

Cared For Children and Care Leavers Committee

Date of Meeting:	20 June 2023
Report Title:	Cared For Children and Care Leavers Q4 score card 2022/23
Report of:	Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director of Children's Services
Ward(s) Affected:	All Wards

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1.** This report sets out the performance for the Cared For Children and Care Leaver's service for quarter 4 of 2022-23 (1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023). The cared for children and care leavers committee is asked to note the performance for quarter 4 and to provide support and challenge in relation to performance in relation to cared for children and care leavers.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1** This report provides an overview of quarter 4 performance for children and families services for the relevant indicators for the reporting year of 2022-23

3. Recommendations

- 3.1.** The Cared For Children and Care Leaver's Committee is asked to:
- 3.2** note the performance of children's services for quarter 4.
- 3.3** provide scrutiny in relation to performance in relation to cared for children and care leavers.

4. Reasons for Recommendations

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

5. Other Options Considered

- 5.1.** Not applicable

6. Background

- 6.1.** This quarterly report provides the committee with an overview of performance across cared for children and care leaver's service. This report relates to quarter 4 of 2022-23 (1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023).
- 6.2.** The following indicators have been highlighted for consideration

7. Briefing information

- 7.1** Cheshire East Council were responsible for 576 cared for children at the end of quarter 4. This is an increase from 557 at the end of quarter 3. 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 of 74 per 10,000 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 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) becoming cared for. In Q3 we had 56 UASC in Cheshire East, in Q4 this increased to 57. 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 then accommodated if they are assessed as being under 18. We know that regionally as a local authority, we are the 3rd highest in terms of our UASC numbers. 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 have discharged care orders for 20 children. We have several applications currently before the court so we are hopeful that this positive progress will continue. The progress we are making represents consistent progress and demonstrates a commitment to not intervening in children's lives when this is not necessary.
- 7.3** The additional capacity through the commissioned managed service (7 social workers and a team manager) has brought some stability to the service. At the time of writing this report, the cared for service has 8.5

permanent social work vacancies out of an establishment of 24. These vacancies are filled with agency social workers. This is an improving picture as we are seeing applications from some agency staff to move to permanent positions within the authority. Locally and nationally social work recruitment is a challenge. In 2022, 5400 social workers left the profession, this is an increase of 9% from the previous year. 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.

- 7.4** The timeliness of cared for children's reviews continues to be good, although this has dipped slightly to 80% in Q4, in Q3 this was at 82%. We know that most reviews were re-scheduled within a few days and were therefore only marginally out of timescale. There has been some sickness within the safeguarding service which has impacted upon timeliness, we have also seen an increase in our cared for children's numbers. 96% 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.
- 7.5** Positively, Q4 data shows an increase in children placed with in-house foster carers (122 in Q4 compared to 117 in Q3). The number of children placed with connected carers remains relatively consistent. This means that children are living with someone they have an existing relationship with. There are plans in place to increase recruitment of foster carers, which will mean that we can place more of our children with Cheshire East foster carers. 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.
- 7.6** During Fostering Fortnight in May 2023, there was a comprehensive and innovative campaign to recruit new foster carers. This included several videos across social media where foster carers were sharing their experience of being a foster carer. A few staff also did short recruitment videos where they shared what support was available from the service and

tried to dispel myths about what it takes to become a foster carer. Additionally, there was and a radio campaign.

- 7.7** It is our ambition to have as few children placed in residential care as possible and where they are, this is a matched placement to improve their outcomes. However, currently the number of children living in residential care is increasing. In Q3, the number of children living in residential care was 36, in Q4 this has increased to 43. We remain committed to ensuring that children have the opportunity of living within a family wherever possible and continue to review children's placements to see if there are alternatives. We are currently looking at how we can increase our in-house residential provision thus reducing the need to use unregistered provisions for our children and young people in the future. We currently have 1 child living in an unregistered provision; positively, he has a plan to move to a regulated placement within the next few weeks. There are proposals to open 3 Cheshire East children's homes. It is anticipated by the end of August 2023; Cheshire East will have registered its first Children's Home with another 2 homes registered and operational by the end of December 2023.
- 7.8** The number of adoptions continues to increase with 11 children adopted in 2022/23. We have 19 children living in their adoption placements. Positively, we also have 3 children who are placed in foster to adopt placements. Of the 11 children legally adopted in 2022/23, unfortunately the number of days from entering care to moving into placement with an adoptive family is skewed by a small number of children where there has been delay. The time taken to achieve permanence is beneficial to the child however does impact negatively upon our reported figures. Locally and nationally the timescales for placing children within their adoptive families is monitored to avoid unnecessary delay for children. Pre-pandemic Cheshire East were in a strong position in relation to timeliness, above the regional and national average. However, this has been significantly impacted because of the complexities involved in facilitating transitions and the impact of Covid-19. For those children where delay was experienced, their individual circumstances are well understood, and we continue to scrutinise planning to ensure that children do not experience unnecessary delay.
- 7.9** We are excited and proud that we have successfully submitted a bid to the DFE and have been awarded £1.2 million to support our Care Leavers through a project called Staying Close. Staying Close is a model which provides an enhanced support package for young people leaving care from children's homes and supported accommodation and is designed to be a comparable offer to the option to Stay Put, which supports young people in foster care to remain with their former foster carers until age 21. Staying Close provides an offer of move-on accommodation, alongside a package of practical and emotional support, provided either by a dedicated Personal

Advisor or perhaps a member of staff from their former children's home whom they know and trust. These bespoke packages of support help young people to develop their confidence and skills for independent living, and for their emotional health and wellbeing. In 2017-18, Staying Close was piloted by 5 local authorities and 3 private providers; an additional 15 LAs were funded in 2022-23 and now Cheshire East will be amongst the latest group of councils to be funded for 2023-2025.

- 7.10** Placement stability for cared for children still needs to improve however in Q4 we have seen some improvement in this. We know that due to a shortage of foster placements, some children experience several moves. A new head of service for Provider Services commenced employment in January 2023 and is working to develop the service to improve stability for children. We have also developed a permanence tracker which is assisting in monitoring and driving forward children's plans.
- 7.11** 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.
- 7.12** The NEET data for our 19 to 21-year-old young people shows that 43% 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. However, in a recent meeting with Ofsted they confirmed that the national average for NEET exceeded 40%. We are looking closely at this data and the circumstances for these young adults which include pregnancy, parenting or illness, but are not exclusive to this. We know that our increasing population of UASC young people are not always able to access ESOL courses as many colleges are full. Our Virtual School are providing creative ways of ensuring that these young people are receiving an education whilst they await a college place. We have also developed a NEET challenge panel where we will consider what support we can provide to our young people on an individual basis. Within the Staying Close project there will be a dedicated education worker, which will also greatly assist in terms of supporting our care leavers to access education and employment.
- 7.13** The NEET programme is underway and is being well attended. This is a good way of engaging our young people and it is successful as a pathway to get young people involved in a range of activities and into education, employment, or training. The funding from the DFE for Staying Close

project will enable us to consider if this course can be run on a continual basis rather than twice per year. This is in recognition that previous NEET programmes have seen real successes for our young people.

- 7.14** Most health assessments are being requested within 48 hours of children entering care. During the period 01/04/2022-31/03/2023 there were 216 young people who entered care, two entered care on Police Protection Orders and subsequently left care prior to the health assessment being requested. Out of the remaining 214 young people 169 had Part A completed in timescale (79%) with 45 completed outside of timescales.
- 7.15** Q4 data shows an increase in children seeing a dentist to 70% from 64% in Q3. We are working to try and look at how we capture this data as we believe these figures are not a true representation and hope to see further improvement in Q1. 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.
- 7.16** Q4 data shows that 96% of our care leavers are in appropriate accommodation. This is not 100% because we have a small number of young people who are in prison, and this is never recorded as being appropriate. This is currently less than five and as such the number is suppressed in line with DfE guidelines. 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. We do not have any young people in emergency accommodation.
- 7.17** 74% of care leavers have up-to-date pathway plans and 68% 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 timelier way and to allow for external scrutiny. We have recently been working with Stockport and have engaged in some sector lead improvement work around our Care Leavers. 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.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Annemarie Parker
Appendices:	Corporate Parenting Score Card Q4
Background Papers:	None