
Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee

Date of Meeting:	05 December 2023
Report Title:	Cared for Children and Care Leavers Q2 score card 2023/24
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 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 3rd 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.

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