
Cared For Children and Care Leavers Committee

Date of Meeting: 4 March 2025

Report Title: Cared For Children and Care Leaver's Q3 score card
2024/25
Executive Director of Children's Services

Report of:

Report Reference No:

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 3 of 2024/25 (1 October 2024 – 31 December 2024). The cared for children and care leavers committee is asked to note the performance for quarter 3 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 3 performance for children and families services for the relevant indicators for the reporting year of 2024-25

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 3.
- 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 3 of 2024-25 (1 October 2024 – 31 December 2024).

6.2 The following indicators have been highlighted for consideration

7 Briefing information

7.1 Cheshire East Council were responsible for 551 cared for children at the end of quarter 3. This is a decrease from 557 at the end of quarter 2. 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 68 per 10,000 is slightly below the national average of 70 per 10,000 and is above that of 60 for statistical neighbours.

7.2 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 who are discharged from care continues to increase, since April 24, 105 children have ceased to be cared for (in addition to the 86 who have turned 18). We have several applications currently before the court so we are hopeful that this positive progress will continue. We are demonstrating a commitment to not intervening in children's lives when this is not necessary.

7.4 The timeliness of cared for children's reviews needs some improvement, as performance has not improved from Q2 where it dipped to 72%. Overall, in 2023/24 the performance was at 94%. We know that most reviews were re-scheduled within a few days and were therefore only marginally out of timescale. However, this decline is not acceptable. There has been some sickness within the safeguarding service which has impacted upon timeliness. Some additional recruitment of Independent Reviewing Officers is underway to ensure that there is sufficient capacity within the service. However, we also know that some reviews were cancelled because social workers had not prepared the report in time for the review to take place. This is now an area of focus for weekly performance sessions. Positively, 92% 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 Q3 data shows that the number of children placed with in-house foster carers has remained stable at 116. Positively, the number of children placed with connected carers continues to be high and is 125 in Q3. This means that children are living with someone they have an existing relationship with. We are constantly looking at how we can 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 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.

Unfortunately, number of children living in residential care has increased to 45, from 40 in Q2. 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.

7.7 The number of adoptions continues to increase with 21 children already adopted since April 2024. In 2023/24 we had a total of 24 children adopted and we are confident that we will improve on this number in 2024/25. We have a further 14 children living in their adoption placements including two children who are placed with fostering to adopt carers. Of the 24 children legally adopted in 2023/24, 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. Q3 data shows that it took on average 624 days, compared to a national average of 376. We understand the delay involved for some of these children but have remained ambitious in terms of continuing to search for an adoptive family for them. Some of this delay relates to an older sibling group who have now been able to move to their adoptive placement and so the outcome is positive in terms of the fact that they will not remain cared for throughout their childhood. Locally and nationally the timescales for placing children within their adoptive families is monitored to avoid unnecessary delay for children. 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.

7.8 A number of our most vulnerable Care Leaver's continue to be supported under Staying Close as a result of funding from the DFE. 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. These bespoke packages of support help young people to develop their confidence and skills for independent living, and for their emotional health and wellbeing. The current funding for Staying Close ceases at the end of March 2025. However, the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill introduces a new provision in the Children Act 1989 to require each local authority to consider whether each former relevant child (up to age 25) requires "staying close support" and where their welfare requires it, to offer that support. We await details of further funding to support this area of work, but we are continuing to offer support to those young people who need this.

Placement stability for cared for children has improved but further work is required to ensure that social workers are prioritising long term matching of children. Q3 data shows 67% of cared for children in care for at least 2.5yrs at the end of the period have been living in their current placement for at least 2 years. We have developed a permanence tracker which is assisting in monitoring and driving forward children's plans and ensures that children exit care if possible.

Positively, the number of children with 3 or more placements within a 12-month period has decreased in Q3 to 61 (75 children in Q2) Sometimes, moves for children can be positive, such a move to an adoptive placement. However, work continues to ensure that we understand the narrative for each of these children.

7.9 The NEET data in Q3 for our 19 to 21-year-old young people shows that 34% of this cohort are not engaged in education, employment, or training. This is an improvement from 45% in Q2. The national average for 2023/24 was 38% with statistical neighbours being 37%. We continue to look closely at this data and the circumstances for these young adults which include pregnancy, parenting, or illness, but are not exclusive to this. Within the Staying Close project there are dedicated EET workers and an apprenticeship coordinator, which is positively assisting in terms of supporting our care leavers to access education and employment.

The number of young people who are accessing higher education has increased from, 25 in Q2 to 29 in Q3. Additionally, the number of care experienced adults who are in apprenticeships is also steadily increasing and in Q3 this was 13 (9 in Q2).

7.10 The number of children who had their annual health assessments within timescales within Q3 was 89%. Positively this is an increase from 85% in Q2. Some of the delay relates to children who are placed out of area and where we are reliant on other health services to undertake these assessments.

7.11 Positively 100% of Care Leavers had Health Passports by the time they left care. Progress in this area is now being sustained.

7.12 Q3 data shows that 70% of cared for children saw a dentist within the last 12 months. Nationally, the average is 70% and our statistical neighbour average is 65%. This continues to be an area of focus, and we are looking at ways to ensure that this data is captured. This includes the IRO's recording the dates of dental checks within Cared For Reviews.

7.13 Q3 data shows that 97% of our care leavers (aged 19 to 21) are in appropriate accommodation. This is an improvement from the previous quarter and reflects a period. 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.

7.14 The number of young people living in emergency accommodation varies on a day-to-day basis. Members will be aware that at the time of the Ofsted inspection there were 3 young people living in hotels. Through intensive work with housing colleagues, we have reduced this to 1 young person. Accommodation continues to be our greatest challenge. Young people who end up in hotels are usually our most vulnerable and complex young people and have exhausted all other options. They

often present with issues such as criminality and substance misuse. We know that when a young person has accommodation stability, it is much easier to support them with their complex needs. Work is ongoing in respect of widening our offer of accommodation options to young people aged 16 to 25. This work is part of the Improvement Plan and updates are provided to the Improvement and Impact Board monthly and to each Children and Families Committee. Positively there has been an increase in provision with some of our commissioned providers and this has reduced the number of young people in emergency accommodation.

7.15 75% of care leavers have up-to-date pathway plans, this is a decline from Q2 when it was at 82%. At the time of writing this report, 95% of young people aged 18 to 21 have an up-to-date Pathway Plan. There needs to be a focus on ensuring that our 16- and 17-year-olds have an up-to-date Pathway Plan. This will be a focus of the performance challenge sessions going forwards.

7.16 Plans are being developed now to enable the Care Leaving service to have greater accessibility to our young people. This includes:

- Setting up a dedicated phone line that will be available to care leavers in the evenings and weekend.
- Increasing the community presence of the care leaver service by utilising the Youth Hub in Macclesfield and developing an equivalent resource in Crewe.

The time frame for roll out of the above is being prepared at time of writing.

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.

12 Policy

12.1 There are no direct policy implications.

13 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.

14 Human Resources

14.1 There are no direct human resources implications.

15 Risk Management

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

16 Rural Communities

16.1 There are no direct implications for rural communities.

17 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.

18 Public Health

18.1 There are no direct implications for public health.

19 Climate Change

19.1 This report does not impact on climate change.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Annemarie Parker
Appendices:	Corporate Parenting Score Card Q3
Background Papers:	None