

## **Corporate Parenting Committee**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	18 June 2024
<b>Report Title:</b>	Corporate Parenting update
<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 would ordinarily accompany the score card and provide some analysis. However, for this Committee this report will provide an update in relation to Cared for Children and Care Leavers post ILACS inspection. The cared for children and care leavers committee is asked to note the information within this report in relation to cared for children and care leavers services.

### **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1.** This report provides an update in relation to the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Services.

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1.** The Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee is asked to:
- 3.2** note the report.
- 3.3** provide scrutiny in relation to actions being taken 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.

#### **7. Briefing information**

Members will be aware that in February 2024, Ofsted undertook an ILACS Inspection of Children's Services in Cheshire East.

The four areas inspected were:

1. The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families;
2. The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection;
3. The experiences and progress of children in care; and
4. The experiences and progress of care leavers.

HM Inspectors rated the first three areas of the inspection as requiring improvement to be good. This was due to variability in practice. Some children were found to be receiving good services and achieving good outcomes, but this was not the case for all children and young people.

Ofsted rated the experiences and progress of care leavers as inadequate.

Due to services to care leavers being rated as inadequate, the overall judgement for Cheshire East Children's Services was inadequate. Under the ILACS Inspection Framework, If any area of the inspection is deemed inadequate then the rating of overall effectiveness is graded as inadequate, irrespective of ratings in other areas.

Children's Services are committed to improving services and the recent ILACS Inspection is a catalyst for change, and we are using it as an opportunity to review our processes for performance, quality assurance and knowing ourselves well. Our focus continues to be on achieving excellent outcomes for children and young people through establishing the tools for consistently good practice.

- 7.1** In response to the inspection and the findings, a revised, Improvement and Impact Board has been created. The Board will include multi-agency partners, who will contribute to improvement activity. In addition, an Improvement Plan has been developed and will be shared with Ofsted by August 2024. The Improvement Plan will be supported by a Scorecard.
- 7.2** The Improvement and Impact Board will improve outcomes for Cheshire East's children, young people and families by:
- Scrutinising the quality of services and their impact on outcomes for children and young people.
  - Ensuring there are robust arrangements in place to support and deliver improvements swiftly, and there is focus and drive on continual improvement.
  - Monitoring the delivery and impact of the improvement plan to ensure that better outcomes are achieved and sustained for children and young people, and that the findings from the Ofsted inspection of Children's Services in February 2024 are addressed.
  - Ensuring that there is a joined up multi-agency and whole-council approach to improving support to children and young people.
  - Providing high support and high challenge, holding each other to account for improving outcomes for children and young people.
  - Ensuring the delivery of the improvement plan and evaluation of impact is informed by the views of children and young people, parents, carers, frontline practitioners and managers, and developments are communicated to them and other key stakeholders.
  - Supporting mitigation of risks and taking action to alleviate challenges and barriers to improvement.
- 7.3** Cheshire East Council is currently responsible for 518 cared for children. This is a decrease from 576 at the same time last year. 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.
- 7.4** Some of the decrease in numbers of cared for children relates to a reduction in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) becoming cared for. Although the number of small boats crossing the English Channel continues to rise, our population of cared for migrant young people has fallen significantly to the low 40s where we expect it to either stabilise or fall a little further. This is largely due to the closure of the four hotels that the Home Office had opened in the borough to house adult male asylum seekers; throughout the past 2 years. Cheshire East have received many age disputed referrals from these hotels and have accommodated a significant number as a result. Moving forwards, the only new young people

we should receive will either come via the National Transfer Scheme (at a rate of perhaps 4-6 per annum) and small numbers of spontaneous arrivals via the M6 corridor. Care Leaver UASC numbers are still in excess of 70 but these will decline as our young adults turn 21, gain their right to remain and move into independence.

- 7.5** We are continually 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. Since April 2024, 50 children have ceased to be cared for. 30 of these have turned 18 but positively 20 of these children have ceased to be cared for because they have been adopted, returned home, or become subject to Special Guardianship 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 necessary. This means that when children become subject to Court Proceedings, we are whenever appropriate 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.
- 7.6** Practice Standards have been developed for the cared for and care leavers service to ensure the expectations on practice are clear and to support consistently good practice. These include expectations on recording, visiting, transitions, and responsibilities when cases are jointly held. The practice standards will be available on the Centranet and included as part of staff inductions.
- 7.7** Specific mandatory training for the Care Leavers Service has been developed and rolled out through all service Away Days, to support practitioners to deliver consistently good practice. This will include planning, professional curiosity, adult safeguarding and culture/diversity.
- 7.8** Following a period of consultation, there is a change in the management structure of the care leavers service, removing the role of senior PAs, ensuring that all PAs receive direct oversight and supervision from a team manager (who are qualified social workers) to support good quality supervision and drive improved outcomes for care leavers.
- 7.9** The format of the Pathway Plans for care leavers has been revised collaboratively with young people to ensure it supports good practice. The new plan includes sections for multi-agency professionals' views, and contingency plans.

- 7.10** Since the inspection in February 2024, Care Leaver Hubs are now operational at the Youth Support Service building in Macclesfield on Mondays and Tuesdays and the Lifestyle Centre in Crewe on Wednesdays through Friday. We have deliberately adopted an initial policy of 'soft launches' as we accept that young people will take time to adapt to the new arrangements and feel comfortable in dropping in. However official launch events are scheduled for the first week of July and we have developed a programme of regular events and drop-in surgeries from partner organisations and our own teams. It is essential that free bus travel for Care Leavers (which was originally due for implementation on 1st April) is put in place, as per the new date of August 2024. Throughout the rest of the year, we will develop and expand our programmes and move to a 5-day operation at the main Hub in Crewe and at least a 3 day model in Macclesfield.
- 7.11** To tie in with the launch of our Hubs, Junction 16+, our Care Leaver App will be available to download from the App stores by the end of the first week of July.
- 7.12** One of the greatest areas of need for improvement is accommodation for our care leavers. The current arrangements were commissioned several years ago and do not reflect the growth in numbers or the complexity of need. This was also recognised as an area for improvement within the ILAC inspection which highlighted that a small number of young people were living in hotel accommodation. Hotel accommodation is not an acceptable option for our young people and should only ever be used in exceptional circumstances for very brief periods of time.
- 7.13** We have refreshed and relaunched the protocol for care leavers in emergency accommodation, with clear escalation requirements, to ensure all practitioners are clear on expected practice and there is senior manager oversight of young adults in emergency and unsuitable accommodation.
- 7.14** Work is underway with Strategic Housing, Adult Services and Children's Commissioning to develop sufficiency in this important area for care leavers. Project groups are focusing on developing an Emergency Bed, addition units with YMCA, 16-18 offer (including UASC) and the housing offer for 18+. Updates on this work will be fed into the Corporate Parenting Working Group and the Improvement and Impact Board. We have liaised with both Oxfordshire and Lincolnshire Local Authorities and would like to mirror their offer to our young people. In Oxfordshire young people have access to a range of options across 9 service levels (including emergency accommodation) with well over 200 placements offering accommodation until age 21 if necessary.

- 7.15** The offer of support to our care leavers aged 21 plus is being developed and refreshed. The inspection highlighted this as an area of concern. All young people aged 21 plus were contacted post inspection. Over half of the young people contacted indicated that they want a level of support. In the short-term additional staffing has been agreed to meet this need and ensure that appropriate support is provided. It is anticipated that the Care Leaver Hubs will provide ongoing support including access to partner agencies.
- 7.16** Work is ongoing to improve the number of young people who are in EET. All young adults who are NEET and able to work, will have a NEET plan to support them towards gaining EET. Plans will be reviewed every 12 weeks.
- 7.17** Flude House, the first Cheshire East Children's Home is now registered with Ofsted and operational. Work is underway to open 2 more homes within the coming months. This means that Cheshire East children can be provided with residential care within the borough and reduces the need to use external providers who are often very expensive.

## **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:	Corporate Parenting Score Card Q3
Background Papers:	None