



Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report

2017-18

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Foreword



It has been a great pleasure working with members and officer colleagues in this second year of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

The Committee is an advisory committee to the Cabinet; its purpose 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 to hold

partners to account for the discharge of their responsibilities.

We have a continued improvement strategy as we scrutinise and evaluate the ways in which we look after those in our care. Throughout this work however, we are constantly mindful of the voice of the child/young person so that we can build into our plans ways in which they feel we can best help them.

The Committee receives regular updates on National Issues which may affect the way in which we consider our improvement journey. Throughout the year we have been heartened by the dedication and commitment of the officers involved, in constantly achieving improved outcomes for those for whom we care.

The role of the Corporate Parenting Committee is to oversee the corporate parenting function of Cheshire East Council and its partners. It works to ensure that the Executive Director for People (the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire East) and Cabinet Member for Children and Families meet their statutory responsibility towards all children from within the Borough, particularly those from vulnerable groups. The work undertaken is also scrutinised in part by the Cheshire East Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Cheshire East Health and Wellbeing Board.

Gill Merry

Chair of Cheshire East Corporate Parenting Committee

The Corporate Parenting Committee

The committee is comprised of twelve cross party members with Officers in attendance, as required, to cover agenda items and assisted by Democratic Service Officers. It has met on seven occasions over 2017-18:

18th April 2017

2nd May 2017

4th July 2017

19th September 2017

14th November 2017

23rd January 2018

20th March 2018

Attendance at meetings has been excellent with many elected members holding roles in other areas of the Children and Families Directorate, including Children and Families Scrutiny, Fostering Panel, Adoption Panel and as school governors in a variety of schools across the borough.

Cheshire East Profile¹

The following is key data relating to cared for children and care leavers:

- At the end of March 2018 there were 477 children and young people being **cared for** by the local authority. This is an **increase of 55 (13%)** from March 2017.
- This equates to 63 children for every 10,000 in the general population of Cheshire East, and is now **higher than the latest available (2016-17 statutory return) England average of 62** but lower than the North West average of 86. This is also higher than the latest available (2016-17 statutory return) statistical neighbour group average of 58. Based on this figure we are at the higher end of our statistical neighbour group in terms of the rate of cared for children.
- **146 individuals left care in 2017-18**, compared to 145 in 2015-16.
- Cheshire East supported **18 unaccompanied asylum seekers children** (UASC) with placements in 2017-18 which is a rise of 64% compared to last year. It is recognised that many of these young people have

¹ Note that some figures may not correspond with published national data due to reporting arrangements, eg, rounding up and down.

experienced significant adverse life events both within their countries of origin, and during their journeys to the UK. The resulting physical, emotional and mental health needs of this group of young people can be particularly complex and require specialist support services.

- The gender profile of children and young people in care is split **53% male and 47% female**, which is a slightly larger ratio of males compared to last year at 51% and 49% respectively. 44% of the children and young people in care are between the ages of 10 and 15. There are more males than females aged 16+ in care, whereas there are slightly more females aged 4 and under.
- The **average age** of children and young people **entering care** this year has **dropped slightly to 7** compared to age 8 for the previous 3 years.
- A total of 200 **children and young people have entered care** in 2017-18, which is up from 181 in 2016-17.
- As at the end of March 2018, **83% of all children and young people in care were living in a family situation.**

- As at 31st March 2018 there were **45 young people supported in either residential homes or schools.**
- As at 31st March 2018 the ethnic profile of cared for children is **predominantly white British (88%)**, with the biggest other ethnicities of white other and other mixed background. This is an almost identical profile to last year. There has been a small **increase in White European** children entering care over the past two years. In 2017-18 there were 6 (5 Slovakian, 1 polish) in 2016-17 we had 8 (6 Polish, 1 Czech, 1 Lithuanian).
- **15 children and young people were adopted** over 2017-18, which is a 42% drop from the 26 children and young people adopted in 2016-17. There are however a further 41 individuals currently in care where the plan is for adoption.

Focus Areas

Each Committee includes a focus area, where Members look in detail at an area of service that impacts on the outcomes for children and young people in care. The focus areas over the year have been:

- Provision and outcomes for care leavers
- Staffing and infrastructure, including recruitment and retention
- Participation and Engagement

- Health and Wellbeing
- Education, employment and training
- Placement sufficiency including fostering, adoption, residential care, out of borough placements

Services considered by the Committee

In continuing our improvement journey during 2017/8, measured against desired outcomes, we have considered:

- Family Court Proceedings
- Children's Social Care recruitment and retention
- Health of Cared for Children and Young People
- Service Performance Reports
- National Developments
- Cared for Children's participation
- Independent Reviewing Officer's report
- Virtual School's Annual Report
- Fostering Panel's Annual Report
- Adoption Panel's Annual Report
- Local Safeguarding Board's Annual Report
- Care Leaver's Annual Report

Family Court Proceedings

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Children's Social Care reporting on the background and complexity, giving members an insight into the demands on

social workers working from working in the Family Courts based in Liverpool, Crewe and Chester.

Children's Social Care Recruitment and Retention

In listening to the voice of the young people, Members seek to be assured that the measures taken in recruitment and retention of social workers continue to be effective, since the constant changes to social workers proves to be both disruptive and unsettling for young people seeking for stability in their lives.

Health of Cared for Children and Young People

Some of the children and young people who come into our care have had the minimum of health care, not having visited GP's for age checks, not visiting a dentist at all, and with very little consideration given to basic dietary needs, leading to more healthy lives.

It was noted that it was important to recognise both the statutory responsibilities for this vulnerable group of children and young people and the role of agencies working together as corporate parents, in having "high aspirations" for their future. There was some concern that dates for statutory health and other checks were falling behind the time periods set. The

committee looked for reassurance from Children's Services and our health partners that this matter was a high priority and performance has improved over the year from 64% on quarter 4 of 2016-17 to 86% in quarter 4 of 2017-18 for the percentage of initial health assessments requested within 48 hours of coming into care. The percentage of initial health assessments completed by paediatricians within 20 working days has increased from 58% to 78% over the same period. This remains an area of focus.

Service Performance

The comprehensive performance scorecard is considered on a quarterly basis against the five areas of the current Corporate Parenting Strategy.

Members scrutinise and challenge officers around performance to ensure that children and young people in our care get the support that they need, when they need it. The scorecard provides trend and benchmarking data, along with targets and RAG ratings to ensure that the trends in performance are in the right direction. Where necessary, it is expected that actions are put in place to address underperformance and progress is reported to future committees.

National Developments

Each Committee is presented with an Update Report that sets out any national developments that may impact on services

for cared for children and care leavers. The Committee consider any action that may need to be taken in the light of these developments.

We seek to be fully informed on all National Issues relating to our role, benchmarking ourselves against national ratings and any other similar authorities, being very conscious that implementation of any new legislation can take time to embed across service areas.

A new National Adviser to support young people as they leave the care system has been appointed as part of the government's drive to improve the lives of vulnerable children. Mark Riddell, MBE, has been appointed as the National Implementation Adviser for care leavers. He visited Cheshire East in January 2018 and gave an overview of his findings. These will be incorporated into the new Corporate Parenting Strategy that will be launched in 2018-19.

Homelessness Reduction Act

The Act will come into force on 1st April 2018 and will place new duties on Local Authorities and other public bodies to identify, support and refer households at risk of homelessness.

Local Developments

Updates on local developments have included:

- Work on the Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Proposed framework for engagement with the Corporate Parenting Committee
- Participation with children and young people
- Appointment of new Looked After Children Designated Nurse
- Visit from the National Implementation adviser for care leavers
- Updates on Ignition and Signs of Safety
- Support for teams from the Lead Practitioner.

A detailed discussion took place on work to review the Corporate Parenting Strategy and in particular the role of, and relationship with, elected members. Amongst a number of suggestions Members were invited to submit pen pictures of themselves so that cared for children and care leavers could get to know more about them as corporate parents, and to undertake frontline visits to social work teams and where appropriate to meet children and to share resources and knowledge as part of a continuing process of development. These will take place in 2018-19.

Cared for Children's participation

During the course of the year we have been resolute in our desire to hear the voice of the children and young people in our care. Young people were keen to establish their own 'shadow committee' and we ensure that we have attendance at their committee to listen to what is important to them.

It was reported that the Head of Service and the Portfolio Holder were currently attending meetings of 'My Voice', the Children in Care Council, and their representatives would be invited to come to a meeting of the Committee in the near future with a view to challenging the Committee on what they wanted.

We routinely invite representative from My Voice to the Corporate Parenting Committee, which we hold at a time when they are able to attend. We are particularly keen to understand how we can effectively ensure that we listen to their concerns and aspirations. Each meeting includes an input from young people, whereby they can feed in their views even if they do not wish to attend.

Consideration has been given to overall service priorities around participation for the current year, and details of the range of ways in which children and young people are engaged in decisions which affect them.

Members were particularly interested in work associated with early pregnancies, preparations to assist in the transition to

independent living, the arrangements to involve children in care outside the area and how to keep track of children who no longer wished to engage with the services provided once they are over 18 years of age.

We have been pleased to note the effectiveness of the mentor service together with the job coach, which is proving a great success with those making the transition from care.

Annual Reports

Independent Reviewing Officer: members considered the Independent Reviewing Officer's 2016/17 Annual Report and the IRO's contribution to quality assuring and improving services for cared for children and care leavers.

Virtual School's Annual Report: the Service Manager: Virtual School, gave a presentation to the Committee on the Virtual School Head teacher's 2017 Annual Report and drew attention to:

- Context and Operation
- Outcomes 2017
- Strengths of the Virtual School
- Challenges for the Virtual School
- Planned Solutions
- Future developments

In considering the report, Members of the Committee made a number of comments on the continued support for cared for children, including access to Pupil Premium.

Fostering Panel's Annual Report: this is not a statutory requirement, however, it has been customary for its production on an annual basis, outlining the work of the Panel and the challenges it faces as it seeks to approve and review foster carers.

Adoption Panel's Annual Report: this was the final report of the Cheshire East Adoption Panel, since from 1st July 2017 the panel became part of the Regional Adoption Agency, Adoption Counts. The report provided a quality assurance feedback on the standards and approach across the service as to the suitability of prospective adopters and proposed placements.

Local Safeguarding Children Board's Annual Report: The report helps us to better understand how organisations and people work together and outlines how the Board and partners can objectively and critically learn from what works well and act to improve what may not work as well as intended.

Care Leaver's Annual Report: The Committee considered the Care Leavers Annual Report 2017-18. The report provided details of the work undertaken to help care leavers to be better prepared and supported to live independently; have improved access to education employment and training; better

access to health support; access to housing when leaving care and achieve financial stability. New Statutory guidance has been published stating that all local authorities needed to implement a 21-25 offer to care leavers. The guidance does not specify how soon after commencement of the duty the local offer should be published. However, the aim is to publish Cheshire East's local offer in the autumn.

Corporate Parenting Strategy Progress

The existing Corporate Parenting Strategy has the following five priorities, ie, the areas that children and young people told us mattered most to them:

1. Involve me
2. Provide me with a good safe home
3. Keep me healthy
4. Help me achieve
5. Support me to move into adult life

Progress against the corporate parenting strategy has been reported to the committee on an ongoing basis. A summary of progress is attached at Appendix 1.

Priorities for 2018/19

Our key priority for 2018-19 is to develop and implement the new Corporate Parenting Strategy, ensuring the 5 areas are

prioritised and linked in with other council services and wider partner agencies, ie:

- Being a good corporate parent
- Achieving permanency and staying safe
- Improving health and wellbeing
- Ensuring good education, employment and training
- Preparing for Adulthood

We aim to ensure that the participation of children and young people will be central to all that we do.

Appendix 1

Corporate Parenting Strategy Progress 2017-18

Involve Me

- Children and young people are at the heart of decision making in relation to all aspects of their lives and are supported to make their views and wishes heard.
- There are a range of opportunities for children and young people to influence and shape service planning and delivery.
- All staff have the knowledge and skills to engage with children and young people and encourage, promote and support their active participation.

Participation with Children and Young People

In August 2017, responsibility for the delivery of participation with children and young people was brought 'in house' from the Children's Society to Cheshire East Youth Service. One part time worker transferred across to the Council and another Lead Worker post was subsequently filled. These roles coordinate most of the participation activity with children in care and care leavers.

In 2017-18 young people on the Children in Care Council decided to change its name to 'My Voice'. This group meets weekly in term time in Sandbach. The current focus is to increase awareness and attendance at the meetings through encouraging Social Workers and others to promote participation with their young people.

The Participation Team have been making links and engaging with Crewe YMCA, Pure Insight, Voice for Children, the Cared for and Care Leaver Team and Watermill House (P3) to develop a Care Leaver Council/Care Leaver Voice group. The team will be working with these groups to find out what is going well, what could be developed and ideas to make things better around the following priority areas:

- Better prepared and supported to live independently
- Improved access to education, employment and training
- Experiencing stability
- Feeling safe and secure
- Improved access to health and support and achieving financial stability.

To date consultations have taken place with young people around improved access to education, employment and training opportunities. Young people were positive about their relationships with some Personal Advisors and Senior Young Person's Advisors (PAs), however they feel that there is not enough feedback/support from Social Workers and potential employers when doing taster days. Also when living in the YMCA there is less incentive to get into employment because this impacts on rent benefits, making it difficult to achieve sustainability. Young people would like to see employability

hubs/training and longer drop in sessions with Senior Young Person's Advisors.

The service is responding to the issues raised by care leavers, including exploring ways in which the relationships between PAs and care leavers can be strengthened. In terms of incentives to get into employment, the service offers 'top-up' funding to ensure that the young person is no worse off than if they were on benefits. A meeting has been arranged with the individual who raised the issue to ensure that they are supported to access this fund. One of the immediate actions taken in response to care leaver feedback is that when visiting care leavers, PAs no longer take paper and record during the meeting as care leavers did not like this approach. The bigger challenges in relation to employment, housing and health are being tackled within our new corporate parenting strategy (participation with children and young people runs as a theme throughout the new strategy). The new facebook account (detailed below) is a further example of how the team are working and thinking differently about different ways to engage children and young people.

Young people have been a part of the interview panel for the new Virtual School Head. One of the Care Leaver young people is also getting involved with the Foster Care Panel as well. A great example of us as Corporate Parents helping our young people to achieve and come into the family business. Care Leavers are getting involved with the commissioning

process too as they plan to be involved in the Substance Misuse Service Tender to ensure they are involved in decision making processes for services that affect their lives.

Star Awards and November Children's Rights Month (NCRM).

NCRM is where everyone working with children and young people in Cheshire East can celebrate and raise awareness of children's rights in a variety of different ways. One of the main celebrations for cared for children and care leavers in November is the 'Star Awards'. This celebration event and awards ceremony for cared for children and young people and care leavers in Cheshire East, took place on Sunday 19 November 2017 in Crewe and every young person received an invite in the post to attend. The event in 2017-18 was co-produced with young people and were based on nominations from a range of professionals. During NCRM, a number of young people were also involved in takeover day – this included 'taking over' the roles of the Executive Director for People (DCS role) and the Director of Children's Social Care roles for the day.

New Facebook Group

A new Cheshire East Care Leavers Facebook account went live on the 1st March 2018. This is primarily for announcements, new events coming up and anything significant that the service wishes to relay to Cheshire East Care Leavers. It is hoped that this can reach a greater audience to raise awareness around apprenticeship offers,

Job fairs and anything else of significance. This is managed by the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Service on a daily basis and is for posting information out to care leavers in a format that is accessible to them.

Game Changer Conference

Young people from Cheshire East took place in the pre-event consultation for the Game Changer conference in Blackpool - the Game Changer event is a North West regional event for children in care and care leavers and is the first of its kind. Some of the young people were also involved earlier in the year in the planning of the event, that took place in Blackpool on Saturday 4th November.

The Independent Visitor Service

The Independent Visitor Service in Cheshire East is delivered by The Children's Society (TCS). TCS adhere to the new National Independent Visitor Standards, which have been developed alongside other voluntary organisations. There are 14 Standards in all and, more recently, these 14 standards have been made more child and young person friendly by children and young people involved in an Independent Visitor Service. This is expected to enable more children and young people to understand their right to an Independent Visitor.

Xmas dinner

Staff from children's services raised around £100 to provide a celebratory Christmas dinner for young people in care/care leavers.

Participation Network

The participation network has continued to support all staff working in children's services to improve participation with children and young people. The Participation Network Forum is changing its name to the 'Investing in Children and Young People Partnership' as in the collective partnership group we will be applying for the Investing in Children's Award in 2018-19. The partnership will be getting involved with the Children and Young People's Summer Conference, Care Leaver events and the Star Awards later this year e.g. facilitating sessions, ensuring that their young people are involved with planning the event.

Signs of Safety

Cheshire East launched its implementation of the 'Signs of Safety' approach as our way of working with children, young people and families in 2017. 'Signs of Safety' is widely recognised internationally as the leading approach to casework. The model enables children and young people to talk about things that go well in their family as well as things that worry them.

Provide me with a good, safe home

- Improve the availability, quality and stability of local placements
- Ensure that children and young people are fully engaged in decisions relating to their placement choice
- Ensure that only those children who have no alternative placement will reside in care

Increased Demand

The rise in demand for children's social care services, in particular in the number of individuals being cared for by the local authority over recent years has put increasing demand on the service. This is in line with national and regional trends. As at March 2014, Cheshire East supported 333 individuals. As at March 2017, this had risen to 428 individuals – a rise of 95 (29%). At the end of March 2018 there were 477 children and young people being cared for by the local authority, an increase of 55 (13%) from March 2017.

In 2017-18 the Council committed a growth bid to cover the increase in placement costs. In order to mitigate as far as possible the impact of rising numbers and costs, the following action was taken, ie, we:

- Worked hard to increase the numbers of children leaving care through adoption (whilst only 15 were adopted over 2017-18, there were a further 41 individuals in care where the plan is for adoption).

- Worked as part of a shared fostering service with Cheshire West & Chester, Warrington and Halton Councils to improve the recruitment of internal foster carers
- Invested in project Macclesfield and Crewe to prevent the escalation of need
- Continued to improve social work practice (Signs of safety)
- Worked with the LSCB to improve the early help offer.

Foster Care

Work around developing sub-regional collaborative arrangements for fostering services took place in 2017-18. On 9th May 2017, Cabinet considered a report, which sought approval to progress the development of a shared fostering service for Cheshire East alongside Warrington, Halton and Cheshire West and Chester. The report also sought approval to explore the feasibility of a single local authority delivering the functions of the fostering service on behalf of the partnership.

In 2017-18 we have been actively driving forward the recruitment campaign for more foster carers, which in due course should allow for better matching of the children we place. We are specifically targeting the smaller ethnic communities and the LGBT community. Cheshire East maximised the fostering recruitment campaign during Foster Carer Fortnight. This included advertising digitally and PR

activity via the 'You Can Foster' campaign. We also looked at more advertising on Facebook, our internal communication channels and a partnership newsletter.

Work is underway in terms of providing more information via the Cheshire East Fostering Website. The aim is to provide up to date contact information, links to helpful resources and easier access to policies and procedures. Training will be offered to foster carers who are not confident using computers.

We are working to improve the support carers receive from their supervising social workers. We have over the last few months recruited several permanent members of staff to bring stability and consistency to the service.

The foster carer newsletter is now regularly being distributed on a quarterly basis and the foster carer forums have recommenced to keep foster carers up to date and give them the opportunity to air their views. The support groups also continue on a regular basis.

Residential care

Cheshire East aims to provide a more flexible range of children homes and to increase the capacity to care for more of our children within the borough, so redesigned our residential homes. A contract was awarded to BetterCare Keys, a national children home provider, to run from 1 April

2017. However, the provider has had significant challenges in mobilising the service due to recruitment issues and the service will be re-commissioned in 2018-19.

Adoption

2017-18 saw the launch of our Regional Adoption Agency, called Adoption Counts. This is a partnership with Stockport, Trafford, Salford and Manchester Councils, which was one of the first new adoption agencies to open for business in July 2017. The aim of 'Adoption Counts' is to maximise the economies of scale and expertise so that more children are matched with adopters much sooner and locally within the geographical boundary of the agency. There is a particular focus on placing more children for adoption who; have complex needs, are part of a sibling group, and are from black and ethnic minority backgrounds. Adopters and children are also benefitting from a regional approach to post adoption support.

Cheshire East celebrated National Adoption Week in October 2017. This included a range of activities including a media campaign (billboards, posters, digital screens and digital media adverts). There were also press adverts during adoption week in a range of newspapers, including the Macclesfield Express. Adoption was also promoted through social media, including Facebook and Twitter using the hashtags #nationaladoptionweek and #supportadoption. Cheshire East received 27 enquiries during this week (the

highest weekly number to date). This included an open evening on 18th October, which 14 households attended. There were also 9,968 visits to our website during the week, which peaked at 1,881 on 21st October.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance for the Children's Homes that Cheshire East commission or operate directly is important to ensure the best services for our cared for children. Regulation 44 visits and subsequent reports are an important part of the quality assurance framework surrounding Children's Homes and the greater the level of independence, the better. Each Children's Home is required to appoint an independent person to undertake Regulation 44 visits and to date Cheshire East Council have added support and challenge to the process via local Councillors and Voice for Children attending visits.

Ignition

The Ignition Panel has continued to ensure that children and young people are fully engaged in decisions relating to their future accommodation needs. See further detail below under 'Support me to move to adult life'.

Keep me healthy

- Ensure that all Cheshire East cared for children have an initial health assessment within 20 working days of entering care, and statutory review assessment and a robust health care plan agreed (6 monthly for under- fives, annually thereafter).
- Improve the emotional health and wellbeing of cared for children, young people and care leavers
- Promote healthy lifestyles amongst all cared for children.
- Ensure effective health transition planning

Initial Health Assessments

There has been a continued focus on improving the timeliness of initial health assessments and reviews over 2017-18. As at quarter 4, there were 86% of initial health assessments requested within 48 hours of coming into care, and 78% of initial health assessments completed by paediatricians within the statutory requirement of 20 working days. This compares to 64% and 58%, respectively, as at the end of 2016-17. Close monitoring of this performance indicator is essential to ensure continued improvement and it remains a standing item for discussion at the Health Interface Group Meetings held regularly between Health and Local Authority partners.

There is further work to do with the aspiration of ensuring that all children entering care are supported to have their health care needs identified and met in a timely way and this will

continue to be a priority in the 2018-19 Corporate Parenting Strategy.

Review Health Assessments (RHAs)

For children who are under 5 years of age it is a statutory requirement that a RHA should be completed twice in a 12 month period. For children and young people 5 years and above, an RHA is required once a year. Review health assessments are completed for all Cheshire East cared for children and also for children placed in the Cheshire East area by other Local Authorities. Reporting of performance with regards to timeliness of assessments continues to be monitored on a quarterly basis and discussed at the Health Interface Group meetings. A collaborative approach has resulted in a visible improvement in the timeliness of RHAs. True partnership working is yielding positive results and this will continue throughout 2018-19.

At the end of 2017-18, 79% of children who had been in care for more than 12 months had an up to date RHA. For those that were not completed within timescale, analysis of the contributing factors that led to the breach is carried out to identify the areas where further work is required.

Care Leaver's Health Passports

During 2017-18 there has been extensive work completed by the Clinical Nurse Specialist 16+ in the Cared for Children's Team to develop an effective system for ensuring that young people are leaving care at the age of 18 years with a

meaningful, relevant summary of their health history. Engagement has been successful in a large proportion of cases and has involved an innovative and constantly evolving approach to access even the most hard to reach young people. The current format of the Health Passport has been developed with the involvement of young people. Therefore there is confidence that this document is appropriate and what they want.

32 out of 52 health passports were completed during 2017-18. As this was a new process, issues regarding gaining consent from the young people were identified as causing some delay/difficulty in completing the Health Passports. For 2018-19 the 16+ Nurse Specialist has begun to request consent when completing review health assessments from 16 years of age thus increasing the opportunities to obtain the required consent in time for the health passport to be completed prior to the young person reaching 18.

Training and Supervision of Health Professionals

'Looked after children: Knowledge, skills and competences of healthcare staff' (March 2015) is an intercollegiate role framework written by the 'Royal College of General Practitioners', 'Royal College of Nursing' and 'Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health' to provide a framework of competencies required for Health Professionals who work with cared for children. Health Professionals responsible for completing Review Health Assessments are required to demonstrate competence to Level 3 of this framework. At the

end of 2017-18, 91% of all Health Professionals had attended Level 3 training during that year. Also, as part of the Quality Assurance process, training needs may be identified on an ad hoc basis and feedback to practitioners is provided by the Specialist Nurses for Cared for Children when required to ensure health assessments are of a consistently high quality that remain child focussed.

All Health Practitioners who are named professionals for cared for children received supervision from the Cared for Children Specialist Nursing Team on a 3 monthly basis. This is an opportunity to review practice and monitor outcomes of health interventions. During training and supervision cycles, identification of cared for children with SEND is essential to ensure that both the Review Health Assessment and the Education and Health Care Plans are interlinked and used to inform each other.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers

During 2017-18 the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) has increased within the Cheshire East area. It is recognised that many of these young people have experienced significant adverse life events both within their countries of origin, and during their journeys to the UK. The resulting physical, emotional and mental health needs of this group of young people can be particularly complex and specialist support services may be required. In recognition of the unique health and wellbeing needs of this group of young people, a group has been set up with membership from

partner agencies, including Health. The purpose of this group is to develop effective pathways to ensure that health needs are identified promptly, and that referrals to appropriate support services are being made. NHS England has also recognised that this is a concerning issue nationwide and is providing guidance across Regional Networks to enable services to work effectively.

Looked After Children (LAC) Designated Nurse

A new Looked After Children (LAC) Designated Nurse for Cheshire East came into post in December 2017. This role is pivotal to strategic planning, quality assurance and performance monitoring and is essential in advising on the provision of services for vulnerable cared for children and care leavers within the health economy. Key elements of this essential role are supporting the health needs of this group of young people and ensuring that their needs are understood across the health and social care economy.

Family Nurse Partnership

The Family Nurse Partnership helps local young parents to increase their confidence and gives them the guidance and support they need to give their baby the best start in life. Young parents are paired with a specially trained family nurse who visits them regularly, from the early stages of pregnancy until their child is two. The offer was extended in 2017-18 to first time pregnant vulnerable young people in care/care leavers up to the age of 24 (it was previously age 19).

Emotional health and wellbeing

The emotional health and well-being of our cared for children is assessed via the completion of a strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ). The data highlights the need for a greater response from children social care and health. Developments to improve this service area are being discussed as part of the health and social care interface meeting and is being proactively picked up by our looked after children's nurse. This is a key priority of the new corporate parenting strategy.

Help me to achieve

- Ensure that schools are challenged and supported to help all children progress and achieve to their full potential
- Improve the way that children move between schools so that this is timely, smooth and well supported
- Increase the number of children with excellent attendance and reduce the number of days lost through exclusions
- Increase the number of young people who sustain transition from school to training and employment

Education Results

Improving outcomes for cared for children remains a priority for all staff but most especially for the Virtual School. All children have been allocated a named Advisor and additional support and tuition has been made available. Although small numbers, there has been an improvement in the number of

children who reach the expectations at the end of reception this year. This is now at 50%, which is 10% above the 2016 level and the highest result for Cheshire East.

Due to the number of children leaving care there were only four children who completed the Year 2 tests after 1 year in care. Of these, two were not entered for the tests, one reached the expected levels in maths and English and one did not.

2017-18 is the second year of the new curriculum and assessment and so comparisons can only be made with 2016. Although there was an increase in the percentage gaining the expected standard in three of the four areas, (reading, writing, grammar/punctuation/spelling and maths) the number reaching this in reading, writing and maths has fallen, which is disappointing for the pupils and their teachers as well as for those in the Virtual School who have been supporting them. Despite this headline, progress at individual pupil level was above national rates and that for all Cheshire East children in 9 out of 11 areas when compared with children of similar SEN levels. Strategies are already in place to improve outcomes in 2018-19, which include replacing agency tutors with an in-house teacher who will focus specifically on Year 6. These include the purchase of tablets with pre-loaded Key Stage 2 (KS2) learning and revision materials which allow usage and progress to be tracked and additional sessions for carers on

how to raise aspirations and support children to prepare for and complete the tests.

Under the new scoring and reporting system for GCSEs for cared for children, 19% of children have gained Level 2 in maths and English. This is an increase of 7% from 2016 and is above the reported national figure for 2017, which was 17%. Additional tuition and support has been put in place to support pupils taking exams in 2018 and full time education places and independent special schools have been purchased for pupils who were not able to maintain a place in mainstream schools so that they can complete their education and gain qualifications.

The Virtual School has provided updates and training for schools so that they fully understand and implement their duties, which will include supporting previously cared for children from Sept 2018. Virtual School staff have worked with schools and challenged when children have experienced difficulties or were not making progress. Training has been well received with further requests for bespoke training being made and accommodated wherever possible. Additional front line staff have been employed to mentor or provide additional tuition for pupils and this has had a significant impact on attendance and achievement for several dis-engaged pupils.

Ten primary schools have taken part in an attachment research project which has had dramatic positive impact in

pupils feeling safe and secure and ready to learn. A training video is being made to share the learning from the project and we have been asked to present the findings at a national conference in November.

A new ePEP is being developed on Liquid Logic which will improve the ease of completion, security and efficiency of the PEP (Personal Education Plan) process. A pilot has been in place since Sept 2017 with about forty schools now using the system and roll out to all planned by Aug 2019.

Forty-nine children moved schools within the school year 2016-17. Mainstream transfers were usually swift and well managed although admission to some secondary schools, particularly out of Cheshire East has been delayed with schools pointing out barriers and difficulties before agreeing a start date. The Virtual School has adopted a new policy to fund a comprehensive integration plan, which involves the school spending time getting to know the child when they start to try and avoid later issues. So far this is proving very successful. Additional front line staff, mentor and tutor have been employed within the Virtual School and have been deployed when children are between schools or not engaging with their named school. This has proved successful in maintaining a routine for the child and helping them to make progress while not in regular lessons.

Transfers of children with SEN are more complex and are led by the SEN team who have to identify an appropriate school and then consult with them, which has a statutory time period. To try and reduce the time out of education, the Virtual School has worked with the SEN Team and implemented several new processes which include:

- Cheshire East to retain and oversee EHCPs for all children in residential care.
- Tutor to be provided while a child with an EHCP is awaiting a school place.
- Identification of names SEN officer for out of LA cared for children.
- Clear process for other LA's when finding places for Cheshire East children.

Attendance at school is closely monitored. Primary attendance was above the national level in 2016/17 at 96% and has increased to 97% in April 2018. Attendance at secondary school fell slightly to 93% in 2017 but has risen to 95% in 2018. Checks are made monthly and concerns are raised with schools, carers and social workers. A new joint working group called RAIC (Raising Achievement in Care) has been established and the focus of the first meeting was improving attendance. As a result, the expectations of carers to ensure good attendance will be made clear and strategies of how to realise this will be shared.

Reducing exclusions remains a priority and in 2017 there was a decrease in the overall number of sessions lost and the number of children with one or more fixed term exclusion. These trends have continued into 2018, despite an increase in in the cared for population. Reasons for this are complex but include:

- Investigation of all exclusions.
- Intervention and additional PEP for cases of repeat exclusions.
- Supporting schools to find additional/alternative support to avoid exclusions.

There has been a significant reduction in the percentage of 16+ who are NEET (not in education, employment or training) For 16-18 year old cared leavers this has fallen from 32% in May 2017 to 12% in May 2018. This is due to the actions which have been jointly planned and delivered by all LA teams working with this group of young people and co-ordinated by the SPEED (Sixteen Plus Education and Employment Destinations) group which include:

- Post-16 tutor employed to work with pupils not engaged
- Cheshire East setting up in house engagement programmes
- Commissioned support programme, Cygnet, to provide supported work experience

- NEET panel set up to consider 'stuck' cases and what collaborative support can be given
- Closer working with local employers groups so that they are aware of the needs of vulnerable young people and know how to help them give of their best.

Two Cheshire East care leavers were recently commended at an awards ceremony at South and West Cheshire College. Despite setbacks in their education, and through the support of our Virtual School, both of these young people have exceeded in their field. One of these young people won Health and Social Care student of the year for her hard work and determination and is now moving onto University to study mental health nursing. The other young person won the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) student of the year, having arrived in Cheshire East in December 2016 as an unaccompanied asylum seeker through the dispersal programme.

Support me to move to adult life

- Increase the number of young people aged 18-21 who are education, employment or training
- Prepare young people for independent living, to ensure young people have suitable accommodation and are able to live independently with limited support, and experience greater stability
- Young people have the skills and knowledge they need and can protect themselves from risk

National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers

In January 2018 Cheshire East invited Mark Riddell, the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers, to feedback on our arrangements to support care leavers. Feedback was provided by Mark on day two of the visit and identified that the operational model provided by the care leavers team was good and that the personal advisors were committed to improving outcomes for care leavers. However, he found that the 'corporate test' had not been met in Cheshire East. Mark Riddell recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee reconsider the ways in which it is able to directly influence the services that are delivered to care leavers and that corporate parenting needs to become embedded throughout the organisation. Officers have listened to the feedback provided and this will be incorporated into the new Corporate Parenting Strategy for 2018-20.

Ignition

By working with all partners, we are able to provide choice for young people and a process that provides them with a voice and ownership of their accommodation and future plans. Ignition is for young people aged 15½ plus who are thinking about where and how they would like to live when they leave care (we think the earlier we can plan the better the experience!). This is an innovative approach and was short-listed for two national awards in 2017-18. Social Care commissioners from across the North West have taken the time to come and observe Ignition in full flow and have all commented on the fantastic approach that is delivering good outcomes for our Care Leavers.

We now have a strong offer for our care leavers including taster flats, supported independent living, supported lodgings with 'hosts', dispersed properties with the offer of floating support alongside Staying Put and Staying Close arrangements, a group living house and support / acting as guarantor for individual tenancies. All of this choice would not have been possible without the successful partnerships that have developed through Ignition.

Supported Lodgings

The re-commission of supported lodgings services is complete and the contract from 1st April 2018 was awarded to Forum Housing again. Their bid was good and built on the service delivery to date that has developed well through

Forum Housing's attendance at the Ignition Panel and listening to young people's views re their aspirations and planning towards independence. The new service builds in the ability for our more complex young people to possibly access a supported lodging

Supporting Care Leavers as Parents

Motherwell is a charity for women run by women, promoting positive health and wellbeing, by offering a range of educational services, holistic therapies and mental health support. The charity was recently successful in achieving a funding bid to provide a Parent Advocate Worker to support our care leaver parents. The Parent Advocate Worker will provide support to mothers who have had their children removed, to prevent the cycle taking place again via one to one support, counselling and alternative therapies.

Research Project – this will be carried out by the Head of Abuse Studies at MMU Crewe. This is a three year project which will research the correlations in childhood experiences of abuse and implications that this has on parenting. It is hoped that this research will identify which interventions are successful with families, and which are not. Additionally it will also identify if there are any gaps in services.

Positive Parenting Groups – working with the children's centres, we held our first Positive Parenting Group in July 2017 at Oak Tree Children's Centre in Crewe. 11 out of 20

pregnant and parent female care leavers indicated they would engage with the group. Going forward, the group will be split into two models across the North and South of Cheshire East.

- North Locality Positive Parent Group - this will be an informal peer support group with the plan to bring services to the group, as and when identified by the young people or identified by staff as a need, around their parenting and health issues.
- South Locality Positive Parenting Group - one day a month our south based care leaver mothers can access the children's centre and have their own group. On this day they can also access health advice and support from services already based within the centre.

Care Leaver Fathers

Research Project, Care Leaver Fathers - A research project into male care leaver fathers and their experiences and interactions with social care in relation to their own children is currently underway. This research will give the fathers a voice and the data will be used to identify any areas which the fathers feel that support is lacking. Improvements can then be implemented in the service via a training programme will be given for Personal Assistants/Social Workers. We have had a good response from fathers interested in taking part in the research project.

Direct one to one support and group support for Care Leaver Fathers via Dads Stuff - this has been assigned to all Personal Advisors to refer. Dads Stuff who can offer care leaver fathers direct one to one support, and this includes absent fathers who want to be involved in their child's life. They will support dads with their overall parenting and attend meetings in support of dads. Our dads also have the option of attending the Dads Stuff group, once they feel confident in accessing the service, or before if they are happy to. The current group in Sandbach is a busy group and this is being extended across other areas in the authority.

Resource Folder – we have set up a resource folder covering the following topics; advocacy, domestic abuse, emotional and mental health, housing, identity, immigration, independence and ready to live alone, LGBT, money and budgeting, parenting, physical health, sexual health, sexual exploitation, substance misuse and trafficking and slavery.