

Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee Annual Report

April 2022 – March 2023



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Foreword

As elected members, we feel both privileged and challenged by our role as corporate parents. It is a huge responsibility to take on the welfare of other people's children and I know that all those who sit on Children and Families Committee and on Cared For and Care Leavers Committee are grateful to our dedicated teams of officers and social workers. They are passionate about delivering the best possible childhood for our children. The six pledges, launched in June 2022, remain the core of our commitment to Cheshire East Council's cared for and care leavers community. The role of the elected member is to be a critical friend to the professionals who work in children's services, to support them in every way possible and to make those pledges to our children a reality.

I think we all know what we want for our Cared for and Care Leaver children and young adults because it is what we want for our own children. They need security and love and that depends on permanence. This requires a coordinated effort not just from CEC's children's services, the Virtual School, the Family Hubs, the Housing department but also from our partners in the police and NHS. Last year's report referenced the 'joint targeted area inspection' which looked closely at children at risk of exploitation, and it was found that we needed to improve in some aspects of our partner working. I am proud of the excellent work done since then and to have received a report that assures the council that

we now have robust, efficient partner working practices that ensure the safety of our cared for children. Our journey of improvement goes on into next year and with regards to children's safeguarding, we will always be vigilant. Committee members will continue to make regular 'frontline visits' to all areas of children's services.

One of the many challenges for children's services is to train, attract and retain more social workers against the background of a national shortage. We are also working energetically to encourage more foster carers to join the already amazing cohort in Cheshire East. Our priorities do not change greatly from year to year because the needs remain the same. What does change is the way that our teams work to support each other in providing 'wrap around' care to vulnerable children and young people who are care experienced. They are constantly innovating to find even better ways to fulfil those 6 pledges. Our ambitious strategy is outlined in Together for Children and Young People.

As a Committee, we celebrate the achievements of the past year and we are excited about the new projects and new ways of working which will benefit our Cared for and Care Leaver children.

On a personal level, I feel it is a great privilege to sit on this Committee. As a retired teacher, I have enjoyed reconnecting with young people, making a podcast about free school meals with our highly articulate, well-informed volunteers to the Youth Parliament, chatting over a jigsaw puzzle at the My Voice Centre or visiting the brilliant Holiday Activities again.

Cllr Carol Bulman, Chair Cared For and Care Leavers
Committee. July 2023.



*Councillor Carol Bulman, Chair of Cared for Children and Care Leavers
Committee and Lead Member for Children and Families*

The Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee

Having the right values, beliefs and culture around prioritising and championing the needs of cared for children and young care-experienced adults is essential to achieving excellent outcomes for children and young people. Our corporate parenting responsibility is a shared one that requires a high level of commitment from the leadership of the council, as well as the support and ambition of all council employees and partners.

The name of the Corporate Parenting Committee has been changed to the Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee in response to feedback from care experienced children and young people. This was agreed in the meeting on 10 January 2023 and endorsed by the Children and Families Committee in February.

The purpose of the Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee, in its role as an advisory committee to the Children and Families Committee, is to ensure that the council effectively discharges its role as corporate parent for all children and young people in care, and care leavers from 0-25 years of age, and holds partners to account for the discharge of their responsibilities. The terms of reference are included within the [council's constitution](#), and these are reviewed annually.

The Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee is comprised of twelve cross-party members, with council officers in attendance to support agenda items as required. The committee is administered by officers from democratic services. The committee has met on five occasions in 2022-23.

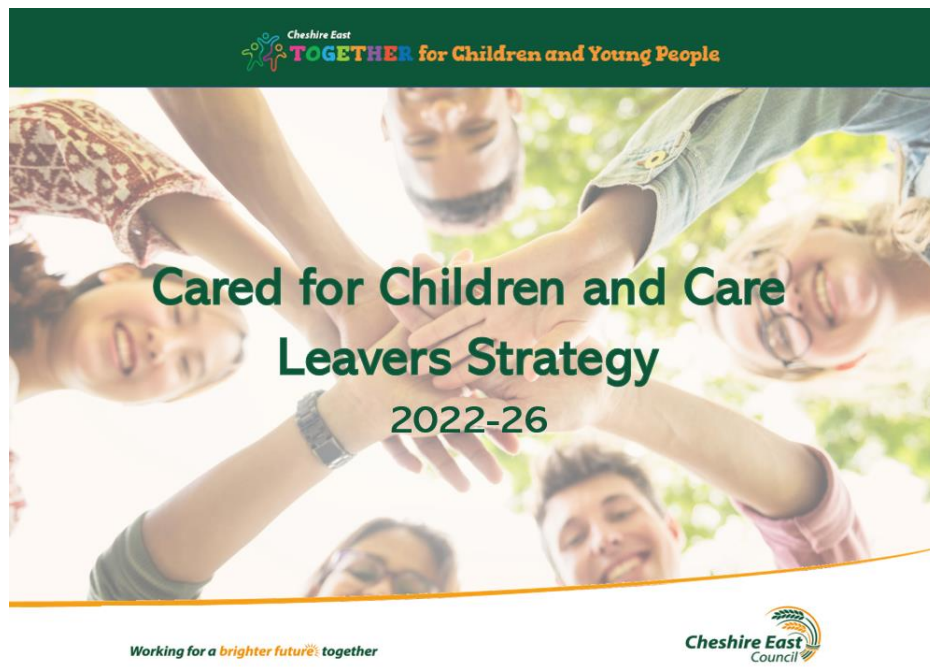
In preparation for the discussion and challenge at committee, our Shadow Committee of young people meets in advance with the chair of the committee and the head of service for cared for children and care leavers to comment on the matters that are to be presented to committee. They share their lived experience of how services are designed and delivered and ultimately what it feels like to be a cared for child or care-experienced adult in Cheshire East.

Officers and partners present information to the committee. This includes information on how services are supporting cared for children, young people and care-experienced adults, and provides feedback from external scrutiny, so that members can evaluate the service that is being delivered to ensure we are effectively meeting children and young people's needs. Performance reporting and impact is scrutinised by the committee, along with issues and risks.

The committee oversees the delivery of our Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy and the pledges that we made in June 2022.

Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy and Pledges

The **Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-26** was co-produced with children and young people and launched in July 2022.



The strategy sets out a number of pledges we are making to our cared for children and young people and those who are care

experienced. These are based on what these children and young people have told us will make the most difference to their lives:

Pledge One

We will care for our cared for children and care leavers as any good parent would

Pledge Two

We will improve education, employment, and training outcomes

Pledge Three

We will be truly aspirational to give all children and young people a forever home and to keep them safe

Pledge Four

We will improve health and wellbeing outcomes

Pledge Five

We will prepare young people for adulthood

Pledge Six

We will work TOGETHER with children and young people

Committee meetings during 2022-23 received quarterly performance reports alongside the Cared for Children and Care Leavers scorecard. Workstream groups aligned to the pledges are in place to ensure that the strategy is delivered effectively.

Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy Progress

Pledge One

We will care for our cared for children and care leavers as any good parent would

Staff and elected members will understand their responsibilities and be **ambitious in their roles and they will advocate and champion** the needs of cared for children and care leavers in everything they do.

We will **know ourselves and the needs of our cared for children and care leavers well**, and design and deliver services that meet these needs.

Decisions about children and young people's lives, and the services that support them, **will be made with them and for them**. We will always value their views.

Key achievements this year

- The new Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy for 2022-26 has been co-produced with children and young people based on what is most important to them. It sets out our

ambitions as corporate parents and what actions we will take to continue to develop our support.

- Our cared for children and care leavers told us that some of the language used in the previous strategy was too clinical and not meaningful to them. We therefore worked together to rename the new strategy. A new governance structure to deliver the strategy and actions is in place.
- The name of the Corporate Parenting Committee was also changed to reflect children and young people's wishes regarding the language we use.
- Initial training around corporate parenting responsibilities and championing cared for children has been undertaken with councillors.
- The timeliness of cared for children's reviews continues to be good, this was 80% at the end of Quarter 4 (Q4) and 96% of children were involved in their reviews.
- The views of children and young people were captured in 97% of all reviews completed in the year, with 60% of those aged 4 years and over attending in person. 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.
- Young people's views inform service development. My Voice have been involved in a range of service development activity and frontline recruitment, and the views of cared for children,

young people and care leavers are sought through a biannual survey. Youth Council are active members of the Children and Young People's Trust.

- There has been continued regional participation around understanding the needs and voice of care experienced young people and care leavers.
- A care leavers diagnostic took place in October 2022 to evaluate the quality of support offered and areas for development. 46% of care leavers rated their support as being 10 out of 10, with 80% rating a 7 or higher. 98% said they felt listened to by their Personal Advisor (PA).
- Several activities for November Children's Rights Month were run with the Participation Team and the Care Leavers' service. This included young people 'taking over' part of the Children and Families Committee, as well taking over the role of the Director of Children's Services for a day.
- We have established a new role – Apprenticeship Coordinator – to support cared for young people and care leavers.



Next steps

- Continue to work with cared for children and care leavers to change the language we use.
- Develop a directory of resources and support that is accessible for our young people and families.
- Champion and progress towards becoming a fostering friendly authority.
- Stabilise the workforce so that children and young people benefit from enduring relationships with their social worker.
- Provide ongoing training and support to councillors, stakeholders and employees about being the best parents to our cared for children and care leavers.
- Embed support for care leavers across whole council decision making. Cheshire East are considering making 'care leaver' a protected characteristic as recommended in the national review of children's services.
- Review our strategy on an annual basis to ensure progress is monitored and actions and priorities remain relevant.
- Establish councillor frontline visits to cared for services, aligned to the cared for children and care leavers outcomes.
- Work together to ensure that the right children become cared for and deliver our strategy on Creating a Sustainable Future for Children's Social Care.

- Regularly celebrate the achievements of our cared for children through events, such as the Star Awards and National Care Leaver Week, and ensure individual achievements, such as exam results and settling at a new home, are also celebrated.



Pictured above: Cared for children and young people displayed their artwork at an art exhibition

Pledge Two

We will improve education, employment and training outcomes

We will have **high aspirations** for every child and young person and will **help them to achieve their ambitions**, using opportunities in the 'family business' and our contacts so that they can be **happy and successful** in their education, training and employment.

Every child and young person will have an **education plan that is targeted to enable them to reach their full potential**.

We will strive to ensure that every child and young person will have **access to consistent, high quality, well-matched, opportunities in education, training, and employment**.

Key achievements this year

- The [Virtual School headteachers' report for 2021-22](#) was presented in the November 2022 committee meeting, providing full details of the previous academic year with an outline of the impact and achievements of our children and young people. This is updated and published annually.
- All cared for children have a designated Virtual School (VS) advisor who monitors and tracks each child and ensures timely

support is in place for areas such as intervention, and challenge fixed term exclusions.

- As of the end of Q4, 73% of cared for children were in good/ outstanding schools. 20% of schools are without an updated OFSTED rating due to academy conversion. Where children are placed in schools below good, this is often as a result of maintaining current school placements when children enter care to preserve relationships and links with home. Within these cases, the VS advisor will ensure robust support and oversight is in place, such as undertaking additional visits.
- Robust live attendance tracking and a specialist attendance officer are in place to monitor daily attendance and offer timely support to children, schools and settings, parents/carers.
- The number of 16-18-year-old young people in care who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is low (12 in March 2023). We have a dedicated 16 plus advisor within the VS, and this reflects the proactive work to keep our young people in education or support them into employment and training.
- The post-16 team consists of a VS advisor, learning mentor and post-16 tutor, to track and monitor 16- and 17-year-old cared for children ensuring targeted support is in place, in particular for those at risk of becoming NEET. There is a bespoke offer for post-16 cared for children, including our 'venture with confidence' programme, to promote education, employment and training for young people.
- We have also developed a partnership challenge panel where we will consider what support we can provide to our young people on an individual basis. Supporting clear intervention and actions to re-engage in education, employment and training.
- Our 'venture with confidence' programme has enabled young people to re-engage with education, training and peer support. This continues to be planned for the 2023-2024 cohort. There have been 26 referrals over the two programmes, with 23 young people successfully completing the course, many securing places at college or work experience. 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.



Pictured above: One of our young people taking part in the 'venture with confidence' programme

- We have three learning mentors offering support for social, emotional and mental health, and ensuring enhanced transition for children and young people for identified phases of education.
- VS Deputy Headteacher in place to oversee further developments and to include extended duties.
- Development of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) content to ensure more robust recording of pupil premium, SMART targets and measuring impact/outcomes.
- VS designated training for all schools/settings: including workshops delivered by a range of multi-agency services.
- The VS are supporting our children to have access to books and reading through funding Letterbox Trust parcels. This year we have had a specific focus on signing up all our children moving into Reception, Year 1 and Year 5 to receive the parcels to support them with their transition into their assessment years.
- School-led tutoring funding has been fully used and allocated to pay for additional tutoring for cared for children.
- The Virtual School Governing Board has been embedded to provide challenge, scrutiny and support, with representatives from across all key stakeholders including education, health, social care and foster carers.
- The number of fixed term exclusions for our cared for children continues to be below both our statistical neighbours and North West recorded data. We have had no permanent exclusions of cared for children for over four years.
- Primary exclusions continue to remain low with some areas of focus needed for fixed term exclusions within secondary, although in line with national figures. We are currently working with wider partners to continue to develop alternative strategies to exclusion.
- 73% of PEPs were judged 'good' after designated teacher training sessions.
- 21.3% of Cheshire East cared for children achieved a grade 4+ in English and Maths, compared to 22.1% nationally (data from the local authority interactive tool (LAIT)). 32.7% of our cared for children achieved a grade 5+ in GCSE English.
- 93% of our Year 11 students in July 2022 had a clear pathway plan for post-16 study.
- 78.7% of Year 13 students were either in education, employment, or training.
- In Year 14, seven students are enrolled on an apprenticeship course and four are attending higher education this year.
- More cared for young people than ever are going to university as a result of our aspirational culture and joined up working.
- The Virtual School has supported children to access recreational activities – supported with additional funding for swimming

lessons, horse riding lessons, music lessons, performing arts and forest school.

- We know that our increasing population of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) are not always able to access English for Speakers of Other Languages (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.
- National Apprenticeship Week was celebrated in February 2023, and we used a variety of methods to increase apprenticeship awareness for our care leavers across the council.



Next steps

- Develop opportunities for apprenticeships within the council and local businesses. Offer support to care leavers in preparing for and undertaking apprenticeships from our Apprenticeship Coordinator.
- Share success stories across the council and local community, promoting the benefits for all.
- Continue to improve the completion rate and quality of PEPs across all years from early years to post-16.
- Continue to provide support and interventions for schools and children to improve outcomes (narrow the gap and lost learning) and attendance, evaluating the impact of the intervention and use of pupil premium.
- Strengthen children and young people's voice to support the strategic development across all areas of the Virtual School.
- Ensure that agencies providing opportunities for our children and young people are supported and equipped to understand and meet their needs.
- Continue to implement a robust action plan to reduce NEET and encourage re-engagement opportunities for our care leavers.

Pledge Three

We will be truly aspirational to give all children and young people a forever home and to keep them safe

We will strive to ensure that every child and young person will have the **opportunity to live in a good, safe home locally**, either with their family or in another long-term home. All decisions will be made and reviewed with them, without delay.

We will **respect those people who are important to our children and young people** and make sure that these safe relationships are sustained.

We will **keep children and young people safe**.

Key achievements this year

- 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.
- Dedicated resource for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) – two social workers currently, which we are increasing to three, resulting in timely specialist support.
- Care proceedings work has been transitioned into the cared for service, for earlier consideration of permanence options.
- Discharge of care orders to ensure children rehabilitated home do not remain subject to court orders longer than necessary; this continues to increase, and practice is embedded.
- Secured dedicated venues for family time, so families can access a venue that is close to where they live. Our dedicated Family Time Coordinator has kept children connected to their families.
- Step down panel – all residential placements are agreed by the Director, ensuring only the right children are in residential care, including very exceptional use of unregistered arrangements and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS). We have developed a policy around the use of unregistered provision. This policy ensures that should such arrangements be necessary that there is robust senior management oversight.
- Re-development of the resource and accommodation panel, chaired by the heads of service to ensure consistent management oversight, challenge and scrutiny of support for families, financial implications and ensuring robust planning and timescales around accommodation and resources.
- We have continued developing sufficiency options including redeveloping our residential care offer and two Mockingbird constellations. Bespoke packages and edge of care support have enabled children to remain within their extended families/networks.

- 77% (Q4) of cared for children and young people are living within a 20-mile radius of their home address. Many of those placed furthest are living within their family networks or have/are achieving permanence. Arrangements for any child who lives at a distance are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure this remains appropriate.
- We are continuing to work to reduce the number of children who live in residential care; this number does fluctuate due to their needs and the availability of foster placements. As of end of Q4 we had 43 individuals in either a Cheshire East or independent home, this is 19.3% compared to England at 16% and the Northwest at 14%. We remain committed to ensuring that children have the opportunity to live within a family wherever possible and continue to review children's placements to see if there are alternatives.
- We currently have 56 children (9.7%) placed with parents – this is a significant drop from 17% last year and much closer to latest available national picture of 7%, lower than the North West at 12%. This is consistent progress and demonstrates a commitment to exiting children's lives when intervention is not required and ensuring children remain within their birth family where possible.
- 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 and there are several

applications before the court. We have a designated legal advisor who is ensuring that discharges can be made quickly and effectively within the court arena.

- A small but well-regarded Special Guardianship Order (SGO) team supports an increasing number of children/families where permanence is achieved through the making of this order.
- We have improved communication and engagement with foster carers – regular newsletters, forums, surveys and attendance at gatherings. Foster carers are also involved in service developments. There has been the development of a specific fostering Facebook page and increased social media presence.



- We have engaged in sector-led improvement around fostering which is proving to be beneficial, and we are also working towards recognition as a 'fostering friendly' organisation.

- 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.
- We remain ambitious for securing adoption for children – 11 children have been adopted so far this year, and another 19 are living in their adoption placements. We also have three children who are placed in foster to adopt placements.



Next steps

- Continue our focus on achieving consistently good quality assessments and plans.
- 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.

- Develop our in-house residential provision and continue to increase the number of foster carers to improve opportunities for children and young people to live closer to home.
- Improve concurrent and early permanence planning through the Resource and Accommodation Panel (RAPP). Utilise this as a forum for senior leaders to support the service to achieve permanence plans and ensure progress is reviewed regularly. Clear actions to be set to hold the service to account.
- Build upon family networking meetings and inclusion of families and reduce the number of children needing to enter court and/or remain within care.
- Further strengthen our communication and engagement with foster carers and involve them in service development.
- Secure family-based living for cared for disabled children – we are working to expand our number of in-house short break and specialist foster carers through a targeted recruitment campaign.
- Continue to ensure that cared for children and young people can live in good, safe homes locally, as early as possible.

- Development of the No Wrong Door model principles within Cheshire East which will provide support to young people who are within or on the edge of the care system.
- Increase support to cases where there is a possibility of adoption disruption.
- Review and enhance the offer for special guardianship, considering bespoke support offers.
- Improve our decision making regarding Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs). Develop a clear process and policy around entitlements and support for SGO's.
- We will ensure children and young people have opportunities to stay connected to their families and friends in the least restrictive way possible.

Pledge Four

We will improve health and wellbeing outcomes

We are committed to **understanding the health needs** of our children and young people **as early as possible** and to ensure they are **given the highest priority** in every service.

We will ensure that **practitioners understand and meet the diverse health needs** of our children and young people, **including those with health inequalities** faced by race, ethnicity, ability and disability and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

We have **ambition to ensure that we further improve responses** to children and young people in relation to having their **health needs met**.

We will **equip** our children and young people to have **high aspirations for their own health and wellbeing**.

Key achievements this year

- Health colleagues have access to the case record system to improve the timeliness of health assessments. They will automatically be notified when a child enters care.
- There is a good emotional wellbeing offer through Pure Insight, which is supporting over 300 young people.
- 100% of young people that consent to a health passport have received one by their 18th birthday. Work has been undertaken to strengthen the understanding of health passports and consent with young people.
- Most initial health assessments are being requested within 48 hours of children entering care. Overall, for the year, 76% were requested within timescales and 59% were completed within timescales.
- We know that our increase of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) cared for children has resulted in some delays because of additional complexities such as ensuring an interpreter is present. An additional increase in children coming into care has also added to the complexity and impacted timeliness; in 2021-22 157 children entered care, this number increased to 218 in 2022-23.
- The percentage of children who had their annual health assessment was 89.3%; this is an improvement on last year's figure of 80% and in line with the England average of 89%. The figure is slightly higher than our statistical neighbours' average of 86%.
- 96.6% of children aged five and under had their developmental checks completed within timescales.
- 92.6% of routine childhood immunisations were completed.
- Our dedicated emotional wellbeing service delivers support for young people and their carers.
- 74.5% of children had their teeth checked by a dentist, this is a significant improvement on last year's figure of 51%. The NHS England dental referral scheme across Cheshire and

Merseyside provides an opportunity for all our children and young people to access a dentist more easily. The scheme will continue for 2023/24, and children who are struggling to access a dentist locally can be referred in for emergency treatment or a routine dental examination.

Next steps

- More children and young people have seen a dentist than is recorded on our system. We are building into children's reviews a mandatory question to increase the accuracy of the data.
 - Continue to promote the NHS England dental referral programme to ensure cared for children have access to timely dental health services.
 - Raise awareness across our workforce and promote and monitor access to a range of services and agencies available to support the health needs of our children and young people.
 - Track and monitor the health needs of our children and young people, including those who are currently living outside of Cheshire East, ensuring their needs are met.
 - Support children and young people in care to have improving emotional mental health and wellbeing.
- We will ensure cared for children and care leavers have their health assessed in a timely way and that assessments are of a good quality and used to inform the care plan.
 - Improve access and timeliness of full health-screening for all UASC.
 - Develop an effective tool that can be used to measure health outcomes for cared for children.
 - We will support timely and effective transitions from children's services to adult services.



Pledge Five

We will prepare young people for adulthood

We will **support young people early with the skills needed** to prepare for their future through access to a range of good quality services.

We will be a **consistent guide** for our young people. We will **celebrate their successes** and **support them when things don't go well**.

We will **respect our care leavers as young adults** and adapt our relationships to their needs.

Key achievements this year

- We are currently working with 315 young people in the care leavers service, of whom just over 30 are open to us formally under the 21+ offer. A further 140 young adults know that they can also access support and advice from us at any time via this provision, and an additional 71 cared for children are supported jointly via a social worker and PA to prepare for adulthood.
- Connections between the cared for and care leavers service have improved, resulting in better preparation for adulthood.
- The [local offer](#) has been reviewed together with our care leavers and we will be using their feedback to enhance our offer further.
- We have a strong financial offer for care leavers, including a £2,500 setting-up grant, dedicated financial support for young people at university, financial support while young people wait to receive Universal Credit, and financial incentives for those who are not ready for work but can volunteer. This will increase this year due to national guidance for young people turning 18 years after April 2023.
- At the end of Q4, 20 young adults aged 21 and over have been allocated personal advisors (PAs).
- The monthly Ignition Panel helps young people make informed choices about where they might live in the future. All 16-year-olds are now considered at Ignition to strengthen early planning and support for independence.
- 75 young people are residing in independent living.
- The successful tenancy ready course has an average of two young people per month completing to secure their B status.
- The number of ignition taster flats has increased from 14 to 16 to support young people to be tenancy ready.
- Two 16+ flats have been commissioned to offer short break or shared care independence living experiences to young people transitioning to adult services. We have submitted a short break innovation bid to the Department for Education (DfE) to secure two additional flats.

- We are in touch with 98.5% of care leavers aged 19-21 compared to 97% last year. The average for England and for our statistical neighbours is 92%. In the North West it is 95%.
- The Care Leavers Survey found that 46% of care leavers rated their support as being 10 out of 10 (on a scale of 1-10 where 10 is very good). 80% rated it as 7 or higher. 98% said they felt listened to by their PA.
- One care leaver gave the following feedback about their PA: *"He is very lovely to talk to, he makes me laugh all the time and I am not scared to talk to him or ask for his help."*
- There are good links in place with local Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) centres. A reduction in benefit sanctions has been seen in the past 12 months.
- Effective mentoring and wellbeing support, including support for young parents, is in place through Pure Insight which supports over 300 young people. Provision increased in April 2022 ensuring no young person was on a waiting list. Feedback from young people on the support is overwhelmingly positive.
- Q4 data shows that 97% of care leavers aged 19-21 are in appropriate accommodation compared to 88% nationally (in the Northwest this rate is 90%, and for our statistical neighbours it is 88%). The rate 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 as being in suitable accommodation with 3% being in custody. The other main reasons for accommodation being classed as unsuitable is emergency accommodation or homelessness. We monitor our use of emergency accommodation alongside housing colleagues; our use of emergency accommodation is minimal.
- As of the end of Q4, 93% of care leavers had up-to-date pathway plans. Pathway plan reviews have now transferred to the safeguarding service to ensure that they are reviewed in a timelier way and to allow for external scrutiny. We have recently been working with Stockport Council and have engaged in some sector-led 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.
- 55.4% of our 19 to 21-year-olds are in education, employment or training (EET), in line with the national picture. Our latest 'venture with confidence' course for young people who have experienced specific difficulties in accessing work or training has been a great success. We continue to be aspirational that the course and support from our apprenticeship coordinator will increase the number of 19- to 21-year-olds in EET over the next year.

- We have strengthened our practice in relation to 16 and 17-year-old homeless young people and updated the 16/17-Year-Old Homeless Joint Working Protocol.



Next steps

- Enhance our local offer in line with feedback from care leavers, including support around the cost of living.
- Explore developing an app for the local offer to support improved communication and meaningful ways of keeping in touch, offer digital peer support groups, and gain young people's feedback.
- Communicate with children and young people what our relationship and contact with them will look like, so they understand what to expect and know how to raise any worries they have around this.
- Understand how children and young people want us to communicate with them and look at ways to develop our digital offer in line with their views.
- Publish and publicise the care leaver offer in accessible ways, in line with statutory guidance. Ensure that care leavers know what they are legally entitled to and are helped to access support after they leave care. Review the care leaver offer in partnership with care leavers when there is an annual review.
- Ensure that all children in care and care leavers know how to make a complaint and have access to advocacy services.
- Allocate cared for children a PA as close to age 16 as possible, in line with statutory guidance.
- Involve children in care and care leavers in developing their plans for after care. Plans should take account of young people's wishes and concerns, when possible, including those related to feeling safe, where young people want to live, and what they want to do with their future.
- In order to increase the range of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) accommodation within the Cheshire East boundary, we will be tendering for regulated 16+ accommodation in summer/autumn 2023.



Pictured above: here's a great photo of some of the young UASC we've supported, photographed with the Mayor at last year's Star Awards

- Celebrate the achievements of our care leavers, during National Care Leavers Week.
- Ensure care leavers are supported to make decisions that affect their lives e.g., housing, jobs, etc.
- Embed family networking and safety planning to reduce 16/17-year-old homelessness and support young people to return to live at home sooner.
- Ensure that care leavers who become parents are well supported and have prioritisation of access to services.
- Make links with providers around bespoke accommodation provision for young people to provide more choices outside of Crewe.
- We have been successful in a bid to the DfE for Staying Close funding and will be developing our project plan to ensure young people leaving residential care have bespoke accommodation and care support.

Pledge Six

We will work **TOGETHER** with children and young people

We will work **TOGETHER with children and young people** in all that we do.

We will work to make sure that **participation is at the heart** of everything that our staff, partners, and elected members do.

Cared for children and care leavers will be **empowered to make decisions that affect their lives**.

Key achievements this year

- We have continued to deliver on our TOGETHER vision – children, young people and parents/carers are actively involved in shaping services and support for cared for children and care leavers. A number of our [key strategies](#) have been coproduced with children and young people, including our Children and Young People's Plan, Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy and Participation Strategy.
- Children and young people have told us that the most important thing we can do is listen to them and take what they say seriously. We have developed an additional pledge in the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy to focus solely

on participation (working together with children and young people) to ensure that children and young people are always at the heart of everything we do and are involved in the decisions that affect their lives.

- My VOICE (Voices of in Care Experience) have been involved in a range of projects including:
 - co-producing our new Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy and pledges to cared for children and care leavers
 - making cards for all our cared for children to celebrate International Care Day 2022
 - an art exhibition sharing experiences of being cared for
 - developing a 'coming into care' guide
 - being involved in recruitment and selection of new staff
 - taking part in 'Take Over Days' with the Executive Director of Children's Services and the Participation Team
 - celebrating cared for children's achievements through our annual STAR awards and November Take Over
 - attending the Shadow Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee
 - attending and being a part of Cared4NorthWest (the regional Children in Care Council)
 - the recommission of the Emotionally Healthy Children and Young People's Service
- Cared for children delivered a reading at the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Service at Chester Cathedral in June 2022. This opportunity was ringfenced to cared for children, again demonstrating Cheshire East's commitment to corporate

parenting. One young person who took part felt that the experience would help strengthen their future prospects, such as employment and university applications.



- Care experienced young people were involved in recruitment for the roles of Head of Service for Provider Services and Head of Service for Safeguarding, as well as positions within the Virtual School. Their insight, professionalism and probing questions were impressive. Involving cared for children and care leavers ensures that there is a balanced view, and this helps to strengthen relationships with professionals. It also helps them to gain transferable skills such as interview preparation, empowerment, and communication.

- Care leavers attended full council to speak about why the pledges of the strategy are important. Full council adopted the pledges, voted unanimously and demonstrated their commitment to corporate parenting.



- Care leavers were involved in developing a training resource for professionals working with care experienced children and young people who have experience of domestic violence and domestic abuse. Training that is co-produced by young people ensures that it is shaped by their lived experiences.

- Cared for children attended and helped to plan Table Turners, an event aimed at having open discussions and offering recommendations to decision makers about issues connected to health and wellbeing.
- Children and young people have worked to improve the language that is used across services for cared for children and care leavers. This includes changing the name of the strategy and committee from “Corporate Parenting Strategy/Committee” to “Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy/Committee”. Care leavers presented these recommendations at committee in November 2022.

Next steps

- Continue to work together with children and young people to enable children to participate in a meaningful way to develop our services and inform practice.
- Embed the TOGETHER approach with our children and young people, making sure that all staff, partners, and elected members are working to listen to and act on what children and young people tell us.
- Increase the range of opportunities and the number of children and young people engaging in activities in ways that are helpful to them.

- Ensure there are opportunities for senior managers and councillors to hear direct from children and young people about their experiences and ideas.
- Following the annual survey of cared for children and care leavers, all services to evidence actions based on recommendations by children and young people.
- Ensure that children and young people are involved in the recruitment of all key posts in Children's Services.
- Ensure that the child's voice and their lived experience is evident in decision making when commissioning services.
- Improve and develop the language we use when working with and writing about our cared for children and young people, "writing to the child".

