluation and implementation of findings

Your young people and staff will be invited to attend the annual conference run by, and for, young people. These have been a huge success and the impact on young people has been amazing. Watch the film of their [2022](#) and [2023](#) conference.

2.11 Peer Evaluation and implementation of findings

Young people from Care Leavers National Movement (CLNM) receive professional training on research and evaluation methodology to enable them to peer evaluate each other's LHPs. They do this on a bi-annual basis, reinforcing the principles of young people co-designing and developing their LHPs. Following an evaluation young people and staff use the next 12 months to work together to implement the evaluation recommendations.

2.12 Newsletters

NHP and CLNM provide bi-annual newsletters. LHP staff receive a monthly newsletter.

TRAINING and SUPPORT TO STAFF

2.13 Introduction to the House Project approach

All staff in LHPs will be required to attend a 'block' of training which will include the ORCHIDS Framework, Psychologically Informed Practice and the House Project Programme (HPP).

2.14 The House Project Programme (HPP)

LHPs will have access to the HPP. The programme ensures adherence to the fidelity of the House Project approach and provides the experiences, skills and knowledge that young people need to grow in confidence and be successful in their LHP.

The programme is web-based, flexible and modular and so may be delivered to suit a young person's needs, whether they are in education, training or employment (ETE) or currently NEET. The design is not based on a traditional, formal education model and instead takes a social pedagogical approach. It follows a group-work approach to enable young people to build connections, support one another and be part of a community.

HPP is certificated by AQA and SQA. It is classed as a reintegration programme meaning that all young people are recorded as ETE. Young people receive certificates as they progress through the programme.

HPP is delivered by the LHP with support from local partners. NHP support covers:

- developing local partnerships to build support for the programme
- providing advice and strategies to work with young people using a social pedagogical approach
- resources for each section of HPP
- verification and feedback to LHPs with regard to completion of HPP modules.
- regular practitioner team support and Community of Practice sessions focussed on group-work approaches to support implementation and facilitation
- national networking opportunities for the LA's Virtual Head and other members of the team.

We are currently working with two LAs who have well established LHPs to develop ways of utilising the House Project approach to support all young people leaving care in the LA.

2.15 Practice Framework

NHP developed the ORCHIDS Framework together with young people. The framework defines the House Project approach which makes it different to other leaving care options. It stands for Ownership, Responsibility, Community, Homes, Interdependence, Developmental Direction and Sense of Wellbeing and is supported by Self Determination Theory.

LHPs use the framework to:

- Plan and deliver direct work with their young people as part of the HPP
- Work in a way that enables partners and the broader workforce to engage in the project
- Drive practice in a positive way and provide a safe context for supporting young people in their first home.

The framework also serves to provide a set of standards to recognise, celebrate and build on success.

2.16 Psychological Input

NHP's approach is psychologically informed and we commission psychologists to provide input and support to ourselves and LHPs. Psychologists facilitate learning workshops for all staff in the House Project community. They help staff to understand the impact of trauma and to link theory to practice.

Each LA is also required to source psychological support for its own LHP. This can be done locally or via NHP. This support needs to include:

- A team formulation for each young person. This will involve all the key professionals and will support people to start to make sense of what we are seeing, why the young person is having these experiences and how we can help. The aim is to strengthen our understanding of the young person, so that we can strengthen our connection with them and tailor the support to their needs and strengths.
- Monthly psychological consultation for the LHP team. The consultation gives staff a space to reflect on how the team are currently managing, how individuals are managing and how to help the team to keep supporting young people. There is also space to think about specific young people.

The psychologist does not meet directly with young people. Their role is to support staff to think in a psychologically informed way, helping them to put this into practice and better support young people.

Historically LAs have struggled to secure in-house psychological support. We have contracts with psychology providers so that psychology services can be sourced alongside the Membership Agreement. This does away with costly commissioning processes, reduces the cost of the service to LAs and ensures quality and availability as the LHP starts.

2.17 Social Pedagogy

NHP have been trained in Social Pedagogy and we have since commissioned ThemPra to deliver social pedagogy to LHPs. This approach fits with the House Project approach and we have developed an HPP certificated Social Pedagogy Award for LHP staff.

2.18 Consultation to Project Leads

LHPs will have a minimum of monthly NHP consultation with an agenda which is jointly agreed. This can include a 'one to one' with the Project Lead and will also include time with the LHP team. Attendance at other meetings can be agreed and could include a Corporate Parenting Panel, Service Events, and Team Meetings etc.

2.19 Community of Practice

NHP will facilitate regular meetings for LHP staff to:

- Share practice and service developments
- Deliver professional inputs which will include:
 - ORCHIDS Framework
 - the House Project Programme
 - Trauma Informed Practice
 - performance
 - documentary making
 - evaluation
 - participation and engagement with young people incl. Care Leavers National Movement (CLNM)
 - web design and maintenance

The meetings will be virtual or physical which can take place at regional venues.

2.20 Ongoing relationship with Senior Officers

Assistant Directors of the LA will be invited to attend bi-annual Strategic Leads Group Meetings with NHP and events.

The Director will be available to support/attend local Strategic/Corporate meetings by agreement.

3. FINANCE

3.1 Financial modelling

The cost of accommodation for young people represents one of the highest challenges to LA budgets. LHPs deliver improved outcomes for young people at lower costs which reduces demand on wider LA and partner agency budgets with stable tenancies, improved emotional, physical and mental health and less contact with criminal justice services. We have a financial modelling paper which can be tailored to the needs of a specific LA once placement data/salary costings are shared with NHP.

3.2 Membership fees

The membership fees for the service recorded in this outline are set at £35,000+vat pa for years one, two and three. In year four and subsequent years the membership fee is £25,000+vat pa.

3.3 Internal scaling

The membership fees are calculated on the costs associated with supporting an LHP that operates one cohort per year with a cohort size of around 10 young people. As LAs become confident in the approach, and can see the benefit of improved outcomes and budgetary savings they have started to scale internally. For LHPs who run two cohorts per year or two separate and distinct cohorts from the same staff, an additional cost will be charged to cover the additional overheads.

4. ADDITIONALITY

4.1 Other income/resources streams

As a Charity we are able to bid for monies and accept donations to improve the offer to LHPs and young people.

Energy Management

We provide a white good and an introductory fuel voucher for all young people when they move into their first home.

4.2 Partnerships

NHP is keen to develop partnership arrangements both for LHPs and with NHP. Stakeholders recognise the structured asset-based approach and are keen to develop ways of working to the benefit of young people. This yields opportunities for apprenticeships and work-based experience (Reconomy, Valpak and Donald Insall) improvement in financial literacy for young people and redesign of financial services to young people (MyBnk).

4.3 Aspirational Awards

In 2022 we established Aspirational Awards. Investing directly in individual young people with care experience is one aspect of our approach to create lasting positive change. Young people are able to request funds to "live their dream". We will source income streams to enable this to continue and grow.

5. MEMBERSHIP

For your LHP to continue you must adhere to the fidelity of the NHP Framework outlined in the contract.

NHP continues to be a learning organisation. Whilst the fidelity of the model will not change, there may be alterations to practice and policy elements. We will continue to work with you on any changes to the way NHP services are delivered.



NHP
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Financial Modelling



NHP

Living connected and fulfilling lives

Introduction

The National House Project (NHP) provides a psychologically informed practice framework to support young people in care to move into their own homes and live connected and fulfilling lives. It improves outcomes for individual young people and also realises financial savings to Local Authority (LA) budgets. This paper considers the costs to set up and run a Local House Project (LHP) and the potential savings that can be made by the LA.

Key Costs to all Local House Projects

The cost to run an LHP varies from LA to LA depending on local arrangements and variations in costs. There are key costs that relate to all LHPs.

Staffing

With a small workforce of one Project Lead and two Facilitators it is critical that the right staff are appointed and are then trained and supported to undertake the role. NHP will be involved in the recruitment process and once appointed staff receive training from NHP, clinical psychologists and social pedagogues and join a 'community of practice' with other LHP staff. Whilst there are events for all LHP staff more focused work is completed on regional and sub-regional footprints.

The current salary range for the Project Lead is £30,000-£56,000 with most posts paid at £44,000 or less. Figures for this financial modelling have been based on £45,000.

The current salary range for the Facilitators is £18,000-£32,000, with half of the posts being paid at £26,000 or less and with only one LA paying more than £30,000. The figures for this financial modelling have been based on £30,000.

Costings for both roles have been calculated with 'on costs' of 25%. Budget has been profiled for the posts at £56,250 and £37,500 respectively. The terms and conditions of staff employed in the LHPs are determined locally and will be factored into actual calculations once provided to NHP. Full yearly costings for salaries are estimated at £131,250 per annum.

Expenses

NHP facilitate a Community of Practice for staff from LHPs. Whilst this can be developed and provided virtually there will be a need to undertake some physical meetings and travelling to this and other NHP and LHP related activities requires budget. A sum of £2,500 has been allocated for this.

Activities linked to House Project Programme (HPP)

HPP is modular and web based and ensures adherence to the fidelity of the House Project (HP) approach. It has activities that are designed to provide opportunities that support the development of the young person and prepare them for individual living e.g., trip away, doing up the base, cooking etc. An annual budget of £5,000 per cohort has been suggested.

National House Project (NHP)

NHP has developed expertise and the necessary resources to support the set up and management of LHPs in different LA's allowing for the local context as determined by the political and corporate environment. Whilst the framework can be adapted to the local context, there are key fidelity elements that must be in place to achieve both the outcomes for care leavers and savings to LA placement budgets.

The 'Offer' document provides detail of the support that is provided by NHP to anyone setting up and managing an LHP and the associated costs are calculated on a 'not for profit' basis. The membership fee for the first three years is £35,000+vat pa and year four and beyond is £25,000+vat pa.

A membership agreement will be provided to the LA and when this is agreed and signed, an invoice will be issued for the first year's payment.

NHP will support the LA on preliminary work needed to achieve Membership Agreement sign off (3-6 months). Costs to the LA commence at this point.



Psychological Services

It is a requirement of the membership agreement that all LHPs have access to monthly support from a Clinical Psychologist. The Psychologist does not see individual young people but will support the LHP staff with formulations, safety planning and encourage team working. They should be experienced in trauma informed approaches and understand the care system.

Psychology should be in place at the commencement of the LHP and whilst the original intention was to access this from existing local frameworks, LHPs struggled to source this service. NHP contract with psychology providers who can be commissioned to deliver this monthly support. This avoids the protracted commissioning process that would result from spot purchasing arrangements and results in a lower unit cost to the LA. We strongly advise that the LA purchase this as part of the first-year membership which will ensure the provision is available at the outset, is of good quality and hence will set the foundations for delivering a safe and informed service. If the LA opt to use a local provider, then they should factor in the cost for this. On the rare occasion that this service can be sourced from existing arrangements then no budget will be required but even when using pre-existing contracts there are often associated costs. As the costs for our psychology providers have thus far proven to be lower than for other options, we have factored these into the calculations.

The psychology support is provided at two levels:

14 days and 16 days – depending on the needs of the LHP.

- The 14 day service (4 days formulation, 10 days consultation) is £11,900 +VAT pa
- The 16 day service (7 days formulation and 9 days consultation) is £13,600 +VAT pa

The psychology element is reviewed yearly.

Ongoing costs for individual young people

Living Allowance

When young people move into their properties the LA provide them with the equivalent Universal Credit payment until they are eligible to receive Universal Credit Benefit. This provides the opportunity for young people to manage bills and budgeting in a supportive arrangement prior to them being able to receive benefits in their own right. This is set at an annual cost of £30,000 for 10 young people..

Housing provider costs

The LA pays the young persons rent until they are able to claim Housing Benefit. We have factored in £70 pw per young person, with an annual cohort cost to the project of £36,400 for 10 young people.

These key elements contribute to a first-year cost of about £185,650 rising to £252,050 in years two and three before dropping to £242,050 in year four and subsequent years.
This is the minimum cost to run a LHP.

Additional costs to some Local House Projects

The following elements need to be available to the LHP and depending on local conditions, may or may not be charged to the LHP. No LHP thus far has incurred all of the following costs;

Base - Office accommodation

The LHP will need a base that is a shared space for LHP staff and young people. Young people are supported to develop the space allowing them to develop ownership of the accommodation and use it as a 'drop in' function. This will be required from the commencement of the LHP. LAs are traditionally asset rich and usually have access to buildings and office accommodation. Only a few LHPs thus far have incurred charges for office accommodation. If the LHP is to be charged for office accommodation it is not likely to exceed £10,000 pa.

Refurbishment

It is important that young people are involved in, and take responsibility for, the decoration (and rarely refurbishment) of the properties that will become their homes. All LHPs thus far have been able to access budgets from the Housing Provider that are routinely used for getting properties ready to be occupied and we have therefore not included costings for this.

The additional costs of the accommodation would take the first year cost to £195,650 rising to £262,050 in years two and 3 before dropping to £252,050 in year four and subsequent.

Project Costings

| Project costs - all HPs | Year 1 | Year 2 & 3 | Year 4 |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Project Lead (incl. 25% on costs) | £56,250 | £56,250 | £56,250 |
| Facilitators x2 (incl. 25% on costs) | £75,000 | £75,000 | £75,000 |
| Expenses | £2,500 | £2,500 | £2,500 |
| Activities linked to HPP | £5,000 | £5,000 | £5,000 |
| NHP membership fee | £35,000 | £35,000 | £25,000 |
| Psychology support | £11,900 | £11,900 | £11,900 |
| Living allowance | | £30,000 | £30,000 |
| Housing Provider Costs | | £36,400 | £36,400 |
| Minimum Costs per annum | £185,650 | £252,050 | £242,050 |
| Project costs - all HPs | Year 1 | Year 2 & 3 | Year 4 |
| LHP base | £10,000 | £10,000 | £10,000 |
| Maximum costs per project | £195,650 | £262,050 | £252,050 |



Table A. Costs of establishing and managing a Local House Project

Savings

Placement costs

The financial model is based on supporting young people to step down from regulated placements (internal and purchased foster care, residential care and supported lodgings) in to LHP properties. For the model to be cost effective, the placement savings need to cover the costs of both setting up and running the LHP. Given that there is a lead in time to young people moving into properties there are upfront costs to establish the LHP, and savings will only be made when young people move into properties. For simplicity we have modelled the finances on this being at the end for year one, but most young people will move in earlier than this, achieving additional savings to those identified here.

LHPs work with young people aged 16 onwards and through the practice framework they are supported into their own homes. Moving young people in a planned and supported way into their own homes shortly after their 17th birthday avoids expensive placement costs. In England the cost saving element is usually only for one year until the 18th birthday however many LAs are paying supported accommodation costs for young people over the aged of 18, and whilst this does not therefore represent a saving, it is avoidance that reduces the overall expenditure for the LA.

The savings potential in Scotland is greater with the financial responsibility extending until 21. LAs in Scotland have also highlighted the pressures and costs arising from young people who have left LA provision only to find themselves homeless and needing accommodation aged 18-21. These young people are expensive to

accommodate when they come back into the system as there is limited provision able to meet their needs. The HP approach in Scotland has worked successfully with this cohort and cost avoidance figures mirror the savings profile.

The availability of reliable costings for analysis is challenged by different accounting methodologies across LAs. So, whilst each LA will have considerable data about their placement costs, it is difficult to compare LA costings. We have provided the latest published costings from comparator data sources (see table B) (each of the LAs that we have worked with have thus far identified independent sector residential placement costings to be much higher, and on average in the region of £250,000 to £300,000).

Whilst these are average costs from 2017 data for fostering placements and 2020 data for residential placements (which have undoubtedly increased) the range of independent sector costs vary greatly. The 2018 'Association of Directors of Children Services (ADCS) Demand Pressures' report recorded that one LA paid almost £1m pa for one young person.

NHP is not prescriptive about the route and placement type from which the young person moves into the LHP. The move has to be right for the young person and the LHP will determine which young people join the project and therefore how much will be saved from placement budgets.

The following demonstrates the costs and therefore savings to the LA for young people moving from placement types:

| Placement types | Annual average cost | Evidence base |
|--|----------------------------------|---|
| Internal Fostering | £24,700 | Fostering Stocktake 2017 |
| Independent Sector Fostering | £41,496 | Fostering Stocktake 2017 |
| Internal Residential | £260,269 | Personal Social Services Research Unit 2020 |
| Independent Sector Residential | £201,596 | Personal Social Services Research Unit 2020 |
| Internal Foster Care to House Project to free up space for step down from Internal Residential | £235,569 (£260,269 - £24,700) | |
| Internal Fostering to House Project to free up space to step down from Independent Residential | £176,986 (£201,596 - £24,700) | |

Table B. Published average yearly costs for placements and potential average yearly savings dependent on origin of placement type

For LHPs to be cost neutral, the savings (cost avoidance) made from reduced placement costs need to cover not only the annual running costs (circa £260,000) but also repay the investment for setting up the LHP. After covering these costs the approach can then offer recurring annual reductions to LA expenditure.

The full effect of the savings proposals is based on all 10 young people moving into their properties for a full year prior to reaching their 18th birthday. Given the supply and availability of properties this may not be achieved but there is considerable 'headroom' on the proposal for the savings to be realised.

The approach is based on an agreed number of properties at any one time (with an average cohort size of around 10). Young people will move from an introductory to secure tenancy when they have successfully lived in their home for 12 months and the next time they move will be because they choose to do so. The commitment from the housing provider, therefore, is to make around 10 properties available per year for House Project young people to move into.

Financial Modelling

1. This financial modelling paper has been developed with data from LAs who have made annual savings from £150,000 to upwards of £1.5M.
2. The mix of young people will determine the savings potential.
 - a. Moving 10 young people from the lowest unit cost of provision (fostering) avoids costs of £247,000 which very nearly covers the cost of running the project
 - b. Moving one young person out of internal residential (£260,269) each year will avoid placements costs which covers the costs of running the project.
3. Taking the maximum costings, the annual cost of running the project will be £195,650 in year one, £262,050 in years two and three and £252,050 in year four and each year thereafter.
4. Young people move into placements at around month 12 making savings to placement cost budgets in year 2. Based on the following scenarios:
 - a. One young person moving from internal residential provision (£260,269) and nine young people moving from internal fostering (£222,300) reduces placement cost expenditure by £482,569. This will cover operating costs (£262,050) and achieve an in-year saving of £220,519*
 - b. Three young people moving from independent residential provision (£604,788) and seven young people moving from independent fostering (£290,000) reduces placement cost expenditure by £894,788. This will cover operating costs (£262,050) and achieve in year saving of £622,738**

In all likelihood actual savings will be somewhere between these projected amounts.

These savings have been worked with the maximum annualised costings. The savings potential increases by a further £10,000 per year if the LHP operates to the minimum annualised costings.

5. If the LHP does not have to pay back the set-up costs from year one they will make savings to LA budgets when young people move in at month 12.
6. If the first year set up costs do have to be repaid, then it is projected that the costs will be paid back by 12 months in scenario 4a* and 4 months in scenario 4b**. Again, it is likely to be between month 4 and 12 with current project data suggesting that most LAs will pay back the investment by month 7.
7. The projected forecasting is based on a full year effect. Most young people do not move into their property at 17 but do so typically between 17 and 17.5. If we revise the projections to only consider a 6-month savings effect (half year effect less housing and living costs) then the cost avoidance amounts are reduced to £143,460 in 4a and £344,569 in 4b.
8. The HP approach is demonstrating that it is effective for all young people and makes a significant difference to those who have struggled to live in family settings (foster care) and who have incurred high costs often associated with out of area placements.
9. Given the savings potential many LAs are including young people over the age of 18 amongst their cohorts. This is often where care leavers are vulnerable and will not cope without additional support but do not reach the threshold for adult social care provision. Whilst there is technically no budget allocation for these individuals it is difficult to regard this as a 'saving' but not only is it morally the right thing to do, but children's social care are spending vast sums of money on supported lodgings provision and hence the cost avoidance is significant.
10. The forecasting is based on full year effect and for it to be recurring annual cohorts of young people work through the project and graduate on a yearly basis. We expect young people to be in their homes by month 9 in the first and recurring years. As we have not factored in any savings prior to month 12, there will be additional savings if young people do move between months 9 and 12.

11. The HP approach was driven by the ambition to improve the outcomes for young people leaving care. It was developed within the mandate that it would be cost neutral and could not incur additional costings. Learning from practice, evaluations and developments has demonstrated that outcomes are improved significantly and that costs can also be reduced to the placement savings budgets. The improved outcomes for young people also reduces demand and expenditure on the adult social care sector and to partner agencies. The forecasted savings highlighted in this paper relate solely to the savings to LA children's social care budgets.

Independent Evaluation - York University 2020

The Evaluation considered the financial implications of the House Project approach and the Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) highlighted a positive return on investment of 1.4 from year 2 which increases to 2.0 in year 3 (a saving of £2 for each £1 invested in the House Project).

Whilst these are undoubtedly positive findings, we are less than convinced that this accurately reflects the savings to LAs. These calculations were developed in 2019 and relate to LAs that were establishing the framework approach. The savings to current LAs are now much greater. We plan to undertake a piece of work to review the CBA and the savings to the wider public purse.

Additionality

Much of what we do at NHP is to constantly seek to provide 'additionality' to young people whether that be in resources or experiences and whilst the benefits do not translate directly to budget lines there is a return (annual) to your young people (based on a cohort of 10).

Being a member of LHPs means that:

- Each can access a white good and introductory fuel voucher when they move in to their first home
- Each young person can access 'fuel crisis' vouchers
- Each young person in their own home can bid into the Aspirational Awards
- Each young person can access professional work wear from Suited and booted or Smartworks (difficult to put financial value but Hugo Boss/Armani suits don't come cheap)

OPEN

Children and Families Committee**19 January 2026****Improvement Plan Progress Report****Report of: Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director, Children's Services****Report Reference No: CF/24/25-26****Ward(s) Affected: All****For Scrutiny****Purpose of Report**

- 1 This report is part of our regular updates to committee on the progress of the Children's Services improvement plan. The improvement plan addresses the findings from the Ofsted inspection in February and March 2024.
- 2 This report also includes the findings from the councillor visits to frontline services which took place in November 2025. Councillor frontline visits enable councillors to have oversight of quality of practice and people's experiences of working for the council
- 3 The [findings on the third Ofsted monitoring visit](#) on cared for children and permanence were published on 13 November 2025.

Executive Summary

- 4 We are continuing to make progress in delivering our improvement plan, with 57% actions now complete. The third Ofsted monitoring visit confirmed that improvements are being made and recognised the significant investment in Children's Services and a strengthened commitment to Children's Services across the council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the progress against the improvement plan.
2. Note the findings from the councillor visits to the fostering service and residential service in November 2025.
3. Note the findings from the third Ofsted monitoring visit on cared for children, planning and achieving permanence.

Background

5 Improvement governance arrangements are continuing to monitor progress against the plan and provide scrutiny and challenge monthly. Changes to the plan since the last report which have been agreed through these arrangements are included in Appendix 3 for transparency.

Progress against the improvement plan

6 The improvement plan at Appendix 2 was updated on 12 November 2025. Appendix 1 shows an overview of the RAG ratings for each action.

7 Key improvement activity which has taken place since the last update to committee includes:

- The practice standards have been revised and will be relaunched to ensure expectations on practice are clear to everyone.
- A new quality of practice framework is being developed. This will replace our quality assurance framework and will ensure we understand ourselves and develop our practice in relation to our audits and feedback from children, young people and families.
- Successful implementation of restorative practice as our practice model is critical to our sustained improvement, so we are partnering with L30 Relational Systems who specialise in working with Children's Services directorates to build a bespoke training programme. L30 Relational Systems are well regarded in the sector and recognised as experts in this field. This is anticipated to start in Q4 this year.
- The Housing Charter for care leavers aged 16-25 has been launched. The initiative aims to provide stable accommodation and tailored guidance to help young people transition confidently into independent adulthood. 13 registered providers have now signed up to the Charter and bi-monthly meetings are planned to share good practice, discuss issues and update on support available in line with the Charter commitments.
- To continue supporting the practice of our Designated Teachers we have hosted a 'New to Role' training session and we have rewritten our Personal Education Plan Quality Assurance documentation to refine our success criteria and guidance for schools.
- The refreshed recruitment campaign for children's social care was launched on 20 November - [Cheshire East TOGETHER for social work](#).

8 The third monitoring visit in October 2025 found that the senior leadership team is sharply focused on improving the quality of social work practice. There has been improvement in services since the inspection, such as in the quality of care plans, challenge from IROs, and oversight of all cared for children. It also found a number of strengths in practice, such as that children remain in the care of their wider family members when it is safe for them to do so, and most

children live with carers who understand and meet their needs well. Practice in some areas remains too inconsistent, which we know, and are continuing to focus on. The review of the practice standards, new quality of practice framework, and new improvement plan, will all support our improvement work moving forwards.

9 At the last committee meeting in November, councillors requested an independent view of progress from the Improvement Board Chair. The Director for Children's Services has confirmed that this update will be provided to policy and opposition briefings.

Findings from Councillor visits to frontline services

10 This report covers the findings from the third round of visits which took place in November to the Fostering Service and Residential Service.

11 The visits support councillors to understand:

- The quality of frontline practice
- How we support teams to deliver good quality practice.

12 The findings are summarised below.

13 Strengths:

- Staff are child-focused. Young people's emotional needs are well understood and supported, including support to build/ maintain connections with people that are important to them.
- Young people's feedback on the support they receive is very positive, and young people are achieving positive outcomes.
- Children and young people benefit from kinship foster carers which means they remain within their wider families.
- The Mockingbird model provides support to foster carers.
- Referral schemes for foster carers are working well.
- Access to LiquidLogic for residential teams has improved communication with social workers.
- There is a positive culture within the residential service, staff feel listened to, valued, and empowered to make decisions. Staff wellbeing is prioritised. There is a strong training offer.
- Managers are approachable. Management support and team relationships are strong.

14 Areas for development:

- Challenges with Unit4, and the time to recruit to roles, are impacting on recruitment and the ability to recruit bank staff to the residential service.
- Recruitment of foster carers is a challenge. Cheshire East is competing with private fostering agencies to attract foster carers.
- Ensuring we have the right support for kinship carers.
- Foster carer forums need to take place to provide support to foster carers, hear their views, and enable foster carers to develop peer networks.
- There has been instability in the fostering service which has impacted on capacity.

Consultation and Engagement

15 Practitioners' views on improvements are sought through the councillor frontline visits, sector led improvement programme work, Ofsted monitoring visits, and DfE progress reviews. The third Ofsted monitoring visit found that staff felt listened to and engaged in Cheshire East's improvement journey, and that there was a level of optimism and confidence across the workforce that things are getting better.

Reasons for Recommendations

16 Cheshire East Council's Children's Services received an inadequate judgement in the Ofsted inspection in 2024. 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 councillors 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 scrutinise the improvement plan. | Committee will not have oversight of progress against the plan so cannot be assured that outcomes will be improved for children and young people. | There is a risk that improvements are not achieved at the pace needed. |

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance

- 17 This is a further update report for the committee on the children's improvement plan. It is within the committee's remit to monitor improvement within the service and ensure compliance with the improvement notice served by the DfE.
- 18 Members of the committee therefore need to be assured that all requirements and recommendations within the ILACS report and the improvement notice (served upon the council by the DfE on the 24 July 2024 resulting from the Ofsted inspection findings), are complied with and that the plans in place deliver the improvements required are within the timescales set by the DfE.
 - a. Failure to comply or poor progress against the improvement plan can result in the imposition of directions to secure performance, which can include DfE intervention and nomination of a person to act on its behalf to secure performance.
- 19 The recent Ofsted monitoring visit recognised that progress has been made in several areas identified in the improvement notice however, there are a number of areas which require further development and monitoring via the improvement plan.
 - (a) The protection of vulnerable people is a council responsibility so continued regular oversight by members of the Children and Families Committee, alongside the overall approach to improving service provision, aligns with this obligation.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 20 The improvement plan to address the findings from the inspection was agreed at the Children and Families Committee on 16 July and Full Council on 17 July, which included the approach to the funding of the plan.
- 21 The overall funding was approved totalling £1.987m across the two financial years 2024/25 and 2025/26 with an additional £0.013m budget increasing the total budget to £2.000m.
- 22 The 2025/26 forecast at FR3 is £1.761m as detailed in the table, this reflects the current recruitment position. The combined 2 year costs of £2.305m is an overspend of £0.305m.

| Expenditure Group | 2025/26 Budget (Original Planned) | 2025/26 Actuals End of October 25 | 2025/26 Forecast Total |
|---|---|---|---------------------------|
| Edge of Care Support Workers (5 FTE) | £208,100 | £0 | £0 |
| Team Leader (2 FTE) | £133,434 | £26,714 | £70,624 |
| QA Officer (1 FTE) | £66,717 | £15,273 | £59,800 |
| Project Manager (grade 11) to lead 18-25 accommodation recommission (1FTE) | £66,717 | £30,680 | £35,591 |
| Connected Care Assessor (2 FTE) | £114,702 | £43,783 | £103,944 |
| Independent Reviewing Officer (2 FTE) | £133,434 | £66,725 | £151,339 |
| Personal Advisor (3 FTE) | £124,860 | £86,067 | £131,806 |
| 2.00 FTE Agency Social Worker (initial plan 6.00 FTE Direct Employees) | £344,106 | £81,075 | £126,315 |
| 2.00 FTE Agency Team Managers | £0 | £108,190 | £180,333 |
| Family Group Conference Support Worker (originally 4 FTE, increased to 6 FTE) | £166,480 | £105,088 | £287,491 |
| Childrens Commissioning Event | £0 | £186 | £186 |
| Children's Home for Children with Complex Mental Health Needs and Challenging Behaviour - design costs and programme document | £0 | -£1,292 | -£1,292 |
| Head of Service - Integrated Front Door (1 FTE) | £0 | £108,110 | £172,503 |
| Project Lead (1 FTE) | £0 | £85,206 | £85,206 |
| Relationship Support Service | £0 | £15,000 | £15,000 |
| Safeguarding Quality Assurance Manager (1 FTE) | £0 | £69,048 | £123,944 |
| Service Manager - Children with Disabilities (1 FTE) | £0 | £96,418 | £134,278 |
| Specialist Expert Support - External Consultant to work on Health programmes | £0 | £54,416 | £54,416 |
| Childrens Staff Event | £0 | £250 | £250 |
| Corporate Exc Workstream | £0 | £0 | £30,000 |
| Grand Total | £1,358,550 | £990,937 | £1,761,734 |
| Original improvement plan as agreed at full council in July 2024 | | | |
| Amended item from the original improvement plan | | | |
| Additional items identified through improvement activity | | | |

23 This position continues to be monitored through in-year forecast reporting.

24 The overspend has been offset by legitimate use of Grant Funding at FR3, in line with the grant conditions. Any budget shortfall in future years will be addressed as part of the 2026/27 Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Human Resources

25 HR are supporting improvement work and attend and report to each Improvement Board.

Risk Management

26 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.

Impact on other Committees

27 None.

Policy

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| | Commitment 2: Improving health and wellbeing | |
|--|---|--|

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

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

Other Implications

29 The improvement plan aims to improve the outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people.

Consultation

| Name of Consultee | Post held | Date sent | Date returned |
|---------------------------------------|---|------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Statutory Officer (or deputy):</i> | | | |
| Chris Benham | Director of Finance and Deputy S151 Officer | 19/12/25 | 06/01/26 |
| Kevin O'Keefe | Interim Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) | 10/12/25 | 22/12/25 |
| <i>Legal and Finance</i> | | | |
| Diane Green | Finance Manager | 26/11/25 | 18/12/25 |
| Tessa Williams | Interim Principal Child Care Lawyer (People Team) | 26/11/25 | 03/12/25 |
| <i>Other Consultees:</i> | | | |
| <i>Executive Directors/Directors</i> | | | |
| Dawn Godfrey | Executive Director, Children's Services | 19/12/25 | 22/12/25 |

| | | | |
|------------------------------|---|----------|----------|
| Vonni Gordon | Director of Quality, Partnerships and Commissioning | 03/12/25 | 19/12/25 |
| Access to Information | | | |
| Contact Officer: | Vonni Gordon, Director of Quality, Partnerships and Commissioning Vonni.Gordon@cheshireeast.gov.uk | | |
| Appendices: | Appendix 1: RAG rating overview Appendix 2: Improvement Plan Appendix 3: Changes to improvement plan actions Appendix 4: Vital Signs Scorecard <u>Appendix 5: Ofsted monitoring visit findings on cared for children and permanence</u> | | |
| Background Papers: | <u>Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 10 November 2025</u> <u>Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 15 September 2025</u> <u>Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 9 June 2025</u> <u>Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 7 April 2025</u> <u>Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 13 January 2025</u> <u>Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 11 November 2024</u> <u>Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 16 September 2024</u> <u>Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 16 July 2024</u> <u>Report on the Ofsted inspection findings to the Children and Families Committee on 3 June 2024</u> <u>Cheshire East's Ofsted Inspection Report published 16 May</u> | | |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <u>Ofsted ILACS Framework</u> |
|--|---|

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Improvement Plan Rating Overview

Ratings as at 12 November 2025

Key

| Colour | Action Definition |
|---------|---|
| Grey | Not started yet/ action closed and replaced with new action |
| Red | Not on track |
| Amber | On track to be completed within timescales |
| Amber E | Completed but we need to embed and evidence impact |
| Green | Completed and embedded with evidence of impact |

Chapter 1

| Senior Leaders' Oversight | | | |
|---------------------------|--|---------|-----------|
| Ref | Action | Due by | RAG |
| SL1 | Reporting and governance arrangements | Jan 25 | Complete |
| SL2a | Internal Family Feedback Strategy | Apr 25 | Amber E |
| SL2b | Partnership Family Feedback Strategy | Mar 25 | Amber E |
| SL3 | Improvement Board | July 24 | Complete |
| SL4 | Children's Services Strategic Quartet | July 24 | Complete |
| SL5 | Corporate parenting strategic board | Nov 24 | Amber E |
| SL6 | Corporate parenting training | Sept 25 | Amber E |
| SL7 | Care leaver champions | Apr 25 | Amber E |
| SL8 | Cared for children and care leavers strategy | TBC | Reviewing |
| SL9 | Quality assurance activity against improvement plan | Feb 25 | Amber E |
| SL10 | Service manager thematic audit group | Aug 24 | Complete |
| SL11 | Share audit findings with teams | Sept 24 | Complete |
| SL12 | Vital signs performance report | Sept 24 | Complete |
| SL13 | Councillor oversight of frontline practice | Sept 25 | Complete |
| SL14 | Children's social care national framework implications | Feb 25 | Complete |
| SL15a | Practice guidance on timescales | Jun 25 | Amber E |
| SL15b | Embed practice standards | Apr 25 | Amber E |
| SL16 | Examples of good practice | Aug 24 | Amber E |
| SL17 | Strengthen the audit process | Nov 25 | Delayed |
| SL18 | Family feedback implementation plan | Oct 25 | Reviewing |

| Care Leavers: Quality of Practice | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|----------|----------|
| Ref | Action | Due by | RAG |
| CLA1 | Practice standards | June 24 | Complete |
| CLA2 | Mandatory training plan | June 25 | Complete |
| CLA3 | Management structure | April 24 | Complete |
| CLA4 | New pathway plan format | May 24 | Complete |
| CLA6 | Arrangements for young adults where there are safeguarding concerns | Sept 24 | Complete |
| CLA7 | Recruit Care Leaver Ambassadors | Oct 24 | Complete |

| Care Leavers: Planning for Adulthood | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---------|----------|
| Ref | Action | Due by | RAG |
| CLB2 | Review Ignition Panel | Sept 24 | Complete |
| CLB3 | Preparing for adulthood in practice standards | June 24 | Complete |
| CLB4 | Care leaver hubs | July 24 | Amber E |
| CLB6 | Health histories development | July 25 | Complete |
| CLB7 | PA training on health histories | June 24 | Complete |
| CLB8 | Local offer app | Aug 24 | Complete |
| CLB9 | Review the local offer | Dec 24 | Complete |
| CLB10 | PA training on the local offer | July 24 | Complete |
| CLB11 | Participation opportunities at hubs | July 24 | Complete |
| CLB12 | Free bus pass for care leavers | Oct 24 | Complete |

| | | | |
|-----|---|---------|-----------|
| P3 | Management session on planning | Sept 24 | Complete |
| P4 | Reflective case discussions for CP | July 24 | Complete |
| P5 | Permanence action plan | TBC | Reviewing |
| P6 | Best practice guidance on care planning | June 25 | Amber E |
| P7 | Review children's panels | Jan 26 | On track |
| P8 | Training on partnership challenge | Dec 24 | Complete |
| P9 | New forms in line with families first | Feb 26 | On track |
| P10 | Single assessment | Mar 26 | On track |
| P11 | Training plan for lead practitioners | Apr 25 | Amber E |
| P12 | Central place for resources | Sept 25 | Reviewing |

| | | | |
|-----|---|---------|----------|
| S7 | Two council residential homes | Jun 25 | Complete |
| S9 | Joint commissioning high needs placements | Feb 26 | On track |
| S10 | Young people influence recruitment of foster carers | Sept 24 | Complete |
| S11 | Homes for cared for children workstream | Apr 25 | Amber E |

Chapter 2

| The Front Door | | | |
|----------------|---|---------|----------|
| Ref | Action | Due by | RAG |
| FD1 | Contact guidance | July 24 | Amber E |
| FD2 | Review LA MASH arrangements | Aug 24 | Complete |
| FD3 | Multi-agency workshop reviewing front door arrangements | Jan 25 | Complete |
| FD4 | Chapter 3 Working Together | Apr 25 | Amber E |
| FD5 | Establish a MASH | Mar 26 | On track |

| Strategy Meetings | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|---------|----------|
| Ref | Action | Due by | RAG |
| SM1 | Workshop on strategy meetings | Aug 24 | Closed |
| SM2 | Minute-taking training | Aug 24 | Closed |
| SM3 | Management analysis box | June 24 | Complete |
| SM4 | Partnership and managers training | Oct 24 | Amber E |

| Life-story work and later-life letters | | | |
|--|---|--------|---------|
| Ref | Action | Due by | RAG |
| LS1 | Commission training | Mar 25 | Amber E |
| LS3 | Monitoring for life-story work and later life letters | Aug 24 | Amber E |

| Health of Cared for Children | | | |
|------------------------------|---|--------|---------|
| Ref | Action | Due by | RAG |
| H1 | Prioritisation for vulnerable children for CYPMHS support | Mar 25 | Amber E |
| H2 | Waiting well initiatives | Mar 25 | Amber E |
| H3 | Review emotional support for UASC | Aug 25 | Amber E |
| H4 | Joint health and CSC reviews of health assessments timeliness | May 24 | Closed |
| H5 | LA single point of contact | May 24 | Closed |
| H6 | Quarterly reporting to NHS England | May 24 | Closed |
| H7 | Health and wellbeing workstream | Jun 25 | Amber E |
| H8 | Review and streamline health assessment process | May 25 | Amber E |

| Education for Cared for Children | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|---------|----------|
| Ref | Action | Due by | RAG |
| ED1 | Education advisor attendance meetings | Apr 24 | Complete |
| ED2 | Attendance forum | Apr 24 | Complete |
| ED3 | Multi-disciplinary attendance meetings | Apr 24 | Complete |
| ED4 | PEP training | Dec 24 | Amber E |
| ED5 | Review PEP form | Sept 24 | Amber E |
| ED6 | Benchmark cared for attainment against their peers | Feb 25 | Amber E |

| | | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--------|----------|
| ED7 | Audit young adults who are NEET at 20 | Mar 25 | Complete |
| ED8 | Use RONI to identify at risk of NEET | Nov 24 | Complete |

| Workforce | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|--------------|----------|
| Ref | Action | Due by | RAG |
| W1 | Financial support for the plan | July 24 | Complete |
| W2 | Capacity for the care leaver service | July 24 | Complete |
| W3 | Review IRO capacity | July 24 | Complete |
| W4 | Recruitment and retention group | Sept 24 | Amber E |
| W5 | Recruitment and retention strategy | Dec 24 | Amber E |
| W6 | Recruitment campaign | Nov 25 | On track |
| W7 | Reporting on caseloads | Aug 24 | Complete |
| W8 | Masters apprenticeship scheme | Mar 25 | Complete |
| W9 | Seek practitioner views | Qrtly review | Complete |
| W10 | Communicate improvement progress | Qrtly review | Complete |
| W11 | Seek children's views through audit | Monthly | Complete |
| W12 | Base build children's services | Mar 26 | On track |

Chapter 3

| Entries to Care | | | |
|-----------------|--|---------|----------|
| Ref | Action | Due by | RAG |
| C1 | Review children's experiences to see if early help could have been offered | Feb 25 | Amber E |
| C2 | Early Help Strategy | June 25 | Complete |
| C3 | Joint protocol for police protection | July 25 | Closed |
| C4 | Neglect Strategy | June 25 | Complete |

| Children's home inspection | | | |
|----------------------------|---|--------|----------|
| Ref | Action | Due by | RAG |
| CH1 | Weekly management reviews | Mar 25 | Complete |
| CH2 | Strengthen reg 44 visits | Mar 25 | Complete |
| CH3 | Review the recording system for residential provision | Mar 25 | Complete |



Children's Services Improvement Plan

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Introduction

This is our action plan to address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of children's services in Cheshire East which took place in February and March 2024. The findings from the inspection are available in a report on the [Ofsted website](#). The inspection gave Cheshire East's children's services an overall grading of inadequate and found that although some improvements had been made since our last inspection in 2019, the quality of practice and the experience and progress of children and young people was too variable, and for care leavers this was inadequate. We need to make significant improvements, and this plan sets out how we will do this.

We are committed to improving outcomes for children and young people. We will use the inspection and monitoring visit findings to continue to improve the support we offer. This plan responds to all the areas identified in the inspection report. Immediate action was taken to improve services, starting during the inspection, and this is reflected in the plan alongside longer-term actions and ambitions.

Through the delivery of our plan and our programme of improvement, we will continue to embed a culture of high support and high challenge and be a **child-focused** organisation that works **together with** people, through effective relationships that support positive change. We know our workforce is our most important asset and we will continue to support and regularly communicate with frontline practitioners and managers so everyone understands their role in improvement and we co-produce, deliver, evaluate and celebrate changes together.



Context

This inspection, and previous inspections, have shown that Cheshire East's children's services have not provided consistently good quality support to our children and young people. We were judged inadequate in 2013 and 2024. In developing this plan, we have critically considered what barriers have prevented us from achieving good quality services to date. We have recognised that in the past we have moved from fixing problem to problem, which has led to a 'stop/start' approach. We now need to embed a systemic approach to improvement; changing our culture, developing the right systems and processes to ensure we routinely evaluate impact, and holding our shape around the changes we expect to see – holding the right people accountable consistently at every level.

We will be reviewing and changing our services in line with the [children's social care national framework](#) to ensure that we deliver consistently good quality practice that achieves strong outcomes for children and young people.

Cheshire East Council, like councils across the country, has been experiencing unprecedented financial pressures. In February 2024, the council approved a balanced budget for 2024/25, which included spending money from reserves to cover the impact of additional financial pressures. The level of reserves is now insufficient to adequately protect the council against future risks. Forecasts indicate there is four-year funding gap of £100m to balance the budget and hold an appropriate level of reserves.

Alongside the improvement programme in children's services, Cheshire East Council has embarked on a significant transformation programme. The council-wide transformation plan will aim to address the funding gap and will be submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) as part of the criteria for exceptional financial support from the government.

We calculate that £1.986m of additional investment will be required to support children's services to deliver our improvement plan at pace. A

costed proposal for additional capacity and expertise to support improvement was received and agreed by the Children and Families Committee and Full Council in July 2024.

Challenges for children's services are challenges for the whole council, and there is whole-council commitment and support for delivering this plan. This improvement plan is part of the council's transformation and has been informed by the findings from the LGA corporate peer review in March 2024.

The council's transformation plan will also support us to achieve our improvement plan. Cheshire East Council's transformation will include changes to the organisation's culture - embedding high standards, and effective challenge and performance management where these are not met, focusing on outcomes, not process. These messages will be echoed through our children's leadership and management programme.

The council's transformational plan will also support improved working between council services and improve the support to services from enablers.

This plan also feeds into our wider strategy for developing the council's children's services, the Together Strategy, which has the following building blocks:

- **Together supporting and enabling our workforce:** we have the right people, with the right skills and support to improve the outcomes of our children and young people
- **Together connecting as one team:** we work as one team across children's and adult services with shared skills, processes and communication to focus on the needs and experiences of children, young people and their families
- **Together improving and innovating our services:** our children, young people and their families have consistently good/ outstanding experiences of our services

- **Together collaborating with our families, colleagues and partners:** we adopt an 'experts by experience' approach that ensures that those receiving or delivering our services help to shape them.

Coproduction

In Cheshire East, we aim to work [TOGETHER](#) and adopt an 'experts by experience' approach that ensures that those receiving or delivering services help to shape them.

We will engage children and young people throughout our improvement journey in developing and delivering improvements. Children and young people's views will influence our delivery on a child, service, and strategic level. We are developing new Corporate Parenting governance arrangements that will include care experienced young people as key members. Young people will also be involved in shaping and evaluating services through our young people's participation groups, through our audits, young people's surveys, and the local offer app.

We will also continue to engage with practitioners and managers within our frontline teams to ensure we are all delivering improvements together, and we will ensure their feedback, and feedback from our partners, informs our evaluation of impact.

Support and Challenge

We are committed to delivering this plan and achieving consistently good and better services that achieve strong outcomes for children and young people. We know that we cannot deliver this plan alone, and that we need to work together with our children, young people and families, with our teams, across the partnership and throughout the council.

Throughout the development of the plan, we have engaged with frontline practitioners and managers on the inspection findings and what support

they need moving forwards, and we will continue to engage with our workforce throughout the delivery of the plan to ensure we are all on this journey together.

This plan has been developed together with and provided with scrutiny and challenge by:

- service managers and service leads, including partners
- the children's services leadership team
- the council's leadership team
- the Safeguarding Children's Partnership
- the Improvement and Impact Board
- elected members on the Children and Families Committee and Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee.

The final plan was endorsed by full Council.

We will continue to invest in our workforce through training, development, and management and leadership support and challenge. Training has been tailored to the areas for improvement raised during the inspection and will continue to be responsive to development needs throughout the year as identified in quality assurance and monitoring activity. This includes a bespoke leadership programme for all leaders within children's services to embed a culture of high support and high challenge, and embedding restorative practice as our practice model so we build strong relationships that support effective change. The impact of training and support on practice will continue to be evaluated through the delivery of this plan so we can adapt and respond to areas for improvement.

We will also seek to 'infect our system' with good practice by collecting and sharing examples of good practice with teams.

We also recognise the enormous value from learning from other areas. We will work through the sector led improvement programme (SLIP) to support improvements. We have reviewed successful improvement plans in other areas and sought advice from other authorities and external bodies with specialist expertise, including the LGA and DfE, to support the

development of this plan and will continue to use these sources throughout improvement journey. We will continue to learn from innovative and best practice in other areas to improve our offer for children and young people in Cheshire East.

Monitoring Impact

The first chapter of the plan is structured under the seven areas for improvement highlighted in the 2024 Ofsted inspection report. It starts with senior manager oversight, to ensure this drives continuous improvement, followed by care leavers, as this is the area requiring the greatest improvement. The second chapter considers the additional areas for development from the inspection report. The third chapter covers additional actions identified through internal assurance activities.

The 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 report on impact against the inspection findings. Progress against actions and impact against the inspection findings will be rated using the following:

| Colour | Definition |
|---------|--|
| Grey | Action not started yet, no risk to implementation anticipated |
| Red | Action not on track |
| Amber | Action not yet completed, but on track to be completed within timescales |
| Amber E | Action completed but we need to embed and evidence impact |
| Green | Action completed and embedded with evidence of impact |

The sources we will use to assess our impact for each area of the plan are outlined in each section. These include:

- Seeking and listening to children and young people's experiences

- Single agency and multi-agency audits
- Performance indicators
- Listening to practitioners and managers, including within partner agencies
- Recruitment and retention information.

Our impact on work with children and young people will also be evaluated through Ofsted and DfE monitoring visits.

The plan will be a live and responsive plan, so will adapt to incorporate new actions as needed.

Governance and Accountability

Progress against the plan will be driven by senior leaders and will be assessed and monitored through specific workstreams that report into a Partnership Oversight Group.

An independently chaired Improvement and Impact Board will formally scrutinise progress and impact. Key members of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership and the council's senior leadership team are members of the Improvement and Impact Board.

The Corporate Parenting Executive Board will drive developments for cared for children and care leavers, and so will contribute to delivering improvements in relation to the inspection findings. The Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee will scrutinise progress pertinent to care experienced young people.

The Safeguarding Children's Partnership will receive six monthly updates on progress enabling all members to scrutinise and challenge progress.

The Children and Families Committee will scrutinise impact against the plan at every committee meeting.

The Children's Services Strategic Quartet, chaired by the council's chief executive, will scrutinise progress for children and young people. Progress

will also be reported into the corporate assurance panel, an external panel monitoring the council's transformation.

Key stakeholders, including our workforce, will be kept informed of progress through regular communications. Feedback from our workforce will continue to be sought through existing forums/ mechanisms such as team meetings, senior leaders walking the floor, councillor frontline visits, and #talktogether staff sessions.

Glossary

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.

Care leavers can also be referred to as care experienced young people or young adults, as they have had experience of being in care. This term tends to be preferred by young people/ young adults. Both terms are used interchangeably within this plan.

| Abbreviation | Expansion |
|--------------|--|
| CINCP | Child in Need and Child Protection |
| CYPMHS | Children and young people's mental health services |
| DfE | Department for Education |
| DLUHC | Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities |
| EET | Education, employment or training |
| ICB | Integrated Care Board |
| IRO | Independent Reviewing Officer |
| LGA | Local Government Association |
| MASH | Multi-agency safeguarding hub |
| NEET | Not in education, employment or training |

| | |
|-------|--|
| NHS | National Health Service |
| PAs | Personal Advisors |
| PEPs | Personal education plans |
| RONI | Risk of NEET indicators |
| SLIP | Sector led improvement programme |
| SMART | Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-based |
| UASC | Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children |

Children's Services Improvement Plan on a Page

Our improvement plan sets out how we will address the findings from the [Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services \(ILACS\)](#) in February and March 2024. It covers the 7 areas inspectors highlighted:

| Senior leaders' oversight | Care leavers | Quality of plans | Quality and frequency of visits | Management oversight and supervision | Effectiveness of IROs | Sufficiency of placements |
|--|---|--|---|---|---|---|
| What the inspection found: We need to improve how we monitor if children are getting the right support, as some children were not getting support that was good enough | What the inspection found: We need to improve the quality and consistency of support to care leavers, including those who are homeless and those who are over 21 | What the inspection found: We need to improve the quality of plans for children so they are child-focused and drive timely change | What the inspection found: We need to improve the quality and frequency of visits to children to ensure they are purposeful and in line with children's assessed needs. | What the inspection found: We need to improve the quality of management oversight and supervision to ensure this supports consistently good practice | What the inspection found: We need to improve the effectiveness of child protection chairs and IROs to escalate, challenge, and scrutinise plans for children | What the inspection found: We don't have sufficient placements to meet children and young people's needs |
| What we will do: Review reporting and governance arrangements Develop a Family Feedback Strategy Monitor progress against the improvement plan through an independently chaired Improvement Board Embed our practice standards 'Being Brilliant at Best Practice' Revise quality assurance arrangements Step up a new Corporate Parenting Executive Board to ensure there is a whole council and partnership approach to improving outcomes for care experienced young people Commission corporate parenting training for senior leaders and elected members Develop corporate parenting champions across the council | What we will do: Develop practice standards Roll out a mandatory training plan specific to the care leavers service Change the management structure Revise the format of the pathway plan with young people Formalise arrangements around young adults where there are safeguarding concerns Develop care leavers hubs in Crewe and Macclesfield Launch an app for the local offer Develop EET plans for all young adults who are NEET and able to work Increase apprenticeships and other route to work opportunities Refresh the protocol for care leavers in emergency accommodation Mobilise additional accommodation options for 16-18 year olds Implement a wider 18-25 accommodation offer Review the 21+ offer and approach | What we will do: Embed restorative practice Continue to run masterclasses on plans Hold a management and leadership session on plans Establish reflective case discussion meetings to progress outcomes for children on longer child protection and repeat plans Develop a permanence action plan Develop care leavers hubs in Crewe and Macclesfield Launch an app for the local offer Develop EET plans for all young adults who are NEET and able to work Increase apprenticeships and other route to work opportunities Refresh the protocol for care leavers in emergency accommodation Mobilise additional accommodation options for 16-18 year olds Implement a wider 18-25 accommodation offer Review the 21+ offer and approach | What we will do: Strengthen the performance framework to ensure there is robust performance management of visits to children Deliver masterclasses on purposeful visits Reissue the visiting template to support consistent recording Develop and roll-out e-learning on visiting Review permanence decision panels Explore what partnership training is needed to support effective challenge Develop a new child protection plan in partnership with children, young people and families Review the cared for plan in partnership with children, young people and families | What we will do: Commission a bespoke leadership development programme for all leaders in children's services Deliver an in-house leadership and management programme for children's social care tailored to our areas for improvement Update the supervision policy and develop practice guidance on reflective supervision All managers to complete supervision training Embed the permanence tracker Review the care plans for all cared for children who are not currently in foster care or planning to return home | What we will do: Review the performance management framework for IROs Include IROs in the in-house and commissioned leadership and management programmes Review and refresh the IRO best practice guidance Hold an IRO service development day every 3 months Revise the guidance on IRO quality assurance alerts to support outcome-focused practice Explore and challenge performance around permanence in performance clinics | What we will do: Develop a system which enables family led decision making including training and a family network procedure Join Foster4 Work in partnership with the other Foster4 LAs to build our offer – ensuring there is an effective front door to support those who make an enquiry about becoming a foster carer Explore opportunities within the council to increase fostering marketing and raise awareness of fostering Develop specialist foster carers to support children to step down from residential care Develop our third Mockingbird constellation Open two council residential children's homes Carry out a deep dive on reunification and step down for children from care Investigate the potential for joint commissioning of high needs placements |

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Children's Services Improvement Plan Timeline

Our improvement plan set out how we will address the findings from the [Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services \(ILACS\)](#) in February and March 2024. This is the timeline for what we will achieve by delivering our plan.

What we achieved by the end of June 2024

What we achieved by the end of September 2024

What we achieved by the end of December 2024

What we achieved by the end of March 2025

1. All 209 21+ care leavers contacted and offered support. Tracker in place to monitor engagement with 21+ care leavers
2. New management structure in the care leavers service
3. Developed and started delivering a bespoke training programme for the care leavers service
4. New best practice guidance for the care leavers service
5. Coproduced new pathway plan
6. Foster4 – we joined and launched new service
7. Opened a new residential home – Flude House
8. Revised quality assurance framework
9. New Improvement and Impact Board to drive and evaluate progress against the improvement plan
10. New Children's Services Strategic Quartet to provide improved leadership and accountability for children's services
11. Director level project group for accommodation for cared for young people and care leavers

12. Care leaver hubs (safe spaces) in Crewe and Macclesfield
13. Local offer app launched
14. Proposals in place to address 16-18 and 18-25 accommodation shortages
15. Revised protocol for care leavers in emergency accommodation
16. All young adults who are NEET and able to work will have an EET plan
17. Reflective case discussions established for longer child protection and repeat plans
18. Third Mockingbird constellation
19. Senior leaders and first tranche of managers trained in our bespoke management and leadership programme
20. Revised supervision policy
21. Vital signs performance report in place to support evaluation of the improvement plan

22. Additional capacity in place to deliver the improvement plan
23. First meeting of the multi-agency corporate parenting executive board
24. LGA corporate parenting training rolled out for senior leaders and elected members
25. Local offer reviewed together with young people and partners
26. Additional accommodation options in place for young people aged 16-18 using flexibilities/ modifications in current contracts
27. Refreshed workforce strategy

28. Strengthened performance framework
29. Increased apprenticeship opportunities and other route to employment opportunities in place for care leavers
30. Approaches in place to ensure the most vulnerable children and young people are prioritised for mental health support
31. 'Waiting well' initiatives developed with key health providers and third sector provision
32. Level 7 apprentice scheme to support people to train as social workers with Cheshire East

Improvement Plan

All ratings are accurate as at 12 November 2025.

Chapter 1

1. Senior Leaders' Oversight

| What needs to improve | | | | |
|---|--|---|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| Senior leaders' oversight of performance to ensure that there is a coherent approach to continuous improvement. | | | | |
| What inspectors found | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Senior leaders had not recognised, until this inspection, the extent of improvement required in services for care leavers. 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. As a result, too many vulnerable care leavers are not getting the right level of help, support or protection.Despite improvements, the quality of practice is still too variable. Improved timeliness has not been achieved for all children. Implementation of improvement plans needs to accelerate across teams but in particular within the care leavers service.Leaders have recognised in their self-evaluation that more needs to be done to ensure that quality assurance activity is identifying all areas of poor practice and that it is consistently having an impact on outcomes for children.Not all young people are informed of, or understand, the pledges contained within the cared for children and care leavers' strategy. | | |
| Ref | Action | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating |
| SL1 | Ensure there is effective line of sight from frontline practice through to the Executive Director of Children's Services through a review of reporting and governance arrangements, including a review of the performance framework. | Executive Director of Children's Services | January 2025 | Complete |
| SL2a | Develop a Family Feedback Strategy to ensure our services develop in response to what our families tell us. | Head of Service Children's Development and Partnerships | April 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact |

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|------|--|---|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| SL2b | Develop a partnership child and family Engagement strategy that describes how and when to facilitate co-production and will be linked to the family feedback strategy. | Safeguarding Children's Partnership | March 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| SL3 | Refresh the terms of reference for the Improvement and Impact Board, and expand the board to incorporate partners, to ensure there are robust arrangements in place to drive and scrutinise impact for children and young people in response to the inspection findings. | Executive Director of Children's Services | July 2024 | Complete |
| SL4 | Establish a Children's Services Strategic Quartet to provide improved leadership and accountability for children's services in line with best practice in the LGA guide for Chief Executives , and for council leaders , and DfE statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services . | Executive Director of Children's Services | July 2024 | Complete |
| SL5 | Step-up a multi-agency corporate parenting executive board to drive and scrutinise progress for cared for children and care experienced children and young people and ensure there is a whole council and partnership approach to supporting our young people. | Executive Director of Children's Services | November 2024 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| SL6 | Commission LGA corporate parenting training for senior leaders across the partnership and all elected members. | Executive Director of Children's Services | September 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| SL7 | Develop Corporate Parenting champions across the council to increase awareness and support for care experienced young people and young adults. | Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers | April 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| SL8 | Refresh the cared for children and care leavers strategy 2022-26 and action plan together with our care leaver ambassadors. | Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers | TBC | Reviewing |
| SL9 | Develop quality assurance activity to evaluate the impact of the improvement plan. | Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance | February 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact |

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| SL10 | Establish service manager thematic audits to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas and drive improvements. | Service Managers CINCP | August 2024 | Complete |
| SL11 | Develop mechanisms to ensure audit findings and feedback from children and young people are routinely shared with teams to strengthen the impact of audits on practice. | Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance | September 2024 | Complete |
| SL12 | Develop a vital signs performance report in line with the improvement plan areas to support effective evaluation of improvement activity and drive improvements. | Business Intelligence Manager | September 2024 | Complete |
| SL13 | Ensure councillors have oversight of practice and receive feedback from frontline practitioners through a variety of opportunities. | Business Manager | September 2025 | Complete |
| SL14 | Review the children's social care national framework and its implications for practice and processes, to embed consistently good practice that achieves strong outcomes for children and young people. | Principal Social Worker | February 2025 | Complete |
| SL15a | Develop practice guidance on timescales to ensure expectations are clear to practitioners and managers. | Business Development Officer | June 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| SL15b | Embed the practice standards ('Being Brilliant at Best Practice') through our culture, leadership, and developing and sharing key communications on practice. Continually evaluate impact and reinforce messages through monthly performance meetings and quality assurance activity. | Principal Social Worker | April 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| SL16 | Collate and share examples of good practice to embed understanding of good practice across teams and to celebrate good work. | Principal Social Worker | Start sharing practice by August 2024 and continue throughout the year | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| SL17 | Strengthen the audit process – revise the audit tool and integrate audit and reporting within the child's record. | Quality Assurance Improvement Lead | November 2025 | Delayed |
| SL18 | Develop an implementation plan for the family feedback strategy. | Participation Lead | October 2025 | Reviewing |

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| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | <p>The pace and impact of changes will be evaluated through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> monthly reports against the improvement plan monthly performance indicators in the vital signs performance report practice review audits which assess the quality of practice across services thematic audits to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas feedback from children and young people from our participation groups and through audits. Ofsted monitoring visits will demonstrate whether our understanding of improvements are accurate. | What we will see when we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements result in consistently good quality practice - over 80% of audits will be good or better quality. Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of children's outcomes and areas for development. Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the practice and development needs of staff on both an individual and workforce level. Quality assurance activity drives improvements to the quality of practice, resulting in improved outcomes for children. 90% young people tell us they understand the pledges contained within the cared for children and care leavers' strategy. The council will have at least 20 care leaver champions across all the directorates. |
|--|--|--|---|

Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people

The third monitoring visit in October 2025 found that the senior leadership team is sharply focused on improving the quality of social work practice. The executive director has established clear priorities and is working to stabilise the workforce and improve services for children. There has been significant investment in children's services and a strengthened commitment to children's services across the council. The chief executive and lead member continue to be well sighted on the progress of improvement plans and the areas for further development in children's social care.

The practice standards have been revised and will be relaunched to ensure expectations on practice are clear to everyone.

2. Care Leavers

What needs to improve

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.

A. Quality of practice

What inspectors found

The quality of practice for care leavers is inadequate.

Relationships and transition to the care leavers' service

- 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. For some, their voice is not evident and plans lack detail which means their individual needs are not always sufficiently understood. This means that there are some young people who leave care with too much uncertainty about how they will be supported.
- 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.
- Case records do not reflect the work undertaken with young people.

Pathway plans

- Pathway plans do not consistently cover all the important elements of young people's lives. Wishes and feelings are not always clearly expressed. They 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.

Recognising and responding to risk

- Risk of harm is not always recognised or responded to effectively.
- For some 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.

| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. <p>Management oversight</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PAs receive supervision, however the quality of supervision was variable. Most supervision is brief and task focused. Significant gaps in supervision exist on some young people's care files meaning there is a lack of consistent management grip on driving young people's plans forward and ensuring they are safe. | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---------------|
| Ref | Action | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating |
| CLA1 | Develop and launch practice standards for the care leavers service to support consistently good practice. This will include clear standards on recording, visiting, transitions, and responsibilities when cases are jointly held. | Service Manager Care Leavers | June 2024 | Complete |
| CLA2 | Develop and roll out a mandatory training plan that is specific for the care leavers service to support practitioners to deliver consistently good practice. This will include planning, professional curiosity, adult/ transitional safeguarding and culture/diversity. | Principal Social Worker Service Manager Care Leavers | Launch in June 2024 and deliver over the year | Complete |
| CLA3 | Change 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. | Service Manager Care Leavers | April 2024 | Complete |
| CLA4 | Revise the format of the pathway plan with young people to ensure it supports good practice. The new plan will include sections for multi-agency professionals' views, and contingency plans. | Service Manager Cared for Children | May 2024 | Complete |
| CLA6 | Formalise arrangements around young adults where there are safeguarding concerns to ensure senior leaders have oversight of these young adults and that multi-agency team around the adult meetings are held to develop safety plans with them. | Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers | September 2024 | Complete |
| CLA7 | Recruit Care Leaver Ambassadors to work together with us to improve services, and to represent the experiences of cared for children and care leavers to the Corporate Parenting Strategic Board and corporate parenting workstreams. | Participation Lead | October 2024 | Complete |

Please also see the section on management oversight and supervision

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| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and plans and will assess if PAs can tell young people's stories. Thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas, for example UASC young people. Some of the thematic audits will involve phone calls to young people to understand their experience of services, the impact of their plan, and their relationships with their PAs. The percentage of young people with PAs and pathway plans at 16. | What we will see when we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice to support care leavers will be of consistently good quality and will support young people to achieve good outcomes. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality. Management oversight is good quality and drives improved outcomes. Over 80% of management oversight in audits will be good or better quality. 100% of young people will get to know their PAs from age 16. 90% young people will tell us they have good relationships with their PAs and know how they will be supported once they leave care. 100% PAs will be able to tell young people's stories. 100% case records will accurately reflect work with young people. Pathway plans will cover all the important elements of young people's lives, and will reflect their voices and their individual needs, including their cultural heritage. Plans will consistently include other professionals and will be ambitious for young people. Over 80% plans audited will be good or better quality. There is appropriate professional curiosity, which means risk of harm is recognised and responded to swiftly and effectively. When potential risk of harm is identified, it is managed or mitigated effectively. 100% audits will show appropriate professional curiosity and that risk of harm is responded to. |
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B. Planning for Adulthood

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| What inspectors found | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 such as those with complex mental health and emotional needs, proactive transition planning does not always take place. This means that these care leavers do not access the help and support that they need. Not all care leavers have access to their full health history. This means important information that could be used to provide ongoing support to them as they transition to adulthood is not available or used to inform care planning for them. |
|------------------------------|---|

| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 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. 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. | | | |
|------|--|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| Ref | Action | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating |
| CLB2 | Review terms of reference and membership for Ignition Panel to ensure young people's post 18 plans are effectively tracked and reviewed from age 16 to ensure proactive transition plans are in place. | Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers | September 2024 | Complete |
| CLB3 | The practice standards will specify which preparing for adulthood roles should be undertaken by social workers and which by PAs and will set clear expectations on what care leavers should receive/ have in place. | Service Manager Care Leavers | June 2024 | Complete |
| CLB4 | <p>Develop care leavers hubs, with our care leavers, as a safe space for care leavers to access support and advice.</p> <p>Advice sessions will be offered from the hub to support preparation for adulthood, including housing, finances, drug and alcohol support, parenting support, careers advice, CV workshops, and interview preparation.</p> <p>Emotional health and wellbeing support will be available at the hub through Pure Insight and health support through the cared for nurse.</p> | Service Manager Care Leavers Area Delivery Manager Targeted Youth Work | Interim hubs in Crewe and Macclesfield by July 2024 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| | | Head of Service for Education Participation and Pupil Support | Consider suitable options for a long-term care leaver hub in Crewe by the end of 2025 | On track |
| CLB6 | Engage and consult with care experienced young people on how they want to understand their health histories and adapt the current process in line with their feedback. | Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children | July 2025 | Complete |
| CLB7 | Deliver training to PAs on arrangements to support young people to understand their health histories. | Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children | June 2024 | Complete |
| CLB8 | Launch an app for the local offer. This will ensure all care leavers have immediate access to the local offer and their entitlements through their | Service Manager Care Leavers | August 2024 | Complete |

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|--|---|--|---|----------|
| | mobile. It will also support us to keep in touch with young people and gain their feedback and allow young people to develop peer support groups. | | | |
| CLB9 | Review the local offer together with young people and partners. | Service Manager Care Leavers | December 2024 | Complete |
| CLB10 | Deliver training on the local offer to all PAs. | Service Manager Care Leavers | July 2024 | Complete |
| CLB11 | Develop regular participation opportunities for care leavers through the care leaver hubs, to ensure their views shape services. | Participation Lead | July 2024 | Complete |
| CLB12 | Launch a free bus pass for care leavers aged up to 22. | Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers | October 2024 | Complete |
| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be planning for adulthood. The thematic audit will involve phone calls to young people to understand their experience of services, what they know about the local offer, and how their plan is preparing them for adulthood. The percentage of young people who have access to their health histories. PAs can describe the local offer and explain how care leavers can benefit from it. Feedback from young people accessing the care leaver hubs. | What we will see when we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactive planning takes place for all care leavers ensuring they are prepared for adulthood. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality. 90% young people tell us they feel well supported and have the information they need to be prepared for adulthood. 90% tell us they know about the local offer, the care leavers hub, and their entitlements. 100% care leavers have access to their health histories. 100% PAs can describe the local offer and explain how care leavers can benefit from it. | |
| Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people | | | | |
| From 1 September we extended the hub opening to evening sessions in response to young people's feedback. To date only two young people have accessed the evening hubs. During November we will look to develop the evening sessions with activities we hope will encourage young people to attend. Feedback on the hubs will be sought during the review of the local offer in November. | | | | |

C. Education, Employment and Training

| What inspectors found | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too many care leavers are not in education, employment or training (NEET). They are not being encouraged and well supported to improve their life chances in order to achieve their aspirations for a better future. | | | |
|---|---|--|---|---------------|--|
| Ref | Action | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating | |
| CLC1 | Work together with young adults who are NEET and able to work to develop an EET plan to support them towards gaining EET. Plans will be reviewed every 12 weeks. | Service Manager Care Leavers | September 2024 | Complete | |
| CLC2 | Develop an offer of EET opportunities, including apprenticeships, that support young people to gain employment or training in their chosen field. | Service Manager Care Leavers | March 2025 | Complete | |
| CLC3 | Work with local businesses and organisations, including the chamber of commerce, to secure additional corporate parenting support for cared for children and care leavers and to prepare employers for supporting young people in employment. | Service Manager Care Leavers | March 2025 | Complete | |
| CLC4 | Provide bespoke support to enable young people to be prepared for entering employment through job readiness training, CV and interview support. | Service Manager Care Leavers | October 2024 | Complete | |
| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The percentage of young people who are in EET. Thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas, including EET. | What we will see when we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The percentage of care leavers who are in EET will increase – we want to increase to above 75% in EET. By April 2025, we would have at least 10 new apprenticeship opportunities for young adults. 90% young people will tell us they are encouraged and well supported to improve their life chances and access EET. | | |

D. Accommodation

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| What inspectors found | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. |
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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 not in education, employment or training (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. | | | |
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| Ref | Action | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating | |
| CLD1 | Refresh and relaunch the protocol for care leavers in emergency accommodation, with clear escalation requirements, to ensure all practitioners are working to expected practice standards and there is senior leadership oversight of any young adults in emergency and unsuitable accommodation. | Service Manager Care Leavers | August 2024 | Complete | |
| CLD2 | All young people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or in emergency accommodation will be reviewed in weekly performance clinics and by the monthly risk management forum to ensure effective plans are in place to support and protect them. | Service Manager Care Leavers | June 2024 | Complete | |
| CLD3 | The weekly temporary and emergency accommodation meeting will consider any care leavers who need accommodation. | Housing Options Manager | June 2024 | Complete | |
| CLD4 | Deliver training for PAs on supporting young adults with housing concerns, including how to support young people to meet the criteria for housing allocation in other areas, so they can provide bespoke support tailored to young adults' needs. | Housing Options Manager | July 2024 | Complete | |
| CLD5 | Establish a director level project group for accommodation for cared for young people and care leavers to drive increased sufficiency. | Interim Director of Commissioning | July 2024 | Complete | |
| CLD6 | Explore and review the suitability of temporary and emergency accommodation options across Cheshire East to increase options for care leavers. Identify gaps in provision to inform commissioning to ensure we can meet young people's needs. | Service Manager Care Leavers Head of Housing Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs | September 2024 | Complete | |
| CLD7 | Develop proposals to address 16-18 and 18-25 accommodation shortages. | Head of Housing | July 2024 | Complete | |

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| | | Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs | | |
| CLD8 | Mobilise additional accommodation options for cared for young people aged 16-18 using flexibilities/ modifications in current contracts. | Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs | October 2024 | Complete |
| CLD9 | Implement a wider 18-25 accommodation offer, ensuring this is shaped by our care experienced young adults. | Head of Housing Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs | July 2026 | On track |

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| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas, including care leavers in unsuitable accommodation. The thematic audit will involve phone calls to young people to understand their experiences. The number of young people who are homeless. The number of young people in unsuitable accommodation. | What we will see when we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 80% care leavers who live out of area access suitable housing in a timely way. 90% care leavers tell us they are well supported. Effective plans and contingency plans prevent care leavers from needing to access emergency or unsuitable accommodation. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality. Records on where young people are living are accurate and there is effective oversight of young people's accommodation. |
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Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people

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| Plans for procurement 'lotting' and approach for the 18-25 accommodation offer were agreed at the Children and Families Committee in September. An audit on emergency accommodation reviewed 12 care leavers identified at risk of homelessness or who were homeless in the last 3 months. 11 of the 12 cases were rated good. Strengths identified included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persistent efforts by PAs and Team Managers to engage and support young people Homeless and at risk of homeless young people were closely monitored through the weekly B&B meetings, risk management forums, and supervisions. There is evidence of care planning meetings being held and IRO oversight. Clear escalation to senior managers in complex or high-risk cases. |
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E. Care leavers aged over 21

| What inspectors found | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For care leavers over the age of 21, persistent efforts to engage them are not routinely made. 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. It was not evident on young people's records that discussions had taken place to inform a decision as to young people's informed choice to move from having a personal advisor to the 21+ offer. Disabled care leavers who are open to the 21+ offer are not prioritised as a vulnerable group and as such the local authority cannot be assured that their needs are being met. In cases seen there was not enough evidence of persistence or curiosity in where they may be now, despite histories of having extensive engagement with services as children. The quality assurance of the care leaver cohort aged 21+ needs strengthening. | | |
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| Ref | Action | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating |
| CLE1 | Contact all 209 care leavers aged over 21 to ensure they are aware of the support available to them and offer them an allocated worker. | Service Manager Care Leavers | March 2024 | Complete |
| CLE2 | Review the 21+ offer and approach, formalising this in a protocol and ensuring it is clear on the local offer. The protocol will include continued proactive communication post 21 so young people know what support is available. | Service Manager Care Leavers | July 2024 | Complete |
| CLE3 | Review cases for care leavers with a disability who are open to the 21+ offer to ensure their needs are being met. | Service Manager Care Leavers | June 2024 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| CLE4 | Develop a tracker for care leavers aged over 21 and monitor through weekly performance clinics to ensure there is regular oversight of engagement and support with these young people. | Service Manager Care Leavers | May 2024 | Complete |
| CLE5 | Establish regular quality assurance around care leavers aged over 21 to ensure there is effective oversight of their outcomes and that this drives improvement. | Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers | August 2024 | Complete |

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| CLE6 | Review the impact of the revised 21+ offer with young adults, involving them in shaping any changes to services. | Service Manager Care Leavers | March 2025 | Complete |
| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be support to those 21 and over, including those with a disability. The thematic audit will involve phone calls to young adults to understand their experience of services. The percentage of care leavers over 21 who we were in touch with within the last 3 months. | What we will see when we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persistent efforts to engage young adults over 21 are routinely made. We are in touch with over 90% of care leavers over 21 in the last 3 months. Over 90% young adults will tell us they know that support is available if they need it. There is effective oversight of young adults aged 21+ and their outcomes, including young adults with a disability. | |
| Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people | | | | |
| An audit on care leavers over 21 with a disability was carried out in September and is informing practice improvement. | | | | |

3. Quality of plans

What needs to improve

The quality of plans for children to ensure that they are more child-focused and drive forward positive change in a timely way.

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| What inspectors found | Child in need and child protection <ul style="list-style-type: none">The quality of child protection plans is inconsistent. Some are outcome focused although some lack purpose and urgency. Some children have been subject to protracted child protection planning.The quality of safety plans is inconsistent, mostly relying on vulnerable parents and are overly optimistic. The use of jargon makes it difficult for parents to understand what is required.Multi-agency core groups meet regularly to review progress however social workers do not routinely update children's experiences against the child protection plan.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.When child in need and child protection plans do not progress, there was drift and delay for children, and ineffective challenge from the chair and multi-agency group in child in need meetings, core groups and review conferences. Cared for children <ul style="list-style-type: none">The quality of care plans for children is inconsistent.Consideration is not routinely given to permanence planning for children from an early stage.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. | | | |
| Ref | Action | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating |
| P1 | Embed the agreed restorative practice model approach to support requirement for consistently good practice. | Principal Social Worker | December 2024 | Complete but need to evidence impact |

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| P2 | Continue to provide masterclasses – short in-house training sessions for practitioners and managers on specific topics. This will include planning. The masterclass programme will continue to be responsive to audit findings to support improved practice. | Principal Social Worker | Starting in April 2024 and running throughout the year | Complete |
| P3 | Hold a management and leadership session on planning to ensure there is a shared understanding on what constitutes a good quality plan, and that the role of team managers and IROs is clear in scrutinising plans to ensure all plans are good quality. | All Service Managers | September 2024 | Complete |
| P4 | Establish reflective case discussion meetings to progress outcomes for children on longer child protection plans and repeat plans. | Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager, Child Protection | July 2024 | Complete |
| P5 | Develop a permanence action plan to ensure permanence planning is considered and progressed from an early stage, with permanence plans being in place at the second cared for review. The permanence action plan should consider all routes to permanence, including reunification. | Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers | TBC | Reviewing |
| P6 | Develop best practice guidance on care planning to ensure expectations to support permanence and life story work are clear. | Service Manager Cared for Children | June 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| P7 | Review children's panels and the outcomes they achieve for children (including permanence) to ensure they are effective and streamlined. | Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care | January 2026 | On track |
| P8 | Explore within the multiagency safeguarding group what training is needed to support effective partnership challenge. | Children's Safeguarding Partnership Training Manager | December 2024 | Complete |
| P9 | Review and refresh forms within the child's record in line with families first and remove references to Signs of Safety. | Business Development Officer | February 2026 | On track |
| P10 | Develop a new C&F assessment. | Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care | March 2026 | On track |
| P11 | Develop a clear training plan for the lead practitioners to support improved quality practice. | Lead Practitioners | April 2025 | Complete but need to |

| | | | | evidence impact |
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| P12 | Develop and launch a new central point for children and families resources, practice guidance and training. | Business Development Officer | TBC | Reviewing |

Please also see action M05 - Embed the permanence tracker to monitor achieving permanence planning within statutory and children's timescales.

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| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of plans across all service areas. Multi-agency audits will tell us about the quality of multi-agency challenge in supporting plan progression. Permanence planning will be a focus of thematic audits. The percentage of plans judged good or better. The percentage of plans within timescales. The percentage of children on repeat child protection plans. Number of children on CP plans over 15 months. The percentage of permanence plans in place by the second review. The number of children on care orders and number of care orders discharged. | What we will see when we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans will be consistently good quality, with effective contingency plans, child-focused and result in good outcomes for children and young people. It will be easy for everyone to see what needs to happen from the plan. Over 80% plans audited will be good or better quality. Drift and delay is prevented through effective management oversight and partnership challenge. Consideration is routinely given to permanence planning for children from an early stage and children achieve permanence in a timely way. Repeat child protection plans will be under 15%. 100% permanence plans will be in place by the second review. |
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Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people

Successful implementation of restorative practice as our practice model is critical to our sustained improvement, so we are partnering with L30 Relational Systems who specialise in working with children's services directorates to build a bespoke training programme. L30 Relational Systems are well regarded in the sector and recognised as experts in this field. This is anticipated to start in Q4 this year.

A test environment for the new central resource platform is being set up so we can look at functions and options for development. Housekeeping on our current document libraries and storage arrangements is taking place.

4. Quality and frequency of visits

What needs to improve

The quality and frequency of visits to children so that they are purposeful and in line with assessed needs.

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| What inspectors found | Child in need and child protection <ul style="list-style-type: none">Visits to children in need and those subject to child protection plans are not always carried out at a frequency reflecting assessed need. Not all visits are carried out within local authority prescribed or statutory timescales. There is a lack of clarity on the expected visiting times for children in need.Some children are not visited often enough for social workers to build trusting relationships with them. Changes in social workers impacts this.Visits to children do not always have purpose and do not link to their plans clearly enough. Records of visits vary in depth and quality of detail. Some visits are very brief, and their contribution towards the assessment or progress of the plan is limited. Cared for children <ul style="list-style-type: none">Visits to children in care are not always carried out in line with statutory visiting schedules or their assessed need. |
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| Ref | Action | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating |
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| V1 | Strengthen the performance framework to ensure robust performance management of visits to children. | Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care | September 2024 | Complete |
| V2 | Support improved visiting practice through the masterclass training programme and briefings to team meetings. | Principal Social Worker | September 2024 | Complete |
| V3 | Reissue the visiting template to practitioners to ensure consistency in recording. | Principal Social Worker | July 2024 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| V4 | Develop and roll out e-learning on visiting to support purposeful visits that are carried out with a frequency that reflects children's needs. | Principal Social Worker | August 2024 | Complete |

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| V5 | Deliver training to the children's social care workforce on the impact of recording and how this impacts on children's understanding of their experiences. | Principal Social Worker | May 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact | | |
| V7 | Team managers to review visiting schedules in supervision, and IROs and CP chairs to have oversight of frequency visits to children. | All Team Managers and IROs | Evaluate in January 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact | | |
| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and visits, and the quality of relationships with children and young people. Timeliness of visits. | What we will see when we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visits to children are carried out at a frequency reflecting assessed need and this is clearly recorded on their files. Over 80% visits will be in line with need as shown through audit. Children are visited often enough for social workers to build trusting relationships with them. 90% of young people will tell us they trust their social workers. Visits to children are purposeful and clearly link to their assessments or plans. | | | |
| Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people | | | | | | |
| <p>The third monitoring visit on cared for children found that the frequency of visits to children in care has improved; most are now visited in line with statutory visiting schedules, but not all visits are in line with children's needs. The quality of recording of visits is still inconsistent.</p> | | | | | | |

5. Management Oversight and Supervision

What needs to improve

The quality of management oversight and supervision to ensure that consistent, good social work practice is in place.

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| What inspectors found | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Management oversight and challenge are not fully embedded across all service areas. 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 upon in a timely way.The quality of supervision is too variable. Supervision is not always sufficiently analytical or reflective. Supervision is not consistently driving children's plans forward, actions although timebound roll over for many months without completion. This means not all children's circumstances are sufficiently understood.For a small number of young children who live in children's homes 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.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. |
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| Ref | Action | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating |
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| MO1 | Commission a bespoke leadership development programme to support all leaders in children's services (from team leaders and above) to develop their leadership, reflective skills, and confidence in effective challenge to improve practice and outcomes for children. | Principal Social Worker | Running between March 2024 - June 2025 | Complete |
| MO2 | Deliver an in-house leadership and management development programme for children's social care, tailored to our areas for improvement, to support a culture of high support and high challenge and embed consistently good quality practice. | Principal Social Worker | To commence in April 2024 and run throughout the year | Closed |
| MO3 | Update the supervision policy and develop practice guidance on reflective supervision based on best practice. | Principal Social Worker | September 2024 | Complete |

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| MO4 | All managers to complete supervision training to support them to deliver reflective supervision that considers children's lived experiences, supports learning and improves practice. | | | Principal Social Worker | Training to be delivered between November and March 2025 Commission a final cohort by end of October 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| MO5 | Embed the permanence tracker to monitor achieving permanence within statutory and children's timescales. | | | Service Manager Cared for Children | Evaluate impact in October 2024 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| MO6 | Review the care plans for all cared for children who are not currently in foster care or planning to return home to ensure they are on the right plan. | | | Head of Service Safeguarding and Quality Assurance | July 2024 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| MO7 | Revise the supervision form to ensure that children and young people's views are included and considered as part of reflective supervision. | | | Head of Service Child in Need and Child Protection | October 2024 | Complete |
| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and management oversight. These audits include a review of case supervision which informs the judgement on management oversight. The percentage of supervision within timescales. | What we will see when we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management oversight and challenge are embedded across all service areas. Over 80% of management oversight in audits will be good or better quality. Supervision is consistently good quality, analytical and reflective. Management oversight improves social work practice, leading to children and young people receiving timely support and experiencing good outcomes. Children achieve permanence in a timely way. 100% children will have a permanence plan by their second review. Over 90% supervision will be within timescales. | | | |
| Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people | | | | | | |

A new permanence tracker and panel was put in place over August which will strengthen our approach to achieving permanence. Ofsted's third monitoring visit found that the focus and oversight of early permanence had improved.

6. Effectiveness of IROs

What needs to improve

The effectiveness of child protection chairs and independent reviewing officers (IROs) to escalate, challenge and scrutinize plans for children.

| What inspectors found | • Child protection chairs are not consistently effective in driving forward plans for children. Some children have been subject to protracted child protection planning, some plans lack purpose and urgency. They do not consistently advocate for children. Consequently, there are missed opportunities to act when risks increase, or changes have not happened within the child's timeframe. For example, for children who experience long-term neglect. • Child protection chairs recognise they need to be more specific about what needs to change within the timeframe for children. Some plans are lengthy and opaque, the use of jargon makes it difficult for parents to understand what is required. • Permanence plans are not routinely identified by the time of children's second reviews, leading to drift and delay of children's plans. For some children, IROs were not seen to actively raise this within the care for children's review. • IROs do not always robustly challenge the appropriateness of plans, which are not always-outcome focused, or challenge drift. • The quality and impact of care planning for cared for children was variable. For some children, the impact of multiple social workers and IROs has resulted in drift and delay of their plans and permanence. • For a small number of young children who live in children's homes 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. |
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| Ref | Action | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating |
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| IR1 | Review the performance management framework for IROs to ensure that we can evidence their impact in children's plans and children's lives. | Head of Service for Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance | September 2024 | Complete |
| IR2 | IROs will be included in the in-house and commissioned leadership and management development programme. This will ensure we have a consistent understanding of quality and expectations on practice and joint approach to improvement. | Principal Social Worker | IROs to be included by April 2024 | Complete |

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| IR3 | Review and refresh the IRO practice standards to embed consistently good quality practice. | Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers | Review quarterly at service development days | Complete | | |
| IR4 | Hold an IRO service development day every 3 months to embed consistently good practice. | Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers | Every 3 months from June 2024 | Complete | | |
| IR5 | Revise the guidance on IRO quality assurance alerts to support improved outcome-focused practice in line with our key improvement areas, e.g. planning, tailored visiting, and preventing drift and delay. | Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers | August 2024 | Complete | | |
| IR6 | Explore and challenge performance around permanence in performance clinics with IROs to ensure this is achieved within children's timescales. | Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager, Cared for Children | July 2024 | Complete but need to evidence impact | | |
| IR7 | Carry out consultation and engagement sessions with cared for young people to evaluate the impact of the cared for IRO service and redesign the consultation forms for older young people. | Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager, Cared for Children | March 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact | | |
| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and plans. Themes and impact of IRO quality assurance alerts. Percentage of plans that are good or better quality. Number of children on CP plans over 15 months. Percentage of repeat child protection plans. Percentage of permanence plans at the second review. | What we will see when we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> IROs consistently drive forward plans and advocate for children. Plans are good quality, outcome-focused, and result in good outcomes for children. Over 80% plans audited will be good or better quality. Children achieve long-term permanence in a timely way. 100% children will have a permanence plan by their second review. Repeat child protection plans will be under 15%. | | | |
| Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people | | | | | | |
| <p>The Ofsted monitoring visit on cared for children found that IRO oversight has improved; during this visit inspectors found that for some children, when their plans are not progressing, IROs are challenging practice effectively. There has been some improvement in this area since the inspection which is starting to have an impact and is reducing drift and delay for some children.</p> | | | | | | |

7. Sufficiency of placements

What needs to improve

The sufficiency of suitable placements that can meet children and young people's assessed needs.

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| What inspectors found | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When children cannot remain in the care of their birth parents, there is variability in how quickly potential carers from within the extended family are identified. Challenges to sufficiency impact on the choice of placements and the quality of children's experiences. Some children still live in homes that do not match their needs, due to a lack of choice. Sufficiency of in-house foster carers is a challenge. Some children experience multiple placement moves, which are unsettling for them. There are inconsistencies in management oversight and recording as to the rationale for this. 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. Some young children live in residential children's homes for long periods of time. |
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| Ref | Action | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating |
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| S1 | <p>Deliver a system which enables family led decision making to support children and young people to stay safely within families:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a family network procedure - Develop training for the workforce to deliver family network meetings | Head of Service Child in Need and Child Protection | TBC | Closed |
| S2 | Join Foster4, which will provide additional resources for fostering recruitment and training. | Head of Service Children's Provision | May 2024 | Complete |
| S3 | Work in partnership with the other local authorities to build our Foster4 offer, ensuring there is an effective front door to the fostering service so we can effectively support those who make an enquiry and increase the number of foster carers within Cheshire East. | Head of Service Children's Provision | October 2024 | Complete |
| S4 | Explore opportunities within the council to increase fostering marketing and raise awareness of fostering to increase the number of people considering fostering. | Head of Service Children's Provision | October 2024 | Complete |

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| S5 | Develop specialist foster carers to support children and young people to step down from residential care. | Head of Service Children's Provision | TBC | Reviewing |
| S6 | Develop our third Mockingbird constellation to increase support for foster carers and children and young people in foster care. | Service Manager for Fostering | September 2024 | Complete |
| S7 | Open two Cheshire East Council residential children's homes to increase the placement options for Cheshire East's young people. | Head of Service Children's Provision | Flude House to open in April 2024 | Complete |
| | | | Cherry Tree House to open in July 2025 | Complete |
| S9 | Establish effective processes with relevant system partners for consideration of joint commissioning and funding arrangements of placements where there is a combination of health, education and social care needs. | Health Consultant | February 2026 | On track |
| S10 | Young people to develop recruitment questions to ask foster carers, and deliver training to the fostering panel, to ensure children and young people's voices and experiences are included in the recruitment and selection of foster carers. | Participation Lead | September 2024 | Complete |
| S11 | Develop a 'Good Homes for All' workstream and action plan to improve outcomes for cared for children. This workstream will include a care leaver ambassador to ensure the views of care experienced children and young people shape our priorities and service development. | Head of Housing Participation Team | April 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in in-house fosters and increase in range of foster carers to support different groups, for example older young people. • Percentage of children and young people in foster care with Cheshire East carers. • Reduction in the timeframe to bring in new foster carers. • Number of children and young people with 3 or more placement moves. | What we will see when we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When children cannot remain in the care of their birth parents, their networks are explored at an early stage to support them to remain with their wider family where possible. • There is sufficient choice of placements to meet children and young people's needs, which means children are placed in a home that is right for them. | |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people will report that their placements meet their needs and they feel safe and supported. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people experience stable homes and placement moves are prevented/ limited wherever possible. |
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Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people

We are working with a company (Reconnect) who will recruit specialist foster carers for us on a salaried basis to support children and young people to step down from residential. This work has only just started and therefore a completion date is not able to be provided at this stage.

The Charter launch meeting with registered providers, Care Leaver Ambassadors, Children's Services and Housing took place on 3 October. 13 registered providers have now signed up to the Charter and bi-monthly meetings are planned to share good practice, discuss issues and update on support available in line with the Charter commitments. A mandatory training session for PAs on the pathway for pre and post tenancy support and information took place on 2 October, and a mop up session is planned for 12 November. There will be a presentation of the changes at the full Housing Options and Homelessness Team meeting in November.

The Care Leaver Ambassadors have filmed videos to support other young people with advice and information for when they move into their first homes which will be promoted during Care Leavers' Month.

Chapter 2

1. The Front Door

| What inspectors found | | Action | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| Ref | Action | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating |
| FD1 | Update the contact guidance to include that where the threshold for a referral is clearly met, cases must be actioned immediately. This guidance will also include ensuring consent is clearly recorded. Embed the guidance to support consistently good practice. | Service Manager Integrated Front Door | July 2024 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| FD2 | Review multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) arrangements in other local authorities to learn from good practice and inform the development of multi-agency decision making in the front door. | Head of Service Early Help, Prevention and Domestic Abuse Service Manager Integrated Front Door | August 2024 | Complete |
| FD3 | Hold a collaborative workshop to review the current front door provision and agree actions to establish multi-agency decision-making, informed by the inspection findings and observation of good practice in other areas. | Head of Service Front Door | January 2025 | Complete |
| FD4 | Consider chapter 3 of Working Together 2023 in the safeguarding partnership to establish agreed multi-agency working arrangements. | Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance | April 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|------------|----------|--|--|--|
| | | | Chair of the Safeguarding Partnership and statutory partners within the partnership | | | | | |
| FD5 | Establish a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH), supported by effective partnership governance arrangements. | | Head of Service for the Front Door | March 2026 | On track | | | |
| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly multi-agency front door thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be step up to social care. These audits also consider consent and timeliness of decisions. The percentage of contacts that are referred to children's social care completed within 24 hours. | What we will see when we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families stepping-up from early help services to statutory services will swiftly receive support. Over 90% of referrals to children's social care will be within 24 hours. 90% parental consent will be well recorded. All decisions for referrals to children's social care will be made swiftly. Over 80% referrals audited will be good quality. The multi-agency partnership is routinely included in social care decisions about next steps to help and protect children and when managers make decisions to close referrals. | | | | | |
| Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people | | | | | | | | |
| A detailed report on the progress of the front door will be received by the Improvement Board in November. | | | | | | | | |

2. Strategy Meetings

| What inspectors found | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy meetings do not consistently capture the discussion about risk, which means that the rationale for decisions made, and next steps, is not always clear. | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Ref | Action | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating | | | | |
| SM1 | Deliver a workshop on strategy meetings for team managers to support consistently good practice. | Service Managers CINCP | August 2024 | Closed | | | | |
| SM2 | Deliver training for unit coordinators on minute taking to support consistently good practice across the team in capturing discussions on risk. | Children and Family Service Business Support Lead | August 2024 | Closed | | | | |
| SM3 | A management analysis box to be added to the strategy discussion form to ensure a clear rationale for decisions is included. | Service Managers CINCP | June 2024 | Complete | | | | |
| SM4 | Develop managers training to strengthen contributions during strategy discussions, what is recorded, and how minutes are signed off. | Lead Practitioners | October 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact | | | | |
| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy discussion audits within the 8-weekly multi-agency liaison meetings will tell us about the quality of strategy discussions and whether the rationale for decisions is clearly recorded. | What we will see when we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy meetings consistently capture the discussion about risk which means that the rationale for decisions and next steps is clear. 90% strategy discussions will have a clear rationale for decisions. | | | | | |
| Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people | | | | | | | | |
| Internal training on strategy discussions was carried out through the practice lead training programme. | | | | | | | | |

3. Life-story work and later-life letters

| What inspectors found | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| Ref | Action | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating | | |
| LS1 | Commission external training on life-story work to ensure practitioners understand the expectation, importance, and how to complete it. | Principal Social Worker | March 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact | | |
| LS3 | Establish a process for monitoring and reviewing life-story work and later-life letters. | Service Managers Cared for Children | August 2024 | Complete but need to evidence impact | | |
| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback from children and young people, and their carers – children will tell us they have a better understanding of their life stories. | | What we will see when we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life-story work and later-life letters are started early so children understand why they are in care. | | |
| Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people | | | | | | |
| The practice guidance for cared for services includes guidance on life story work. | | | | | | |

4. Health of Cared for Children

| What inspectors found | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waiting lists result in some delay in children accessing emotional support services. A small number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and young people wait too long to access emotional support and counselling due to waiting lists. Initial and review health assessments are not always completed within appropriate timescales. | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| Ref | Action | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating |
| H1 | Develop prioritisation matrices/ approaches to ensure the most vulnerable children and young people are prioritised for mental health support based on an understanding of the additional and differing needs and risks for children with experience of the care system. | Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs Programme Lead for Mental Health and Neurodiversity – Cheshire East NHS ICB | March 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| H2 | Develop 'waiting well' initiatives with key health providers and third sector provision to support children and young people while they wait based on an understanding of protective factors and how they can be increased and developed in response to needs. | Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs Programme Lead for Mental Health and Neurodiversity – Cheshire East NHS ICB | March 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| H3 | Review the current emotional support offer for UASC young people in Cheshire East, taking into account any recommendations/ good practice from the Cheshire and Merseyside scoping exercise on support to UASC young people. | Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children | August 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| H4 | Health and children's social care to jointly review the timeliness of health assessments on a six-weekly basis to support improved timeliness. | Service Manager Cared for Children Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children | May 2024 | Closed |
| H5 | Develop a single point of contact for health assessments within the local authority to support increased timeliness. | Service Manager Cared for Children | May 2024 | Closed |
| H6 | Report quarterly to NHS England on out of area initial and review health assessments that are out of timescale to drive improved timeliness. | Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children | May 2024 | Closed |

| | | | | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|-----------|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| H7 | Develop a health and wellbeing workstream and action plan to improve health outcomes for cared for children and care leavers. This workstream will include a care leaver ambassador to ensure the views of care experienced children and young people shape our priorities and service development. | | Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children | June 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact | | |
| H8 | Review and streamline the process around initial health assessments to improve timeliness. | | Head of Service Child in Need and Child Protection | May 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact | | |
| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | • Waiting lists for children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS). • Timeliness of annual health assessments, initial and review health assessments. | What we will see when we've addressed this area | • Children and young people access children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS) without delay. 90% of non-urgent referrals receive an assessment within 6 weeks. 90% wait no more than 6 weeks between assessment and treatment. • 90% annual health assessments will be completed within timescales. | | | | |
| Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people | | | | | | | |
| The Care Leaver Health Group is working on developing sleep packs for UAS young people as national evidence suggests this is a significant factor in good mental health for this cohort. The ambition is for these to be provided to each UAS young person. The focus of the September Good Health and Wellbeing Workstream was emotional health of cared for children including UASC. | | | | | | | |

5. Education for Cared for Children

| What inspectors found | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too many primary-aged children in care experience attendance issues as they move into secondary school. • Personal education plans (PEPs) 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 employment, education or training (NEET) does not begin early enough. | | |
|------------------------------|--|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| Ref | Action | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating |
| ED1 | Review attendance through education advisors' fortnightly attendance meetings and determine clear actions for young people to improve their attendance. | Head of Service for Inclusion | April 2024 | Complete |
| ED2 | Review the plans for those with lower than 50% attendance, in alternative provision, or not in full time education, in a forum chaired by a head of service, to ensure there are clear actions on what needs to happen and there is senior leader oversight of these young people. | Head of Service for Inclusion | April 2024 | Complete |
| ED3 | Hold multi-disciplinary team meetings for individual children and young people when required to improve attendance. These meetings develop a plan to improve attendance and continue to meet until attendance has improved. | Head of Service for Inclusion | April 2024 | Complete |
| ED4 | Improve the quality of PEPs through delivering training, ensuring we are ambitious for young people, targets are SMART, and there is a clear early planning for preparing young people for adulthood and securing EET. Involve young people in the development and delivery of the training to ensure the impact of a good quality PEP is clear. | Head of Service for Inclusion | Delivery from September - December 2024 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| ED5 | Review the PEP form to ensure that this supports improvement in areas where care experienced young people attain less well than their peers, for example reading. | Head of Service for Inclusion | September 2024 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| ED6 | Report cared for children's attainment against their peers within scorecards and performance reports to drive improved performance. | Head of Service for Inclusion | February 2025 | Complete but need to |

| | | | | evidence impact |
|---|--|--|---|-----------------|
| ED7 | Audit young adults who are NEET at 20 and look what learning can be taken from their preparation for adulthood to improve our support. | Head of Service for Inclusion Service Manager for Care Leavers | March 2025 | Complete |
| ED8 | Use the risk of NEET indicators (RONI) to identify which cared for young people in Year 11 are at risk of NEET and ensure that the right support is in place to support them into EET. | Area Delivery Manager Youth Support Service – NEET and Preparing for Adulthood | November 2024 | Complete |
| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percentage attendance for cared for children. Educational outcomes for cared for children. PEP audits will tell us about the quality of PEPs and impact, and how well they support preparation for adulthood and prevent young people becoming NEET. Percentage of PEPs that are good or better quality. Percentage of young people in care in Year 12 and 13 that are NEET. | What we will see when we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 95% attendance for all cared for children Educational outcomes for cared for children are good and in line with their peers. Cared for young people are well prepared for adulthood. Identifying children and young people who are at risk of NEET begins early and helps to prevent them becoming NEET. 95% of PEPs are graded as good or better 90% of young people in care in Year 12 and 13 are EET. | |
| Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people | | | | |
| To continue supporting the practice of our Designated Teachers we have hosted a 'New to Role' training session and we have rewritten our PEP Quality Assurance documentation to refine our success criteria and guidance for schools. | | | | |

6. Workforce

| What inspectors found | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent changes in social workers impact on the quality of relationships and the progress of plans for some children, leading to delay. • Too many children have experienced changes in social worker, which means they must retell their story, and this prevents them from being able to build trusting relationships. • The impact of multiple social workers and IROs on care planning has resulted in drift and delay for some children in achieving permanence. | | |
|------------------------------|--|--|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Ref | Action | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating |
| W1 | Review capacity across children's social care and supporting services to deliver the improvement plan and develop a costed proposal to the Children and Families Committee. | Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care | July 2024 | Complete |
| W2 | Assess demand to the care leavers service and determine what capacity is needed to support allocation at 15 years 9 months and to increase support to care leavers aged 21+. | Service Manager Care Leavers | July 2024 | Complete |
| W3 | Review capacity across the two IRO teams to look at how we can create dedicated time for supporting and driving improved outcomes for care leavers. | Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance | July 2024 | Complete |
| W4 | Reestablish a workforce, recruitment and retention group for children's social care. | Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care | September 2024 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| W5 | Refresh the workforce strategy. | Head of HR Principal Social Worker | December 2024 | Complete but need to evidence impact |
| W6 | Develop and launch a refreshed recruitment campaign to attract high quality practitioners and managers to Cheshire East. | Head of HR Principal Social Worker | November 2025 | On track |

| | | | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|--|------------------------|----------|
| W7 | Develop reporting on caseloads specific to each service on what we would expect to see to support effective oversight. | | | Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care Business Intelligence Manager | August 2024 | Complete |
| W8 | Launch a level 7 apprentice scheme (a masters equivalent programme, so a shorter programme than our current BA equivalent level 6 apprenticeships) to supplement our current scheme supporting people to train as social workers with Cheshire East. | | | Principal Social Worker | To start in March 2025 | Complete |
| W9 | Seek practitioners' views on the support they receive to deliver good practice, workloads, and progress to date, through the practice review audits, elected member frontline visits, and walking the floor. | | | Executive Director of Children's Services | Quarterly review | Complete |
| W10 | Keep the children's workforce updated on developments around the inspection findings through the monthly children's newsletter and monthly talk together sessions with the DCS to ensure there is a joined up approach to improvement. | | | Executive Director of Children's Services | Quarterly review | Complete |
| W11 | Seek children, young people and families' views of the support they have received through our audit process. | | | Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance | Monthly | Complete |
| W12 | Deliver a base build of children's services to ensure there is the right support to meet children's needs. | | | Executive Director of Children's Services | March 2026 | On track |
| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice across all service areas and include feedback from children and families on their relationships with their workers.Caseload data.The percentage of social worker vacancies and the percentage turnover rate for social workers. | What we will see when we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Social workers build effective and trusting relationships with children and families, which supports improved outcomes for children and young people. 90% young people tell us that they trust their social workers.Teams are stable, meaning children and young people don't experience frequent changes in social worker or IROs.Average caseloads are 15 for AYSEs, 20 for cared for, and 22 for CINCP.80% practitioners tell us that their caseloads are manageable and they feel well supported by managers. | | |
| Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people | | | | | | |

Video and creative for the refreshed recruitment campaign has been approved by the children's leadership team.

The Ofsted monitoring visit found that practitioners felt listened to and engaged in Cheshire East's improvement journey. Practitioners' views on the support they receive are sought through the Ofsted monitoring visits, councillor frontline visits, and coffee morning sessions.

Detailed planning is underway to progress the service redesign in line with the Families First Reforms timetable.

Chapter 3

Actions from internal assessment activities from September 2024

Entries to Care

| Source | | Focus on Care Planning and Children who have become Cared for since April 2024 – Report to the Improvement Board on 7 November 2024 | | | |
|------------------------------|---|---|---------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Areas for improvement | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Too many children were coming into care in an unplanned way (58 of 116 in Q1 and Q2 2024-25).• There were 25 children who were not open to children's services before becoming cared for.• 7 children were open to early help when they came into care.• The number of unplanned entries to care include a high percentage from the use of Police Protection Powers.• Interim care orders were granted for 18 children where the Court did not endorse the care plan. | | | |
| Ref | Action | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating | |
| C1 | Review children's experiences and identify if there were opportunities where early help could have been offered to support them. | Head of Service for Early Help and Protection | February 2025 | Complete but need to evidence impact | |
| C2 | Refresh and relaunch the early help strategy to ensure there is a strong partnership approach to delivering early help. | Head of Service for Early Help and Protection | June 2025 | Complete | |
| C3 | Agree a joint protocol for responding to and managing police protection, including how police protection paperwork is shared and recorded on a child's electronic file. | Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance | July 2025 | Closed | |
| C4 | Develop a neglect strategy to ensure all agencies are responding appropriately to neglect and earlier intervention is considered where necessary. | Children's Safeguarding Partnership Business Manager Head of Early Help and Prevention | June 2025 | Complete | |

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|--|---|--|--|
| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the number of children coming into care in a planned way. • Reduction in the use of Police Protection. • Reduction in the number of care plans not endorsed by the court. | What we will see when we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children will come into care in a planned way. There will be no unplanned entries into care unless there are legitimate reasons which the partnership feel is acceptable (by exception). • Children and families will have their needs identified early and will receive effective support that prevents issues from escalating. Children who do come into care in a planned way will have evidence of earlier intervention having taken place. |
| Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people | | | |
| Quarterly partnership meetings are now in place to review performance on use of police protection powers. An audit of children who were not known to children's social care services prior to PPP will take place before the end of December to identify if there were missed opportunities to offer help earlier. | | | |

Children's home inspection

| Source | | Children's home monitoring visit – 4 February 2025 | | | |
|--|--|---|--|---|----------------------|
| Areas for improvement | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three requirements were restated from the last inspection in November 2024 as they were not met: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written plans need to contain all known risks to children and have clear strategies for staff to follow to keep children safe. Monitoring and review systems need to ensure that shortfalls in the quality of care are identified and addressed. Case records need to be up to date and include the information and documents listed in Schedule 3. | | | |
| Ref | Action | | Action Owner | Due by | Action Rating |
| CH1 | Implement weekly management reviews of compliance with standards to drive improved management oversight and improved quality of practice. | | Registered Manager | 7 March 2025 | Complete |
| CH2 | Strengthen the regulation 44 visits and reports through delivery of training to ensure there is effective oversight of the quality of care. | | Head of Service Children's Provision | March 2025 | Complete |
| CH3 | Review the recording system for residential provision within LiquidLogic to ensure this supports best practice and recording holds appropriately. | | Registered Managers and Business Intelligence | March 2025 | Complete |
| How we'll assess if we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly regulation 44 visits and reports, considering the quality of practice and compliance with standards. Audit by Head of Service to test monitoring and review systems in place and quality of practice. | | What we will see when we've addressed this area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children's plans will contain all known risks to children, there will be clear strategies in place for staff which are followed and support children to be kept safe. Monitoring and review systems accurately identify shortfalls in the quality of care and actions is taken swiftly to address these. Case records are up to date and include all the information and documents listed in Schedule 3 so there is a accurate record of the child's experiences and support. | |

Appendix 3 – Changes to the improvement plan actions agreed through improvement plan governance arrangements

The timescales for the following have been revised to ensure these are suitable:

| Ref | Action | Original timescale | Revised timescale | Reason |
|-----|--|--------------------|-------------------|---|
| P7 | Review children's panels and the outcomes their achieve for children (including permanence) to ensure they are effective and streamlined | September 2025 | January 2026 | This review had started but was delayed due to the monitoring visit. |
| P10 | Develop a new C&F assessment | October 2025 | March 2026 | The C&F assessment is being aligned with families first to ensure it is future proofed, the timescale has been extended in line with the families first approach. |
| W12 | Deliver a base build of children's services to ensure there is the right support to meet children's needs | December 2025 | March 2026 | This timeline has been updated in line with the implementation plan for families first. |

The following action is delayed:

| Ref | Action | Original timescale | Reason |
|------|---|--------------------|--|
| SL17 | Strengthen the audit process – revise the audit tool and integrate audit and reporting within the child's record. | November 2025 | The audit forms are currently being built within the child's record system. Business Intelligence have been experiencing difficulties building the authorisation stages of the form. If this is not able to be resolved we will need to approach LiquidLogic for a solution. |

The following action has been revised to reflect activity:

| Ref | Action | Original timescale | Reason |
|-----|---|--------------------|--|
| SM4 | <p>Develop partnership and managers training to strengthen partnership contributions during strategy discussions, what is recorded, and how minutes are signed off.</p> <p>Has been revised to:</p> <p>Develop managers training to strengthen contributions during strategy discussions, what is recorded, and how minutes are signed off.</p> | October 2025 | <p>Internal training on strategy discussions has been provided by the practice leads.</p> <p>Effective understanding of strategy discussions will be a core activity for multi-agency child protection teams which we are required to develop under families first. As part of these developments, a training programme and practice guidance will be developed.</p> |

The following actions are under review/ scoping:

| Ref | Action | Reason |
|------|---|--|
| SL8 | Refresh the cared for children and care leavers strategy 2022-26 and action plan together with our care leaver ambassadors. | We will revise the cared for children and care leavers strategy from April 2026. The corporate parenting executive board and workstreams are currently driving work in this area. |
| SL18 | Develop an implementation plan for the family feedback strategy. | An implementation plan has been developed however, we are currently reviewing this and ensuring this is in line with our other plans, including our new Quality of Practice framework. |
| P5 | Develop a permanence action plan to ensure permanence planning is considered and progressed from an early stage, with permanence plans being in place at the second cared for review. The permanence action plan should consider all routes to permanence, including reunification. | This will be reviewed as part of the development of the new improvement plan. |
| P12 | Develop and launch a new central point for children and families resources, practice guidance and training. | A test environment for the new central resource platform is being set up so we can look at functions and options for development. |

| | | |
|----|---|---|
| | | All existing policies, procedures and practice guidance will be reviewed and we will ensure synergy of guidance and language, and align to families first developments, by November 2026. |
| S5 | Develop specialist foster carers to support children and young people to step down from residential care. | We are working with a company (Reconnect) who will recruit specialist foster carers for us on a salaried basis to support children and young people to step down from residential. When a contract is in place this will identify the intended outcomes and timescales. |

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|---|-----------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| RAG rating for actuals against targets (it is not appropriate to have targets for all indicators) | On target | Within 15% of target | More than 15% from target |
| Direction of travel shown between current and previous month (green indicates an improvement and amber indicates a decline) | ▲ | ▼ | |

Indicators of Success

The indicators below will demonstrate change achieved

Rates are calculated using the 2023 ONS mid year population estimate 0-17 of 81,634 (Office of National Statistics) and are calculated as a rate per 10,000 children aged 0-17.

| ID | Early Help and Front Door Responses - Early Help and Front Door information only | Oct-24 | Nov-24 | Dec-24 | Jan-25 | Feb-25 | Mar-25 | Apr-25 | May-25 | Jun-25 | Jul-25 | Aug-25 | Sep-25 | Target | SN av | Direction of travel |
|----|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-----------|-------|---------------------|
| 1 | Percentage of Early Help Assessments completed within 45 working days (in month) | 84.0% | 87.4% | 94.0% | 99.0% | 96.0% | 99.0% | 95.0% | 97.8% | 98.4% | 99.3% | 100% | 94.7% | 90.0% | N/A | ▼ |
| 2 | Percentage of Early Help episodes closed within the last 12 weeks who have been referred to Social Care (in month) | 4.4% | 4.2% | 4.5% | 3.2% | 7.5% | 8.8% | 5.5% | 4.9% | 4.8% | 5.6% | 5.7% | 4.4% | Below 8% | N/A | ▼ |
| 3 | Number of children stepped down from Child In Need to Early Help (in month) | 41 | 18 | 20 | 9 | 27 | 31 | 20 | 22 | 23 | 27 | 17 | 10 | Monitor | N/A | ▼ |
| 4 | Number of ChECS Contacts (in month) | 935 | 747 | 817 | 933 | 912 | 1083 | 910 | 931 | 893 | 1186 | 951 | 1269 | Monitor | N/A | ▲ |
| 5 | Percentage of repeat contacts where previous contact was within previous 12 months (in month) | 53.8% | 50.8% | 44.5% | 46.1% | 45.4% | 43.1% | 44.9% | 41.1% | 41.8% | 40.6% | 39.0% | 46.8% | 45% | N/A | ▲ |
| 6 | Percentage of ChECS Contact decisions made within one working day (in month) | 77.2% | 89.6% | 91.7% | 93.3% | 84.7% | 82.1% | 87.8% | 74.2% | 71.2% | 69.4% | 78.5% | 78.0% | 90.0% | N/A | ▼ |
| 7a | Number of Referrals (in month) | 226 | 181 | 216 | 223 | 255 | 272 | 180 | 229 | 330 | 229 | 172 | 199 | Monitor | N/A | ▼ |
| 7b | Percentage of referrals leading to 'No Further Action' (in month) | 10.2% | 2.8% | 0.5% | 1.8% | 0.3% | 0.3% | 2.8% | 2.6% | 7.3% | 9.6% | 10.5% | 10.0% | below 10% | N/A | ▼ |
| 8a | Percentage of visits within 5 working days of referral (in month) | 68.4% | 58.3% | 57.7% | 50.8% | 65.2% | 55.2% | 64.5% | 66.7% | 46.9% | 59.0% | 54.0% | 56.3% | 90.0% | N/A | ▲ |
| 8b | Percentage of referral visits within 10 working days of referral (in month) | 84.0% | 79.0% | 77.0% | 74.0% | 83.0% | 83.0% | 88.0% | 82.0% | 77.0% | 85.0% | 73.0% | 81.0% | 90.0% | N/A | ▲ |
| 9 | Percentage of re-referrals within previous 12 months (rolling 12 months) | 16.0% | 16.0% | 16.0% | 16.0% | 16.0% | 16.0% | 16.0% | 15% | 16% | 15% | 15% | 16% | below 18% | 19% | ▼ |
| 10 | Percentage of single assessments leading to closure (in month) | 52.5% | 43.0% | 42.8% | 48.6% | 46.9% | 47.7% | 57.1% | 57.1% | 50.5% | 58.4% | 48.6% | 56.7% | 45% | N/A | ▲ |
| 11 | Percentage of single assessments closed with outcome of Early Help | 16.4% | 13.6% | 21.1% | 6.9% | 17.5% | 10.9% | 12.4% | 23.1% | 12.9% | 19.8% | 16.8% | 7.1% | 25% | N/A | ▼ |
| 12 | Percentage of strategy discussions held within 48 hours of referral date | 80.6% | 69.6% | 83.7% | 67.8% | 60.8% | 57.8% | 47.6% | 45.7% | 50.0% | 70.6% | 76.9% | 52.6% | 90.0% | N/A | ▼ |
| 13 | Percentage of strategy discussions with the outcome 'Section 47 enquiry required' (in month) | 75.9% | 78.5% | 62.2% | 68.5% | 71.7% | 67.3% | 59.1% | 64.5% | 57.9% | 73.8% | 60.0% | 65.5% | 60% | N/A | ▲ |
| 14 | Percentage of authorised Section 47 Enquiries with the outcome 'Convene initial child protection conference' (in month) | 24.4% | 16.1% | 21.7% | 24.1% | 20.0% | 30.4% | 33.6% | 16.2% | 31.7% | 24.2% | 32.4% | 30.2% | 35% | N/A | ▼ |

Narrative:

ID 4: All contacts are now being loaded at the ChECS front door, in September 168 of the 1269 were transferred to Early Help. The increase in contacts in September can be largely attributable to schools returning (211 contacts)

ID 7b: The % of referrals resulting in no further action has remained high and accounts for 24 individuals (13 families). Of these, there are a couple of families where the young people are currently being supported by other LAs and will be subsequently moved to Cheshire East following completion of work.

| ID | Robust and effective social work practice - All of CYPFS | Oct-24 | Nov-24 | Dec-24 | Jan-25 | Feb-25 | Mar-25 | Apr-25 | May-25 | Jun-25 | Jul-25 | Aug-25 | Sep-25 | Target | SN av | Direction of travel |
|----|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|---------------------|
|----|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|---------------------|

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|-----|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-----------|-----|---|
| 15 | Rate of Children in Need (CIN) per 10,000 children (month end snapshot) | 100.4r | 106.2r | 108.4r | 126.4r | 135.9r | 134.9r | 122.7r | 127.4r | 133.8r | 122.5r | 113.1r | 107.7r | 105-135 | N/A | ▼ |
| 16 | Rate of Children subject to a Child Protection Plan (CP) per 10,000 children (month end snapshot) | 34.3r | 32.4r | 30.4r | 29.3r | 28.9r | 30.0r | 30.6r | 29.2r | 30.4r | 29.3r | 29.6r | 26.3r | 34-35 | 38r | ▼ |
| 17 | Rate of Cared for Children (CIC) per 10,000 children (month end snapshot) | 68.6r | 68.6r | 67.5r | 67.3r | 67.3r | 67.4r | 67.6r | 66.8r | 66.4r | 66.3r | 66.0r | 65.3r | 64-66 | 64r | ▼ |
| 18a | Percentage of single assessments completed within 45 working days (in month) | 74.4% | 82.0% | 66.5% | 65.2% | 76.0% | 72.2% | 86.4% | 86.7% | 88.8% | 86.4% | 91.2% | 81.1% | 90.0% | 87% | ▼ |
| 18b | Percentage of single assessments completed within 45 working days (year to date) | 73.1% | 74.0% | 73.2% | 72.5% | 72.8% | 72.7% | 86.4% | 86.5% | 87.3% | 87.0% | 87.8% | 86.7% | 90.0% | 87% | ▼ |
| 18c | Percentage of single assessments completed within 45 working days (rolling 12 months) | 80.2% | 80.1% | 78.4% | 75.7% | 74.0% | 72.7% | 73.4% | 74.5% | 76.6% | 77.4% | 78.6% | 80.5% | 90.0% | 87% | ▲ |
| 19 | Percentage of children seen during assessment (completed in month) | 97.80% | 96.2% | 99.1% | 97.60% | 98.2% | 96.5% | 96.0% | 96.0% | 90.1% | 96.3% | 95.4% | 95.8% | 95.00% | N/A | ▲ |
| 20 | Percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 working days of Strategy Discussion (in month) | 93.9% | 64.7% | 66.7% | 82.9% | 71.4% | 91.4% | 87.8% | 100.0% | 79.4% | 86.7% | 88.9% | 81.0% | 90.0% | 79% | ▼ |
| 21 | Percentage of current children subject to Repeat Child Protection Plans within 2 years (month end snapshot) | 9.2% | 9.8% | 9.7% | 8.4% | 7.2% | 8.2% | 10.8% | 11.3% | 10.9% | 10.0% | 10.3% | 11.6% | below 15% | N/A | ▲ |
| 22 | Percentage of children who have a closed Child Protection plan open for 2 years or more (year to date) | 4.6% | 4.1% | 3.6% | 3.1% | 2.9% | 2.7% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 4.5% | 4.5% | 3.4% | below 4% | 4% | ▼ |
| 23 | Number of children with a missing episode(s) in month | 59 | 53 | 49 | 46 | 44 | 57 | 56 | 76 | 84 | 68 | 44 | 50 | below 50 | N/A | ▲ |
| 24 | Contextual Safeguarding - Number of Current Children with an active exploitation Flag (month end snapshot) | 44 | 47 | 48 | 53 | 52 | 51 | 54 | 52 | 56 | 59 | 56 | 50 | Monitor | N/A | ▼ |
| 25 | Percentage of PLO (Public Law Outline) concluding within 16 weeks | 66.7% | 66.6% | 40.0% | 14.3% | 12.5% | 33.3% | 35.7% | 16.6% | 14.2% | 40.0% | 50.0% | 44.4% | 90.0% | N/A | ▼ |

Narrative:

ID 16: The rate of young people being supported under a Child Protection Plan is possibly lower than we would expect given our demography.

ID 18a-c: There has been a drop the timeliness of assessment in September, which has also impacted slightly on the year to date position.

ID 23: There has been a further positive reduction in the number of young people reported missing in the month of August. Alongside this we continue to closely monitor the take up of return to home interviews and how they inform revisions in plans to better support our young people.

| ID | At risk of Care, Cared for and Care Experienced Children and Young People - All of CYPFS | Oct-24 | Nov-24 | Dec-24 | Jan-25 | Feb-25 | Mar-25 | Apr-25 | May-25 | Jun-25 | Jul-25 | Aug-25 | Sep-25 | Target | SN av | Direction of travel |
|-----|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|-------|---------------------|
| 26 | Number of admissions to care in month | 13 | 26 | 12 | 23 | 15 | 20 | 17 | 14 | 18 | 23 | 18 | 8 | 15 | N/A | ▼ |
| 27 | Number of discharges from care in month | 13 | 24 | 20 | 24 | 13 | 17 | 15 | 21 | 21 | 24 | 15 | 13 | Monitor | N/A | ▼ |
| 28 | Number of unregistered placements – Under 16 (month end snapshot) | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 0 | N/A | ◀ ▶ |
| 29 | Number of unregistered placements – Age 16+ (month end snapshot) | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 0 | N/A | ▲ |
| 30 | Number of residential placements (month end snapshot) | 41 | 42 | 44 | 49 | 50 | 51 | 50 | 45 | 46 | 51 | 54 | 54 | 43 | N/A | ◀ ▶ |
| 31 | Number of children subject to Police Protection Powers (PPP) who entered care in month | 7 | 8 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 0 | N/A | ◀ ▶ |
| 32 | Percentage of discharges from care to Special Guardianship Order (rolling 12 months) | 9.0% | 10.3% | 10.6% | 13.4% | 12.9% | 13.4% | 14.5% | 15.2% | 16.0% | 16.0% | 16.4% | 16.5% | 13.0% | 10% | ▲ |
| 33 | Number of Special Guardianship Orders in place | | | | | | | | | | | | | Monitor | N/A | |
| 34a | Number of Children in "in house" foster care provision (inc Kinship) | 251 | 249 | 241 | 239 | 235 | 233 | 230 | 230 | 223 | 224 | 209 | 205 | 240 | | ▼ |

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|-----|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----------|-----|
| 34b | Number of Children in IFA Placements | 121 | 118 | 114 | 124 | 121 | 119 | 130 | 126 | 131 | 126 | 133 | 132 | Monitor | |
| 34c | Percentage of children placed with 'in house' foster carers (month end snapshot) | 67.5% | 67.8% | 67.9% | 65.8% | 66.0% | 66.0% | 63.9% | 64.6% | 63.0% | 64.0% | 61.1% | 60.8% | 70.0% | N/A |
| 34d | Total number of Mainstream Fostering Households | 74 | 75 | 73 | 73 | 73 | 76 | 77 | 75 | 75 | 75 | 74 | 73 | Monitor | N/A |
| 34e | Total number of approved Kinship Households | 65 | 56 | 56 | 52 | 48 | 50 | 53 | 52 | 52 | 52 | 54 | 56 | Monitor | N/A |
| 34f | Total number of Fostering Households | 138 | 131 | 128 | 124 | 121 | 125 | 130 | 127 | 127 | 127 | 128 | 129 | Monitor | N/A |
| 35 | Short Term Placement Stability (month end snapshot) | 12.4% | 11.5% | 11.1% | 11.7% | 11.1% | 11.5% | 10.3% | 11.0% | 11.3% | 12.2% | 11.0% | 11.0% | 11.0% | N/A |
| 36 | Long Term Placement Stability (month end snapshot) | 65.3% | 66.1% | 67.4% | 67.6% | 67.6% | 68.9% | 69.5% | 67.7% | 68.6% | 67.7% | 65.1% | 62.6% | 70.0% | N/A |
| 37a | Percentage of Initial Health Assessment Reports completed within month where paperwork was received from CE within 5 working days of admission to care | 30.0% | 60.0% | 77.8% | 66.7% | 27.3% | 17.6% | 53.8% | 54.5% | 23.5% | 40.0% | 20.0% | NYA | 85.0% | N/A |
| 37b | Percentage of Initial Health Assessment Reports completed within month that were completed within 20 working days of admission to care | 36.4% | 60.0% | 81.8% | 61.9% | 23.0% | 20.0% | 43.8% | 57.1% | 23.5% | 52.4% | 11.1% | NYA | 85.0% | N/A |
| 38 | Percentage of children in care with health checks up to date | 83.0% | 83.0% | 86.0% | 90.0% | 92.0% | 89.0% | 88.0% | 86.0% | 84.0% | 85.0% | 87.0% | 88.0% | 90.0% | 85% |
| 39 | Percentage of children in care with dental checks up to date | 62.0% | 59.0% | 57.0% | 68.0% | 62.0% | 66.0% | 86.0% | 94.0% | 96.0% | 95.0% | 95.0% | 94.0% | 80.0% | 75% |
| 40 | Percentage of children in care with optical checks up to date | | | | | | | | | | | | | | N/A |
| 41 | Percentage of children in care with immunisations up to date | 55.0% | 54.0% | 53.0% | 53.0% | 54.0% | 54.0% | 81.0% | 78.0% | 76.0% | 76.0% | 85.0% | 83.0% | 70% | N/A |
| 42 | School attendance rate for children known to Social Care - statutory school age in Cheshire East schools only (month end snapshot for academic year) | 87% | 87% | 86% | 86% | 86% | 86% | 85% | 85.4% | 84.8% | 84.1% | 84.0% | 88.0% | 89.0% | N/A |
| 43 | Number of Children in Care without a School Placement - statutory school age | 3 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 0 | N/A |
| 44 | Number of Children in Care with a Current Suspension - statutory school age | 15 | 27 | 32 | 36 | 38 | 40 | 40 | 44 | 47 | 47 | 47 | 8 | below 20 | N/A |
| 45 | Number of Children in Care with a Current Permanent Exclusion - statutory school age | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | N/A |
| 46a | Percentage of Care Leavers aged 17 to 18 in Education, Employment or Training (month end snapshot) | 70.0% | 74.0% | 76.0% | 74.0% | 69.0% | 65.0% | 69.0% | 67.0% | 67.0% | 67.0% | 65.0% | 60.0% | 77.0% | 66% |
| 46b | Percentage of Care Leavers aged 17 to 18 in Suitable Accommodation (month end snapshot) | 93.0% | 99.0% | 97.0% | 97.0% | 98.0% | 96.0% | 97.0% | 93.0% | 93.0% | 95.0% | 97.0% | 96.0% | 95.0% | 87% |
| 47a | Percentage of Care Leavers aged 19 to 21 in Education, Employment or Training (month end snapshot) | 59.0% | 61.0% | 66.0% | 68.0% | 66.0% | 63.0% | 63.0% | 64.0% | 65.0% | 64.0% | 65.0% | 63.0% | 60.0% | 56% |
| 47b | Percentage of Care Leavers aged 19 to 21 in Suitable Accommodation (month end snapshot) | 92.0% | 95.0% | 97.0% | 97.0% | 95.0% | 96.0% | 97.0% | 97.0% | 96.0% | 95.0% | 95.0% | 95.0% | 95.0% | 87% |

Narrative:

ID 28 & 29: As at the end of September the 8 unregistered placements relate to specialist provision. 2 currently inspected by CQC and a further 3 are Ofsted registered supported accommodation however the individuals concerned are receiving additional care and support the provider isn't registered for.

ID 32: There is a continued increase in the numbers of individuals being able to leave care and be supported in homes via special guardianship orders.

ID 46a-47b: In the main we are demonstrating improved outcomes for our Care Leavers however there is still more to do to increase the % of 17-18 year olds in education, employment and training.

| ID | Quality Assurance and Audit (safeguarding) - All of CYPFS | Oct-24 | Nov-24 | Dec-24 | Jan-25 | Feb-25 | Mar-25 | Apr-25 | May-25 | Jun-25 | Jul-25 | Aug-25 | Sep-25 | Target | SN av | Direction of travel |
|----|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|-------|---------------------|
| 48 | Timeliness of Reviews of Child Protection Plans (month end snapshot) | 93.4% | 92.9% | 97.0% | 91.9% | 90.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 97.60% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 90-95% | | ◀ ▶ |
| 49 | Timeliness of Reviews of Children in Care (month end snapshot) | 68.4% | 78.0% | 74.0% | 77.1% | 71.1% | 91.3% | 80.2% | 80.0% | 81.9% | 91.7% | 90.3% | 93.3% | 90-95% | | ▲ |
| 50 | Number of Informal quality assurance practice alerts | 0 | 1 | 3 | 7 | 11 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | Monitor | | ◀ ▶ |
| 51 | Number of formal quality assurance practice alerts | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | Monitor | | ◀ ▶ |
| 52 | Number of good practice alerts | 8 | 9 | 5 | 4 | 7 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 9 | 10 | 8 | 11 | Monitor | | ▲ |

Narrative:

ID 48: Child protection plan review timescales has remained at 100% for 3 consecutive months which is the best possible outcome for our young people.

ID 49: Although a slight dip, the timeliness of children in care reviews remains in line with target.

| ID | Quality Assurance and Audit (auditing) - All of CYPFS | Oct-24 | Nov-24 | Dec-24 | Jan-25 | Feb-25 | Mar-25 | Apr-25 | May-25 | Jun-25 | Jul-25 | Aug-25 | Sep-25 | Target | SN av | Direction of travel |
|----|--|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-------------|-------|---------------------|
| 53 | Overall number of collaborative or thematic audits completed | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 14 | 12 | 16 | 18 | 24 | 47 | 21 | 6 per month | N/A | ▼ |
| 54 | Overall percentage of audits completed within timescale | 100% | 83% | 100% | 83% | 67% (4) | 74% (14) | 41% (5) | 31% (5) | 50% (9) | 54% | 74% (35) | 37% (11) | 100% | N/A | ▲ |
| 55 | Overall percentage of audits graded as good or better following moderation | 0% | 50% (3) | 17% (1) | 33% (2) | 25% (1) | 38% (3) | 33% (4) | 14% (2) | 28% (5) | 38% (9) | 28% (13) | 33% (7) | 80%+ | N/A | ▲ |
| 56 | Overall percentage of audits graded as 'does not yet meet good' following moderation | 100% (6) | 50% (3) | 83% (5) | 67% (4) | 75% (3) | 62% (5) | 67% (8) | 86% (14) | 72% (13) | 62% (15) | 72% (34) | 67% (14) | 40.0% | N/A | ▲ |
| 57 | The % of audits that were down graded at moderation | 17% (1) | 0% | 0% | 33% (2) | 25% (1) | 13% (1) | 25% (3) | 14% (1) | 33% (4) | 17% (4) | | 19% (4) | 10% | N/A | |
| 58 | Overall number of family help audits completed | | | 7 | | | 9 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 7 | 6 | N/A | ▲ |
| 59 | Overall percentage of family help audits graded as good or better following moderation | | | 43% | | | 43% | 0% | 33% | 40% | 67% | 40% | 71% | 55% | N/A | ▲ |
| 60 | Overall percentage of family help audits graded as 'does not yet meet good' following moderation | | | 57% | | | 57% | 100% | 67% | 60% | 33% | 60% | 29% | 30% | N/A | ▼ |
| 61 | The % of family help audits that were down graded at moderation | | | 0% | | | 22% | 0% | 33% | 20% | 0% | 20% | 0% | 15% | N/A | ▼ |
| 62 | Overall number of Multiagency audits completed | | | 27 | | | | | | 6 | 15 | | | 25 | N/A | |

Narrative:

ID 53 & 54: Please note that 30 collaborative audits were issued but only 21 completed. In terms of the 21 there were 11 (52%) completed in timescales

ID 55-57: Of the 21 audits completed 15 were moderated and 4 were subsequently downgraded

| ID | A Stable and able workforce - All of CYPFS | Oct-24 | Nov-24 | Dec-24 | Jan-25 | Feb-25 | Mar-25 | Apr-25 | May-25 | Jun-25 | Jul-25 | Aug-25 | Sep-25 | Target | | Direction of travel |
|----|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--|---------------------|
| 63 | Early Help / Targeted Support - Average Caseload | | | | | | | | | | | | 19 | 20 | | |
| 64 | Children's Social Work - CIN/CP Average Caseload | 19 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 21 | 20 | 20 | 22 | 20 | 20 | 19 | 17 | | ▼ |
| 65 | Children's Disability Team - Average Caseload | 21 | 25 | 22 | 21 | 22 | 20 | 17 | 15 | 20 | 20 | 19 | 18 | 20 | | ▼ |
| 66 | Cared for Children Service - Average Caseload (not inc Fostering Service) | 17 | 17 | 17 | 17 | 17 | 16 | 16 | 16 | 16 | 15 | 16 | 15 | 17 | | ▼ |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
| 67 | Care Leavers - Average Caseload | 14 | 15 | 14 | 16 | 16 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 18 | | ◀ ▶ |
| 68 | Unallocated cases at month open where referral is over 3 working days | 10 | 1 | 11 | 1 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 4 | ▲ |
| 69 | Percentage of Social Workers with more than 20 children allocated (month end snapshot) | 36.7% | 37.4% | 42.4% | 39.6% | 48.4% | 43.0% | 41.0% | 33% | 45% | 30% | 32% | 27% | 35% | ▼ |
| 70 | Percentage of Case Supervisions in time – CIN/CP Teams (month end snapshot (all workers)) | 73.0% | 66.0% | 59.0% | 62.0% | 65.0% | 68.0% | 88.0% | 80.0% | 79.0% | 77.0% | 80.0% | 88.6% | 95% | ▲ |
| 71 | Percentage of Case Supervision's in time – Cared for Team (month end snapshot (all workers)) | 56.0% | 60.0% | 52.0% | 58.0% | 55.0% | 51.0% | 71.0% | 72.0% | 75.0% | 83.0% | 64.0% | 79.2% | 95% | ▲ |
| 72 | Percentage of Case Supervision's in time – Care Leavers Service (month end snapshot (social workers)) | 67.0% | 66.0% | 43.0% | 61.1% | 40.0% | 12.0% | 62.0% | 43.0% | 41.0% | 48.0% | 78.0% | 61.0% | 95% | ▼ |
| 73 | Percentage of Case Supervision's in time – Care Leavers Service (month end snapshot (PA's)) | 74.0% | 75.0% | 69.0% | 68.0% | 78.0% | 68.0% | 59.0% | 66.0% | 68.0% | 82.0% | 76.0% | 90.0% | 95% | ▲ |
| 74 | Percentage of Case Supervision's in time – Children's Disability Team (month end snapshot (all workers)) | 79.0% | 70.0% | 73.0% | 76.0% | 63.0% | 61.0% | 71.0% | 94.0% | 98.0% | 70.0% | 89.0% | 72.0% | 95% | ▼ |
| 75 | Percentage of Case Supervision's in time – Court team (month end snapshot (all workers)) | | | | | 34.0% | 20.0% | 10.0% | 95.0% | 78.0% | 24.0% | 26.0% | 75.6% | 95% | ▲ |
| 76 | Percentage of Foster Carer Supervision – Fostering Service (month end snapshot) | 79.6% | 90.0% | 82.4% | 76.0% | 87.2% | 90.9% | 80.0% | 86.8% | 85.0% | 78.0% | 70.0% | 66.0% | 95% | ▼ |
| 77 | Turnover rate for Social Workers (month end snapshot) | 16.7% | 18.5% | 18.5% | 21.1% | 24.2% | 25.3% | 26.2% | 25.8% | 22.2% | 17.4% | 24.1% | 19.9% | 15% | ▼ |
| 78 | Vacancy rate for Social Workers (month end snapshot) | 26.5% | 26.5% | 25.6% | 23.6% | 28.7% | 32.0% | 29.9% | 28.7% | 27.4% | 20.7% | 28.5% | 30.8% | 25% | ▲ |
| 79 | Sickness Average Days Lost Per FTE (Rolling Year) - CYPFS department as a whole | 11.26 | 10.57 | 10.85 | 10.05 | 12.42 | 13.42 | 13.82 | 13.83 | 14.19 | 14.47 | 15.22 | 15.15 | 10 | ▼ |
| Narrative: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ID 63: We have completed additional analysis and data extraction which has enabled us to report on average case loads for Early Help/ Targeted Support for the first time. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ID 64 & 69: There has been a downward trend in average case loads across the teams, with only the CIN/CP teams above the target level. Crucially supervision timescales in these teams is high which means workers are being well supported which will enable much better support for our young people. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ID 77: There has been a slight downward trend in turnover rate of staff which will hopefully enable more stability for our young people in terms of consistency of worker. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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Children and Families Committee

Work Programme 2025 - 26

| Report Reference | Title | Purpose of Report | Lead Officer | Consultation | Equality Impact Assessment | Part of Budget and Policy Framework | Exempt Item | Comments |
|-------------------------|--|--|--|--------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|----------|
| 16 February 2026 | | | | | | | | |
| CF/05/25-26 | Third Financial Review 2025/26 | To note and comment on the Third Financial Review and Performance position of 2025/26, including progress on policy proposals and material variances from the MTFS and (if necessary) approve Supplementary Estimates and Virements. | Executive Director of Resources, Section 151 Officer | No | No | Yes | No | Scrutiny |
| CF/33/25-26 | Schools Funding Formula and Early Years Funding Formula 2026/27 | This report will provide committee with an update on the Dedicated School Grant (DSG) for 2026/27 and request approval for the allocation of each sub block making up the DSG. It will request approval of the schools funding formula and early years funding formula following recommendations from the Schools Forum. It will also request approval to provide delegated authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to use the funds in accordance with the relevant guidance and proposed funding formula methods. | Executive Director Children's Services | Yes | No | TBC | No | Decision |
| CF/46/25-26 | New Primary school at Basford East, near Weston, Crewe - Update for members on the recent public consultation. | Report to Note - As detailed in the 15th September committee report, an update to be provided for members on the recent public consultation for the new Primary school at Basford East, near Weston, Crewe | Director for Education, Strong Start and Integration | Yes | Yes | No | No | Scrutiny |

Children and Families Committee Work Programme 2025 - 26

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|----------------------|--|--|---|----|-----|-----|-----|----------|
| | Reconnect Programme | Business case for the approval of the Reconnect Programme in Cheshire East for cared for children. | Director of Commissioning, Quality Assurance and Partnerships | No | Yes | Yes | TBC | Decision |
| 13 April 2026 | | | | | | | | |
| CF/07/25-26 | Service Budgets 2026/27 | To set out the allocation of budgets for 2026/27, for all Committees, following Council's approval of the Medium Term Financial Strategy in February 2024, as determined by Finance Sub-Committee. | Executive Director of Resources, Section 151 Officer | No | No | Yes | No | Scrutiny |
| CF/45/25-26 | Home to School Transport Task & Finish Group Scrutiny Report | To update committee on the findings from the Home to School Transport Task & Finish Group. | Executive Director of Children's Services | No | No | No | No | Decision |

Task and Finish Groups

| Group | Membership | Established | Purpose |
|--|--|-------------|---|
| Review of Home to School Transport - This is a cross-directorate Task & Finish Group with Highways & Transport Committee | C & F - Cllrs M Beanland, L Crane, E Gilman, B Puddicombe H & T - | April 2025 | <p>This project will enable members of both Highways & Transport Committee and Children & Families Committee to jointly scrutinise the Council's arrangements for provision of Home-to-School Transport, including SEND.</p> <p>The Council provides transport for approximately 4000 students to educational establishments in the borough and beyond.</p> <p>The MTFS provides an increase in budget (FY2025-26) of £1.5 million with further growth expected in future years. Transport services make up 17% of the overall children's revenue budget.</p> <p>There have been recent planned changes to the council's policies, procedures and procurement arrangements for home-to-school transport and members are interested to understand the effectiveness of these and what else can be done to ensure services provide value-for-money.</p> |

Children and Families Committee Work Programme 2025 - 26

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| Families First Programme | Cllrs L Crane, S Bennett-Wake, E Gilman, G Hayes, G Smith, Cllr J Saunders | May 2025 | <p>The objectives of this project are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To understand the rationale and evidence base for place-based locality working and locality proposals for multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working for children and families in Cheshire East.• To understand how this links to the Families First Partnership approach and the requirement to implement the reforms and be up and running by 31st March 2026.• To contribute towards the development of the Families First Partnership plans. |
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Briefing Reports/Reports for noting

| Title | Purpose of Report | Lead Officer | Expected Circulation Date via the Members Hub |
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Note: These reports will be circulated outside of committee meetings - [Library folder - Reports for Noting - Reports for Noting | Cheshire East Council](#)

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