

# Cared For Children and Care Leavers Committee

## Agenda

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**Date:** Tuesday, 5th December, 2023  
**Time:** 2.00 pm  
**Venue:** Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields, Middlewich Road,  
Sandbach CW11 1HZ

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1. **Apologies for Absence**

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 - 6)

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

4. **Update from the Shadow Committee (Verbal Update)**

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

5. **Adoption Counts Annual Report 1 April 2022 - 31 March 2023** (Pages 7 - 42)

To receive the Cheshire East Council Adoption Service Annual Report -1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023

6. **Cheshire East Advocacy and Independent Visitor Service – The Children's Society Annual Report** (Pages 43 - 62)

To receive the Cheshire East Advocacy and Independent Visitor Service – The Children's Society Annual Report October 2022 - September 2023

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For requests for further information

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7. **Cared for Children and Care Leavers Scorecard Q2 2023-24** (Pages 63 - 74)

To consider the performance for the Cared for Children and Care Leavers service for quarter 2 of 2023-4.

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

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

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

**PRESENT**

Councillors L Anderson, M Beanland, C Bulman, D Clark, E Gilman, G Hayes,  
S Holland, B Puddicombe and S Adams

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE**

Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director Children's Services  
Kerry Birtles, Director of Children's Social Care  
Laura Rogerson, Head of Service: Inclusion  
Samantha Walker, Head of Service: Children's Provision  
Annie Britton, Participation Lead – Youth Support Service  
Josie Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer

**ALSO PRESENT**

Dr Naomi Jayatilake, Designated Doctor for Cared for Children – NHS  
Cheshire and Merseyside

**8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Bennett-Wake, Cllr Bulman,  
Cllr Critchley, Cllr Posnett and Cllr Saunders. Cllr Adams attended as a  
substitute.

In the absence of the Chair and Vice-Chair, the committee appointed Cllr  
Anderson to chair the meeting.

**9 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**10 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING****RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2023 be agreed as a  
correct record.

## **11 UPDATE FROM THE SHADOW COMMITTEE (VERBAL UPDATE)**

The committee received a presentation on the shadow committee, My Voice, which included an overview of the committee and highlighted some of its achievements and areas of campaigning, such as:

- Renaming the committee and the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy
- Encouraging Full Council to adopt the strategy
- Co-producing the strategy and Children and Young People's Plan
- Co-Chairing and presenting at the Children's Trust Board.

The presentation included audio recordings from some of its members as a way of providing feedback from some of the young people involved.

A query was raised regarding the term 'Shadow Committee' and whether this aligns with young people's expectations, particularly following the work undertaken around re-naming the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee. Officers would discuss this with the young people to seek their views.

A further query was raised regarding the Shadow Committee's interactions with senior executives of Cheshire East and partners and it was suggested that it would be valuable for them to have an informal meeting with the agenda set by the young people as an opportunity to share their experiences and concerns without it being adult-led.

The committee welcomed the presentation and the use of voice recordings and suggested that it would be helpful to continue this at future meetings.

## **12 CARED FOR CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23**

The committee received the report which set out the work of the committee and progress against the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy over the past year.

A query was raised regarding fixed term exclusions, which were lower in Cheshire East than those of statistical neighbours, and how that compared with figures for pupils who were not care experienced. It was noted that this information would be brought to a future committee meeting. There had been no permanent exclusions for cared for children in Cheshire East for four years.

### **RESOLVED:**

The Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee:

1. Endorse the Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee Annual Report 2022-23 as set out at Appendix 1.

**13 CARED FOR CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS SCORECARD Q1 2023-24**

The committee received the report which set out the performance for quarter 1 of 2023-24.

A concern was raised about the number of social worker vacancies which had been an ongoing issue. The committee were advised that there were continued conversations about frontline capacity. Vacancies were being filled with agency staff and there had been good conversion from agency to becoming permanent. By increasing capacity, caseloads were able to be reduced for frontline social workers which was leading to an improved and stabilised service.

A further query was raised regarding the number of dental and health checks and whether this was an issue with capacity or data recording. The committee were advised that there had been an issue with the availability of NHS dentists but there were now a number of dentists able to accept cared for children. There had also been a recording issue but this was being closely monitored.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee:

1. Note the performance of children's services for quarter 1
2. provide scrutiny in relation to performance in relation to cared for children and care leavers

**14 NHS UNIVERSAL FAMILY (CARE LEAVER COVENANT) PROGRAMME**

The committee received a report on the Integrated Care Board commitment to the Care Leaver Covenant.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee note the content of the paper and NHS Cheshire and Merseyside's commitment and progress in relation to the NHS Universal Family (Care Leavers Covenant) Programme.

*Cllr Bulman arrived during this item.*

The meeting commenced at 14.00 and concluded at 15.18

Councillor L Anderson

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## **Cheshire East Council**

### **Adoption Service – Annual Report**

**1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023**

## **1. Introduction and Purpose of the Report**

This report fulfils the obligations in Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002 to report to the “executive side” of the local authority. This has guided the structure and information set out in the report below.

It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 31 March 2023. Plans for children are dynamic and develop every day and the picture will have changed at the point that this report is read.

## **2. Working with Cheshire East Council**

Since going live, Adoption Counts has had responsibility to discharge Cheshire East's responsibilities as an Adoption Agency. The working relationship between the LA and the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) has been fundamental to the success so far of the partnership working and has been embedded at all levels. The Director of Children's Social Care sits as a member of the Adoption Counts Board. The Head of Service with a link to adoption is invited to attend the quarterly operations group meetings. These provide an important opportunity for operational issues to be raised and shared with equivalent managers from the other partner LAs and with the senior managers in the RAA. There is a shared ownership of the agenda and a range of issues are discussed with very positive communication and outcomes as a result.

The Operations Manager linked to Cheshire East is in regular contact with the Head of Service linked to adoption to discuss performance over the period and any issues or themes that may be arising. This is very much a two-way dialogue, with Cheshire East ensuring that the RAA is fulfilling its responsibilities as well as the RAA being able to offer feedback to the LA about any emerging themes or issues in care planning or working together.

One of the Team Managers within the Cared for Children and Care Leavers service attends the monthly Adoption Counts tracking meetings and is an active participant. The tracking meetings are an opportunity for scrutiny and performance management following the whole cohort of Cheshire East children where there is or may be a plan of adoption including:

- Children now adopted to ensure that life story books and later life letters are received.
- Children placed for adoption but not yet adopted to track the progress of placements and the timeliness of adoption order applications.
- Children where a family has been identified to ensure that there is no avoidable delay in the shortlisting and matching process and throughout the planning of introductions and placement.



- Children subject to a Placement Order where a family has not yet been identified. This cohort is rigorously discussed to ensure that the family finding strategy is being carried out effectively and is the forum for escalation of agreements regarding family finding within the RAA, other LAs or in the voluntary sector.
- Children in care proceedings where there may be a plan of adoption as their final care plan. These children are tracked closely both in the LA and the RAA to ensure that there is timely progression of the plan from Agency Decision that they Should Be Placed for Adoption, through profiling and the identification of a family.
- Children under the Public Law Outline where there may be a plan of adoption should care proceedings be initiated.
- Children requiring legal revocation of placement orders and “Should be placed for adoption” rescinds.

We are currently tracking 126 children upon our tracker, during this period of time we have tracked between 73 – 126 children each month. There is no doubt that the efficacy of these meetings is improved when care planning representatives from the local authority (LA) attend as this ensures a robust joint approach.

The team manager in the RAA linked to Cheshire East also attends the monthly tracking meetings and she, alongside the three dedicated Family Finders, regularly work in Cheshire East office bases alongside the social work teams, attend legal gateway meetings and final care planning meetings to provide advice and a view where required. Links between Cheshire East and the RAA seem to be embedded well.

### 3. Performance

#### 3.1 Children made Subject to Should be Placed for Adoption (SHOBPA) decisions

Number of children made subject to SHOBPA decisions per month							
Cheshire East	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	
	5	4	3	1	2	3	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total
	4	1	1	3	1	1	<b>30</b>

All of the children made subject to a SHOBPA decision within this period are the subject of Court proceedings and had the decision made following all other options having been ruled out or discounted by the LA.

### 3.2 Children subject to Placement Orders

Number of children made subject to Placement Orders per month							
Cheshire East	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	
	0	1	4	0	1	2	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total
	4	2	1	2	1	3	<b>21</b>

Out of the twenty one Placement Orders granted within the period:

Fourteen children have subsequently been placed for adoption. Twelve of the children were placed below the A2 threshold of 121 days, with two further children (siblings) placed within six months.

The care plan for one of the children is to remain in the care of his foster carer – the foster carer is in the process of being assessed as an adopter, approval panel is scheduled in May.

The care plan for one of the children is to be placed with the adopters of an older sibling. The adopters are currently being assessed as second time adopters.

The placement orders for the remaining five children were granted towards the end of this period, family finding is ongoing with potential links identified for three of the children.

The number of both SHOBPA's and Placement Orders within this period have increased in comparison to data from last year (13 and 13 respectively).

### 3.3 The Number of Children who had a Change of Plan in the Period

There have been two children who have had a change of plan in this period. The children are a sibling pair aged 3 years and 1 year who were placed with extended birth family, which is a good outcome for the children.

### 3.4 Number of Children Placed for Adoption during period.

Number of children placed for adoption per month							
Cheshire East	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	
	1	0	1	0	1	2	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total
	0	2	2	3	2	4	<b>18</b>

94% of the children placed for adoption were placed with prospective adopters approved by Adoption counts.

There were eighteen children placed for adoption during this period. The A10 measure for this cohort of children is 569 days and the A2 measure is 153 days.

Eleven of the children were placed outside of the A10 measure (average time between a child entering care and moving in with adoptive family) It is worth noting that we are continuing to see court timetabling for care proceedings taking longer for a number of children. This therefore has had an effect upon the overall A10 timescales. One of the children had an A1 measure of 1396 days due to complex care proceedings which were adjourned / appealed on several occasions. Seven children were placed within the A10 measure, their average was 340 days which is well below the national target.

Thirteen out of the eighteen children were placed within the A2 measure, timeliness for these thirteen children is excellent with an A2 average of 79 days.

For the remaining children:

Prospective adopters were identified for one of the children within timescales, however, a sibling was born at the end of proceedings and following further assessment, the care plan was to place the siblings together. His A2 measure was 266 days. The remaining four children were identified as having very complex health and developmental needs. Their A2 measures were 177, 177, 174, 935 days respectively.

### 3.5 Number of children adopted

Number of children made subject to Adoption Orders per month							
Cheshire East	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	
	2	2	0	0	0	2	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total
	0	4	1	0	0	0	<b>11</b>

For this cohort, the average number of days for A10 is 659 days, which is over the threshold of 426 days. There are nine children outside of the threshold. Eight of the children experienced extended care proceedings, their A10 measures were 505, 505, 697, 812, 815, 1207, 458 & 504 days. One child had a measure of 1683 days as further assessments of longer term care needs were required prior to formulating a plan of permanence.

For A2, the average number of days for this cohort is 285 days which is over the threshold of 121 days. Seven of the children had a decision made about their match with their adoptive families within the threshold. The A2 average for these children was 81 days.

The four children placed outside of the are the children detailed above. Their A2 measures are: 462, 501, 1448, and 159 respectively.

As can be seen from the above information, despite robust family finding it has taken longer to achieve permanence for a higher number of children during this period. This is for several reasons, care proceedings for a number of the children have taken longer.

We have seen an increase in the number of birth parents applying for leave to contest placements orders and in family members coming forward to be assessed at a later stage in proceedings. A number of the children also had very complex needs, were older in terms of adoption or were part of a sibling group. In order to achieve good outcomes for these children, it was important to ensure families were found who had the understanding, skills and capacity to meet their long term needs. For these children timeliness needs to be balanced against achieving the right outcome. It is extremely positive that permanence through adoption has been achieved for each child. It is important to state whilst overall timeliness has been affected by the length of time it has taken to place these children, the majority of children with less complex needs have been placed and adopted well within recommended thresholds and a good outcome has been achieved for all children placed for adoption within this period.

The numbers of children placed and adopted in this period are similar to the numbers from the same period last year, 17 children were placed and 14 children adopted 1.4.20 - 31.3.21.

### **3.6 Early Permanency**

Six children have been placed in an early permanence placement during this period with fostering for adoption carers, temporarily approved by Cheshire East's Agency Decision Maker as foster carers under regulation 25A of the Care Planning Regulations on 12.5.22, 28.10.22, 2.11.22, 12.1.23, 3.2.23 and 10.3.23.

### **3.7 Disruptions**

There has been one adoption disruption in this period, a 2 year old who was placed for adoption on 25/8/22 with the placement ending on 31/8/22. A disruption meeting was held and concluded the disruption could not have been predicted and the end of the placement was nothing to do with the child or his needs.

## **4. Quality of Reports**

CPRs (child permanence reports) are audited as routine by the relevant Adoption Counts Team Manager prior to SHOBPA consideration and then again by either the Team Manager, Family Finder or Senior Practitioner before matching panel. This is to ensure that CPRs are graded as being 'Good' as a minimum and that the final report is submitted to panel rather than reports still requiring amendments. The CPR is then graded by the panel considering the match.

Six child permanence reports (CPR's) audits have been completed during this period. Of those:

Four were graded as in need of improvement and two as good at point of SHOBPA.

From these CPR's three were grading as good at point of panel match. Panel gradings for the remaining three CPR's are not available as of yet, as we have not been in the position to proceed to matching panel for these children within this period. To ensure the CPR's reach the grading required of good by matching panel, one to one support and advice will be given to ensure CPR's contain all information required as a lifelong document for the children.

Rating	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	In Need of Improvement	Total
<b>SHOBPA</b>	1	14	0	4	19
<b>Panel</b>	5	7	1	4	17

2CPR's were not given a grading

CPR reports presented to adoption panel consider gradings at the child's match, as opposed to the gradings prior to matching panel from the team Managers. This was due to, on occasion, there being a discrepancy between an auditor's grading compared to that of panel. The figures presented above are based on panel gradings, given their independence and impartiality.

This evidences that the new quality assurance process is now well embedded in practice and the overall quality of CPR's has improved. Support and training is offered to support children's social workers in completing children's CPR's. This includes specific training that can be delivered to teams, one to one support with social workers and advice with a robust quality assurance system with the ADM and Panel Adviser to SHOBPA.

## **Recruitment of Adopters**

### **5.1 Approvals**

There were 42 families approved as adopters during the first six months of this year (1.4.22 – 30.9.22) and 37 families approved as adopters during the last six months of this year (1.10.22 – 31.3.23) 79 families approved in total. This is a decrease of 8 families (9%) from the year before when 87 families were approved.

At the end of the period (31<sup>st</sup> March 2023) there were 42 families in Stage One, 8 in between Stage One and Stage Two, and 35 in Stage Two; a total of 85 families in the assessment process. There were 86 families in the assessment process at the end of last year so this evidences the level of business is maintained at a relatively consistent level. This is positive and is a strong position from which to enter the new year.

Enquiry numbers have significantly increased with 803 in first 6 months of year and 1013 during second half of the year, 1816 for the full year. This is 388 more than the

previous year where there were 1428 enquiries in total. This is the largest number of enquiries we have ever seen and continues the trend from last year. From the feedback we have collated, the increase in enquiries seems to be due to our social media campaigns alongside the messages from the #YouCanAdopt campaigns. It is worth noting that a high percentage of the enquiries are just asking for information packs and not proceeding with an assessment, this could indicate that they are not yet ready to proceed but are exploring adoption earlier than they perhaps would have in the past.

<b>SOURCE</b>	<b>2021/2022</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>	
<b>Online (includes Google Ads/organic Searches)</b>	<b>1058</b>	<b>1373</b>	
Local Council referral (online and offline)	103	91	
Other	16	10	
Recommendation from friend and family	32	36	
Previous Adoption Enquiries	76	93	
<b>Social Media</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>182</b>	
Second Time Adopters	11	15	
Outdoor Advertising	7	5	
Event/Info Stand	1	9	
Radio	4	2	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1428</b>	<b>1816</b>	

Numbers of initial visits have remained constant, with 74 taking place in the first 6 months of the year, 97 during the last six months, so 171 in total. This is a decrease of 2 from the previous year (2021 – 22) when 173 initial visits took place and 214 in the year 2020 – 21.

Registrations of Interest received in this financial year (the formal application to be assessed as prospective adopters) have also decreased by 13%, 43 in first 6 months, 64 in second part of the year, 107 in total from 123 the previous year (2021 – 22).

Our performance should still be viewed in the context of an ongoing national shortage of adopters. It suggests that the strategies implemented through our Recruitment and Marketing plan continue to be effective in terms of our adopter sufficiency, although of course we are not complacent and continue to strive to increase our numbers further.

We will continue to raise the profile of our agency to achieve adopter sufficiency for our children across our five local authorities, with a surplus to generate income and offset the cost of inter-agency placements for our children who need them.

Monthly Adopter Sufficiency meetings continue with the Head of Service, the Operations Managers, the Recruitment and Enquiries Manager and the Marketing Officer meeting to plan and review our progress.

## 5.2 Referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

No referrals were made to the IRM during this period.

## 5.3 Partner/step-parent adoption enquiries

Our Recruitment Team received 48 partner / step-parent adoption enquiries in the first six months of the year and 57 in the second half of the year, 105 enquiries in total. This is an increase of 17% on the previous year when 90 enquiries were received in total.

<b>Enquiries</b>	<b>1.4.22 – 31.3.23</b>	
<b>LA</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Approx. Percentage</b>
<b>Cheshire East</b>	26	25%
<b>Total</b>	105	

10 enquiries resulted in an office meeting taking place with a social worker, for information gathering and advice, in the first six months of the year. 13 enquiries resulted in an office meeting taking place in the second half of the year. 23 office meetings took place in total. This is 5 less than the previous year when numbers rose dramatically that year following the pandemic.

<b>Office Meetings</b>	<b>1.4.22 – 31.3.23</b>	
<b>LA</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Approx. Percentage</b>
<b>Cheshire East</b>	10	43%
<b>Total</b>	23	

7 applications were accepted during the first six months of the year, and 7 in the second six months, 14 in total.

	<b>1.4.22 – 31.3.23</b>	
<b>LA</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Approx. Percentage</b>
<b>Cheshire East</b>	3	21%
<b>Total</b>	14	

## 5.4 Information events

Before the pandemic, these were held on a fortnightly basis at locations around the region. Since then, these events have been held 'virtually', currently on a bi - weekly basis, where potential adopters watch from their own homes.

These have continued to be very successful indeed.

We had 136 families attending information events in the first six months of the year, and 172 in the second six months, 308 in total. This is an increase of 26 families (9%) compared to last year when 282 families attended events.

## **5.5 Training groups**

During the last 12 months, 3 day adopter preparation training groups have been held on a monthly basis, with additional tasks/modules being given to applicants to do in the evenings. These are now held in person, replacing the virtual sessions which were presented just after the pandemic.

93 families attended these groups during this period, with 36 attending the first half of the year and 57 in the second half of the year. This figure is 18% less than the previous year when 114 families attended training.

Regular reviews of how the training is delivered have taken place and a work group has been set up to ensure information given is constantly up to date.

## **5.6 Marketing and Recruitment Campaigns**

Our marketing activity remained consistent this year. We continued with a high presence of digital and social media advertising, and continued with outdoor advertising (billboards, etc.), radio advertising, magazines specifically for certain communities/locations, leaflet drops, etc.

We also commissioned the Manchester Evening News for set time periods of online/media advertising. This has been very successful as not only was there targeted Facebook advertising, but there was also a high additional digital presence.

We have continued with targeted Facebook advertising to specifically reach out for members of the Black Community to come forward and think about adoption, and we attended specialist certain events with this aim in mind.

This year was the first since the pandemic that we were able to return to attending outdoor public events, and our attendance at these included Pride events, BobExpo, etc.

The national #YouCanAdopt summer campaign took place this Summer, and the website and social media hashtag #YouCanAdopt was used widely. We were able to use the resources from this campaign to assist us with online and social media marketing.

Additional marketing was booked for National Adoption Week, which took place between 17th – 23rd October 2022. We ran our own advertising during the entire campaign period, to go alongside the national campaign, using the same message, content, and useful podcasts, aiming to make Adoption Counts stand out amongst our competitors and drive applicants to our website.



**6 Compliments, comments and complaints**

<b>Description - compliments</b>
Feedback from an adopter who advised their adoption support social worker had been fantastic.
Positive feedback received from prospective adopters about their supervising social worker.
Feedback from an adopter who said their supervising social worker has been excellent with the right balance of pragmatism, practical advice, and sensitivity. They have always found her to be approachable and non-judgmental.
Positive feedback from someone attending Friends & Family training. 'The session was very well put together and delivered, set everyone at ease while sharing naturally difficult by appropriate material and helped prepare families for long-term support.'
Praise for Adoption Support SW's for their 'incredible support' in helping with therapeutic approaches to parenting
Feedback for Adoption Support SW who supported an adoptive parent on several occasions by visiting the child's school to try and educate them on how to deal with adoptive children and trauma.
Positive feedback from a new adopter regarding the transition process, from both her point of view and that of the foster carer.
<b>Description – complaints</b>
A complaint from a company director in relation to payment processes for therapeutic work commissioned for children and families. The complaint was upheld in part.
Complaint from a potential adopter who had a match with a child withdrawn post shortlisting and approval. They criticized the Adoption services lack of transparency during decision making. The complaint was not upheld
A concern raised from an adopter regarding the care the child's previous foster carers had provided for the child. This included cancellation of health appointments, the possessions and clothes passed on during introductions, and the fact they did not keep a memory box for the child. The concerns were passed on to the Local Authority and the independent fostering agency to explore further.

A complaint from an adopter who had experienced an adoption disruption. The adopter expressed unhappiness regarding the levels of support and tone of communications. The adopter stated they had experienced a lack of honest, transparent information and advised they were unhappy with the way the Local Authority had managed the breakdown.

## **7. Practice Developments in Adoption Counts**

### **Family Finding**

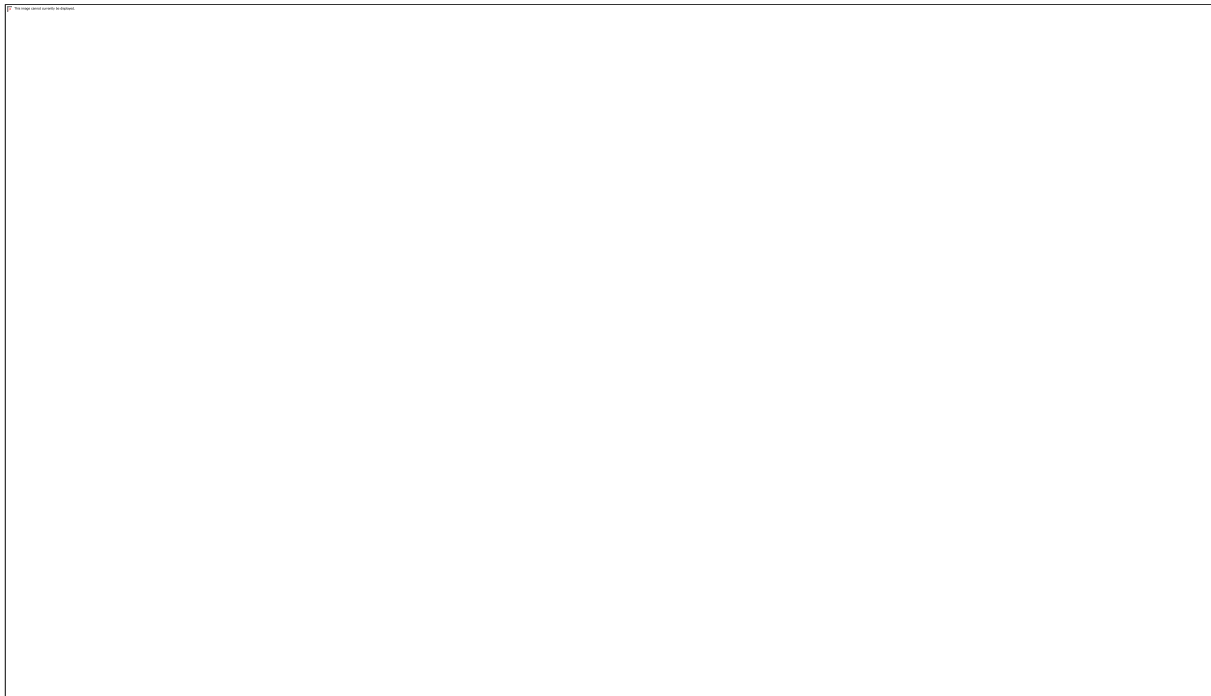
We continue to hold monthly strategic matching meetings which are attended by all our family finders and recruitment and assessment social workers. These meetings enable us to profile all our priority children (children with a final hearing in the next month and children with a Placement Order) to ensure links and matches are prioritised for all our children waiting. We are currently in the process of completing a review of our strategic matching process to ensure best outcomes for all our children and prospective adopters.

In addition to strategic matching we will also be working in partnership with CoramBAAF from April 2023 to pilot a collective matching project.

Collective matching is a strategic solution to family finding that builds on existing individual practice and aims to use our supply of adopters as efficiently as we can to maximise the number of children we find families for.

We will be applying this to all our priority children we are aiming to match and using the data supplied by CoramBAAF to inform our strategic matching processes.

*The image below shows two sets of adopters and two sets of children and the perceived 'strength' of the matches between them.*



*Under current practice, the likelihood is that the 'very good' match would be pursued, leading to only one match being made. Taking a Collective Matching approach, we would progress the two 'good matches' so that two matches are made.*

The table below compares the characteristics of the traditional approach to family finding with those of Collective Matching:

Traditional approach	Collective Matching
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family finding is done on an individual basis – a child is allocated to a social worker and they search for appropriate families for that child</li> <li>• It tends to maximise the number of 'best' matches made – social workers look for the strongest possible match</li> <li>• We are already using technology to support us in searching for families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A centralised approach to identifying potential matches</li> <li>• It aims to maximise the number of children for whom a match is found</li> <li>• It uses technology to look at all the children and all the families and assess the 'strength' of each possible match</li> <li>• It would replace the initial sifting step of family finding by identifying potential matches for each child, so</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practitioner and QA role are essential in determining whether a match is suitable</li> <li>• Adopters can choose not to adopt a child</li> </ul>	<p>that family finders do not have to review multiple PARs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practitioner and QA input would remain in place so that matches are still suitable</li> </ul>
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We have continued to hold adoption picnics and have held 2 virtual picnics where we profiled children using a range of video clips. Adopters can access these video clips of children for a limited period via a secure Adoption Counts website on our SharePoint site. During this period we have featured 17 children with 54 households attending resulting in 15 expressions of interest. One match resulted from this event for a sibling pair, both children are now placed. We had planned to hold a face to face picnic in February 2023 but this did not go ahead as all bar 2 of the children we were intending to profile were linked / matched. We will be holding a face to face picnic event in June.

Our adopters have also been invited to and attended several profiling events and we feature our children at a regional activity events. We worked in partnership with the NW RAA consortium to hold an adoption picnic in March, this resulted in several EOI's for our children. We are working with CoramBAAF to hold an activity day in Manchester in April 2023.

The family finders have continued to meet on a quarterly basis as a group to discuss practice issues and developments. During our last three development days, we have discussed a range of issues including performance data, sharing best practice, early permanence, peer support, race and ethnicity and matching considerations. Our next development day will be a joint event with our recruitment and assessment colleagues in June.

The Adoption Counts annual report for 21/22 highlighted that our children who wait longer are continuing to wait. It was agreed that we needed to look at each individual child to ascertain the reasons behind the delay and to reflect on any approaches that may reduce further delay. The themes which have arisen from the meetings taken place to date include:

- Delays in court timetabling which have impacted upon care planning decisions.

Courts have directed additional independent social work assessments to be completed both in terms of parenting assessments and in relation to assessments of connected carers.

For several children connected carers have come forward at a late stage in proceedings.

- Completion of sibling assessments.

A sibling group of three experienced a break down in introductions. Further assessment of the children's needs was subsequently completed with a recommendation to place each child separately. The importance of understanding the effects trauma bonds and adversity can have upon sibling relationships was highlighted.

- How we can enable prospective adopters to gain practical parenting experience and a real understanding of children's lived experiences.

We continue to work in partnership with other regional adoption agencies within the northwest and attend the northwest early permanence consortium meetings held on a quarterly basis. We have worked together as a group to offer 6 weekly peer support groups / meetings for all our early permanence carers. A member of our staff has been appointed to develop national early permanence procedures in line with the strategy to promote early permanence opportunities for children aged 4 and over.

A national practice guide with resources for early permanence is in the process of completion.

We will be offering the opportunity for ten of our early permanence carers to receive individual mentoring via a peer support system offered via Adoption UK during 2023.

### **Recruitment and Assessment**

Enquiry numbers to assessment data relating to numbers and approved adopters is detailed in section 5.1. The conclusions we can draw from this data is that we have approved the least number of adopters since Adoption Counts became operational in 2017, we have approved 79 adopters in this reporting time period.

Performance in relation to timescales for Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the assessment process are as follows:

- Stage 1 - 27% were within timescales.
- Stage 2 - 70% were in timescales.

The delays in stage one have been related to statutory checks taking longer, the additional counselling references that are now requested following the Cumbria CSPR, overseas checks causing delay and previous partner references. In relation to systems and processes the Business Support Manager has reviewed these and support from one of the Team Managers has got us back on track in completing statutory checks in a timely way. This will not account however, for the delays in some checks as detailed above.

Adopter tracking meetings have (currently) been introduced to focus on the timeliness of Stage 1 & Stage 2 assessments whereby individual social workers report on the key dates and progress in relation to assessments being completed. The impact of these

meetings will be measured each month to ensure any barriers to meeting timescales are considered.

Applicants withdrawing from the assessment process were all considered appropriate by the agency and the adopters, with reasons being; change of circumstances, reflective learning changed the adopter's perspective and matching considerations not correlating with the needs of the children waiting.

Recruitment and Assessment social workers target (FTE) is to complete 8 assessments per year. We have reviewed this figure in line with the caseload weighting for a FTE social worker as this was previously 9. This was compared with other RAAs in the region and was felt to be a realistic achievement.

Sufficiency meetings focus on the number of adopters needed to meet the needs of children with a plan of adoption, if this needs to be reviewed strategically plans will be put in place to consider the number and type of adopters needed to meet the needs of children.

In relation to assessments, Adoption Counts have six staff who are trained in Adult Attachment style interview (ASI) training. One is an Operations Manager one Advanced Practitioner and four social workers. ASI interviews are completed families in assessment if it is considered this tool can enhance the assessment. The attachment style interviews are a model of practice that offers a conversational style interview which questions adoptive applicants about their current relationships with their partner (if a couple), family of origin and with two adults close to the applicants. The interview looks at general styles of relating to other adults in terms of self-reliance and how easy it will be for them to get close and be at ease in accessing help. This will be a clear indicator of how as adoptive parents they will reach out for support during the parenting of a child or young person through adoption.

In relation to the quality of assessments this is high on the agenda. The robust QA system in place whereby Prospective Adopter Reports (PARs) are quality assured by Team Managers, Panel Adviser and Panel chairs. This three tier process ensures that assessments are thorough, child centred and clear in adopters skills and abilities to meet the needs of children.

Approved adopters are given the opportunity to complete an Interactive profile to demonstrate their skills and abilities in offering a child permanence through adoption. This enhances the matching process and hopefully assist those who wait longer for a match as family finders for children will see a different dimension to them. Some approved adopters are reluctant to go down this path however, social workers are encouraging in this way of profiling.

Preparation Training continues to be delivered face to face by social workers within the Recruitment and Assessment teams along with colleagues from family finding and adoption support. This offers a holistic view of adoption and co-production evidenced from the three areas of service.

We will continue with all R&A SWs as part of the Preparation Training rota to facilitate the training with the support of their colleagues.

Top up Training is offered for prospective adopters in Stage 2 of the approval process and for approved adopters, is jointly delivered by the recruitment and assessment team, family finding team and adoption support. This is a comprehensive programme of training for applicants and adopters increasing their knowledge and preparation of parenting their child or children through adoption. Feedback from approved prospective adopters both pre-and post-approval is positive. We plan that all prospective adopters will attend the Race and Ethnicity Training to not only widen their thoughts and understanding of parenting a child from a different ethnicity but also about parenting children having a deeper knowledge and acceptance of diversity.

**Nicola Booth**

Operations Manager

30.9.2023

## Adoption Support

### **Adoption Service – Annual Report**

**01.04.2022 – 31.03.2023**



## **Adoption Support**

Adoption Support remains integral to our delivery for adopted children, new and established adoptive families, birth families and adopted adults, recognizing the lifelong journey. We remain committed to supporting families in the early transition stages of a placement, through to Adoption Order and beyond. We recognize that new challenges may emerge throughout a child's life requiring varying levels of tailored support to ensure successful outcomes for children. We have based our service delivery on a graduated approach, with our Adoption Psychology Service forming the foundation of our delivery.

### **Adoption Psychology (Centre of Excellence for Adoption Support)**

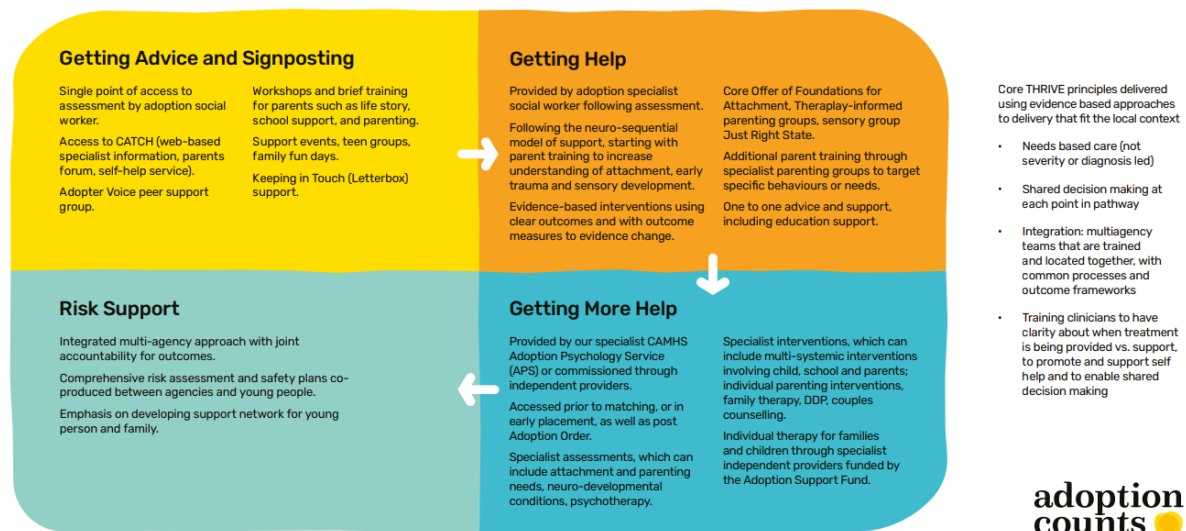
#### **Service Overview**

The short-term funding for this service has been agreed by the board until March 2023, with negotiations with Clinical Commissioners to secure longer term funding on a joint basis moving forward. Due to a freeze on funding any new services during the pandemic there has been no opportunity to present this business case to CCG's until this year. This process is underway with our Greater Manchester and Cheshire East NHS commissioning colleagues and a renewed request will be made this year.

**The Adoption Psychology Team** is an assessment, consultation and therapeutic CAMHS and Educational Psychology partnership service for adopted children, their parents, carers and workers. It is a partnership between Manchester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, One Education and Adoption Counts. The service is multidisciplinary including clinical psychology, therapeutic social work, child psychiatry and educational psychology.

The service enables a coordinated approach to the mental health and emotional wellbeing and develops the skills of the social work teams through consultation, training and joint working. It is consultation and referral-based and offers timely and flexible appointments. The updated iThrive model below shows how the Adoption Psychology and Adoption Counts Adoption Support Service fit together.

## i-THRIVE Model of Care - Adoption Support



### AP Service outcomes

1. Adopted children have good mental health
2. Adopted children have healthy relationships
3. Adopted children have stable placements
4. Adopted children and their parents have a positive experience of care and support

### Service Aims

Children who have a Placement Order and an adoption plan are offered, where necessary, assessment and intervention to support decision making and make recommendations to inform their placement needs. Transitions consultations has been developed to identify the right support pre- and early placement.

Adopted children and families have access to assessment and interventions to improve their relationships, emotional and behavioural regulation and engagement with learning.

Children and families placed in their adoptive placement can access group-based approaches as part of an early intervention package to enable families to have a good start on their adoption journey.

Children who have been placed in their adoptive placement are able to access specialist assessment and intervention up to age 12.

Adoption social workers, family finders and children's social workers can access Specialist Consultation for adopted children up to the age of 18 for advice and signposting.

Prospective adopters and adoptive parents are offered training, consultation and evidence-based interventions to enhance their understanding and management of the psychological needs of children who have experienced abuse and neglect.

Adoption Social Workers are offered training and consultation to enhance their understanding, assessment skills and knowledge of attachment, mental health difficulties and interventions

The adoption psychology annual report is available which details the services offered, take up from families and measurable benefit of the services delivered.

The **Multi Agency Resource Panel**, continues to consider complex cases that require Adoption Support Fund (ASF) match funding from the Local Authority. This has enabled more consistent and transparent decision making across the region. The panel consists of representative from CAMHS, Virtual Schools, and Social Care, and enables professional challenge and support to make the best use of resources in our agency.

In this period the panel have considered 26 requests for match funding, for therapeutic work which costs over and above the Fair Access Limit of £5000 per child per year. Further details are in the table below regarding ASF applications.

### **Adoption Support Fund Applications**

We have continued to access the ASF to provide additional therapy for adoptive families. This has enabled families to receive specialist support that we would not have been able to provide in house or access from other universal services.

The ASF continued to offer funding for specialist assessments and therapeutic support. This year 541 applications were made (compared to 2021/22 this is a 19% increase). Funds drawn down for adoptive families increased to £1,912,477.

As anticipated the majority of applications were made in Q4 and a significant increase in the number of applications year on year (456 increasing to 541). This may reflect the social workers ability to plan ahead this financial year which was hindered by the ASF late renewal date in February 2022.

	2021-2022 total	Current year total 2022-23
Number of applications made	456	541
Amount in £	1,672,387	1,912,477 Includes 48,562.76 matched funding for the highest need families

Each Local Authority's ASF applications in 2022-23 are detailed below:

LA	Number of applications	Amount	Applications approved with match funding	Match funded amount paid by LA
Cheshire East	162	542,434	4	6940.51
Group applications (spanning all LA's)	11	57,574	0	0
Totals	541	1,912,477	19	48,562.76

The ASF pilot project, requesting outcome measurement tools at the start and end of therapeutic interventions, ended in October 22. Adoption Counts made the decision to continue to ask providers to complete outcome measures for all applications. This was because we felt it was best practice. The ASF also indicated that this would be rolled out to all applications from April 23, so we felt it was best to continue with the requirements we had from our providers. The ASF have since postponed this national roll-out to later in 2023.

## 5.5 Referrals / Enquiries for Adoption Support

The team has 930 open cases. These cases are:

	Previous year 2021-22	Q1 2022	Q2 2022	Q3 2022	Q4 2023	Comments
Open cases (these are broken down into	853	897	898	956	930	First Response, Long term and adopted adults cases

categories below)						
First Response	185	198	199	206	199	
Long term	465	516	501	538	529	
Adopted adults open cases	203	183	198	212	202	
Letterbox (not in figure above)	1298	1266	1385	1367	1360	See breakdown below

Further information about the case numbers, including specialist workers:

	Previous year 2021-22	Q1 2022	Q2 2022	Q3 2022	Q4 2023	Comments
Therapeutic social worker (cases counted in long term team above)	72	81	81	93	82	2.5 FTE
Education advisor	39	39	45	42	39	0.5 FTE
Adoption "Surgeries" completed	126	25	25	25	25	

In the year 2022-23, demand has increased by just under 10% for adoption support services, which includes assessment, therapeutic support and ongoing social work provision. Due to increased demand, the waiting period for an assessment has increased this year.

All families who ask for support, and require an adoption support assessment, are currently offered an appointment within 12 weeks of their initial call, with 2 appointments a week being available. (This period has varied between 8-17 weeks this year). Calls are triaged by First Response team with those needing more urgent help receiving support on the initial call and signposted to early support services such as CATCH. At the point of assessment, families are given a named social worker who supports them in accessing the relevant support, often from the ASF.

Note, very few birth families contact First Response for advice as they would get in touch directly with their KIT (letterbox) coordinator, with whom they already have a relationship; or with PAC-UK directly, to receive independent support.

	<b>Referrals for Adopted Adult</b>	<b>New referrals for Adoptive Families</b>	<b>Birth Family</b>	<b>Advice &amp; Signposting</b>
<b>CHESHIRE EAST</b>	18	56	0	6

### Analysis

This year, there has been a steady demand for services for adoptive families. We had 56 new requests for support from adoptive families and 18 new requests for support from adopted adults; these join the 135 families receiving ongoing support (209 in total). On behalf of Cheshire East families we made 162 ASF applications, drawing down £542,434 for specialist assessments and therapy. On 4 occasions this was matched funded (totalling £6940.51) by the LA.

In this year Cheshire East also agreed to fund ongoing therapy for a child placed in London. Although now the responsibility of their London LA, the agency agreed to carry forward unused funding which had been offered for ongoing therapy when the child was adopted. This amounted to £32,742.50 and will be paid over no more than three years to the London LA.

Referrals for letterbox services increased; this appears to have had a substantial increase (147 to 285) but this is due to a change in the recording method, where we have listed each child individually rather than each family.

### Keeping in Touch Team KITT (previously Letterbox):

We updated the name to KITT to reflect our drive to improve ways for adopted children to maintain contact with their birth relatives. This will not only be through letters but through exchanges of photos, emails, voice notes and in-person meetings where possible. We continue to develop resources for families and professionals in response to adoptee feedback on what works for maintaining relationships and creating identity post-adoption.

	Previous year 2021-22	Q1 2022	Q2 2022	Q3 2022	Q4 2023	Comments

Cheshire East	147	190	269	285	285	Increase over 12 months due to change in recording process
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The Keeping in Touch Team (Letterbox) team are holding all contact referrals; this has 1367 active exchanges, with some having exchanges several times a year involving multiple birth family members. We write to all who reach 18 and have an active letterbox arrangement and offer ongoing support, so a small number of the cases above relate to young people aged 18+.

We continue to be part of the letterswop pilot alongside 4 other RAA's. The Letterswop service is a digital platform to exchange information between adoptive and birth families; again, this is part of our focus on Keeping in Touch and maintaining relationships for children. The pilot period has been extended and additional features, such as voice note and video exchanges, have been trialled. There has been particularly good use of this platform by a Salford adoptive and birth family, who have exchanged information including birth parent wishing their child a happy birthday, and adoptive parent responding shortly afterwards to share the birthday activities and thank them.

### **Process**

The Board granted an additional 2.5 staff on a temporary basis in recognition of the historic under-resourcing of Adoption Support, and to manage the increasing demand post-Covid. 1 joined in November 22 and left in Mar 22, with replacement joining in April; and the others in January 23. These staff have settled into their roles and have offered a benefit for the service to enable:

- Enabled development and delivery of a teen group for young people
- Enabled development and delivery of a sensory attachment programme for children (Just Right State group)
- Increased opportunities to deliver additional therapeutic group support to adopters and children
- Slowed the increase in the waiting times by offering additional assessment "surgeries"
- Increased therapeutic social work availability to extend the transition support for early placement
- Improved morale in the social work group by enabling a small reduction in caseloads
- Enabling a return to monthly evening workshops, and monthly peer support drop-in sessions for parents and children
- 

A report will be shared with the Board for September to consider the benefits these workers bring to adopters and children.

Management support has been increased as a senior practitioner role was dissolved, and a post created in a management position. This individual moved into the new post. The therapeutic social workers has been boosted by an additional social worker, and we have seen benefit to the services offered to pre- and early placement support with the majority of the 93 families being supported being in early placement. We have observed increasing demand from early placement and this may reflect factors including:

- Increased awareness of adoption support from preparation training
- Better recognition of emerging need by social workers and prospective adopters
- Increasing complexity of children being placed for adoption

Closing cases and signposting families on to other services continues to be a challenge, as families often have a need for adoption support for long periods while change can be slow, and pressures on family high. We continue to look at options for closing cases, including reviewing outcome measures to identify goals achieved. We are also offering more face-to-face events and groups and anticipate this will alleviate some anxiety for families who can still access the service regularly, without needing to have an allocated social worker.

We encourage the use of CATCH, which is an online platform from Adoption UK which offers specialist online support, training, and a forum for families. As this was not used as extensively as expected, we reduced our contract with the provider this year. We hope to increase usage for all families in early placement as well as those more established families. We have so far not seen extensive take-up from families, but those that do use CATCH report they find this really valuable and these are often the families accessing our universal offer. We will continue to advertise this in the newsletter as well as at events with families and at the top-up training.

The core offer of therapeutic groups for all families in the early stages of placement continues. We ran therapeutic parenting groups “Foundations for Attachment” and the “Theraplay-informed parenting groups” for parents and children together. We have invested in training for our therapeutic social workers so they can deliver these groups without the need for external providers; this will give more flexibility and increase service income.

### **Birth families**

First Family delivered through PAC-UK are our current provider of support to birth families following a decision for their child to be adopted.

The clear and easy referral process is increasing the number of families who access the service.



**PAC-UK** offer our independent birth parent counselling for all 5 LA's. We continue to have a positive working relationship with PAC-UK. The 44 new referrals to the service in Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 represents 88% of the annual target of 50.

Through PAC-UK, birth mothers and fathers have the opportunity to attend a support group at the end of their intervention. This is used as an exit strategy for birth parents to continue to access support but to also build upon peer support. We value this as an important step in our maintaining contact agenda. In practice we see birth parents who have received good counselling support, are more able to manage reunions with adopted teens, and this benefits the young person and their adoptive family.

A focus for PAC-UK in the year ahead is to increase referrals for birth fathers earlier on in the adoption process. A birth fathers focus group meeting therefore took place in March 2023 to look at how PAC-UK can reach birth fathers at an earlier stage. Some really helpful discussions took place, and themes have emerged for PAC-UK to consider moving forward.

#### **First Contact**

90% of Q4 referrals were contacted within 14 days.

#### **First Family Facebook Group**

This closed and well monitored group is allowing birth parents to share thoughts and feelings around adoption as well as for PAC-UK to post useful links to help and resources around eg mental health and domestic violence. A number of Adoption Counts birth parents are members.

**Further detailed information is available in the PAC – UK annual report, which can be shared on request.**

#### **Support Groups**

This year we have been able to return to in-person events and activities. Adopter Voice feedback informed us that they would like an online and in-person offer so this was developed.

We have delivered:

- Monthly play and stay (coffee drop in) sessions for families
- Fun days at Tatton Park and Z-Arts
- Teen group
- Evening workshops on therapeutic parenting, education and sensory need, both in person and online
- Developed alongside North West RAA partners “keeping safe online” training

### **Practice Developments in Adoption Counts**

Developments within the service include:

- The Education Psychology team have created education advice for children moving to adoption
- Establishing a regular meeting with our virtual schools to explore topics which benefit adopters
- Developing a group for adopted teens
- Developed a sensory group
- Created and continue to develop direct contact procedures and good practice guidance
- Adapted and delivered adoption support top-up training

We undertook a “blueprint” assessment in September 2022 with Stephanie Blshop, who evaluated each aspect of our adoption support offer. She gave feedback and development ideas which we have taken forward to improve our service and offer. For example, developing information about post-commencement access to records; developing a clearer intake process and differentiating between teams. This report is available on request.

**Kristen Roberts**

**Adoption Support Operations Manager**

## **Adoption Panel Chair's 6 monthly report 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023**

### **1. Introduction**

This report is a biennial report completed in rotation by the Independent Panel Chairs for Adoption Counts. The statistics used in the report and the quotations from the Panel feedback process are supplied by the Panel Administration Team, the Data Coordinator and the Panel Advisor for Adoption Counts. Thanks are expressed for their hard work in bringing the information together.

### **2. Overview of Panels**

The 'temporary' arrangements for Panels brought about by the Covid pandemic situation have continued and Panels are still being held virtually using Microsoft Teams. This has been seen as the "normal way" to conduct panels with many members and adopters having a preference for this arrangement, however in person panels have been re-introduced and 3 have been undertaken although in recent months the planned in person panels have had to take place virtually due to availability and time constraints of panel members. Panel Chairs have been available.

Panels are held every two weeks on Fridays; every three weeks on Thursdays; every six weeks on Wednesdays and every six weeks on Tuesdays. This pattern of timings is consistent with arrangements pre-Covid and the usual locations of Panels are used as a reference.

Room availability post lockdown has been problematic and there are only available rooms for in person panels at Etrop Court or Unity House (however Unity House cannot commit to a consistent room as this depends on room availability)

Panels usually begin at 9.15 /9.30am, can cover from one item to a maximum of five items and generally happen on a weekly basis. The frequency of Panels supports the timeliness of approvals and matches. There remains the option to arrange additional Panels should that be necessary.

Sometimes items are removed from the agenda by the chair, in discussion with the agency advisor, before other panel members have had sight of the documentation, however this is rare. Items are usually taken off the agenda early rather than later because of outstanding checks, references or other key documentation

### **3. Panel Membership**

During the reporting period there were 42 panel members on the Central List. The make-up of the list is as follows:

4 Panel Chairs, 1 Vice Chair, 14 Local Authority and/or Adoption Counts Social Worker representatives, 18 Independent members, 3 Medical Advisors, 1 Elected Member, and 1 NHS member.

The independent members are made up of Adoptive Parents, and/or people with a background in Health, Education, Youth Work and the Police

9 of the Social Workers are from Adoption Counts, 1 is from Stockport, 1 is from Salford, 1 from Cheshire East and 2 are from Manchester.

Panels do not have to have a fixed membership or a maximum number of members and there is no limit to the number of people whom it considers suitable to be members of an adoption panel. These members need to be suitably qualified and/or have the experience to consider these cases. We are fortunate in that our members do have the expertise and experience to make recommendations however our ethnicity is that of predominately White British and we need to proactively encourage new members that reflect the diversity of the area that Adoption Counts serves.

During this period we have had regular attendance by one of the Local Authority's Paediatricians and this has been very much welcomed, however this is sometimes limited to the start of the meeting and if any new medical information arises during panel we are left without that level of expertise. It would be beneficial if this function was shared between the 5 authorities to ease the burden of this on the 1 paediatrician that currently supports our work and this might allow them to commit to the full panel meeting.

Similarly social workers from the 5 authorities should commit to releasing at least 2 from the 4 smaller Authorities that make up this RAA and 3 social workers from Manchester to again ease the pressure on the existing volunteers that we have from them and to ensure that we have representation to cover for sickness and leave. On rare occasions the panel advisor has had to step in and be the social worker representation which leaves panel without an advisor.

### **Panel Member Appraisal**

2 appraisals took place during the reporting period. All remaining appraisals will take place during the next 6 months with any 1 of the 4 chairs.

### **Panel Member Training**

No specific adoption related training days in this period. However various members of staff undertook training on GDPR, DBS undertaken, and Safeguarding training. The learning pool has continued to develop.

Panel Chairs have continued to meet up quarterly with agency senior managers. This has been meaningful and allows all parties to discuss any issues, both good practice and areas for development in a constructive manner. The meeting is enriched by the attendance of ADMs joining the meeting, this supports good

discussion about issues pertaining to all 5 authorities and promotes consistency . Comments from ADMs are particularly useful and much valued, however not all ADM's attend and their ability to influence practice and resources can be limited.

The Panel Member Learning Library is still active and available to all panel members via SharePoint. This resource contains a wide variety of learning material including policy and procedure documents, information leaflets, training slides, information re: adoption support; recruitment and assessment and family finding.

All Panel members are required to keep a record of their learning and research, which should be reflected on and discussed during their appraisals to ensure their commitment to continued professional development. For panel members that are social work trained this CPD can be used to meet the requirements of their professional registration

#### **4 Panel Business Cases considered by Panels (1 October 2022- 31 March 2023.)**

Total number of Panels:	26
Number of approvals heard:	40
Number of approvals agreed	38
Number of approvals deferred	0
Number of single adopters approved	4 out of 5 presented
Number of couples approved	34
Number of matches heard:	43
Single children matched	36
Sibling groups of two matched	7 (14 CPR's in total)
SHOBPA's	3 (1 child presented twice due to deferral)

There has been 2 less panels in this quarter than last and a slight decrease in number of adopters approved ( 38 approvals , last quarter 42).

However there has been over 30% increase in children(43 matches to 31 last quarter) being matched this quarter with increases seen in both single children(36 to 28 previously) and sibling groups , sibling groups over 50% rise (7 sibling groups to 3 previously)

There has been 3 SHOBPA's on the agenda for 2 relinquished children.

#### **Data**

#### **CPR/PAR**

For the above period, 53 CPRs were presented to Panel (this included seven sibling groups of two) and 40 PARs.

<b>RAA data on quality of reports at final audit. All agencies</b>					
<b>Matches 53 CPRs</b>			<b>Approvals 40 PARs</b>		
Outstanding	8	15.09%	Outstanding	5	12.5%
Good with outstanding features	2	3.77%	Good with outstanding features	5	12.5%
Good	31	58.49%	Good	26	65%
Satisfactory	1	1.88%	Satisfactory	1	2.5%
In need of improvement	9	16.98%	In need of improvement	3	7.5%
Ungraded	2	3.77%	Ungraded	0	0%

Agency policy requires all CPRs and PARs presented to Panel to be graded at least Good at second audit. The percentage of CPRs graded Outstanding , Good with outstanding features or Good is marginally less at 77.35% than last quarter's figure of 79.41%, however we are now seeing some CPRs that are outstanding.

The outstanding CPR's give a robust analysis of the options available that have been considered by the agency for the future care needs of that child whilst consideration is given to the Welfare Checklist at all times.

PARs graded Outstanding, Good with outstanding features or Good has risen from 58.14% in the previous quarter to 90% . Some of the reasons behind this improvement are better analysis and information on relevant and current issues coupled with the inclusion of adopter's emotional well-being/ risk assessment post Leiland-James Corkhill review .

## **SHOBPA**

	<b>Cheshire East</b>
Outstanding	0(1)
Good with outstanding features	1(0)
Good	12(2)
In need of improvement	2(2)
Ungraded or not applicable	0

The figures in brackets show the quality of these reports at the end of the previous reporting period

There appears to be far more consistency across all 5 authorities in producing Good paperwork for SHOBPA , what we need to see is more Good with outstanding features and Outstanding reports .

This will ensure that all children in the future will have a better understanding of their need for a permanent placement outside of the family and the decision making process that led to this.

## 5. Panel Scrutiny – timescales

### Matches

A1 met	20	41%
A1 not met	22	46%
A2 met	27	56%
A2 not met	19	40%

### Breakdown by LA

	Children Matched in Period	A1 Met	A1 not met	A2 Met	A2 not met
CE	14	6(43%)	7(50%)	9(64%)	5(36%)

The statistics model used for A1 and A2 performance give only an average performance indication based on local and national trends, however this is the same for all RAA's and Authorities.

A1 in this period has again seen improvement on the last reporting period (41% compared to 38% in April 2022 to September 2022).

The A2 performance has dipped from 68% to 56% As always, there have been a few children where there have been protracted care proceedings , outside the control of the Local Authority or the Agency, and carer assessments put forward late .

These statistics need to be seen in the general context of increases in Special Guardianship Orders and a reduction in numbers of Placement Orders leading to adoption, reflecting the view of only to be made where nothing else would do , where

no other course was possible in the child's interest, i.e. that the least interventionist approach should be adopted by the judiciary.

## Approvals

Of the 37 Adoptive families that were approved in the period:

- None completed Stage One within 8 weeks. All were outside timescales.
- For the 31 that were still ongoing in Stage One at the end of the period, 15 (37%) were still within timescales and a further 16 (63%) were out of timescales
- 9 approved Adoptive families completed Stage Two within 16 weeks (24%); 28 were completed out of timescales (76%).
- For the 27 families that were still ongoing in Stage Two at the end of the period, 19 (48%) were still within timescales and a further 8 (52%) were already out of timescales.

Some of the reasons for delay have been due to sickness, change of social worker and where applicants have changed jobs, had imminent house moves or had sudden bereavement. However what is causing most of the delay is obtaining reports / information about any counselling that prospective adopters may have had (recommendation from Leiland -James Corkhill review) in the past. Where it has been impossible to get that information a risk assessment must be completed that is agreed by the Head of Service and countersigned.

Both PARS and CPR's should have been quality assured before panel and of a Good standard.

A number of PARs and CPRs have been sent for Panel consideration which, although graded 'Good' by the auditor, are not considered to meet that standard by the Panel Chair. A discussion will then follow with the agency advisor and, possibly, the relevant Operational Manager as to whether the report should be withdrawn for further work or allowed to proceed to avoid delay. Lack of proof reading is often an issue making reports difficult to read. The general rule being that the CPR/ PAR must contain sufficient information for panel to be able to make a decision with further work undertaken prior to match will usually suffice to prevent delay.

It is a shame for staff that in some instances the very high quality of the pre-Panel social work is not reflected in the quality of the reports.

Progress from recommendations from previous Chair report:

Work has been undertaken to promote the notion that a CPR should be written **to** the child, or as a minimum, all of section 9. This has been fed back to the team managers within Adoption Counts to be distributed to family finders and the Local Authorities. This will also be noted in each feedback to ensure the message is being shared.



Additionally, the panel advisor has put together a tool for auditing CPR's that has been shared with Adoption Counts as well as the 5 local authorities. The tool clearly outlines what is expected in each section. The existing audit has been updated to be section specific to enable more explicit audits to be completed that support workers.

Although it has been agreed that in Foster to Adopt placements coming for a match should give information about transition and how the child is settling with the adopters this is not consistent across the RAA. Some of it can be gleaned from the foster carers report but again the quality can vary.

Kim Scragg  
Adoption Counts Panel Chair  
September 2023

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# **Cheshire East Advocacy and Independent Visitor Service – The Children's Society**

## **Annual Report**

October 2022 - September 2023

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## **The Children's Society Vision**

The Children's Society is commissioned to deliver the Children's Rights Advocacy and Independent Visiting Service for Cheshire East Council. The Children's Society has held the contract since November 2014 and was recommissioned on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019 for 5 years.

This annual report provides an overview of the work undertaken between **1<sup>st</sup> October 2022 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023**.

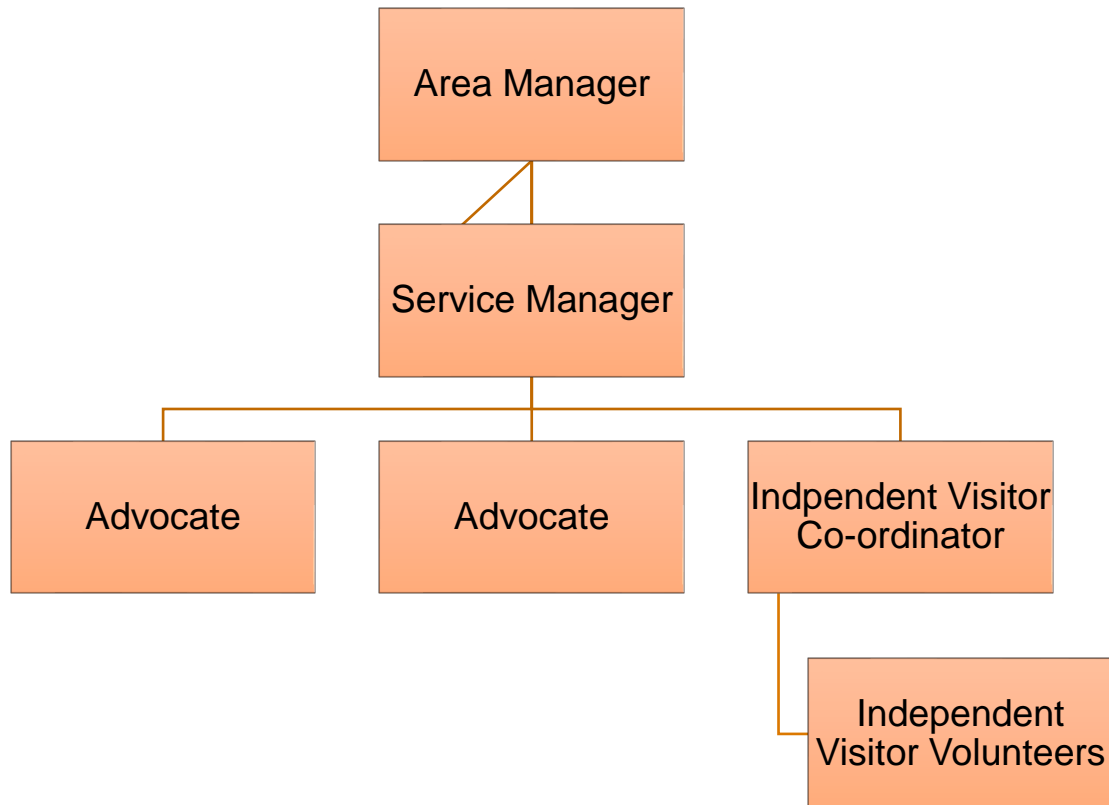
**The Children's Society's Vision - *A society built for all children.***

Our vision is the world we seek to create. And we won't rest until we've achieved our vision. Where together with young people and our supporters, we've created a society built for all children. Where hope is alive in every child.

**The Children's Society's Goal - *By 2030 we will have overturned the damaging decline in children's well-being, setting a path for long lasting growth.***

In the decade ahead we are determined to make sure this generation of children have a better childhood. So we will set out to build a happier, safer society for young people to grow up in, where they can look forward to their futures with more hope.

## Team Structure



We have previously facilitated social work student placements, and the last student on placement finished February 2023. We are due to host another student placement in January 2024.

## Advocacy

### Advocacy in Cheshire East

Advocacy is offering support and information to children and young people, empowering them to ensure their rights are respected, their views and wishes heard and reflected in decision-making about their lives.

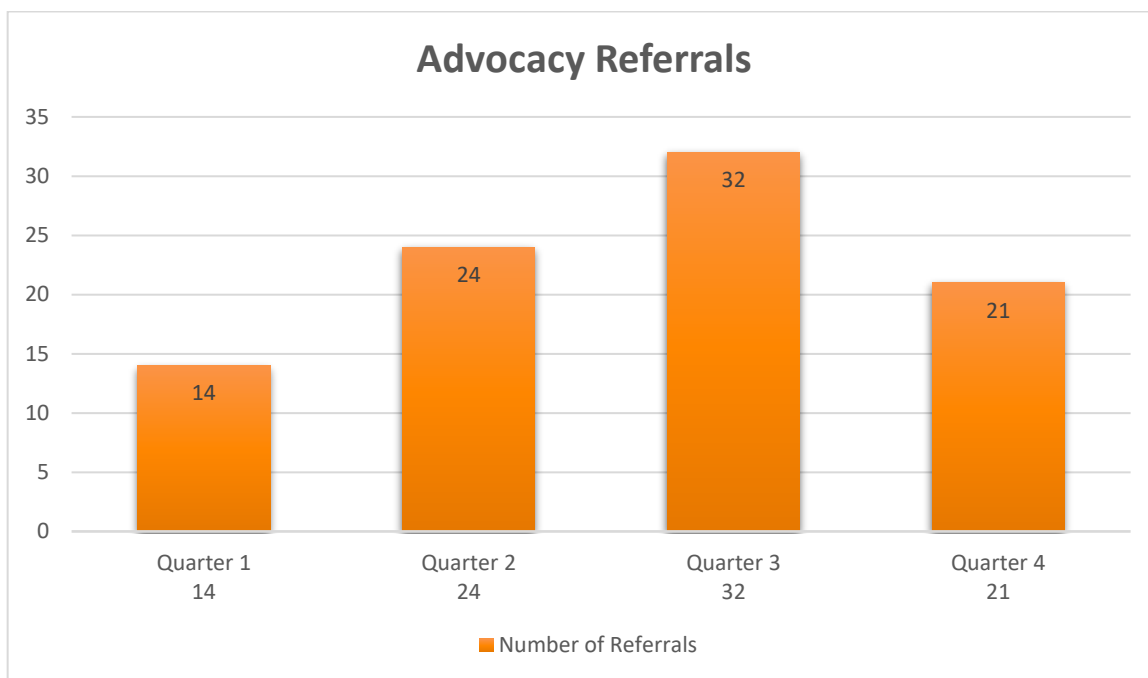
We offer independent children's advocacy for children and young people who fit the following criteria:

- Cared for by Local Authority (0-17)
- Care Leavers (18-25)
- Have a disability (0-18 and up to 25 if in transition to adult services)
- Homeless 16–17-year-olds
- Private Fostering
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people
- Subject to a Child Protection Plan
- Children and young people making a complaint against a social care service

## Referrals

Number of eligible children and young people accessing advocacy services:

We received 91 referrals from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022 to September 2023. In the previous year, over the same period, we received 99 referrals.



## Children and Young People's Eligibility Status

Eligibility Status	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Cared for child	9	8	12	11
Care Leaver	3	7	6	0
Child or young person with a disability	2	8	4	4
Child or young person on a Child Protection Plan	0	0	5	1
Asylum Seeking Child or Young Person	0	1	5	5
Homeless 16/17 year olds	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>21</b>



During each quarter, we report on the number of children and young people who have received advocacy support. This includes new referrals and those already open from the previous quarter. The length of the advocacy relationship varies depending on the issue that is being supported. Some young people are open to the service for less than a week and some for a significant length of time. (For example, where there are court proceedings ongoing).

Quarter	Number of Children and Young People Accessing Advocacy
Q1 October – December	39
Q2 January – March	37
Q3 April – June	46
Q4 July – September	30

## Themes and Trends

We continue to deliver advocacy support to young parents who are either cared for or are care leavers. These young people have access to someone independent, who can work together with legal professionals to ensure that they are able to understand what is happening and why.

We have supported six young people who have had an issue with their placement. Three of these were out of borough and they wanted to remain out of borough. This is difficult as housing is not straightforward for young people who are care leavers outside of their home authority.

There has been a significant increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people. The work that has been carried out has mainly been supporting these young people at their age assessments. We have a skilled and knowledgeable advocate who is working closely with the social work teams.

We have not received any referrals for 16/17 year old homeless young people this year and low numbers of children subject to Child Protection plans.

There has been an increase in referrals for care leaver parents whose children

are subject to child protection plans. We have provided support to them to attend the conferences and then any ongoing support through proceedings.

We have received 6 self-referrals over the year, where the young person makes direct contact with us to ask for our support. 18 referrals were re-referrals where the child or young person has received advocacy before and has asked to engage with the service again. We see this as very positive that children and young people come back to us when they have an issue to resolve.

## **Achievements**

We have created child and young person friendly reporting material, which is shared with My Voice (Children in Care Council) and any children and young people who are interested in our service. We encouraged feedback from My Voice members and children accessing the advocacy service and implemented their suggestions. For example, the word 'referrals' was changed to 'requests' as that made more sense for children and young people.

One of our advocates has extensive experience with working with unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children and young people. He has worked together with social care colleagues to ensure there is a specialist advocacy offer for these children and young people. This has been very successful, and 10 young people have been supported through their age assessments. This support was deemed extremely necessary, and we have been awarded funding for a two-day post to concentrate on this work. We are excited about what we can achieve over the next year of our contract.

## **Challenges**

During this year we have had a change of service manager. This is the first time since the beginning of delivering the Children's Rights contract in Cheshire East that this has changed. Due to long-term sickness and the recruitment of a new manager, there were challenges in allocating all referrals within 3 days. This year has been the first time we have held a waiting list, which we are proud about. We have received a large number of referrals with increasing complexities, meaning children and young people are open to us for longer periods of time. These complexities include young people who are parents and require support navigating legal processes for their children, non-

instructed advocacy (for both children and young people with significant disabilities and very young children), age assessments and challenges with language barriers.

Across the authority and country, we have seen a large increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people requiring social care support. This has been reflected in an increase in advocacy referrals, which has added to our workload. We have responded quickly to referrals which were time sensitive, such as age assessments. When a referral for an age assessment was received, we acted quickly and attended the arranged dates to prevent delay for the authority. Earlier in the year, age assessments would take between 6-12 hours and now more recently can last between 12-30 hours. This is a significant amount of advocacy time as the advocate meets with the young person prior to the assessment to explain the process and to ensure the young person feels supported by an independent person.

## Independent Visitor Service

### Independent Visiting in Cheshire East

The role of the Independent Visitor (IV) was introduced as a statutory service for looked after children in the Children Act 1989. An Independent Visitor is a volunteer who is matched with a child in care aged between 8-18 years of age.

Independent Visitors offer the chance for children in care to build a “trusting, positive relationship with a trained volunteer. We ask volunteers to commit to 2 years. The service has a KPI (Key Performance Indicator) target of 20 matches at any one time.

All our independent visitor volunteers are fully trained in their role, including training in a comprehensive safeguarding program. They are recruited by safer recruitment trained volunteer managers and are DBS/reference checked.

All volunteers are required to engage in group support meetings and supervision every 3 months.

### Referrals

**Quarter 1** – 0 new referrals / 1 new match

**Quarter 2** – 3 new referrals / 0 new matches

**Quarter 3** – 2 new referrals / 2 new matches

**Quarter 4** – 2 new referrals / 2 new matches

We have supported 18 children and young people this year in matches with an independent visitor. At the end of the year we had 14 children matched with an independent visitor.

We have many consistent matches and the top lengths of our matched children and young people are:

Over 4 Years: 1 young person

Over 3 Years: 1 young person

Over 2 Years: 4 young people

Over 1 Year: 3 young people

All other matches commenced within the last 12 months.

## Achievements

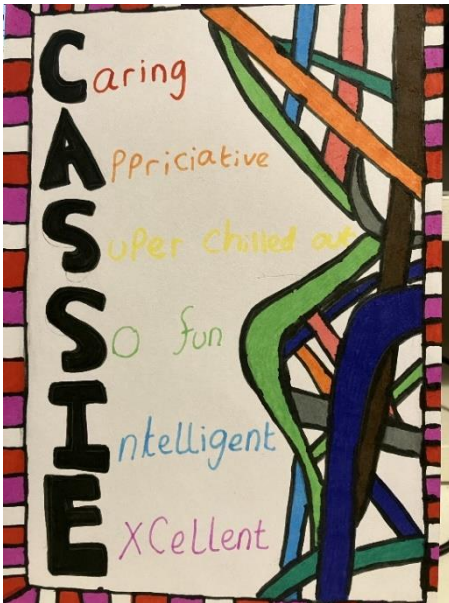
During volunteer week, one of our Cheshire East Independent Visitors worked with our storytelling team to create a case study about what it is like being an IV. 'Jack' said: *"One of the lovely things about being an Independent Visitor is knowing that something you're doing is having a huge positive impact on someone else's life."*

The full case study can be found here: [Becoming an independent visitor | The Children's Society \(childrenssociety.org.uk\)](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk)

Prior to Volunteers Week, we sent craft packs out to all our matched children and asked them to create a postcard which represented what they thought about having an Independent Visitor. We got some lovely responses to share with the volunteers, including these;







The Independent visitor service has implemented a feedback loop with the child's Social Worker. Following the child or young person's 3-monthly review, the IV coordinator contacts the Social Worker to give them an update of how the match is going and any positive information / concerns are shared. (consent is gained from the child or young person first). This is a new way of working and improved communication has been beneficial to the children and the service.

Our volunteer retention is very good, and we have volunteers in place with us who have been volunteering for 2/3 years. They are provided with an extensive package of support, including 3-monthly supervision, bi-monthly group supervision and one-to-one ongoing support from the volunteer coordinator.

This year we received our first referral for an unaccompanied asylum-seeking young person, and this is proving to be very successful.

## Challenges

Post Covid-19 lockdowns and the increased cost of living have caused a downturn in the number of people coming forward to volunteer their time. This is a national picture, but we are working hard to find new ways of attracting volunteers to become independent visitors by working closely with our

colleagues in the volunteering services, attending volunteers fairs and creating volunteer case studies to share with prospective volunteers.

We have children and young people on the waiting list who are living out of area. This creates challenges in recruiting volunteers where we need to find a volunteer to suit the need of the children out of the local authority area. We engage with the local volunteering services to try and promote the opportunity within their area and are looking into the use of social media to attract volunteers out of area.

## Service Audit

The Children's Rights Service was subject to a routine audit by our commissioners in January 2023. The audit inspected the service as a whole and the journey that children and young people take from initial contact to the end of the relationship.

For the audit, we created nine case studies of randomly chosen children and young people to demonstrate the work that was carried out and the outcomes that were achieved. The auditor also accessed children's files to ensure a full audit of the work we did. We were proud to show the hard work that our team have put into the service and show the journey that children and young people took with us.

The audit was a lengthy and time-consuming process; however, it was a valuable experience for us to reflect, improve and develop our service.

Feedback we received from the auditor:

*It is clear the Children's Society continues to work to achieve the best outcomes for the children and young people and the service. They have made positive changes to their processes to undertake the recommendations made during the audit.*

Comment from the contract manager Victoria Davies:

*I would like to add, since contract inception, The Children's Society have continued to deliver a high-quality offer through a changing landscape - i.e.*

*Covid, increase in out of borough casework, age assessments and social care restructures/relationship building. The expertise and pragmatic approach of The Children's Society staff has ensured the service remains current, forward thinking and truly valued.*

## **Our Aims and Progress for 2022-2023**

Our aims we set out last year and the progress we have made:

- The service's aim is to empower children and young people to self-advocate, using their own voice assertively to influence decisions made about their lives.

**We are encouraging children and young people to express their wishes and views themselves where possible. Our advocates upskill the children and young people by giving them time to discuss their issues and supporting them to have all the information they need. Advocates share the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child where appropriate, in child-friendly language.**

- The service aims for all children and young people in the area to know where to seek advocacy/IV support if they need it. When children access this service, the aim is for them to feel listened-to and supported, and to represent their views purely and effectively.

**We continue to promote the service via social work teams, education providers and networking at events. Advocates have visited the My Voice to discuss the service. We visit children's homes and residential placements and share information with young people and staff.**

- The service wants to develop excellent volunteers who are trained and supported as Independent Visitors that have the skills and resources to support children especially in terms of their mental health and can be alerted to any signs of exploitation.



**We have developed our volunteer training following an internal audit. Volunteers access online courses and then attend face to face training, where they develop their learning in safeguarding and how to support children and young people as an independent visitor. Volunteers have supervision every 3 months. We have increased our group sessions to bi-monthly, where speakers are invited to increase the volunteers' knowledge and skills.**

- We aim to help develop good Social Workers for the future: Ways the team will work towards achieving this is by offering Social Work students' placements, giving them an understanding of Children's Rights and the importance of listening to children & young people.

**We enjoy involving students within the service and believe that they bring something different every time. We last had a student on the team in March 2023 but are working with the Universities to host a placement in January 2024**

- The service will play our part in supporting children and young people's mental health

**We have been working closely with the Cheshire Facilitators to support our young people with mental health difficulties and where there is a diagnosis of ASD/ADHD. The advocates have supported the young people within hospital settings and at home and ensured that robust plans that are child-centered are in place and followed.**

- The service will continue to work in partnership with Cheshire East colleagues to ensure good partnership working and better communication and to develop more webinars to share with colleagues to ensure they are kept up to date and are appropriately informed to refer into the service.

**We continue to build strong relationships with our social care, education and voluntary sector colleagues. We supported one young person to**

**access the Pure Insight mentoring service when they were referred late to have an independent visitor.**

**We are part of the National IV Network and attend their meetings and conferences to discuss the national challenges/successes of the IV service.**

**Due to holding the Children's Rights contract for a significant period of time, our social care colleagues know who to contact when they need to access an advocate for their child or young person.**

## Developments for 2023 - 2024

1. Our focus for the service for 2023 - 2024 is to ensure that children and young people's voices are an integral part of our service delivery. We plan to develop our participation work with children and young people who have accessed either advocacy or independent visiting services. This will enable us to be confident that we are delivering a service that is led by children and young people.
2. For the advocacy team to all be trained in Level 3 Advocating on Behalf of Children and Young People in November 2023. This will mean that the service manager and both advocates hold this qualification.
3. We aim for the service to share child-friendly annual and quarterly reports with My Voice and other interested children and young people. This will ensure that they are able to see how the service is performing, allow challenge and for them to ask questions of us and what we are delivering.
4. We will increase the number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking young people (UASC) that we support once we have recruited a UASC-specialist advocate.
5. We want to increase referrals for children and young people to access the independent visiting service. We are working hard to match the children on the waiting list and hope this will give social workers confidence to refer more children and young people to us.
6. We aim to attract more volunteers to the service. We will do this by improving our links in local areas with voluntary services, universities and local authorities.

7. We plan to continue to involve social care students to support the service and to ensure that children and young people receive a good quality and timely service.



## Feedback Received

*"H sends his thanks for all your help (as do we) and thinks your help has definitely had an impact on the local authority reversing their decision"*

Parent shared their and their child's thanks for advocacy support around school placement.

*"My advocate was nice and I could talk to her with ease, she helped me with my emotions"*

Young person's feedback from satisfaction survey

*"Thanks again for all your support with this, S feels more empowered to be able to express her wishes and feelings."*

Email from foster carer after advocate supported YP with complaint.

Social worker commented that YP had shared info with advocate which they had not shared with social care previously, which shows YP was comfortable sharing their views.

In a Child Protection Conference, professionals cited the increased understanding of the young person's lived experience through advocacy as the major factor behind professionals' confidence in

*"Thank you for helping me to express my thoughts and for always telling me the truth. Sometimes I didn't know what was going to happen and you always explained it to me"*

YP shared thanks during closing visit.

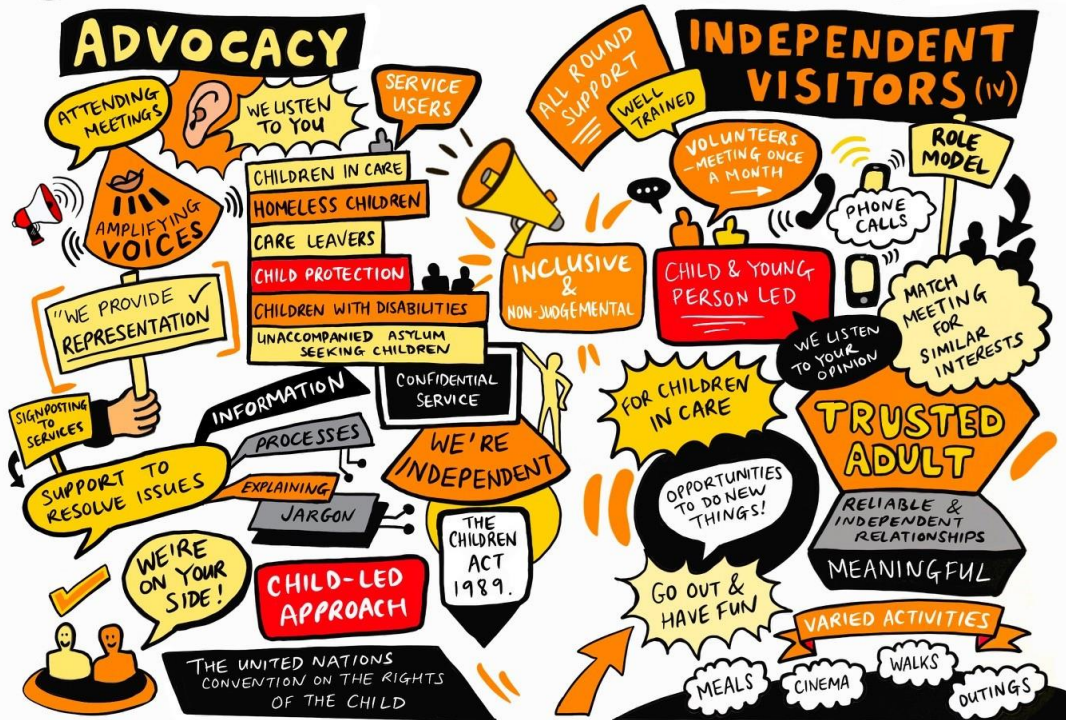
*"My IV and I get on really well together they are fun to be with and easy to talk too, they make my day when they visit. After we have talked she makes me feel lighter and really happy"*

Young person talking about their IV during review with IV co-ordinator



## CHESHIRE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

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Children's  
Society



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*Working for a brighter future together*

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## **Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	05 December 2023
<b>Report Title:</b>	Cared for Children and Care Leavers Q2 score card 2023/24
<b>Report of:</b>	Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director of Children's Services
<b>Ward(s) Affected:</b>	All Wards

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### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1.** This report sets out the performance for corporate parenting for quarter 2 of 2023-24 (1 July 2023 – 30 September 2023). The cared for children and care leavers committee is asked to note the performance for quarter 2 and to provide support and challenge in relation to outcome achieved for cared for children and care leavers in Cheshire East.

### **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1** This report provides an overview of quarter 2 performance for children and families services for the relevant indicators for the reporting year of 2023-24

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1.** The Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee is asked to:
- 3.2** note the performance of children's services for quarter 2.
- 3.3** provide scrutiny in relation to performance and outcomes for cared for children and care leavers.

**4. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 4.1. Cheshire East Council has corporate parenting responsibility for all of our cared for children. Our 2022 strategy makes 6 pledges to our children and young people and was endorsed at Full Council. It is therefore essential that the services that are delivered to support children to be safeguarding from harm and achieve their potential are sufficiently scrutinised.

**5. Other Options Considered**

- 5.1. Not applicable

**6. Background**

- 6.1. This quarterly report provides the committee with an overview of performance across cared for children and care leaver's service. This report relates to quarter 2 of 2023-24 (1 July 2023 – 30 September 2023).

- 6.2. The following indicators have been highlighted for consideration

**7. Briefing information**

- 7.1 Cheshire East Council were responsible for 566 cared for children at the end of quarter 2. This is a decrease from 576 at the end of quarter 1. The cared for children population changes daily as children enter and leave care. Children cease to be cared for due to several reasons, these include turning 18, returning to their birth family, adoption, and special guardianship. The latest comparable data we have across the region shows that Cheshire East's rate is slightly above the national average of 70 per 10,000 and is above that of 60 for statistical neighbours.

- 7.2 Some of the increase in cared for children relates to migrant seeking children becoming cared for. In Q1 we had 55 migrant seeking children in Cheshire East, in Q2 this increased to 64. We have seen an increase in young people who have been placed in hotels by the Home Office, who subsequently challenge their age and are subsequently accommodated if they are assessed as being under 18. We know that regionally as a local authority, we are the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest in terms of our migrant seeking children population. This poses challenges in relation to sufficiency and demand for our services.

- 7.3 We are constantly monitoring the numbers of cared for children and looking at ways to ensure that we are reviewing plans for children to achieve permanence at the earliest opportunity. Positively, the number of children where care orders have been discharged is increasing; in total during 2022/23 we discharged care orders for 20 children. This year we are continuing to make positive progress and at the end of Q2 we had discharged 14 Care Orders. In addition to the work of discharging full Care Orders, the teams are working hard to ensure that where possible children have a plan of permanence where they do not remain cared for unless this



is absolutely necessary. This means that when children become subject to court proceedings, we are whenever possible working towards a plan of permanence. The progress we are making demonstrates a commitment to not intervening in children's lives when this is not necessary.

- 7.4** At the time of writing this report, the cared for service has 11 permanent social work vacancies out of an establishment of 24. These vacancies are currently filled with agency social workers. We are beginning to see applications from some agency staff to move to permanent positions within the authority. We know that having a consistent social worker is positive for children and recruitment of permanent staff is therefore a priority. Locally and nationally social work recruitment is a challenge. Work is being undertaken with HR colleagues to consider how we retain our existing workforce and how we recruit experienced social workers. They are looking at neighbouring authorities to ensure that the Cheshire East offer is attractive and competitive. We are also increasing our workforce through additional 'grow your own' methods such as offering social work apprenticeships and student placements.
- 7.5** The timeliness of cared for children's reviews continues to be good, in Q2, this was at 86%. We know that most reviews were re-scheduled within a few days and were therefore only marginally out of timescale. 95% of children were involved in their reviews. It is important that children and young people are involved in their plan, and we are always looking at how we can develop and improve their participation. Independent Reviewing Officers play an important role with a goal to improve the outcomes for Cared For Children and Care Leavers. They have a specific focus on ensuring that children's wishes and feelings are given full consideration. The IRO's within Cheshire East, visit children between reviews and this helps to build and develop the relationship.
- 7.6** The number of children placed with in-house foster carers has reduced from 124 in Q1 to 117 in Q2. The number of children placed with connected carers remains relatively consistent. Foster care recruitment continues to be a challenge for the service however we are seeing stability in children living with someone they have an existing relationship with when they are placed with their family members. Generally, we want children to remain local and within Cheshire East where possible. For some children, they may live out of the area because they need a specialist placement, or they want to be close to birth family who have moved away. Arrangements for any child who lives at a distance are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure this remains appropriate. Positively the number of children who are living over 20 miles from home is decreasing. In Q1 this was 126 and in Q2 this had reduced to 120.

- 7.7** We continue to work hard to reduce the number of children in residential care, however at present, the number of children living in residential care is relatively consistent. Arrangements for all children who live in residential care are reviewed regularly to ensure that this is the most appropriate placement. There are a few younger children who are living in residential placements who have a plan to step down to foster care. These plans require thorough and steady transitions to ensure that these new arrangements can offer stability.
- 7.8** We are currently looking at how we can increase our in-house residential provision to enable children to live locally, where quality can be maintained and where we achieve value for money. Mobilization of 3 Cheshire East children's homes by the end of the financial year is well underway with our first application with Ofsted pending. In Q2, we had 1 young person living in an unregistered provision. At the time of writing this report, this young person was moving to a registered Children's Home. Where a child is living in an unregistered setting, additional scrutiny and oversight takes place to ensure that the child is safe, and their needs are being met whilst a registered provision is sourced. A newly developed policy around the use of unregistered settings sets out clearly the expectations of social workers and managers and was received by the children and families committee in November 2023.
- 7.9** The head of service for children's provision which includes fostering and residential services chairs a weekly meeting- "Triple S". This weekly panel provides scrutiny and oversight of children's placements, particularly those who are living in residential care to ensure quality and cost effectiveness.
- 7.10** The number of adoptions continues to slowly increase with 11 children adopted in 2022/23. So far this year we have 14 children adopted with another 19 children living in their adoption placements. This means that we are likely to significantly improve the number of children adopted this year compared to last year. There is further work to do to ensure that our timeliness from entering care to placement order improves. This is a priority for the Local Family Justice Board of which director of children's social care is the vice chair.
- 7.11** We continue to work hard to ensure that children have the benefits of placement stability. The number of children who have moved 3 or more times in a 12-month period is reducing. In Q1 this was at 75 but has reduced to 68 in Q2. We know that due to a national shortage of foster placements, some children experience several moves but we are working hard to reduce this as we understand the detrimental impact that instability has on children and young people. Longer term placement stability is more

in line with stat neighbour and England comparator data however there is still more for us to do locally.

- 7.12** The number of 16 to 18-year-old young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is low. We have a dedicated 16 plus advisor within the virtual school, and this reflects the proactive work to keep our young people in education or support them into employment and training. However, we recognise that when young people are not positively engaged in EET before they leave care, this significantly increases the likelihood of them remaining NEET as Care Leavers. Through the Staying Close funding, we have employed a new Grade 10 EET worker who will focus on improving opportunities for all young people aged 16 and over. We are also hopeful that the increased support that young people will receive as part of the Staying Close project will ensure that these young people have targeted support in all areas of their life, including being engaged in positive activities. We want the increased support for these young people to tackle any barriers and disadvantage that Care Leavers face. We know that Care Leavers in England are over 10 times more likely than their peers to be not in education, employment, and training. (Nuffield Foundation May 2023). Early disadvantages such as childhood trauma, disruptions to schooling and placement instability are all contributing factors to young people being NEET.
- 7.13** The new NEET worker will commence employment in January 23 and her focus will be to build stronger links with local employers and ensure that young people know the range of opportunities that are available to them. Targeted support to prepare young people for employment and apprenticeships will also be a key part of the role.
- 7.14** The Q2 NEET data for our 19 to 21-year-old young people shows that 47% of this cohort are not engaged in education, employment, or training. The national average for 2020/21 was 38% with statistical neighbours being 37%. Comparative data for 22/23 is not yet available. Strategically the development of a NEET strategy is underway to ensure that a targeted approach is in place, focusing resources on our most vulnerable young people.
- 7.15** Q2 data shows that 87% of Cared For Children had a health assessment within the last 12 months. This is an improving picture and both social care and health colleagues are committed to continually improving outcomes in this area.

- 7.16** Q2 data shows that 62% of Cared For children have seen a dentist within the last 12 months. We are disappointed that this performance outcome is rather static. Where foster carers are struggling to find children a dentist, this issue is being escalated to health and a dentist will be identified. There is an identified Pathway for escalation of such issues within Cheshire and Merseyside.
- 7.17** The snap shot point at Q2 data shows that 91% of our care leavers are in appropriate accommodation, however this is checked and updated on a regular basis. More recent data suggest this now at 96%. Nationally the latest available data reported 88% of care leavers in suitable accommodation with 3% being in custody; the other main reasons for accommodation being classed as unsuitable is emergency accommodation or homelessness.
- 7.18** 73% of care leavers have up-to-date pathway plans and 81% of care leavers had their plans reviewed within timescales. Pathway Plan reviews have now transferred to the safeguarding service to ensure that our care leavers have their pathway plans reviewed in a timely manner and to allow for independent scrutiny. We have recently been working with Stockport and have engaged in some sector lead improvement work around our care leavers service. This work has been beneficial, and we have implemented some ideas to ensure that our care leavers have the very best opportunities.

**8. Consultation and Engagement**

**8.1.** Not applicable.

**9. Implications**

**10. Legal**

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

**11. Finance**

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

**11.2 Policy**

**12.1** There are no direct policy implications.

**12. Equality**

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

**13. Human Resources**

- 14.1** There are no direct human resources implications.

**14. Risk Management**

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

**15. Rural Communities**

- 16.1** There are no direct implications for rural communities.

**16. Children and Young People/Cared for Children**

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

**17. Public Health**

- 18.1** There are no direct implications for public health.

**18. Climate Change**

- 19.1** This report does not impact on climate change.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Annemarie Parker
Appendices:	Cared for Children and Care Leavers Score Card Q2
Background Papers:	None

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

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

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

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

Priority	Indicator	Indicator name	22/23 outturn	Q3 22/23	Q4 22/23	Q1 23/24	Q2 23/24	23/24 outturn	Benchmark National (most recent available)	Benchmark Stat N'bour (most recent available)	Corporate Plan Aim	Acronym
General	G1	Number of cared for children	580	557	580	576	566				Fair	
	G2	Rate per 10,000 cared for children	74	71	74	74	73		70	60	Fair	
	G3	Number of care leavers (aged 16-21)		302	325	359	379				Fair	
Priority 1 - We will care for our Children and Young People as any good parent would	1.1	% cared for children reviews in timescales	73%	82%	73%	83%	86%				Fair	
	1.2	% of children and young people involved in their reviews	96%	92%	96%	96%	95%				Fair	
	2.1	Number of 16-18 year old care leavers that are NEET		0	13	14	18				Fair	NEET - Not in Education, Employment or Training
	2.2	Number of care leavers accessing higher education (University)		19	18	20	23				Fair	
	2.3	Number of Cheshire East care leavers in apprenticeships (18+)		10	8	8	8				Fair	
	2.4	% 19-21 year care leavers that are NEET (as per national reporting)	44% NEET at birthday	48%	44%	46%	47%		38% NEET at birthday	37% NEET at birthday	Fair	NEET - Not in Education, Employment or Training.
Item safe	3.1	Number of cared for children in external foster care		139	138	130	129				Fair	
	3.2	Number of cared for children in internal foster care		117	122	124	117				Fair	
	3.3	Number of children in care living with relatives and friends (inc reg 24)		109	105	109	104				Fair	Reg 24 -Regulation 24
	3.4	Number of children placed with parents		44	45	41	41				Fair	
	3.5	Number of children and young people in residential care		36	43	47	47				Fair	

Priority	Indicator	Indicator name	22/23 outturn	Q3 22/23	Q4 22/23	Q1 23/24	Q2 23/24	23/24 outturn	Benchmark National (most recent available)	Benchmark Stat N'bour (most recent available)	Corporate Plan Aim	Acronym
Priority 3 - We will work to give all children and young people a forever home and keep them safe	3.6	Number of individuals with 3 or more placements (rolling 12mth figure)		68	74	75	68				Fair	
	3.7	% cared for children in care for at least 2.5yrs at the end of the period and living in their current placement for at least 2 years	70%	66%	70%	71%	70%		71%	72%	Fair	#NAME?
	3.8	Number of cared for children placed over 20 miles from home address (Cheshire East and out of borough)		125	132	126	120				Fair	
	3.9	Number of children living out of borough		237	257	248	235				Fair	
	3.10	Number of cared for children who have been missing in the quarter		35	37	24	33				Fair	
	3.11	Number of children who have a long term matched placement		126	124	148	146				Fair	
	3.12	Number of placement moves in the quarter		103 (85 individuals)	81 (61 individuals)	126 (107 individuals)	89 (77 individuals)				Fair	
	3.13	% of currently cared for children who have had a C&F assessment in the last 12 mths		80%	77%	72%	85%				Fair	C&F - Children and Family
	3.14	% of Cared for Children in care for more that 1 mth who have had a review in the last 6 mths		90%	89%	96%	97%				Fair	
	3.15	% of children ceased to be looked after due to granting of special guardianship order (SGO) - year to date figure	10%	9%	10%	5%	11%		13%	12%	Fair	SGO - Special Guardianship Order
	3.16	% of children ceased to be looked after due to adoption - year to date figure	7%	8%	8%	7%	8%		10%	11%	Fair	
	3.17	Number of children with an adoption decision		37	24	37	35				Fair	
	3.18	Average number of days between entering care and moving in with adoptive family (A10 national indicator) - yearly figure		647	625	743	603		376		Fair	
	3.19	Average number of days between placement order and match with adoptive family (A2 national indicator) - yearly figure		286	286	264	197		185		Fair	
	4.1	Children looked after who had their annual health assessment (%)	89% (OC2 cohort)	83%	89%	79%	87%		89% (OC2 cohort)	86% (OC2 cohort)	Fair	
	4.2	Children looked after who had their teeth checked by a dentist in the last 12 months (%)	75% (OC2 cohort)	64%	75%	62%	62%		70% (OC2 cohort)	65% (OC2 cohort)	Fair	



Priority	Indicator	Indicator name	22/23 outturn	Q3 22/23	Q4 22/23	Q1 23/24	Q2 23/24	23/24 outturn	Benchmark National (most recent available)	Benchmark Stat N'bour (most recent available)	Corporate Plan Aim	Acronym
	4.3	% of 4-16 in care for 3 months or more with a completed SDQ score in the last 12 mths	77% (OC2 cohort)	65%	77%	63%	73%		77% (OC2 cohort)	75% (OC2 cohort)	Fair	SDQ - Strenghts and Difficulties Questionnaire. T
	4.4	% of young people with a SDQ score of 20 or above	28% (OC2 cohort)	27%	28%	29%	29%		37% (OC2 cohort)	40% (OC2 cohort)	Fair	SDQ - Strenghts and Difficulties Questionnaire.
	4.5	Number of care leavers with a health passport		8/14 57%	9/15 60%	28/29 97%	27/28 93%				Fair	
Priority 5 - We will prepare young people for Adulthood	5.1	% of care leavers aged 16-21 with an up to date pathway plan in the last 6 mths		81%	74%	69%	73%				Fair	
	5.2	% of pathway plan reviews completed in timescales in the quarter		78%	66%	77%	81%				Fair	
	5.3	% of pathway plan reviews completed in the quarter where Young persons view were not sent/ gained		12%	9%	12%	11%				Fair	
	5.4	% of former relevant care leaver aged 18-21 that we are in touch with		99%	96%	99%	98%				Fair	
	5.5	% of 16-17 years old currently cared for with a PA allocated		52%	82%	100%	43%				Fair	PA - Personal Advisor
	5.6	% of 17-18 former relevant care leavers in suitable accommodation	93% at yp birthday	97%	93%	98%	86%		90% at yp birthday	88% at yp birthday	Fair	
	5.7	% of 19-21 former relevant care leavers in suitable accommodation	97% at yp birthday	97%	97%	97%	91%		88% at yp birthday	88% at yp birthday	Fair	
	5.8	Number current UASC being cared for	57	56	57	55	64				Fair	UASC - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker
	5.9	Number current/ former UASC care leavers (aged 18-24)		64	42	77	86				Fair	UASC - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker
	5.10	Number of individuals in staying put arrangement		36	29	37	34				Fair	

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