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Children and Families Committee

Agenda

Date:	**Monday, 10th November, 2025**
Time:	**10.30 am**
Venue:	**Committee Suite 1, 2 and 3, Delamere House, Delamere Street, Crewe, CW1 2JZ**

The agenda is divided into 2 parts. Part 1 is taken in the presence of the public and press. Part 2 items will be considered in the absence of the public and press for the reasons indicated on the agenda and at the foot of each report.

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PART 1 – MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED WITH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS PRESENT

1. **Apologies for Absence**

   To note any apologies for absence from Members.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

   To provide an opportunity for Members and Officers to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests, other registerable interests, and non-registerable interests in any item on the agenda.

3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting** (Pages 5 - 18)

   To approve as a correct record the minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 September 2025.

For requests for further information
Contact: Chris Lunn
Tel: 01270 686466
E-Mail: CheshireEastDemocraticServices@cheshireeast.gov.uk

4. **Public Speaking/Open Session**

In accordance with paragraph 2.24 of the Council's Committee Procedure Rules and Appendix on Public Speaking, set out in the Constitution, a total period of 15 minutes is allocated for members of the public to put questions to the committee on any matter relating to this agenda. Each member of the public will be allowed up to two minutes each to speak, and the Chair will have discretion to vary this where they consider it appropriate.

Members of the public wishing to speak are required to provide notice of this at least three clear working days' in advance of the meeting.

Petitions - To receive any petitions which have met the criteria - Petitions Scheme Criteria, and falls within the remit of the Committee. Petition organisers will be allowed up to three minutes to speak.

5. **Cheshire East Youth Council Presentation** (Pages 19 - 28)

To receive a presentation of the priorities and views of children and young people across Cheshire East by representatives from Cheshire East Youth Council.

6. **Youth Justice Plan (2025-26 update)** (Pages 29 - 106)

To consider a report on the updated Youth Justice Strategic Plan for Cheshire.

7. **Update on Home to School Transport Task & Finish Group**

To receive a verbal update on the progress of the task and finish group in relation to Home to School Transport.

8. **Second Financial Review 25/26** (Pages 107 - 130)

To consider a report which provides an update on the current forecast outturn for the financial year 2025/26.

9. **Medium Term Financial Strategy Consultation 2026/27 - 2029/30** (Pages 131 - 144)

To consider the report on the Medium Term Financial Strategy Consultation 2026/27-2029/30.

10. **Holiday Activity and Food Programme 2026 to 2029** (Pages 145 - 162)

To consider a report on the Holiday and Activity Food Programme 2026 – 2029.

11. **Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual report 2024/2025** (Pages 163 - 210)

To scrutinise a report on the progress by Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership, and the impact for children and young people, recognising the achievements and progress made, and to seek assurance around ongoing areas for further development.

12. **Improvement Plan Progress Report** (Pages 211 - 280)

To provide an update on progress against the children's services improvement plan to address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) conducted in February and March 2024. This also includes the findings from the councillor visits to frontline services which took place in September 2025.

13. **Work Programme** (Pages 281 - 284)

To consider the Work Programme and determine any required amendments.

Membership: Councillors R Bailey, M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, L Crane (Chair), E Gilman (Vice-Chair), M Goldsmith, G Hayes, R Moreton, B Puddicombe, J Saunders, G Smith, L Wardlaw and B Wye

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CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Committee** held on Monday, 15th September, 2025 in the The Capesthorne Room - Town Hall, Macclesfield, SK10 1EA

PRESENT

Councillor L Crane (Chair)

Councillors M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, S Gardiner, M Goldsmith, S Holland, B Posnett, B Puddicombe, J Saunders, G Smith, B Wye and D Edwardes

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Martyn Baggaley, Head of Integrated Commissioning
Sarah Clough, Primary Inclusion Co-Ordinator
Alex Cooper, Project Manager, SEND Transformation Team
Rhiannon Edwards, Domestic Abuse Development Advisor
Danielle Holdcroft, Head of Service - Early Years, Family Help and Prevention
Sarah Lomas, School Organisation and Capital Project Co-Ordinator
Kerry Madden, Families First Programme Director
Joanne Prophet, School Organisation and Capital Manager
Dawn Godfrey Executive Director of Children and Families
Nikki Wood-Hill, Finance Manager
Diane Green, Finance Manager
Karen Shepherd - Family Help Front Door and Supporting Families Lead
Karen Shuker, Democratic Services Officer
Tracy Stephen, Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care
Jennie Summers, Head of Legal Services
Caroline Tote, Interim Director of Commissioning, Quality Assurance and Partnerships

18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Bailey, E Gilman, G Hayes and R Moreton.

Councillors S Holland, D Edwardes and S Gardiner attended as substitutes.

19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

During consideration of item 6 - Supported Accommodation for 16–25-year-old Children in Care and Care Leavers in the interest of openness, Councillor S Gardiner declared an interest by virtue of the fact his husband was a partner in a law firm who occasionally represented cared-for children living within Cheshire East. The firm represented the children (very occasionally parents) in care-proceedings in which the Council was a party but there was no direct commissioning or procurement by CEC of his company's services.

During consideration of item 13 – Approval to progress with the proposal for the provision of a new Primary School at Basford East, Shavington, in the interest of openness, Councillor B Wye declared an interest as he lived in one of the wards which was affected by the proposal.

20 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2025 be agreed as a correct record

21 **PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION**

There were no registered public speakers.

22 **CHESHIRE EAST DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICE**

The committee considered a report which provided an update following the review, consultation and engagement of the domestic abuse safe accommodation service, and the new Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2025/28.

The committee were provided with an oversight of the proposed service model and authorisation was sought to follow a competitive tender process and award the successful provider the joint service contract from 1 April 2026.

The committee asked questions and made comments in respect of:

- The need to ensure that there was appropriate support for individuals in communal refuges
- Budget and bed capacity - whether the increased budget of £1.74m was sufficient following previous failures due to lack of funding, and concerns around the reduction in specialist beds from the recommended 41 to 27 by the Council of Europe.
- Whether there was sufficient capacity for victims who must be placed outside their local area for safety reasons
- The absence of 4+ bedroom properties listed in the report.
- Whether communal refuge facilities were being explored and what the outcomes were?
- Concerns about whether accommodation reflected real-life scenarios (e.g., staying with friends first).

In response officers stated that;

- The commissioning process included strict specifications aligned with Women's Aid guidance. Providers must demonstrate trauma-informed practices and provide separate support for children and parents.
- A rapid review was commissioned over the summer, the 27 beds were specifically for crisis situations and there was a Sanctuary Scheme aimed to enhance home security, reducing the need for relocation of the victim.
- There were ongoing discussions with providers to procure dispersed accommodation.
- Properties with up to 4 bedrooms were being considered, and larger properties were not excluded.
- Emphasis was on the need for wide-ranging provision to ensure accessibility and a blended approach was preferred to maintain emergency capacity.

Officers agreed to take away the suggestion in respect of asking victims about their initial steps when reporting, to improve data collection.

In response to a question raised about the success of the council receiving the Platinum Accreditation from the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) award and how it aligned with previous procurement challenges it was noted that the Whole Housing Approach work began prior to the formal start of the 2-year project.

Members noted that there was scope to increase the number of beds beyond the provision of 27 but had concerns around the significant budget implications this would have and additionally spot purchasing beds outside the area would likely be more expensive so how would those additional costs be managed if capacity were increased.

Officers explained that they would work with colleagues in Strategic Housing to look at ways both the housing budget and Domestic Abuse funding could be used most effectively to meet the needs of victims of abuse, in line with the Single Allocation Policy, and in a way which maximised both the Council's core funding and any external grants that could support this work.

The committee expressed appreciation for the improved communication and noted the absence of public speakers could be seen as a positive reflection of progress.

RESOLVED (By Majority)

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Approve the new service model and authorise the procurement for a new service contract for a 3-year term with a 1 + 1 year extension period, noting the feedback from consultation activity over the summer, and Rapid Review analytics conducted by S2, which advise Cheshire East Council to:

a) Increase the number of safe accommodation bed spaces to a minimum of 27 specialist accommodation spaces for Cheshire East.

b) Increase the mix of communal/ dispersed refuges, in order to reduce/eliminate the use of temporary (and unsuitable) b & b accommodation for individuals fleeing domestic abuse.

c) Develop the support offered to children and young people in safe accommodation

d) Improve communication between Housing Options and the safe accommodation provider.

2. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Service and/or equivalent authorised officer to conduct a competitive procurement exercise and enter dialogue with the most competitive bidder if required, issue the notice of contract award once a preferred bidder is identified.

3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to award the contract for the Safe Accommodation, in consultation with the S151 & Monitoring Officers, and with the agreement of the Chair and Vice-Chair of Children & Families Committee.

4. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services for contract and performance management, including all commercial assessments to oversee any contract extensions under the terms including contract performance and efficiency requirements and key performance indicators.

5. Approve the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2025-28 for endorsement and adoption by the Cheshire East Domestic and Sexual Abuse Partnership.

23 SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION FOR 16–25-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS

During consideration of item 6 - Supported Accommodation for 16–25-year-old Children in Care and Care Leavers in the interest of openness, Councillor S Gardiner declared an interest by virtue of the fact his husband was a partner in a law firm who occasionally represented cared-for children living within Cheshire East. The firm represented the children (very occasionally parents) in care-proceedings in which the Council was a party but there was no direct commissioning or procurement by CEC of his company's services.

The committee considered a report which provided an update on the recommissioning activity approved at committee in June and detailed the co-production with the stakeholders to shape the future service offer and next steps to conduct a formal tender to seek a best value service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers aged 16-25.

The committee asked questions and made comments in respect of:

- Why were 16–17-year-olds without adult status being placed into supported independent living settings rather than trying to provide appropriate foster parents.
- Concerns over planning applications where the applicant was a developer, not a care provider.
- How was the selection of the appropriate providers ensured when planning applications were granted?
- Project manager left in August — would the role be filled internally or externally? Would the budget available until March 2026 be used?
- Concerns raised over £11k/week cost for a 17-year-old.
- Had accommodation need been sufficiently modelled given rising care leaver numbers?
- Had inflation been factored into spot purchase costs?
- How were placements managed when children moved outside the local area, were there any reciprocal arrangements in place with other local authorities?
- What would happen when unaccompanied asylum seeker already in the council's system turned 18?

In response officers reported that

- 16–17-year-olds were not placed directly into independent settings, the proposal was part of a pathway to independence, aiming for tenancy readiness by age 25. The specification which had been developed had been done in collaboration with the Care Leavers Service.
- All providers must be Ofsted-registered before contracting and accepted providers for the older group of young people must also be registered housing providers.
- An internal officer would reprioritise tasks to take on the role. A contract start date of 1 July would allow for transition time.
- Costs were not unusual for complex needs and there would always be a need to contract bespoke individual support packages. Exploration around a "care cube" model (similar to what had been done for adults with complex needs) was underway to challenge and manage costs.
- Financial modelling included regional cost differences (e.g. higher costs in the north of the borough).
- Regular dialogue with neighbouring authorities was ongoing to ensure best outcomes and avoiding risk factors.
- Inflation considerations would be addressed in future MTFS planning.
- Any unaccompanied asylum seekers already in the council's care would transition to the adult housing process once they reached the age of 18.

The committee acknowledged the work of the Ignition Panel which formed part of the pathway in the process.

During debate on the item, a friendly amendment was proposed and seconded in respect of recommendation 3 which sought the inclusion of additional wording as follows:

'Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to award the contract for the Supported Accommodation for 16–25-year-old Children in Care and Care Leavers, in consultation with the S151 & Monitoring Officers, and with the agreement of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children & Families Committee *and that any costs above the MTFS budget be reported back to the Children and Families Committee at the earliest opportunity'.*

The amendment became part of the substantive motion.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Approve the new service model and authorise the procurement for a new service contract for a 5-year term with a 1 + 1 year extension period.

2. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Service and/or equivalent authorised officer to conduct a competitive procurement exercise and enter into dialogue with the most competitive bidder, if required, issue the notice of contract award once a preferred bidder is identified.

3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to award the contract for the Supported Accommodation for 16–25-year-old Children in Care and Care Leavers, in consultation with the S151 & Monitoring Officers, and with the agreement of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children & Families Committee and that any costs above the MTFS budget be reported back to the Children and Families Committee at the earliest opportunity.

4. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services and/or equivalent authorised officer for contract and performance management, including all commercial assessments to oversee any contract extensions under the terms including contract performance and efficiency requirements and key performance indicators.

24 **FIRST FINANCIAL REVIEW OF 2025/26**

The Committee considered the report which set out the First Financial Review 2025-26 position based on income, expenditure, and known commitments at the end of June 2025. The First Financial Review 2025-26 reported a forecasted revenue outturn position as an adverse variance of

£3.1m after the application of planned use of Exceptional Financial Support at £25.3m.

The key areas causing the overspend included a projected overspend of £9m in the Children and Families service.

Care placements and staffing costs were identified as the main pressures.

The committee asked questions and made comments in respect of:

- Although the first set of figures for quarter 2 were still being finalised, they did not present a positive outlook. Concerns were raised about Quarter 2 budget figures for Children and Families noting they remained pessimistic and did this reflect the upper limit of financial pressure?
- There were discrepancies in capital programme figures, and a request was made for clarification on budget increases.
- There was repeated overspending in children and families, particularly in transport and staffing, therefore was the budget realistic when set.
- Concerns raised about adoption and Special Guardianship Orders, legal support, and ethical recruitment of social workers.
- Children’s welfare should not be compromised for financial reasons.
- statutory targets set by the government contributed to budget pressures.

In response, officers reported that:-

- Work was ongoing on Financial Report 2 (FR2) and figures would be reviewed with colleagues.
- Information on the capital programme figures would be checked outside of the meeting.
- There were three main reasons for overspending in Children and Families: Rising demand, staffing pressures and budget limitations and work was ongoing in those areas as part of the Transformation Programme

Under the title ‘Right Child, Right Home’ and overall mitigations planned to manage pressures included managing vacancies, particularly agency usage, reviewing costs of placements, establishment reviews, Reunification of children, and Work on Edge of Care Service proposals to identify early intervention and cost reduction.

It was reported that by the end of the month there would be ten agency Socialworkers converting to permanent posts and there would be another cohort of ten international social workers being brought forward in January 2026.

There would be a focus on sustainability which included work on the 3 Year Workforce Strategy which included plans for a Cheshire East Social Work Academy, building capacity and resilience internally.

A Task and Finish Group had been set up following June Committee to look at the work of the Home to School Transport service and transport costs. An update report was requested to be added to the work programme.

The introduction of the Families First Programme would provide early intervention support to address emerging needs within families, thereby reducing the likelihood of escalation to specialist services within Children's Services. This preventative approach would contribute to improved outcomes for children and families whilst also delivering cost efficiencies.

RESOLVED: (By Majority)

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Review the factors leading to a forecast adverse Net Revenue financial pressure of £3.1m against a revised budget of £440.5m (0.7%). To scrutinise the contents of Annex 1, Section 2 and review progress on the delivery of the MTFS approved budget policy change items, the RAG ratings and latest forecasts, and to understand the actions to be taken to address any adverse variances from the approved budget.

2. Review the in-year forecast capital spending of £205.5m against an increased capital budget of £208.5m. This was adjusted at outturn following an approved MTFS budget of £173m.

3. Approve the Supplementary Revenue Estimate Requests for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding over £500,000 and up to £1,000,000 as per Annex 1, Section 3, Table 2.

4. Note the available reserves position as per Annex 1, Section 5.

The committee adjourned for a short break.

25 **FAMILIES FIRST TASK AND FINISH GROUP FEEDBACK**

The committee received a detailed presentation and feedback on the work of the Families First Task and Finish Group

The presentation included information on: -

- Background and legislative context
- Key principles: early help, multidisciplinary and multi-agency teams, integrated front door, family-led decision-making.
- Local implementation in Cheshire East: collaborative areas, family hubs, data analysis, and place-based working.

- Expected benefits and challenges, including sustainability, workforce development, and statutory alignment.

Officers shared a case study highlighting current processes which often involved multiple referrals, families having to tell their story multiple times and a current requirement for workers to change should need increase or reduce

Officers explained how the new model would improve this through:

- Increased integration of services the ‘Front Door’
- Earlier intervention
- Local collaboration among professionals and services
- Consistent support throughout the family’s journey
- Family led decision making

The committee asked questions in relation to:-

- the next steps and whether this could include engagement with schools, town councils and community partners.
- Outcomes and performance measures
- Funding and sustainability
- Workforce training, capacity, and retention
- Data accuracy and deprivation indices

The Chair thanked the officers for all their hard work.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation and feedback be noted.

Councillor D Edwardes left the meeting and did not return.

26 **IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS REPORT**

The committee received an update on the progress to date against the improvement plan following the Ofsted inspection in 2024, the findings from the second Ofsted monitoring visit which took place in June 2025, the findings from the sector led improvement partner (SLIP) work in August 2025, and the findings from the councillor visits to frontline services which took place in July 2025.

Members asked questions and provided comments in respect of

- There was emphasis on the need for robustness in managing change;
- In respect of work on case closures and exit interviews; were there any common themes emerging.
- Concerns raised about senior leadership changes and vacancies affecting service delivery.

- Workload pressures: was the quality of work being maintained.
- Access to training issues
- Children & Case Management - Suspensions: was it the same children being repeatedly suspended.
- PLO (Public Law Outline): what was the reason for only 14 out of 90 targets met.
- Request in relation to fast-tracking AI for form filling.

In response officers reported that:

- Development of the workforce strategy was ongoing to address stress levels, supervision issues which had been highlighted
- managing caseloads remains difficult.
- Support for in-depth exit and stay interviews by the Principal Social Worker to understand retention.
- There were 5 permanent Heads of Service in the social care structure and 3 agency, work continued towards establishing a stable, permanent workforce.
- PLO (Public Law Outline): Backlogs and high caseloads impacting timescales
- AI was part of a corporate programme but there was a cautious approach using it in sensitive areas, but it was acknowledged that there was potential for it to be used for things such as signposting.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Note the progress against the improvement plan.

2. Note the findings from the second Ofsted monitoring visit on children in need and child protection in June 2025.

3. Note the findings from the councillor visits to the cared for service, care leaver service and court team in July 2025.

27 **DSG MANAGEMENT PLAN - REPROFILED 2025/26-2031/32**

The committee received a report which provided an update of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) management plan for the period 2025/26 to 2031/32 to reflect the financial outturn position and the reduced growth of Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCP numbers as at 31 March 2025.

The DSG management plan had been reprofiled to take in to account of the reduced growth of EHCP numbers (6.4% EHCP growth – 1.6% lower than anticipated) and a lower high needs deficit position than forecast as at 31 March 2025 (£6.4 million reduction in the high needs deficit position – giving a position of £113.7 million high needs block deficit).

Officers highlighted that an in-year balanced position was still achievable by year 7 (2030/31) but that would not mean that the deficit had been paid off, it would just mean that the income matched the expenditure.

The accounting override had been extended to 2027/28 by which point the deficit reserve position was forecast to be £190.8m mitigated.

The committee asked questions and made comments in respect of:

- why only half the required funding was available for SEND children.
- As needs assessments had risen sharply which may lead to more EHCPs, were the current projections overly optimistic.
- How did the council's performance compare with other local authorities
- Concerns that reprofiling over a 7-year period did not address worsening short-term projections, was the current forecast reliable?
- Concerns about delays in timescales in respect of funding reaching children.

In response, officers reported that:-

- They were working within the current allocation and aiming to develop a long-term, affordable plan.
- They acknowledged the increase in needs assessments and explained that the management plan was based on the SEN2 survey which was produced in January 2025. Many assessments were expected to result in EHCPs and agreed the plan was challenging but last year's performance slightly exceeded expectations.
- comparisons had been made previously with other local authorities but officers could not comment further without updated data and further research.
- The original plan was for 5 years, but a more robust 7-year plan was introduced in April 2024 as part of the Safety Valve Programme. It aligned with DfE strategies and included annual updates based on EHCP outturns and financial data. Improvements had been noted since the last update.

Officers agreed to raise the issue of delays to funding reaching children with finance colleagues.

The Chair confirmed that a letter had been sent to central government regarding free schools, which were a key part of the mitigation strategy, but that no response had been received to date.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Note and scrutinise the DSG Management plan for 2024/25 to 2030/31 (approved by Children and Families Committee on 29 April 2024) has been reprofiled/re-cast to reflect the lower number of Education, Health, and Care plans and the lower deficit position as recorded on 31 March 2025.

2. Note and scrutinise the impact of the reprofiling:

a. An in year balanced position by year 7 (2030/2031) is still achievable.

b. A reduced forecast deficit reserve position of £766.4 million unmitigated and £205.4 million mitigated by the end of March 2031.

c. A forecast deficit reserve position of £990.3 million unmitigated and £197.6 million mitigated by the end of March 2032.

3. Note the mitigations within the original plan remain in place (approved by Children and Families Committee on 29 April 24).

4. Note the accounting override has been extended to 2027/2028, by which point the deficit reserve position is forecast to be £318 million unmitigated and £190.8 million mitigated.

28 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered the Work Programme.

The following was noted:

- A request was made for public Health Officers to update the committee on the Tartan Rug and its implications, with a suggestion to extend briefings to all members.
- It was agreed that an update report on the work of the Home to School Transport Task and Finish Group be brought to committee.
- Further consideration would be given to the commencement of the Special Guardianship Order Task and Finish Group.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

29 **MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES**

The committee received the minutes of the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee meeting held on 4 March 2025 and 24 June 2025.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be noted.

30 APPROVAL TO PROGRESS WITH THE PROPOSAL FOR THE PROVISION OF A NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL AT BASFORD EAST, SHAVINGTON

During consideration of this item Councillor B Wye declared an interest as he lived in one of the wards which was affected by the proposal.

The committee considered a report on the proposal to progress with the free school presumption process to open a new primary school in Basford East, Shavington, which include the process of attracting potential sponsors to run the new school.

A report had previously been approved by the Children and Families committee in 2022 to progress with the free school presumption process to open a new primary school in Basford East, Shavington. However, in April 2023 the Council were informed that the developer had gone into administration. Consequently, the scheme for the new school was put on hold.

Due to the length of time since the initial consultation and draft school specification documents, officers were advised by the DfE to re start the process.

During consideration of the item, the committee resolved to move into part 2 to consider the confidential appendix to the report. The committee moved back into part 1 for questions and debate.

The committee asked that the following be taken into consideration when designing the building

- That additional classrooms be constructed onsite following the proposal that the school would have facilities for a 2-Form of Entry
- Solar panels be added
- Sprinklers to be included
- Facilities to accommodate noise reduction be included
- Breakout/quiet areas
- Mitigations for the impact on parking for drop off and pick-ups to the school be put in place

Officers agreed to take the requests back to the design team.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That the Children and Families Committee

1. Agree to progress with undertaking the free school presumption process to identify and obtain agreement for a new school sponsor under section 6A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.This will include undertaking a consultation with the local community, local schools, local councillors,

town council and local MP. This is not the formal statutory consultation which sponsors are required to undertake.

2. Note that a further report will be provided to committee with the feedback from the consultation process.

3. Grant approval to enter into contract on a direct award basis with the preferred contractor.

4. Approve entering into a pre-construction services agreement and delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to award a preconstruction services contract to facilitate the delivery of a new primary school on the Basford East development site together with any other agreements associated with or ancillary to the contract where necessary in consultation with the Executive Director of Resources/S151 Officer, the Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer and the Executive Director of Place.

5. Approve the increase in the capital budget required to progress with the new school proposal as set out in the confidential Appendix 1 and request Finance sub-committee to approve the virement of the funds from Basic Need grant to support the scheme.

31 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED:

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item pursuant to Section 100(A)4 of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended on the grounds that it involves the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of the Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and the public interest would not be served in publishing the information.

32 **APPROVAL TO PROGRESS WITH THE PROPOSAL FOR THE PROVISION OF A NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL AT BASFORD EAST, SHAVINGTON**

The Committee considered the information in the confidential appendix.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 3.30 pm

Councillor L Crane (Chair)

Cheshire East
TOGETHER for Children and Young People

Cheshire East Youth Council

Children and Families Committee Update

November 2025

Agenda Item 5

Cheshire East Youth Council

Cheshire East Youth Council is made up of a group of young people who campaign on and create positive change for others. They work with decision makers and help them to make services and the support that children and young people receive better. The group feeds into Children's Trust Board.

The group campaigns on issues that are important to young people e.g. mental health, children's rights, hate crime. They also are involved in service design, development and have delivered training to professionals. The group is driven by important issues not political parties.

Top Issues for Youth Council

- Raise awareness and educate young people on hate crime.
- Free, safe and accessible spaces and places for young people to go.
- Improved and accessible Mental Health Services and support when we need it, within the community and education settings.

Highlights from the last 12 months

- House of Commons and Annual Conference
- Hate Stops Here launch, assemblies and sessions
- Participation and Engagement Strategy and Travel Consultation
- UK Youth Parliament Member of Youth Parliament Selection Event
- Hosted a Q&A with the Leader and Deputy Leader
- Children's Trust Board Activity Day
- Youthforia and the Youthforia Residential
- Part of and sharing views with Votes at 16 regional group
- Enjoyed our sessions, developed our skills

HATE STOPS HERE

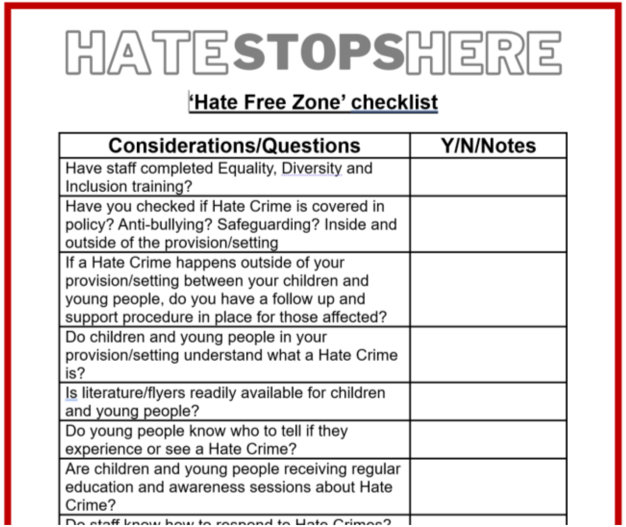
Campaign Aims:

- Make sure that professionals have the resources to teach young people and react / deal with hate crime and discrimination.
- For young people to have improved awareness and understanding of hate crime and discrimination.

HATESTOPSHERE

Resources:

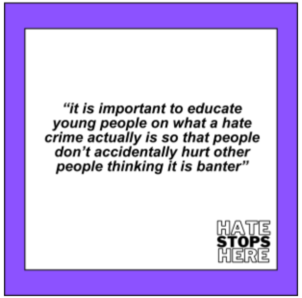
- 4 Sessions plans with resources
- Social Media pack
- ‘Hate Free Zone’ checklist

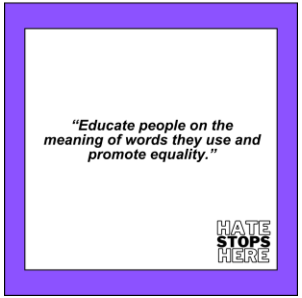


HATESTOPSHERE

‘Hate Free Zone’ checklist

Considerations/Questions	Y/N/Notes
Have staff completed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training?	
Have you checked if Hate Crime is covered in policy? Anti-bullying? Safeguarding? Inside and outside of the provision/setting	
If a Hate Crime happens outside of your provision/setting between your children and young people, do you have a follow up and support procedure in place for those affected?	
Do children and young people in your provision/setting understand what a Hate Crime is?	
Is literature/flyers readily available for children and young people?	
Do young people know who to tell if they experience or see a Hate Crime?	
Are children and young people receiving regular education and awareness sessions about Hate Crime?	
Do staff know how to respond to Hate Crimes?	





SAFE SPACE REMINDERS

Inclusion

Everyone is different.
And that's something to celebrate!

Differences are respected.
No one is treated unfairly for being themselves.

Inclusive and non-judgemental.
We welcome everyone and accept you as you are.

A space to express yourself.
Your voice, style, and story matter here.

Environment

Comfortable and flexible.
We will do our best to make sure the lighting, sound, and temperature feel okay for everyone.

Changeable and adaptable.
We can adjust the space to meet different needs.

Safe and welcoming.
Everyone should feel relaxed and at ease here.

Respectful of personal space.
We look out for each other and make sure everyone feels secure.

Accessibility

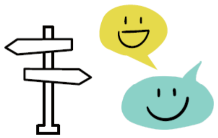
Accessible and supportive of diverse needs.
We consider different physical, sensory, learning, and communication styles.

Sensory spaces & fidget toys.
These can help you feel calm, focused, or just take a break.

Breakout spaces.
There are quiet areas to use for having time to relax, recharge, or be on your own.

Listen and adapt:
We will listen to what you need and make changes to help spaces and activities work for everyone.

Support



Someone available to talk to when needed.
You're never alone here.

Someone there to listen.
Your thoughts and feelings matter.

Someone who can help and support you.
Whether it's a small worry or a big problem.

Hate Free Zone.
This is a space free from bullying, discrimination, or hate of any kind.

Let's make our places and spaces safe and fun for all!

HATE STOPS HERE

People

Conclusion and Recommendations

- We have appreciated opportunities such as Children's Trust Board, Families First Partnership and Committee to provide a platform for our views, lived experience and campaigns.
- We would like further opportunities to be involved in the conversation and development of services connected to our top priorities.
- Children and Families Committee to have ongoing dialogue with young people across Cheshire East to have focussed discussions on our top priorities.
- We would like the support of local leaders across Cheshire East to help implement the Safe Space Reminders into settings.

Any questions? How can you help?

Cheshire East TOGETHER for Children and Young People

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Cheshire East Council

OPEN

Children and Families Committee

10 November 2025

Youth Justice Plan (2025-26 update)

Report of: Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director of Children's Services

Report Reference No: CF/18/25-26

Ward(s) Affected: All

For Decision

Purpose of Report

1 Local authorities have a statutory duty to submit an annual youth justice plan relating to their provision of youth justice services (YJS). Section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 sets out the youth justice partnership's responsibilities in producing a plan. It states that it is the duty of each local authority, after consultation with the partner agencies, to formulate and implement a youth justice plan, setting out how youth justice services in their area are to be provided and funded, how they will operate, and what functions will be carried out.

2 Cheshire East have a shared service arrangement for Youth Justice Services with the other three Local Authorities in the sub-region and as such the Governance arrangements for Youth Justice are overseen by a pan Cheshire Partnership Management Board. The Director of Children Services represents each of the four local authorities on the partnership board and chairing rotates bi-annually. The Executive Director for Children and Families in Cheshire West and Chester Council (Amanda Perraton) currently chairs the Youth Justice Management Board. The Youth Justice Service have refreshed the sub-regional Youth Justice Plan for 2025-26 in partnership with Cheshire Police and the other statutory partners (LAs, NHS, National Probation Services and PCC) and it was approved by Cheshire Youth Justice Management Board on the 24th of June.

3 This report will brief committee on the content of the 2025-26 Youth Justice Plan for Cheshire and seek formal sign off in compliance with Youth Justice Board Guidance (Ministry of Justice) and Regulation 4 of

the 'Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000'.

Executive Summary

4 The Cheshire sub-region is a large complex area and the Youth Justice partnership between and across the four local authorities provides a powerful base to meet the various complexities and challenges faced by the county's children, families, and victims.

5 Despite the scale, Cheshire YJS is a comparatively small organisation comprising 77 WTE staff, including seconded workers. The YJS also has approximately forty active volunteers. This committee approved in April 2024 the transition to a simpler fully hosted model for the Youth Justice Service which went live in April 2025 and means Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC) now function as 'lead authority' on behalf of the pan Cheshire partnership. To be clear, the actual delivery of youth justice services to children, families and victims in Cheshire East has not changed because of CWAC being lead authority on behalf of the four local authorities. The statutory responsibility for providing youth justice remains with each of the four local authorities so an annual update of the Youth Justice Strategic Plan will still be presented formally for approval at this committee.

6 The national body responsible for inspecting Youth Justice Services are His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMiP) with national oversight provided by the Youth Justice Board (YJB). Both HMiP and the YJB recognise Cheshire YJS as of a high standard. The former rated Cheshire YJS as 'Good' in the last full joint inspection (Governance and leadership were rated as 'Outstanding') and the latter granted 2-year pathfinder status for Cheshire's successful youth diversion programme.

7 A new three year Inspection programme was launched by HMiP in April 2025 so the youth justice partnership (note not just the Youth Justice Service as an operational team but the youth justice partnership as a whole of which Cheshire East Children Services is an integral part) will be inspected under this new programme at some time between now and March 2028 (with a three week notice period).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee

1. Note the update on performance and progress made against priority areas during the financial year April 2024 to March 2025 as set out in the refreshed and updated Youth Justice Strategic Plan for Cheshire (attached at Appendix 1).
2. Recommend that full Council approves the content of the 2025-2026 refreshed and updated Youth Justice Strategic Plan for Cheshire.
3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director Children's Services to approve the annual refresh of the Youth Justice Plan for 2026-27 and submission to the national Youth Justice Board in June 2026 prior to it being presented for formal approval, sign-off by members and subsequent publication.

Background

8 Youth Justice (YJ) plans are an opportunity to review performance and developments and plan for the year ahead. This allows services to be able to respond to any changes that have taken place including new legislation, demographic changes, delivery of key performance indicators, and developments in service delivery. The production of a youth justice plan is beneficial to partnership working and service delivery to ensure the best outcomes for children, families, victims, and communities.

9 The Plan has been produced in accordance with National Youth Justice Board guidance and follows their prescribed template to include, introduction, vision and strategy, governance, leadership and partnership arrangements, board development, progress on the previous year(s), resources and services, performance including national key performance indicators, priorities, information on children from groups which are over-represented, prevention, diversion, education, restorative approaches and victims, serious violence and exploitation, detention in police custody, remands, use of custody, standards for children in the justice system, workforce development, evidence-based practice and innovation, service development, challenges, risks and issues.

10 Performance figures included within the YJ Plan show that Cheshire YJS continue to achieve good levels of performance against the three main key performance indicators: First time entrants to the criminal justice system (FTEs), custody rates and re-offending (detailed within the YJ Plan). These are all comprehensively detailed within the plan and are below regional and national averages which is attributable (at least in part) to the strength of the service and a partnership commitment to seeing children in the justice system as children first and offenders

second and adopting an evidence based, trauma informed and restorative approach.

11 In 2024-25 there were 39 Cheshire East first time child entrants to the justice system and 4 Cheshire East children were sentenced to custody. Rates of Serious Youth Violence in Cheshire in 2024-25 were well below the national average at 3.4 offences per 10,000 children compared to a regional average of 7.2 and national average of 6.2 (page 56 of YJ Plan) A continued partnership commitment to reducing the unnecessary criminalisation of cared for children means very few cared for children or care leavers are prosecuted with most now receiving out of court disposals in recognition their offending behaviour is often symptomatic of vulnerability or exploitation and rarely presents a risk of harm to the general public (page 47 of the YJ Plan).

12 Other notable achievements described in the YJ Plan include the continued development of social prescribing which emerged from the recognition that many justice services involve children arriving in the system with previously unmet health needs and/or where clinical models of healthcare have proven ineffective. Examples of activity are illustrated on pages 38-39 of the YJ Plan and include gardening, fishing, and music as psychosocial therapy. Cheshire's social prescribing has been recognised by the Local Government Association as innovative practice and the first application of social prescribing in a youth justice context. It has also been nominated for a Children and Young People Now award in two categories (Mental Health and Wellbeing Award and the Youth Justice Award).

13 The priorities for Youth Justice in Cheshire over the next 12 months are described fully in the YJ Plan but include; 1) Continuing to develop participation and amplifying the voice and influence of children, families and victims 2) Enhance the offer to victims of youth crime, ensuring the Youth Justice service partnership is compliant with the new Victim and Prisoners Act 2024 and 3) Undertake comprehensive quality assurance audits in the following areas of practice; custody and resettlement, the quality and impact of education, training and employment support to justice involved children and work with children subject to out of court disposals.

Consultation and Engagement

The Youth Justice Service have consulted with children, families, victims of youth crime, and professional stakeholders (including specialist academic advisors) in the development of the Youth Justice plan. The sub-regional partnership board have approved it as ready for publication.

Reasons for Recommendations

14 There is provision within the national Youth Justice Board guidance for the Chair of the local Youth Justice Management Board to sign off the Youth Justice Plan and for retrospective approval to be sought from Council(s). Given the timescales and the complex multi-authority configuration of Youth Justice Services across Cheshire this is the approach that was given approval by committee last year (and by cabinet in CWAC, Halton and Warrington councils). It is recommended again that Cheshire East council (along with the other three councils in the partnership) delegate responsibility to their respective Executive Director of Children Services to approve a final draft of the annual update to next year's Youth Justice Plan so it can be submitted to the national board in June 2026 prior to being presented for formal approval, sign-off and publication.

Other Options Considered

15 The only other option is for the annual Youth Justice plan to be presented to full council in four local authority areas prior to the deadline for submission at the end of June. Given the timelines and different processes across four separate councils this would be logistically challenging hence the recommendation for councils to delegate authority for sign-off to the Chair of the pan Cheshire Board which is permissible within the guidance.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance

16 Production of an annual Youth Justice plan is in compliance with section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Refreshed guidance published by the Youth Justice Board in March 2023 made clear that to comply with Regulation 4 of the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 there is a requirement for Full Council to approve and sign off their local areas annual Youth Justice Plan.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

17 Cheshire Youth Justice Service is a shared service partnership arrangement and is funded by the four Local Authorities, with contributions from statutory partner agencies (Police, Health, National Probation Service) with the largest amount of funding coming from the National Youth Justice Board as a ring-fenced national grant.

18 There are no financial implications relevant to this decision. Cheshire East Council formally entered into a partnership agreement for the provision of Youth Justice Services as a shared service delivery model

with Cheshire West and Chester Council as the lead authority. CEC financial contributions are set out within that legal agreement. Because of the economies of scale achieved by delivering youth justice on a shared service basis across the sub-region it represents excellent value for money (less spend on the statutory provision of youth justice services than comparable councils regionally or nationally).

19 The CEC annual budget for 2025.26 is £615k which includes the Youth Justice element of the MTFS (15) Growth to Deliver Statutory Youth Justice Service and Meet Safeguarding Partnership Duties budget increase of £198k. The forecast is £607k producing an underspend of £8k.

Human Resources

20 None

Risk Management

21 No significant risks identified.

22 Section 3 on page 24 of the Youth Justice Plan identifies modest risks to service delivery. These relate to the complexity of the geographical and multi-stakeholder landscape across which YJS operates and the high level of risk and need within the cohort of children it supports.

Impact on other Committees

23 None

Policy

24 No policy implications

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

25 The Youth Justice plan has been produced with due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equalities Act 2010 and to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

26 The plan provides data relating to the proportion of children in the criminal justice system from different ethnic backgrounds because historically children from certain ethnic backgrounds are over-represented in the criminal justice system. Note data shows that (unlike most regions) children from Black or dual heritage backgrounds are not over-represented in the criminal justice system.

27 Similarly, the plan takes full consideration of and makes explicit refence to cared for children and those with SEND – both of whom are over-represented in the Criminal Justice System (see section 11 pages 47-50 in the YJ Plan on over-represented groups in the justice system).

Other Implications

28 No specific public health implications of this report other than to state the strategy for Youth Justice partnership is to minimise the volume of children with previously unmet health needs that are criminalised for offences/behaviour that is symptomatic of previously unidentified health needs.

29 There are no specific implications relating to climate change, rural communities (the YJS outreaches into all communities across the Cheshire sub-region).

Consultation

Name of Consultee	**Post held**	**Date sent**	**Date returned**
Statutory Officer (or deputy) :			
Ashley Hughes	S151Officer	14/10/25	21/10/25
Kevin O'Keefe	Interim Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)	14/10/25	17/10/25
Legal and Finance			
Diane Green	Finance Manager	05/09/25	11/09/25
Jennie Summers	Legal Team Manager (People	05/09/25	05/09/25
Other Consultees: *Executive Directors/Directors*			

Dawn Godfrey	Executive Director Children's Services	21/10/25	22/10/25
Tracy Stephen	Director Family Help and Children's Social Care	13/10/25	14/10/25

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Tom Dooks – Head of Youth Justice Services (pan Cheshire)
Appendices:	Annual Refresh 2025 3-Year Strategic plan 2024-2027

Youth Justice Services

Cheshire East, Cheshire West, Halton and Warrington

Annual Refresh 2025

3-Year Strategic plan 2024-2027

Head of Service: Tom Dooks

Chair of the Management Board: Amanda Perraton

Contents

List of abbreviations

AYM	Association of Youth Offending Team Managers
CJB	Cheshire Criminal Justice Board
CJS	Criminal Justice System
CWCC	Cheshire West and Chester Council
FTE	First Time Entrant
GRT	Gypsy, Roma and Traveller
HMCTS	HM Courts and Tribunal service
HMIP	HM Inspectorate of Probation
HNA	Health Needs Assessment
ICB	Integrated Care Board
KPI	Key performance indicator
LGA	Local Government Association
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
NPCC	National Police Chiefs' Council
OOCD	Out of Court Disposal
OPCC	Office of the Police Crime Commissioner
PACE	Police and Criminal Evidence
PDAT	Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool
PNC	Police National Computer
SVS	Serious Violence Strategy
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SWAP	Safety Working Together Action Prevention
VCS	Voluntary Community Sector
VPA	Victim and Prisoners' Act
VRU	Violence Reduction Unit
YEF	Youth Endowment Fund
YFPP	Young Futures Prevention Partnership
YJAF	Youth Justice Application Framework
YJB	Youth Justice Board
YJS	Youth Justice Services (Cheshire)

Foreword

In my first year as chair, I am delighted to present this comprehensive annual update to our 3-year Youth Justice Strategic Plan for the Cheshire sub-region.

It has been agreed by the YJS Partnership Board and provides an overview of the pan-Cheshire Youth Justice Service, sets out details of performance over the past year and outlines our priorities for 2025-2026. It describes how the partnership will meet our ambitions to deliver a high-quality service for children, families, and victims of youth crime. Our plan is both strategic and operational and describes a committed service that has continued to perform strongly, with a low volume of children entering the Criminal Justice System and we are also encouraged to see reoffending rates declining in 2024-2025. The use of youth custody is also at a record low in Cheshire, with a total of only eight children sentenced to custody in the last year. This reflects the strong relationships Cheshire Youth Justice Service has with the courts and high local confidence in effective alternatives to custody.

The service has operated extremely well against the backdrop of a significantly challenging back-office infrastructure change programme with Cheshire West and Chester Council now hosting on behalf of the multi-authority partnership. I'm extremely proud of the way the service and wider partners came together to deliver this change with minimal impact on services to children, families and victims, while continuing to achieve such impressively consistent performance. I know Tom and the team work hard to ensure Child First, Trauma Informed and Relational Practice are at the core of all their work and it is genuinely heartwarming to hear about and read examples in here of evidence-based values making such a positive difference for some of Cheshire's most vulnerable people.

The YJS Management Board is committed to delivering this plan and will oversee its progress through to approval and publication by all four local councils. We have welcomed some new Board members recently and came together in June for an extended development session. This was to ensure we all fully understand the role and expectation on Board members to embrace Child First principles and set the strategic direction for all things related to Youth Justice across Cheshire, Halton and Warrington.

I am strongly committed to this approach and will ensure the guiding principle of recognising the potential of all children is reflected across all the work we do.

Amanda Perraton
Chair of YJS Management Board

Executive summary

This is the 2025-2026 update of the 3-year (2024-2027) Youth Justice Plan for the Cheshire sub-region. While the foreword from our new Chair, the performance data and accompanying narrative and images have all been refreshed, the broad strategic direction of travel for the Youth Justice Partnership and Cheshire Youth Justice Service (YJS) remain unchanged.

It is evident from national research and two recently commissioned local needs analyses (1), that children entering the Criminal Justice System (CJS) experience multiple adversities and trauma. Early childhood exposure to violence, abuse, neglect, poverty, school exclusion and poor health among justice-involved children, are all disproportionate to the general 10-17 year population. This understanding has influenced the strategic direction of travel for YJS across Cheshire. The priorities and content of this plan align with those relating to children and young people from across the four Cheshire places and the public health approach to violence prevention, as articulated in the Serious Violence Strategy (SVS) for the county (2). There has been a significant decrease in the overall number of children entering the justice system over several years, and the historically low levels have been sustained across Cheshire despite the backdrop of the cost-of-living crisis and other societal pressures. Many comparable regions have witnessed an upturn in child entrants to the justice system in the last couple of years, so we are proud to see the sustained impact of our pan-Cheshire youth diversion model. We have worked extensively with the police to ensure national developments, such as the new Child Gravity Matrix have been incorporated into a new out of court disposal (OOCD) protocol and a new joint decision-making process, which went live in April 2025.

We have a relatively new senior leadership team, however this is bringing fresh perspectives and the right balance of continuity and change as Cheshire builds on a solid regional and national reputation for strong performance. This is an exciting time for Cheshire to develop the partnership, while modernising the service and embracing the latest national and international evidence on Child First Youth Justice.

This plan outlines the “three pillars” vision for the service (Figure 1), which is rooted in the latest evidence and research on what works. In addition, the new leadership team has been implementing modest service re-design, intended to retain the economies of scale and equity of service at a sub-regional level, while aligning more effectively with local place-based services for children, victims and families.

Cheshire YJS has a very good regional and national reputation for delivering positive outcomes for children, victims and families. In common with all youth justice services across England and Wales, YJS continues to report against 10 key performance indicators (KPIs), in addition to the three main outcome measures First Time Entrants (FTE) to the justice system, reoffending and the use of custody.

For Cheshire YJS, 2024-2025 was a year of substantial infrastructure and organisational change. The previous shared service arrangements for youth justice delivery had evolved across the sub-region over two decades and had been through several iterations as Cheshire County Council, separated into two unitary authorities and youth justice teams merged incrementally. A comprehensive review of governance arrangements commented on the historical legacies of a service that had evolved over time, with a complex mix of cash and 'in-kind' contributions. These were highlighted as a risk to sustainability.

Consequently, a sub-regional review into the structure, financial arrangements and future sustainability of YJS as a pan-Cheshire partnership, recommended the service should be 'fully hosted' by one local authority. This proposal was agreed by all statutory partners and formerly approved by all four councils in the spring of 2024. The period between April 2024 and April 2025 involved significant infrastructure change, with multiple project workstreams (ICT, Finance, HR, Legal and Comms) all overseen by senior representatives of a pan-Cheshire 'Transitions Board' sitting in parallel to the main Youth Justice Partnership Board. Maintaining service continuity, while in transition to a hosted model was flagged as the principal risk for the partnership, but apart from relatively minor disruption related to ICT migration, the service has been very resilient and staff adapted where necessary, ensuring services to children, families and victims were largely unaffected.

Vision, mission and values

At the Service Development Day in July 2024, the whole service, including volunteers and some Board members, did an exercise to refresh the Vision, Values and Mission of the Service, ensuring they were aligned with national Child First principles and our three strategic pillars. These are shown below:-

Vision

> ***‘To deliver high quality services that make a difference to everyone we work alongside. Helping our children and others be the best they can be and feel safe and valued in their communities’***

Mission

Supporting children, young people, parents, carers and victims to make positive changes through working collaboratively;

- Promoting safer communities and reducing the likelihood of reoffending and harm caused – by tackling the root causes of children’s offending.
- Listening and responding to the voice of the victim and empowering them to become involved.
- Connecting with children, helping them to understand the impact of their behaviour and achieve improved outcomes.

In addition we committed to the following four **Values** Statements:

- ***Our children and victims are at the heart of all that we do, we work with optimism, empathy and tenacity;***
- ***We approach all we do with care, respect, understanding and empathy;***
- ***Connections matter: We build relationships through working creatively, consistently and with integrity;***
- ***We collaborate with and empower those we work alongside by listening and responding to what they have to say.***

We will continue to value diversity, challenge social inequality and listen to children and victims, while developing trusted relationships that take their views into account. We understand the wider causes of offending behaviour are often rooted in trauma and social inequality, so trauma-informed practice and systemic ideas are at the heart of how we work. We continue to work in a restorative way and strive to achieve the best possible outcomes for our children. YJS continue to work with partners on diverting children away from the formal CJS and continue to seek to detain a minimal number of children in custody, believing they are best supported to make changes in their lives whilst in the community, for all but the most serious of offences.

The latest research and evidence is clear that services working with children, who cause harm to others, should adhere to Child First principles and be Trauma-Informed and Relationship-Based in the way they are configured and delivered. Cheshire has taken these tenets and adopted them as our three pillars (Figure 1) to inform the Youth Justice strategy from point of arrest, right through to the resettlement of children following release from custody.

We know the majority of victims of children's offending are other children and the majority of children who perpetrate violence have themselves, experienced previous violent victimisation. So applying Child First practice is as much about reducing harm to victims as it is about improving the life chances of children who offend.

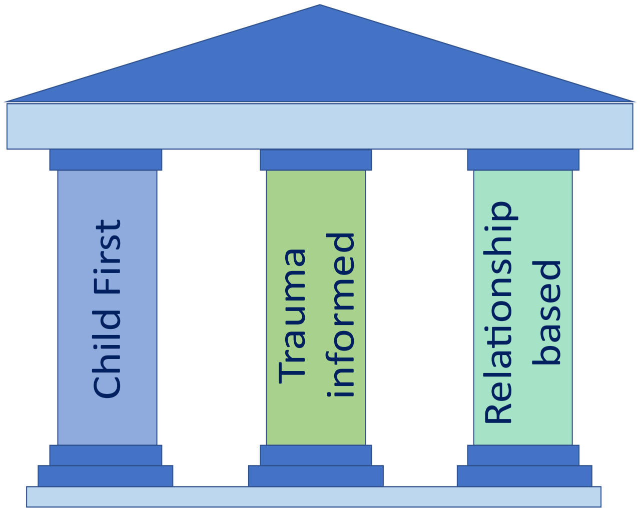


Figure 1. Cheshire YJS Three Pillars Strategic Vision

Regional and local context

The Cheshire footprint covered by YJS comprises the four unitary local authorities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester (CWCC), Halton and Warrington (Figure 2). Each local authority area has a Children's Safeguarding and Community Safety Partnership and Cheshire is divided into three Probation delivery units (North, West and East) and has nine local policing units. The workforce of Cheshire YJS has staff employed by CWCC and seconded workers from Cheshire Constabulary, the Probation Service, three different NHS Trusts and two private providers. The service also has support in a variety of different roles from 40 volunteers. This provides a strong partnership base to meet the various complexities and challenges faced by the county's children, families and victims. An organisational structure chart of staff is shown in Appendix A and ethnicity and gender of staff is shown in Appendix B.

Around 250,000 Cheshire residents are below the age of 18, with 101,077 aged 10-17. Across the four local authorities, there are over 1,000 cared for children. The large geographical area of 905 square miles does present some logistical challenges for the service, which has offices in Crewe, Winsford and Widnes.

Staff work on a hybrid basis with additional virtual working areas in Macclesfield, Warrington, Chester, Runcorn and Ellesmere Port. The children we work with tend to live in these larger, more urban locations.

Cheshire can be viewed as an affluent and rural county with pockets of urban deprivation. The volume of children in the justice system fluctuates between local authority areas but is broadly what would be expected based on population size relative to social deprivation.

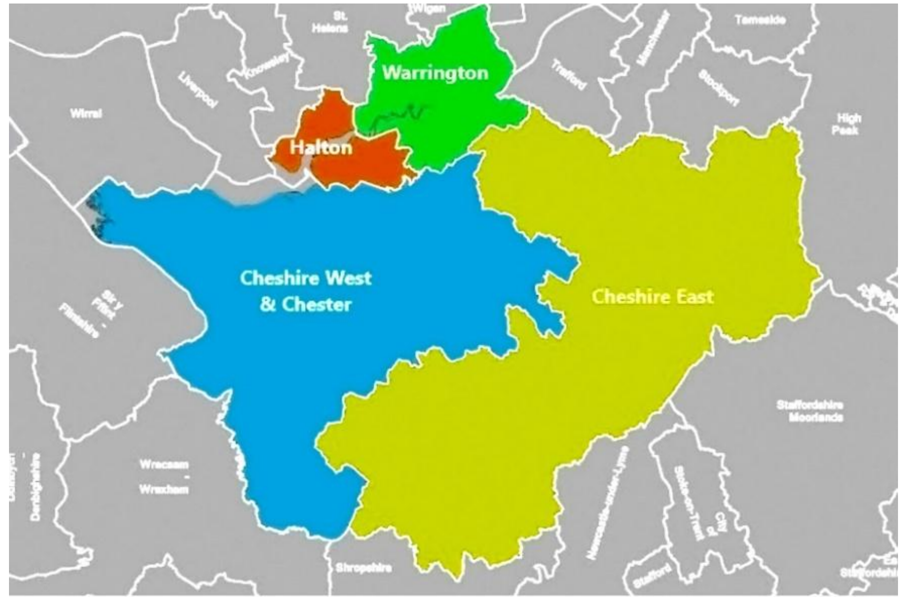


Figure 2. Cheshire and 15 neighbouring local authorities

Cheshire East and CWCC have the largest populations and Halton has the smallest population but higher levels of social deprivation. The UK Government indices of deprivation (2019) (3) show out of 317 local authorities, Halton is ranked highest of the four Cheshire authorities at 39, Warrington 175, CWCC 183 and Cheshire East, has the lowest at 228. Although highly diverse in terms of age, the county is not as diverse compared to other areas of England, with around 95% of residents identifying as ‘White British’. The Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT) community also has a presence in some areas. Figure 2 shows Cheshire shares borders with 15 other local authority areas and has excellent road and rail links to the three closest cities of Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham. Although these provide improved economic and lifestyle experiences, they also enable organised criminal activity such as County Lines and other forms of child exploitation. Cheshire Constabulary’s Operation Apollo continues to respond quickly to new lines and regularly closes these down. New supply lines crop up unless demand drops and this is something Cheshire and the National County Lines Coordination Centre engage with partners to try to drive forward. Over the past 12 months, the average number of lines in Cheshire remains at 38 (range: 20-51) but with a lower peak than the previous year, which went as high as 68.

The place-based graphic in Figure 3 show an overview of demographic data for context only.

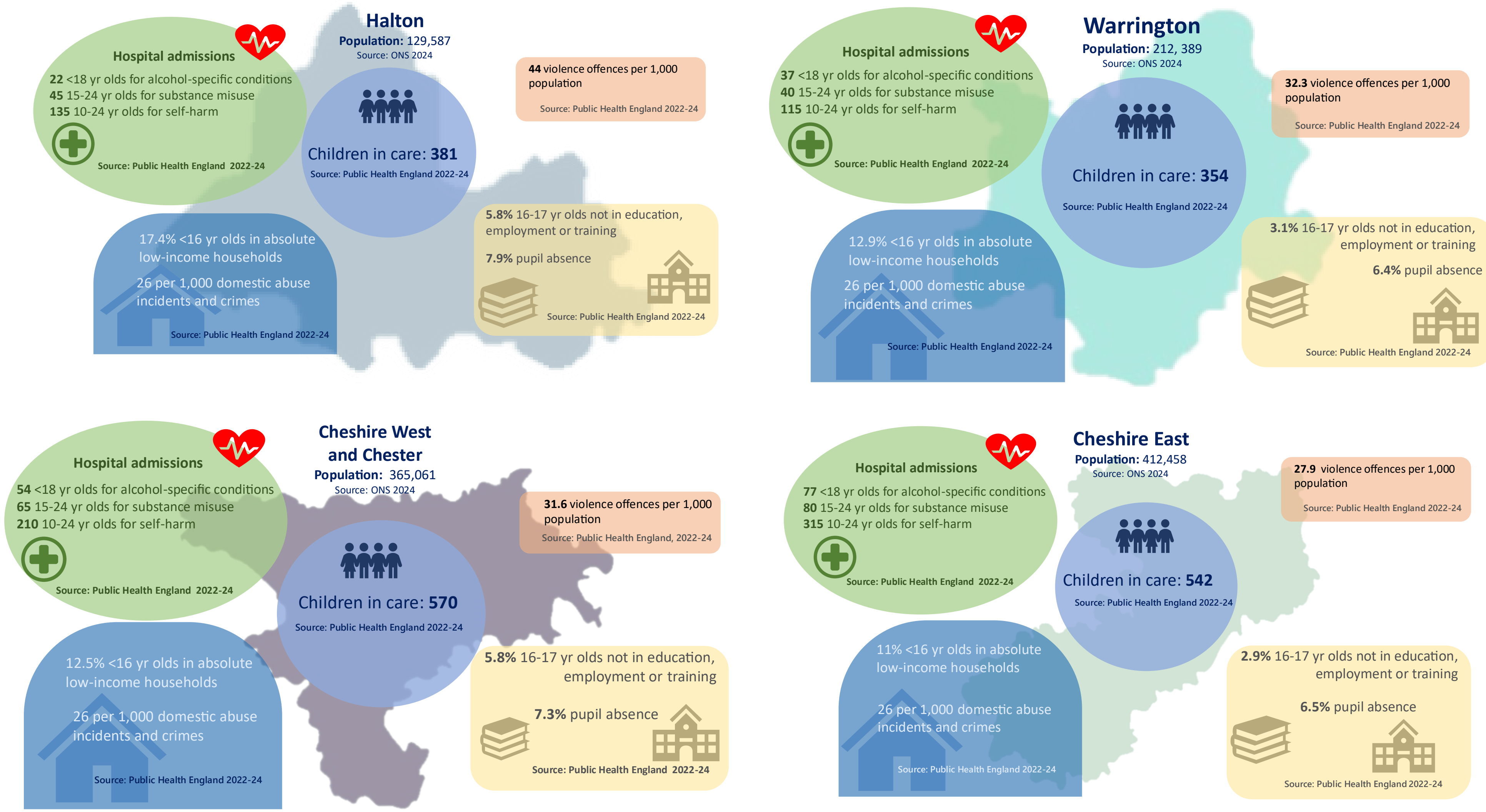
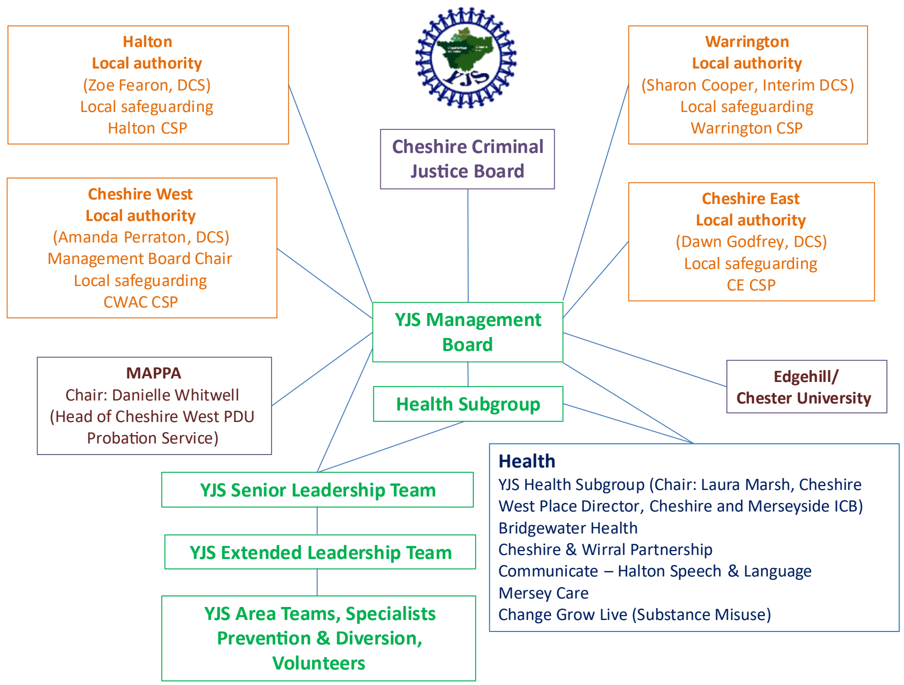


Figure 3. Place-based demographics for Halton, Warrington, Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East (Data sources: NHS Fingerprint [4] and Office of National Statistics [5])



DCS Director of Children's Services. CSP Children's Safeguarding Partnership,
PDU Probation Delivery Unit, ICB Integrated Care Board

Figure 4. Sub-regional Youth Justice System Strategic Partnership

Governance, leadership and partnership arrangements

A strength of Cheshire YJS is the strategic and professional links it has with colleagues at a sub-regional level in the public, private, academic, and voluntary sectors (Figure 4). The YJS Head of Service is a core member of both the pan-Cheshire Criminal Justice Board (CCJB) and Serious Violence Duty Partnership Board with senior youth justice management representation at CCJB sub-groups.

YJS is well placed to influence strategy and decisions at scale despite working in a complex governance landscape comprising four children's safeguarding partnerships, four community safety partnerships and a plethora of other place-based and sub-regional strategic groups, where Cheshire YJS has a duty (or need) to cooperate.

Cheshire YJS is also a core member of the four Children's Safeguarding Partnerships, the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), and the four Community Safety Partnerships.

These links have been enhanced by the adoption of a more youth justice-focussed role for the police officers, as recommended by the last HMIP inspection of Cheshire. After a policing review of Integrated Offender Management and the latest National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) guidance (6) on the role of seconded police officers, Cheshire Constabulary has increased the number of fully seconded and embedded officers in the service from three to four.

Cheshire does not have a Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) so as a sub-region, it does lack some of the investment, infrastructure and collaborative commissioning at scale brought by a VRUs to urban metropolitan areas. Cheshire YJS is an example of how strong governance and leadership can oversee the delivery of an effective multi-agency / multi-disciplinary service across local authority boundaries. However, the move to a single local authority hosted model reflected the need to simplify the operating environment, solve some of the organisational challenges and improve efficiency, enabling YJS as a whole to focus more time on delivering a quality service.

Online harm, neglect (including educational neglect), domestic abuse, sexual abuse and exploitation all feature disproportionately in the lives of justice-involved children and these are also priority thematic areas in Children's Safeguarding Partnerships across Cheshire. This plan specifically refers to the youth justice system but the strategic vision to improve outcomes for children, victims and communities across Cheshire is shared by the wider pan-Cheshire partnership. Timelines for approval at full council are complicated given the sub-regional arrangement. However, the four Directors of Children's Services are committed to taking this latest Youth Justice Plan (and annual updates) through their respective council governance channels.

Board membership and leadership

The Management Board Chair rotates every 2 years, across the four local authorities. CWCC's Executive Director of Children and Families is the current chair of the Board and also provides line management to the Head of Service. Chairing of the Youth Justice Partnership is due to pass to Warrington in April 2027 so with continuity in mind, Warrington's Director of Children Services has recently been appointed as Vice Chair.

Board membership is fully constituted with membership at a sufficiently senior level from all statutory partners, supplemented by other key members, including a leading academic advisor, an independent safeguarding advisor and a magistrate. An induction process is in place for new Board members and a new, over-arching legal partnership agreement between the four local authorities with CWCC as lead authority, hosting the YJS was agreed in April 2025. The partnership agreement outlines how local authority contributions to the service are made according to a percentage funding formula. This was calculated following a comprehensive zero-based review exercise into service demand and activity.

The Youth Justice Partnership (Board) will also utilise the children's committee of Cheshire and Mersey Integrated Care Board (ICB) to highlight service achievements and risks. Notwithstanding the financial pressures on the ICB, the Board has noted that cash contributions from health to YJS across Cheshire have not increased in line with inflation for several years, and a new funding formula to ensure equitable flow from Cheshire and Merseyside ICB to place has been proposed. At the time of refresh in May 2025, this had been accepted by three of the four places across Cheshire but a final formula and total NHS cash contributions for 2025-2026 have yet to be signed off.

The YJS Management Health Sub-group was established as the only explicitly sub-group of the Board because of the complexity of Health commissioning and provider arrangements across the sub-region. The Chair of the Health Sub-Group acts as Management Board representative for health, while also ensuring connectivity to Place Directors and Cheshire and Merseyside ICB.

The sub-group commissioned the Public Health Research Institute at Liverpool John Moores University to undertake a comprehensive Health Needs Assessment (HNA) (1). Published in 2023, the HNA was based on in-depth analysis of 70% of the children Cheshire YJS worked with in 2022. This research remains one of the most comprehensive and statistically valid studies in the UK, into the presenting health needs (sometimes undiagnosed, and frequently unmet) of children in/on cusp of the justice system. The terms of reference of the Health Sub-group were reviewed in 2024 and with wider public health representation, the group is now informing the commissioning of services upstream of the justice system (at place level).

The workplan for the Health Sub-group in 2025-2026 includes reviewing financial contributions to YJS from ICBs in each place and a public health consultant is working on a cost avoidance paper, aimed at demonstrating health investment in YJS avoids downstream costs to NHS, Local Government and the CJS. The Health Sub-group have also noted a rise in ketamine use by children and its associated health problems. In response, public health teams across the sub-region have been delivering a series of training and public health awareness campaigns.

Rea listened to me when I needed her. She helped me with whatever I needed at the time

(Child)

Given the multi-authority constitution, elected members are not on the Youth Justice Management Board, but to raise awareness of youth justice, the service held a bespoke open day for elected members in 2024. This was an opportunity for elected members to learn more about the Child First, trauma-informed and relational way our staff, from different professional disciplines, work together across authorities to support children, caregivers and victims. The event was very positively received by elected members, and YJS staff also welcomed the opportunity to share real examples of how they make a positive difference to the lives of some of the county's most vulnerable people.

This 3-year strategic plan (and subsequent annual updates) will progress through formal local channels for scrutiny, oversight and formal sign off by all four councils in accordance with the legislative requirement after it has been approved by the sub-regional management board. This process remains in place even now CWCC are hosting the service because each authority retains the statutory requirement for provision, scrutiny and oversight of youth justice delivery in their area.

Under a new senior leadership team in 2024-2025, YJS has undertaken some re-design to mirror the area delivery units of policing and probation and to align more effectively with place-based services for children, families and victims (see **Section 10.3 Service Development**).

1. Update on 2024-2025

1.1 Progress on priorities in previous plan

Priority 2024-2025	Progress, what have the outcomes/outputs been?
We will 'ramp-up' participation in creative ways right across the service and facilitate a culture of collaboration where children, volunteers and community groups are enabled to promote prosocial identity and desistance from crime. This will include co-production or co-design of plans, developing projects to support children to desist from crime and reduce harm to victims and communities.	Cheshire YJS' newly created Service Development Hub has been driving participation and application of the Lundy Model (7) of strengthening voice and influence across the service. The organisational re-design and formation of area-based teams is enabling the service to be more outward looking, fostering and nurturing new partnerships with local voluntary community sector (VCS) groups. The YJS Participation Plan has been updated and rebranded as the Participation and Community Development Plan in recognition of the need to connect (or 're-connect') children within their local community. YJS now have designated 'Participation Champions' in each Area Team and managers are influencing local participation strategies. Children supported by the service are now increasingly collaborating on projects with local VCS groups and this will very much continue as a strategic and operational priority, in line with our Child First, Trauma-Informed and Relational principles. The 'My-Plan' document, co-designed with a child, has now been rolled out and is used consistently by professionals and in early 2025, a group of justice-involved children also co-designed an update of the YJS induction booklet. Guides for practitioners on Child First participatory practice have been developed and are being promoted in each area, by our Participation Champions and there have been several excellent examples of co-produced activities (**see Section 4**). These are designed to help children develop a prosocial identity, sense of achievement and re-integrate them into their local community. The Child First evidence-base is regularly promoted through the monthly 'Power in Participation' feature in the YJS newsletter (YJ News) and our senior practitioners are role-modelling the application of Child First into daily practice. In 2024-2025, Cheshire YJS have introduced the concept of an annual 'impact report' providing evidence of community engagement, voice and influence and social prescribing and have shared this with partners via the Management Board. Embedding Child First practice will remain a priority for the life of this 3-year strategic plan.
We will develop a new comprehensive performance reporting and quality assurance framework, ensuring we are data driven and make full use of the	The new framework was designed and developed as an iterative process throughout 2024 and is now presented in PowerPoint format to the Board each quarter. Several data reporting anomalies came to light and YJS are still working with the software provider (CACI Ltd) and liaising with the Youth Justice Board (YJB) data teams and sector colleagues to refine data sets. As a sub-regional partnership, spanning four local authorities, performance reporting is more complex and

management information system to drive practice development.	nuanced than in most Youth Justice Partnerships because data is sent automatically to the YJB via connectivity and the YJB collate and publish it as a pan-Cheshire figure. Disaggregating data to place level necessitates differentiated recording and coding, which is still under development. Notwithstanding this and some significant staffing gaps throughout 2024, the service now has a new Performance Officer and Business and Performance Manager in post who will work closely with senior management and external partners to explore using Microsoft's Power BI to refine reporting in 2025-2026.
We will refine our internal governance processes to ensure management and back-office functions help facilitate the delivery of high-quality services, including enhanced training monitoring and a training needs assessment to inform the staff training plan.	A major organisational review began in 2024-2025 and will continue into 2025-2026. The transition to CWCC as lead authority has taken priority during the last 6 months of 2024-2025 and the absence of a Business and Performance Manager and other vacancies in Business Support have resulted in the review of business support functions not being finalised. Many internal governance functions have been refined to ensure they align with the service's three pillars and new ways of working: including the shift from High Risk Reviews to Safety Panels and the new triaging process and area-based OOCD panels. A staff survey and training needs assessment to inform workforce development was undertaken in 2024 and the service will be commissioning specialist training in a number of areas, based on the findings and priority need. We will also be utilising expertise and experience within the service to deliver more training in-house (see **Workforce Development in Section 7**).
We will benchmark the YJS support offer to victims against the Victims Code of Practice, new Victims' legislation and HMIPs new inspection criteria (refining the role of Restorative Justice workers in YJS if required) identifying and progressing areas for development	A benchmarking exercise was undertaken and presented at the Management Board in December 2024. In common with most Youth Justice Services, there are some gaps, operationally and strategically, in relation to the responsibilities now enshrined in the Victim and Prisoners' Act (VPA) (8). Some of these are systemic and require updating of information/date exchange between Police and YJS and additional YJS personnel being vetted to access the Police NICHE database. The Board have agreed with a proposal from the service to recruit someone with lived experience who can champion the voice and rights of victims and YJS will be exploring options including replicating the 'lay advisor's role on Strategic MAPPA Boards. The service designed a new victim audit tool, based on the key criteria for supporting victims as outlined in the new HMIP Inspection Framework and undertook an audit of victim casework in early 2025. The audit revealed some areas for improvement and these have been collated and captured within the Youth Justice Service Development Plan for 2025-2026. Cheshire YJS were asked to share this new Victim Audit tool (9) on the national YJS resource hub, as it was considered to be the first of its kind following the VPA.

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In partnership with Cheshire Constabulary, we will review the current joint decision-making arrangements for the use of out of court disposals for our children. We will ensure they incorporate the Child Gravity Matrix and children are diverted to the appropriate service according to their level of risk and need.	In 2024, a new joint protocol for youth OOCDs was developed in collaboration with Cheshire Constabulary. The Centre for Justice Innovation acted as a 'critical friend' to the partnership by assisting with ensuring the new protocol is supported by the latest evidence and guidance from the sector. The protocol ensures the revised Child Gravity Matrix and latest YJB and NPCC guidance is incorporated. The new triaging process and area-based joint OOCD decision making panels were then designed in collaboration with Cheshire Constabulary and went live in April 2025. The panels are chaired by YJS Area Team Managers but with a Police Inspector and/or Police Sergeant also in attendance. The panels have ensured a greater level of defensibility and shared decision making around OOCDs. YJS professionals attend panel to present their assessment (using the new YJB Prevention and Diversion Tool) and in line with the new VPA, the victim's voice is sought and considered. These new panels will be refined throughout 2025-2026 and if necessary, adapted in light of Government announcements *vis a vis* 'Youth Futures Prevention Partnerships' (YFPPs), which for Cheshire are not expected to come on line until April 2027.
We will collaborate with partners to deliver against Priority 1 (Prevention) of Cheshire's 2024-2029 Serious Violence Strategy (2) (SVS) by ensuring funding is targeted appropriately to support children at risk of involvement in serious violence.	The YJS Head of Service continues to be an active member of CCJB and also sits on the Serious Violence Leaders Group that oversees commissioning and the operationalisation of the Serious Violence Duty. Developments in 2024-2025 include a new partnership for Cheshire with the organisation Street Games. YJS have been active and influential in connecting Street Games (who have been awarded Youth Endowment funding [YEF]) into Warrington, where the gap analysis and Serious Youth Violence (SYV) data indicates the need for targeted youth provision is greatest. YJS works closely with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and have also ensured justice-involved children are accessing OPCC-funded provision across the county to provide children at risk of crime, with positive **activities, interactions and roles** for identity development (Fresh **AIR** in Child First language). The OPCC's Safety Working together Action Prevention (SWAP) funding comes from depriving organised crime of their assets (Proceeds of Crime Act) and in addition to sporting activities, YJS have developed partnerships with VCS organisations including Culture Warrington, which are providing art and music-based opportunities for children in or on the cusp of the justice system.

Some other notable achievements in 2024-2025 include:-

- Cheshire YJS has been rated consistently within Quadrant 2 (Satisfactory performance) by the YJB's Performance and Oversight Board because of solid and sustained performance across key metrics;
- Our social prescribing model has been cited by the Local Government Association (LGA) (10), YJB and NHS England as innovative practice for supporting children and young people in or on the cusp of the justice system (and has been nominated for a prestigious Children and Young People Now 2025 Award);
- Cheshire Constabulary have refurbished all three custody suites in Cheshire and have adopted trauma-informed and Child First principles through the inclusion of cells designed explicitly with children and neurodiversity in mind;
- YJS ensured justice-involved children participated in the annual 'Big Conversation' with the OPCC and senior police officers, providing their voice and influence on policing priorities across the county;
- The role of volunteering in YJS has expanded with several volunteers being part of our mentoring programme (in line with YEF evidence). Mentors support our children to access other services, to build confidence, learn new skills, and gain employment. One mentor supported a child into employment after helping him with his CV and working on his confidence to approach a local employer directly, who gave him a trial leading to permanent employment;
- Justice-involved children have participated in grass roots VCS community projects, funded by the OPCCs SWAP fund. Examples include the community leaders sports programme at Warrington Youth Zone and DJ workshop delivered by Culture Warrington;
- Justice-involved children participated in the National Citizen Service (NCS) programme in Warrington.

After NCS I am more comfortable trying new things and experiences
(Child)

2. Performance over the previous year

In 2024, Cheshire YJS developed a new comprehensive performance reporting and quality assurance framework so the Management Board, partners and staff can all see areas of strengths and challenge across a wide range of outcomes. We will be data driven, making full use of the management information system to target improvement activity in the areas where it is most needed.

Performance against nationally-measured targets continues to be strong. Since rolling out the Divert scheme in 2017 across all Cheshire local authorities, we have seen fewer children entering the CJS.

Total volume and rates per 100,000 are significantly below regional and national averages and Section 11.4 contains a longer-term trend of FTE data, disaggregated by local authority. Figure 5 shows initial sharp reductions in FTE, with the low base level being sustained again in 2024.

(NB the lowest level of FTE, in 2021 was due to the impact of covid/lockdowns).

Jason, working with him has been fantastic. Jason made everything clear and put it in ways I understand
(Child)

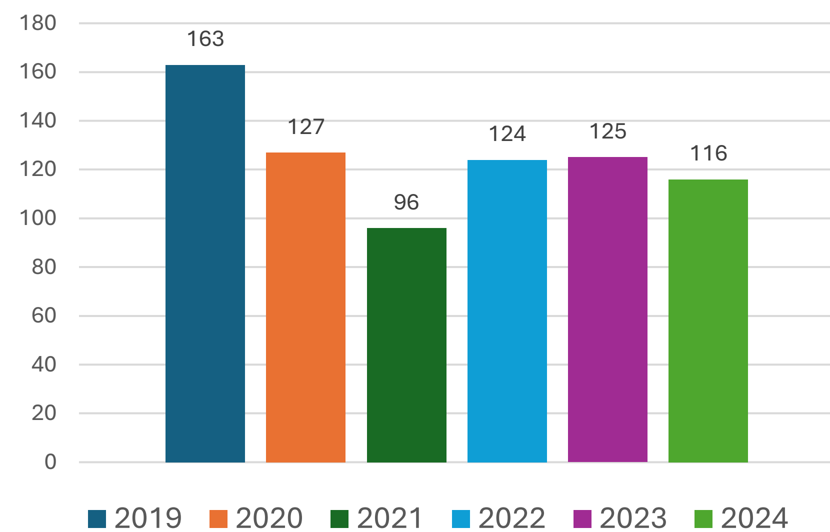


Figure 5. FTEs to the CJS in Cheshire (Jan-Dec 2024)
(Data source: YJAF)

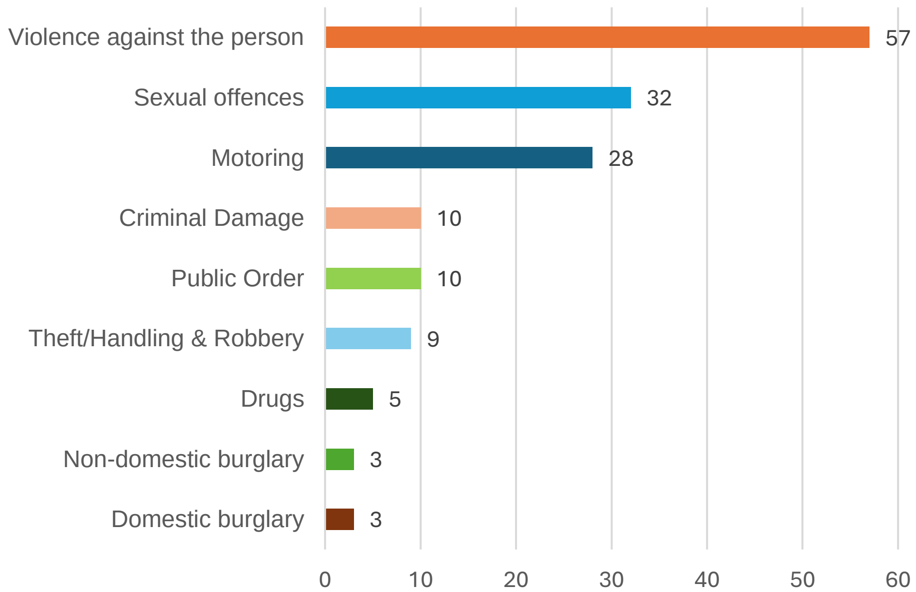


Figure 6. FTE main offence type in 2024-2025
(Data source: YJS local data)

Figure 6 shows violence and sexually harmful behaviour representing the bulk of those committed by children entering the CJS for the first time. This is what we would expect and is compatible with Child First youth justice principles and an effective youth diversion scheme that ensures children are dealt with according to risk and need.

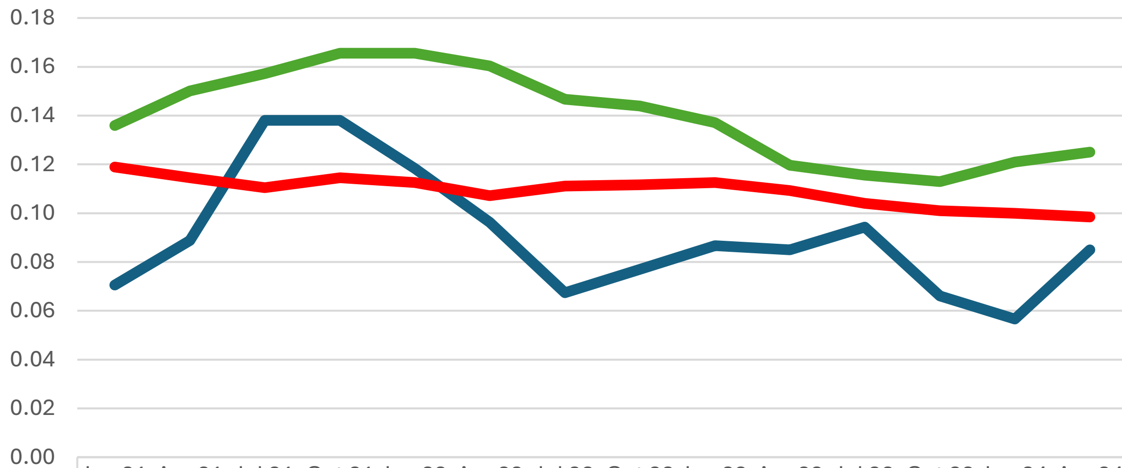
Motoring offences resulting in caution or charge increased slightly in 2024-2025. YJS have developed a partnership with Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service who can deliver an intervention called 'Drive Survive' on our behalf.

Figure 7 shows Cheshire continues to be below the regional and national average for the proportion of sentenced children receiving custody and although the proportion did increase slightly in the 12 months running up to March 2025, it has been trending downwards since 2021.

Cheshire has consistently low numbers of children remanded and sentenced to custody (see Sections 11.9 and 11.10 for place-based detail). Fewer than five children across the whole of Cheshire have been sentenced to custody in any quarterly period going right back to Q2 of 2019.

It is rare for there to be more than 10 children from the four places in Cheshire combined, serving custodial sentences at any one time. While reoffending rates of those children in the system are slightly higher than regional averages, this is attributable to the fact children sentenced by the courts tend to be those with whom we have already exhausted all diversionary options. They are the children who are often more entrenched in criminality and exploitation, so require more intensive intervention and support.

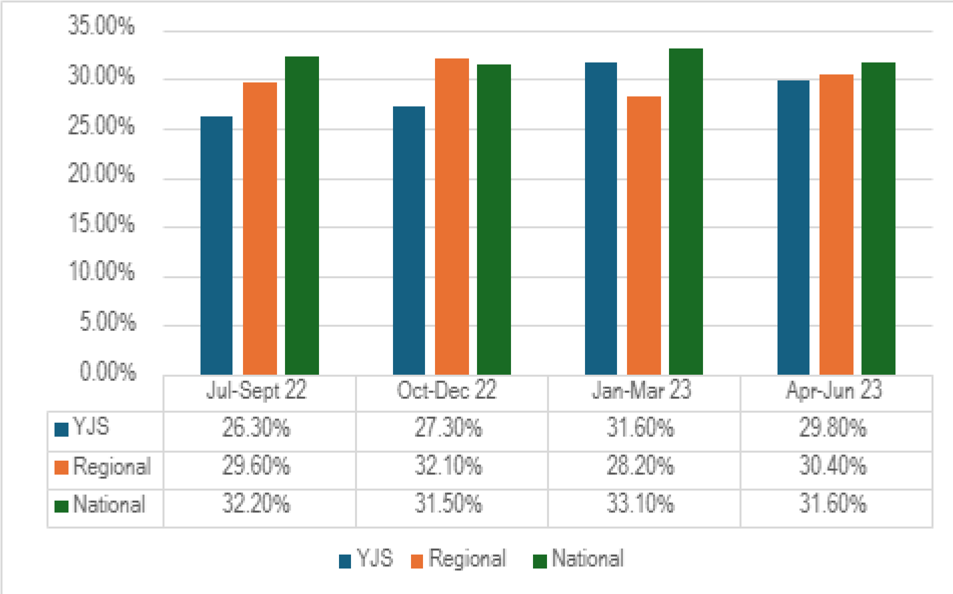
We are also seeing consistently reliable results for those children subjected to OOCDs, in terms of successful completions and reoffending rates, with fewer than one in ten children diverted away from formal sanctions going on to reoffend.



	Jan 21 - Dec 21	Apr 21 - Mar 22	Jul 21 - Jun 22	Oct 21 - Sep 22	Jan 22 - Dec 22	Apr 22 - Mar 23	Jul 22 - Jun 23	Oct 22 - Sep 23	Jan 23 - Dec 23	Apr 23 - Mar 24	Jul 23 - Jun 24	Oct 23 - Sep 24	Jan 24 - Dec 24	Apr 24 - Mar 25
Cheshire East, Cheshire West, Halton and Warrington	0.07	0.09	0.14	0.14	0.12	0.10	0.07	0.08	0.09	0.08	0.09	0.07	0.06	0.08
North West	0.14	0.15	0.16	0.17	0.17	0.16	0.15	0.14	0.14	0.12	0.12	0.11	0.12	0.13
England & Wales	0.12	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10

Figure 7. Custody Rate per 1,000 for Cheshire 10-17-year-olds with regional and national comparisons
(Data source: YJAF)

As a service, we are committed to focusing our efforts on reducing reoffending by our children. However, as we continue to prevent children entering the system and, running parallel, have relatively few children in custody, we recognise reoffending rates are understandably our area of greatest challenge. Figure 8 provides the latest published reoffending data, taken from the Police National Computer (PNC).



My son has learnt to control himself and his anger more. I have a more focused vision for his future and career

(Parent)

Figure 8. Binary reoffending data for YJS compared with regional and national rates July 2022-June 2023
(Data source: YJAF via PNC)

Figure 8 shows Cheshire rates are similar or slightly lower than regional and national rates. Whilst this serves to give us a national picture, it is important to recognise PNC data has limitations. For example, reoffending data is published 2 years behind the current quarter. In addition, the data also includes:-

- reoffending of adults we no longer work with or have never been known to Cheshire YJS;
- reoffending of children from outside areas who offended in Cheshire but have never been open to Cheshire YJS.

Given the limitations in the national data, Cheshire YJS will create a local reoffending cohort from a sample of children and begin tracking any reoffending from this cohort with effect from April 2025.

Desistance from crime for children who experience significant adversity and trauma is not a linear journey. It requires long-term, trusted, relational support from professionals to try and help children achieve a shift toward a more positive self-identity. This is why the vision for the service is underpinned by the three key pillars of Child First, Trauma-Informed and Relational-Based Practice (Figure 1).

Working with girls

National statistics provided by the YJB indicate the number of girls in the youth justice system has tended to be a fraction of the total caseload at around 15%. However, Table 1 shows a review of Cheshire data and since 2023-2024, we have seen a 35% overall increase in the number of girls in the cohort. This is a significant increase in the proportion of girls relative to boys.

Table 1. Number (and percentage of overall cohort) of girls open to Cheshire YJS in 2023-2024 and 2024-2025

		2023-24 (%)	2024-25 (%)
Q1	April-June	22 (17)	26 (19)
Q2	July-September	17 (14)	40 (28)
Q3	October-December	21 (16)	35 (26)
Q4	January-March	27 (21)	35 (22)
Total number		**87**	**136**

(Data source: YJS local data)

> *It's hard …navigating friendships, being online, school. It's non-stop. Also feel judged by what you wear. Doesn't feel a safe world now*
>
> (YJS Girl's Focus Group)

We are aware this is a national trend, noted by other youth justice services but we wanted to explore it in more detail and identify areas for development within the service and across the wider partnership.

Several actions were undertaken to shape and influence our future focus:

- A survey was completed with the girls open to YJS so their experiences could be heard directly and we asked how we can best support them in or on the cusp of the justice system;
- In January 2025, Dr Gilly Sharpe (Senior Lecturer in Criminology at Sheffield University) delivered a whole service presentation on her research findings on girls and young women in the CJS;
- Cheshire YJS is now also on the YJB national forum for work with girls so is learning from and sharing good practice.

Key findings of our review:

- 54% of the offences committed by girls are broadly categorised as violent/harm against a person and research indicates girls can be treated more harshly for certain types of offences, particularly those involving violence.
- Predominantly, girls open to YJS are aged 15-17 years; this is in line with research findings, i.e. girls are likely to offend between the ages of 13 to 16. Early intervention from universal services and targeted services is key to supporting girls with some of the challenges they may be facing, to help reduce them entering the CJS.
- Snapshots indicate for all children in Cheshire, the percentage split across OOCD and post court is approximately 70/30%. However, when focussing on girls, this is more evenly split i.e. OOCD 22 (54%), compared to court-imposed orders 19 (46%) for girls.

The European Guidelines on Child Friendly Justice recognise girls as a minority whose needs are overlooked. This led to the committee recommending, they are paid special attention through gender sensitive provision (11). As a service, we have explored provision for girls in each of the local authority areas, so girls can have a safe space to attend and receive support and build networks.

In 2025-2026, we will use the evidence found in our Girls' Survey, Dr Gilly Sharpe's Presentation (Girls and Young Women in the Criminal Justice System) and other research to inform the way we work with girls as a service. We will ensure Assessments and Pre-Sentence Reports capture the context of the girl's behaviour (trauma, abuse, exploitation) and ensure girls receive the most proportionate outcome and are not over criminalised. We will also develop our understanding of how gender impacts on identity and ensure interventions are evidence-based and gender-responsive.

Figure 9 shows the Token of Gratitude Certificate awarded to the group who gave their time and voice to help improve how we work with girls.

Figure 9. YJS Token of Gratitude Certificate

2.1 National Standards Audit

Submission of a National Standards (NS) audit is a condition of the YJB national grant and the most recent NS audit was undertaken in October 2023, against NS2: Work in Courts. Cheshire YJS received positive feedback from the YJB Regional Oversight Manager on the quality of both the audit process and its findings.

This NS audit was a comprehensive quality assurance audit of the services delivered before, during and after children's appearances before the three magistrate courts and one crown court in Cheshire. Section A looked at Strategy, Section B on Reports and Section C on Process. Sections B and C involved a deep dive practice audit involving 20 cases.

There were nine areas in Section A 'Strategic performance' with four rated **Outstanding** and five rated as **Good**. Cheshire YJS enjoys a strong partnership with HM Court and Tribunal Service (HMCTS), Magistrates, the Police and Crown Prosecution Service. The Head of Service is a member of CCJB and meets quarterly with youth bench magistrates who sit in Cheshire's three youth courts. A former chair of the Cheshire youth bench and a representative from HMCTS are also members of the Management Board.

For sections B (Reports) and C (Process), the audit revealed the overall quality of work was **Good** or **Outstanding**. One criterion required improvement and this related to the adequate referencing of the impact of the child's offence on their victim, by authors of pre-sentence reports. Improvement action has been addressed through local changes to case management and recording guidance, emphasis on managerial oversight and explicitly evidencing the possible impact on victims (even where victim personal statements are unavailable).

3. Risks and issues

The main risk to service delivery and the achievement of positive outcomes for children, victims and families, relates to the complexity of the pan-Cheshire shared service arrangements. To a large extent, this risk has now been mitigated through the move to a fully hosted model with CWCC acting as lead authority, albeit the risk and challenge of operating a lean service spanning four local authorities is an inherent one. Cheshire YJS operates in a sub-regional (pan-Cheshire context) so sits somewhere between place and the larger Cheshire and Merseyside ICB footprint. This can be a difficult space to navigate, particularly from a stakeholder management perspective because the commissioning and NHS provider footprints do not align with the local authority, police and YJS footprint, and there is high turnover of senior leaders at both place and regional level. The vast majority of Youth Justice Services are integrated into single local authority structures with much simpler Governance models – albeit their costs are higher because they have to absorb all management, ICT and back-office costs at place level.

National policy initiatives relevant to the youth justice sector sometimes falsely assume that youth justice is integrated within children services at place, so Cheshire YJS frequently has to adapt or compromise to implement national programmes. This was the case with the Troubled Families and Ministry of Justice (MOJ) Turnaround programme and will also be the case with YFPPs, which the Government expects to be established at place level. The Head of YJS is well networked across all four Cheshire places and the internal service redesign undertaken in 2024-2025 was undertaken with the direction of travel toward place-based YFPPs and Families First in mind.

The other main risk to effective youth justice delivery relates to the precarious financial position all funding partners face. Two of the local authorities in Cheshire have experienced Best Value inspections in the last 12 months and Cheshire and Merseyside ICB is in ‘turnaround’ and making significant spending cuts. With the YJB as the largest single financial contributor to this partnership, also under statutory review, with decisions on multi-year settlements for all departments yet to be made, resourcing remains the biggest single risk to service continuity. Cheshire YJS also has an ageing workforce; there have been several retirements in the last year and a number of experienced staff in front line, managerial and back-office roles are likely to retire within the next few years. Cheshire YJS have recruited younger staff – particularly in front-line practice – and are beginning to explore apprenticeship opportunities with the CWCC organisational development team for workforce planning.

4. Building on our strengths: Plan for 2024-2025

4.1 Child First

In Cheshire, we are committed to Child First principles. As mentioned earlier, these principles, along with Trauma-Informed and Relationship-Based Practice will inform all practice and development activity. YJS will continue to apply the principle of "*Would this be good enough for my child*?" and prioritise the best interests of children, recognise their needs, capacities, rights, and potential.

As well as being child-focused, our work will be developmentally-informed, acknowledge structural barriers and done with children, rather than done to them. YJS has adopted the Lundy Model (7) (Figure 10) as our frame of reference in developing participation across all aspects of service delivery in 2024-2027. The wider partnership are starting to adopt Child First principles in 2024-2025 with all four local authority Children's Services now referencing and training staff on the Lundy Model.

In 2024, Cheshire Constabulary refurbished their three custody suites to become less intimidating for children and in recognition of the fact many children entering police custody are neurodivergent and experience sensory difficulties. Dimmed lighting and foam footballs have been introduced into cells along with chalkboards and edible chalk allowing children to safely express themselves while detained (Figure 11).

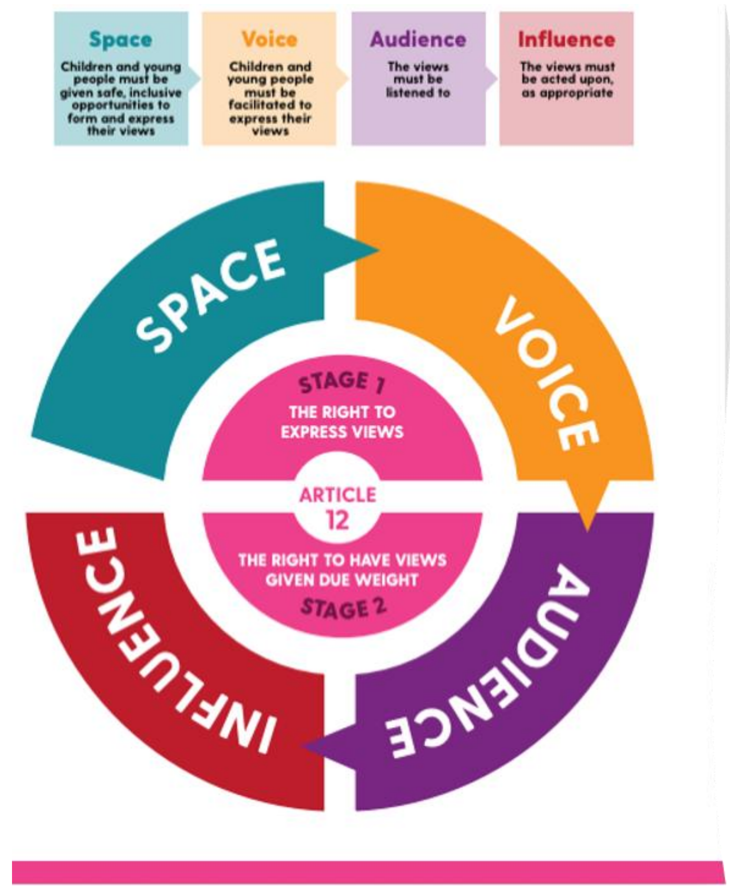


Figure 10. The Lundy Model of Child Participation

YJS has made great strides in this direction of travel in recent years but recognise there is more to do, particularly in relation to meaningful and active participation of children in the justice system.

This is why ***participation*** remains a strategic, operational and practice priority flowing from this Strategic plan.

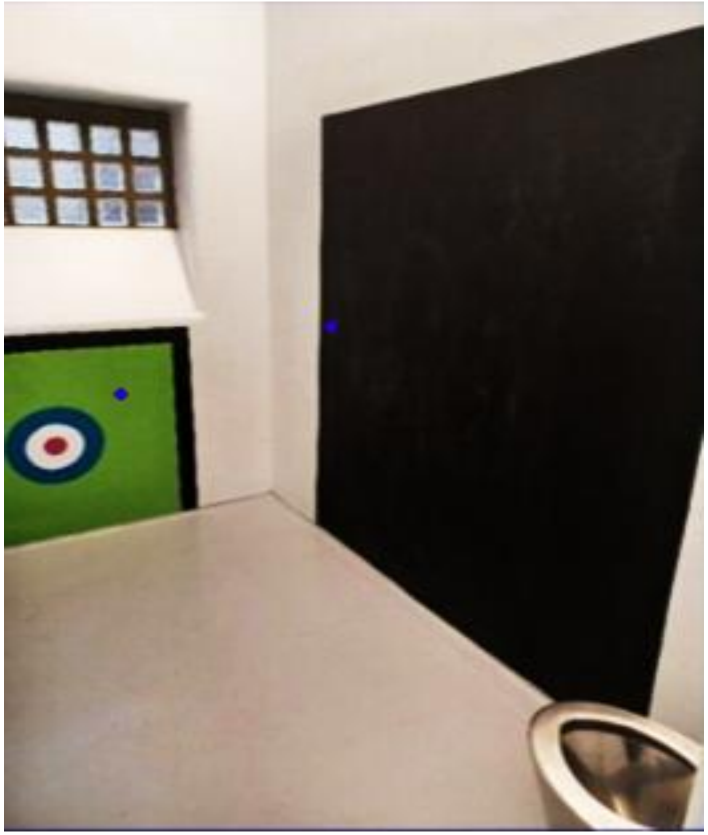


Figure 11. Refurbished police custody cell

The new Service Development Hub is the "engine room" to drive forward participation across all areas of YJS. This will not be easy as children sentenced by the courts often feel they have no power and no voice and they have usually experienced significant trauma and adversity. Offending for many children is in part symptomatic of their own childhood abuse or neglect. YJS held a Service Development Day in July 2024, with **participation** as the theme and the leading children's and social justice charity, Peer Power co-facilitated the day. Through the lived experience of their 'peer leaders', Peer Power have helped YJS harness the power and potential of children and young people to be the catalyst for scaling up some of the co-produced (Child First) activity started in 2023-2024 and developed further in 2024-2025.

An example of this involves a child placed in Cheshire under the care of another local authority. *A* is southeast Asian and Muslim and he participated in a voice and influence project in Warrington and provided feedback on his very personal challenge of moving from an ethnically diverse city to a predominantly white town.

A enthusiastically invited his YJS worker to join him in celebrating his religious festival and sharing food in a lovely, cultural learning exchange. *A* will be helping YJS to help other children from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds – a textbook example of giving children a voice, influence and then activities and interactions to promote prosocial identity.

Figure 12. Mural next to site of Crewe Youth Zone

Several justice-involved children from the Crewe area worked with other children and a professional artist to create the mural in Figure 12 on the side of a building next to where a new ‘Youth Zone’ is being built in the town.

In 2025-2026, YJS will also be working with an arts studio in Halton and Culture Warrington to give justice-involved children similar opportunities to positively (and publicly) express themselves through art.

Each year, YJS encourage and support any children with an interest in art to submit their work to the annual Koestler awards.

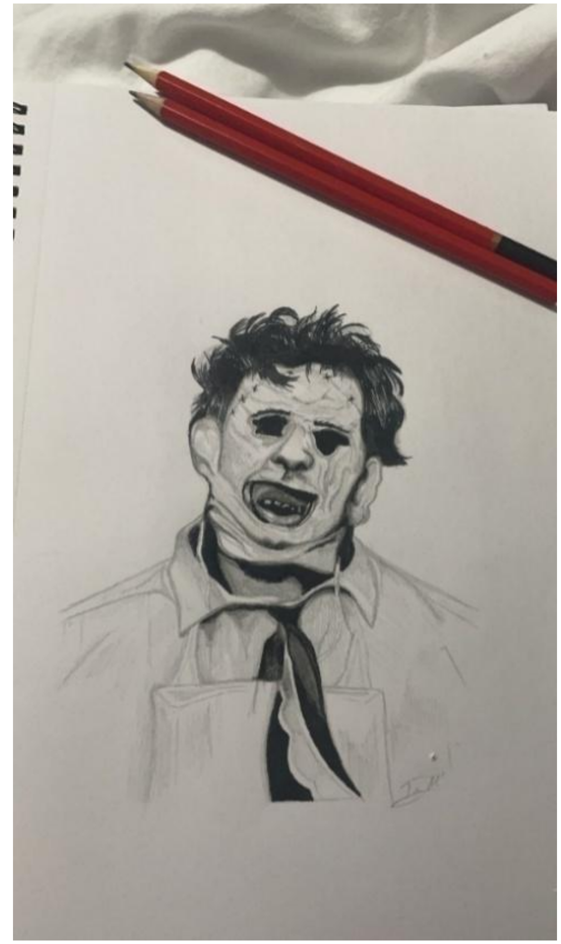


Figure 13 “Leatherface” Koestler Awards submission

Figure 13 shows the latest submission and the artist received a highly commended certificate through Koestler’s fast feedback programme.

Figure 14. Cr8 music project in Macclesfield

H has really enjoyed the music session he attended this week…which is a massive breakthrough for him to communicate with us. He has isolated himself in the family home, which has impacted on his emotional and mental health due to his traumatic upbringing with his father. His case manager and I have been trying to tap into his interests as a way of encouraging socialisation and supporting his mum too.

(Social Worker)

Music is used therapeutically as a tool to engage children who have experienced trauma and encourage them to express themselves while learning new skills. YJS have partnered with a couple of music-based social enterprises to co-produce projects where justice-involved children work alongside musicians to learn new instruments, write lyrics, try DJ mixing and laying tracks on computer.

One child, supported by YJS on the Cr8 project (Figure 14), has developed a real talent on the drums and after a long period out of education has reintegrated back into school. Another child with a real talent for lyric writing, recorded tracks in a studio and released them on Apple music (an excerpt is shown on the right). These are powerful examples of giving children **A**ctivities, **I**nteractions and **R**oles to help them develop positive self-identity, as opposed to an offending identity.

"Be Successful in this life without regret
Stop tryna act bad for a cell

From a young age I been that kid in a court
Trust me didnt lead me nowhere

But I bet you these People tryna act bad for a cell
get chills when they hear a siren pass"

5. Resources and services

The YJS operates as a complex shared service arrangement, with pooled funding from four local authorities, statutory partners, Cheshire OPCC and the YJB core grant. Cheshire YJS will pool the YJB core grant with other funding to:

- Ensure we have a well-trained, supported and motivated team of staff, with the specialist skills to engage children, families and victims;
- Continue to contribute towards funding our Relationship-Based Practice model and further developing participatory work with children, families and victims;
- Continue to pool funding to develop social prescribing and other interventions with children to improve self-identity, health and wellbeing and reduce the likelihood of reoffending;
- Continue to develop diversionary and participatory interventions to divert children away from formal sanctions (supported by contributions from the OPCC);
- Ensure YJS can continue to provide robust, intensive supervision to children in the community to maintain public and judicial confidence and minimising the use of custody;
- Further develop our service offer to victims so we are in line with the Victim Code of Practice (12). YJS will hold a wellbeing day in the summer of 2025 for victims of youth crime across Cheshire. This will also be an opportunity for victims to contribute their views and ideas and we hope to recruit a Victims' Ambassador to be their voice on the Management Board.

6. Board development

The YJS Management Board will hold an extended Board Development session in June 2025. This is being independently facilitated by Child First Consultant, Michael O'Connor. There are a number of new Board members and this will be a timely opportunity to come together as a group of system leaders, from across the sub-regional partnership, to learn about the evidence base behind Child First Youth Justice. The Board will continue to meet quarterly and receive reports from YJS and partners to facilitate scrutiny and discussion around key service delivery and performance areas. The Board's key purposes are:

- To determine strategic direction of YJS, ensuring all statutory partners are fully engaged;
- To oversee and monitor the operational work of YJS;
- To ensure YJS is adequately resourced to carry out its statutory function of preventing offending by children and young people.

The leadership, composition and role of the Management Board are critical to the effective delivery of local youth justice services and Cheshire has senior representation from all statutory partners. The YJS Management Board also has long standing representation from HMCTS, the Magistracy, children's safeguarding, and academia.

As mentioned in section 5, we will be exploring the recruitment of a Victim Ambassador to champion the voice of victims and be a critical friend to the youth justice management team and our partners.

7. Workforce development

In line with our three pillars vision, we are committed to learning and development. It is vital all staff have the appropriate skills and knowledge, are effective in their roles and equipped to deliver high-quality services to everyone they work with.

We encourage staff to identify gaps in knowledge and suggest learning opportunities, across the team and within supervision. In the latter months of 2024, all staff were invited to give their view on our training offer by taking part in a Training Needs Analysis.

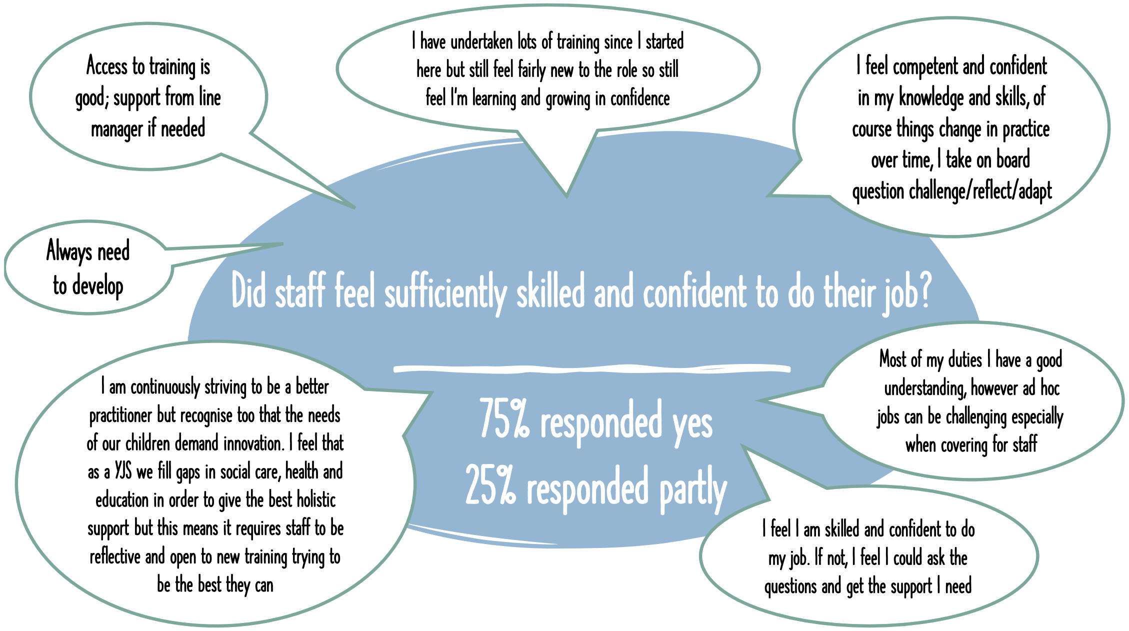


Figure 15. Findings and staff feedback from training needs analysis

Figure 15 gives a flavour of the findings and staff comments.. The analysis revealed the majority of staff were satisfied with the variety and quality of training the service had to offer. The Merseyside and Cheshire training consortium (which commissioned specialist training for the five Merseyside Youth Justice Services and Cheshire) formally ended in March 2025. This is because the move to a fully hosted model in CWCC meant Cheshire YJS was no longer able to hold the purse on behalf of the five other services and none of the Merseyside local authorities were in a position to take over as lead. The dissolution of the training consortium means YJS will need to commission training for staff so this prompted the need for a “stock take” of all current sources of training. A training overview was therefore carried out in spring 2025 and Figure 16 shows a summary of sources with examples.

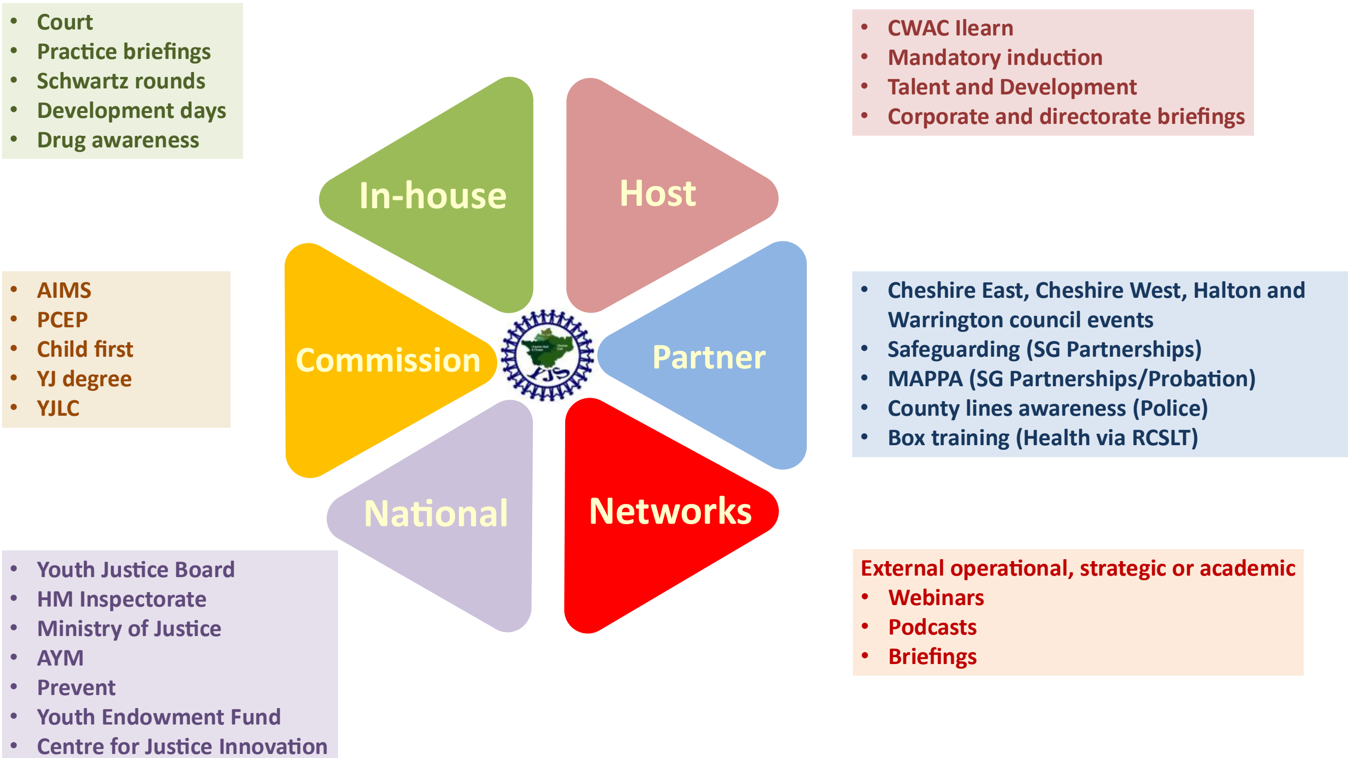


Figure 16. YJS training sources and examples

Occasionally, there are TV and Radio broadcasts pertinent to Youth Justice of interest to staff. Some can spark widespread media and public interest and an example of this in 2024-2025 was the Netflix drama, *Adolescence* (13). In addition, the BBC Radio 4 Reith Lectures (14) this year entitled *Four Questions about Violence,* are of relevance to our work.

In addition to rolling safeguarding refresher training, training undertaken by YJS staff during the last 12 months is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of key work force development activities in 2024-2025

Title	Course Type	Overview
Working with girls in the justice system by Dr Gilly Sharpe Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Sheffield	Academic Guest Speaker (Over Teams)	One of our senior practitioners approached Dr Gilly Sharpe after hearing her speak at a seminar. We were both delighted and fortunate that Dr Sharpe agreed to speak exclusively to our team. This event was attended by 55 staff and recorded for those who could not make it. It prompted the piece of work to review numbers of girls open to Cheshire and develop an action plan to include girls' voices and establish best practice to help girls be the best they can.
All Service Development Day on Participation	Themed All Service Day (In person)	At this event, we revisited our mission and values and also kick started our work on participation, building on the work of Laura Lundy and Louise Forde (speakers from the previous year). The day was facilitated by Peer Power, the leading children's and social justice charity.
Porn Briefing by Axess Sexual Health Education Team	Guest speaker from Axess at Practitioners Meeting (In person)	This session aimed at educating Practitioners on how best to support children about developing healthy and consenting relationships and to keep them safe from harm. Practitioners found the training very useful, especially when working with children who have entered the CJS for harmful sexual behaviour.
Court training	Delivered by YJS staff and court staff (In person in court)	Full service training took place over two days in May last year at Chester Magistrates' Court. Staff, panel members, magistrates and legal advisers attended and participated in this interactive session.
Schwartz Rounds	In house open session for staff (In person)	These theme-based sessions were introduced as part of our trauma informed service development. They are a supportive space for any staff to express views and share their feelings and are facilitated by one of our in-house CAMHS workers and a YJS Practitioner trained in counselling. The theme in 2024-2025 was loss of a young person, prompted as a number of children previously known to the service, have sadly lost their lives.
OOCD panels	In house briefing (In person)	This was a briefing on the introduction of OOCD panels and how they will operate.

PDAT Tool	In house briefing	This briefing was to introduce staff to the new Prevention and Diversion assessment Tool (PDAT).
AIMS training	Commissioned	AIM3 training in assessment and intervention took place to increase the pool of AIM-trained staff in response to the increase in harmful sexual behaviour. The majority of YJS Practitioners are now AIM-trained.
Child First Certificate	Commissioned	Two members of staff completed the Child First module in 2024-2025.
Certificate of Effective Practice	Commissioned	Four members of staff have completed or started the certificate in 2024-2025.
Equality and Diversity training	Commissioned (In person)	The last cohort of staff attended the Wipers training in May 2024. This mandatory training for all staff began in 2023 and was commissioned by the training consortium. It was tailored for youth justice professionals to improve cultural competency and awareness of disproportionality in the justice system.

From April 2025, YJS staff have direct access to CWCC training resources and a raft of Ilearn modules. Ilearn as a training and development platform is being replaced in September 2025, however our commitment to the workforce will continue into 2025-2026, as we will seek to further strengthen workforce development through the following:

- Ensuring all staff are up to date with CWCC mandatory corporate training, DBS checks and service specific mandatory training;
- Developing a more centralised approach to identifying training needs across the service;
- Developing an enhanced training monitoring system and connecting with CWCC Learning and Development Team;
- Revising the Training Plan to be relevant, achievable, and accessible to the whole workforce;
- Continued membership of the Youth Justice Legal Centre, which brings timely and specialist legal advice for professionals and managers and access to a range of in-person training events and remote learning.

Having considered the local data analysis and in support of service priorities, the following workforce development opportunities currently planned for 2025-2026 are shown in Table 3. More opportunities will be added in response to the dynamic nature of working in youth justice.

Table 3. Summary of planned work force development activities in 2025-2026

Theme	Provider	Overview
Online Harmful Sexual Behaviour	Commissioned through the AIM project	To include online sexual abuse, surface, deep and dark web, apps and platforms, hentai and AI and considerations for assessment and intervention. These areas were specifically requested through the Training Needs Analysis.
AIM Restorative Practice and Harmful Sexual Behaviour	Commissioned through the AIM Project (In person)	A 2-day course to enable participants to have a clear understanding of restorative practices and their use in sensitive and complex cases involving harmful sexual behaviour.
IT Canva / forms	In house (Over Teams)	‘Learn with us’ sessions on how to use these applications.
Acronym training	In house (Over Teams)	New Child First method of recording contacts.
Prevent (online extremism)	Department of Education London (Online)	This session includes incel awareness and takes a deep dive into multiple on-line platforms seen in Prevent referrals on children who’ve become radicalised on-line.
Professional Certificate in Effective Practice	UNITAS	An on-line modular course covering essential theory underpinning work with children in the justice system – 2-3 cohorts per year.
Child First Module	UNITAS	A shorter on-line course explicitly covering the latest Child First evidence base.

EDI - Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Awareness (2 modules) History Challenges	University of Worcester and Worcestershire County Council (e-learning)	Traveller community have a presence across Cheshire and the aim of this training is to help staff develop cultural competence in this community.
EDI - Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Awareness	Friends, Family & Travellers (In person)	Aimed at practitioners, the charity Friends, Family and Travellers to give a briefing at the Practitioners' meeting.
Teen to Parent Abuse briefing	Warrington Early Help (Over Teams)	Training has been organised via the Warrington Domestic Abuse Hub.
Transgender Awareness by Axess Sexual Health Education Team	Axess (In person)	This free training aims to increase confidence, knowledge, skills and respect when working with Trans and gender variant people.
Knife Crime Awareness	Ben Kinsella Trust	Exploring the real lived experience of people affected by knife crime and youth violence. Briefing content will be explored in the Practitioners' meeting for staff who could not attend the original session.
Schwartz Round	In House	The theme for 2025 is 'Covid: 5 years on'.
Custody Suite visits	Cheshire Police	Staff are invited to view refurbishments aimed to be more appropriate for children and people with neurodiversity.
Volunteer training	In house (In person)	Delivered over 2 days in the autumn.
Restorative Justice training for new starters	In house (In person)	Delivered with volunteer training in the autumn.

8. Evidence-based practice and innovation

YJS will continue to root all intervention and support with children on the evidence base, but Cheshire will also explore new and innovative ways of connecting with children who find it difficult to access mainstream services. Our approach was described recently by an NHS England lead as the best application of social prescribing in a justice context that she had come across. It was also cited by the LGA as one of their *'innovation in local government'* case studies (10).

Social prescribing in YJS emerged from the recognition that justice-involved children often arrive with previously unmet health needs and after traditional/clinical models of care had failed to reach them. An example being the socially prescribing of fishing as a mindfulness activity in partnership with the Canal and River Trust's 'Let's Go Fishing' programme. In August 2024, five children took part in this session, led by a YJS health worker and one child loved it so much, he stayed all day (Figure 17).

Figure 17. A successful catch with Let's Go Fishing

Adopting a psychosocial therapeutic approach, health workers in YJS are socially prescribing creative and flexible activities to help children improve their health and wellbeing. This has proven particularly effective for males who have experienced intra and/or extra familial violence and are often in a state of hyper-vigilance or hyper-arousal. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is often ineffective with this increasingly large sub-set of our children, so the service has tailored the health offer to become far more psychosocial and adaptable to the needs (and interests) of the children we work with. Our health offer is also supportive towards addressing the impact of trauma.

Figure 18. L's greenhouse and safe haven

L was a vulnerable child awaiting an ADHD and Autistic Spectrum Condition diagnosis and lived in a busy house with five siblings. He found the home environment quite stressful because of the auditory sensory impact and this had caused some intra-familial conflict and police involvement. YJS socially prescribed gardening as a therapeutic activity for L and he has thrived with the responsibility of creating flower beds and growing fruit and vegetables in a new greenhouse, which is now his peaceful safe haven (Figures 18 and 19).
L was given fresh **AIR** through **A**ctivity, **I**nteraction and a new **R**ole as a producer of fresh fruit and vegetables for his family.

Figure 19. L's strawberry plants

Cheshire YJS has a well-developed *"Research in Practice"* working group that was recognised by HMIP in 2021 as an exemplar of collaboration between academia and the youth justice sector. YJS is in a knowledge-transfer partnership arrangement with two local universities (Chester and Edge Hill University) and two senior lecturers in criminology, with a national profile for research on youth justice, now co-chair the Research Group. This collaboration ensures Cheshire YJS retains a national reputation for evidence-based practice and stays at the leading edge of innovation in the sector.

The Research Group has been able to secure several key academics to speak directly to the service about their research. YJS were fortunate to have Professor Laura Lundy, author of The Lundy Model (7) (see Figure 10) speak exclusively to our staff on how best to implement her model. YJS has been fortunate to have a number of key speakers talking to staff about the research behind participation, however the Service Development Day in July 2024 was the catalyst for the development of a participatory model across the service, with Peer Power Youth facilitating the session.

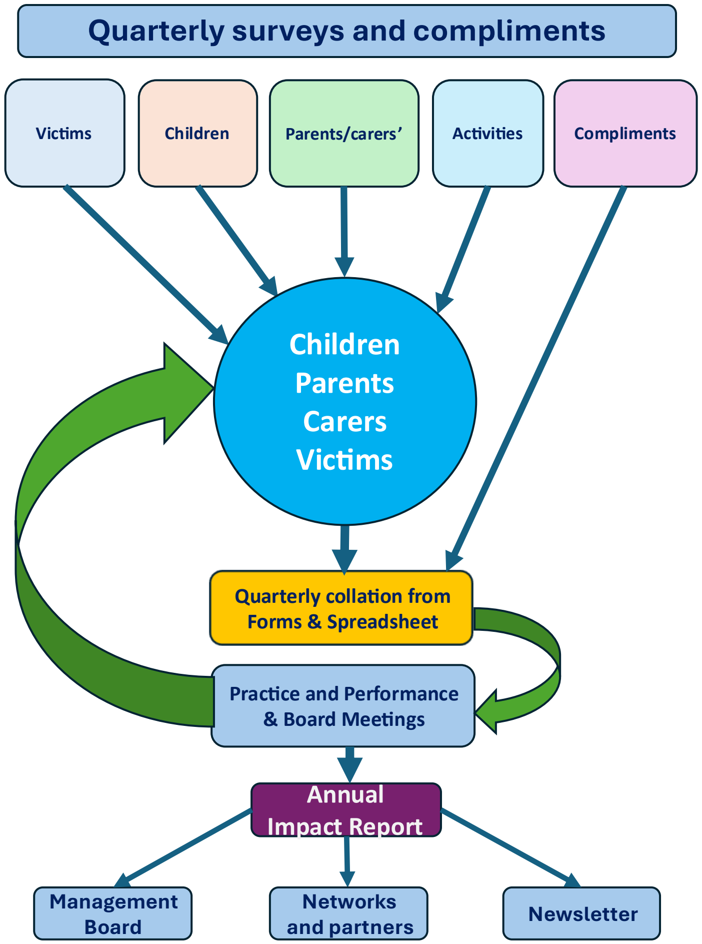


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Figure 20. YJS voice and influence flowchart

Figure 20 illustrates how Cheshire YJS has adopted the Lundy Model (7) as a basis to give voice and influence to all our service users (not just children but families and victims too).

We will be using an appreciative inquiry approach in our work and using 1-1 and group-based activities with service users as a virtuous feedback loop to develop and refine our intervention and support. Collaboration with children not only empowers them with a feeling of agency, it helps to develop skills and develop prosocial identity.

In 2025-2026, Cheshire YJS will continue to partner with national not-for-profits including Leaders Unlocked and local VCS groups such as Culture Warrington on bespoke collaborative projects that amplify the voice and influence of justice-involved children.

Ideas in the pipeline for the next 12 months include "Life through our Lens" where children from different areas of Cheshire will co-produce a film reflecting what living in Cheshire is like for them. YJS are also partnering with an arts studio and professional artist to give children further opportunities to express themselves through street art. These are creative and practical examples of applying Child First principles – Activities, Interactions and Roles (Fresh **AIR**) for developing prosocial identity.

9. Evaluation

The Health Sub-group of the management Board commissioned the Public Health Research Institute at Liverpool John Moores University to evaluate and validate the trauma-informed and relationship-based practice approach adopted by YJS. The passage below is taken directly from their full technical report (1), based on a statistically valid research sample of 70% of the children YJS were working with at the time:

> *"The (Cheshire YJS) offer now provides that key link into mental health, substance use and Speech Language Therapy support, through an equitable healthcare assessment available to all young people entering the YJS. This provided a key opportunity to assess and identify any unmet health needs in these three areas (and wider health and safeguarding needs), which may not have otherwise been identified, and for many was the first time they had access to such healthcare screening. This multi-agency approach not only allowed for quicker identification during the healthcare screening, but it also meant more timely specialist support for families who would have otherwise had long waiting lists to see specialists from CAMHS and SLT. This was identified as an effective way to open the door to this pathway of wider support, recognising that these health needs were associated to the offending behaviour and need to be addressed to prevent further reoffending …..The Cheshire YJS model also provides an opportunity for multi-agency working, not only to provide that overarching multi-disciplinary offer for children and young people, but also in terms of how services work together across Cheshire….The HNA highlights the key work from YJS and wider services across Cheshire in support of families to reduce inequalities, improve wellbeing, and reduce offending. This required skilled, experienced staff working in a trauma-informed way, using a child-focused approach."*

10. Priorities for the coming year

Building on what we have achieved in the previous year, a service development plan outlining management activity, sits underneath this higher-level Strategic Youth Justice Plan and in 2025-2026 will be used to deliver against the following priorities:

We will continue the priority focus on developing participation and amplifying the voice and influence of children, families and victims and embedding this in all areas of the service. We will facilitate a culture of collaboration where children, volunteers and community groups are enabled to promote prosocial identity and desistance from crime. This will include children co-producing a “Life Through Our Lens” film where they will be encouraged to express what their part of Cheshire means to them. We will also be involving children in the co-design of an induction booklet for new entrants to the service, with explicit focus on making our documentation feel more inclusive for children, families and victims of different culture, ethnicity or faith. We will also be accrediting participatory activities (via AQA) so children without prior qualifications receive a nationally recognised certificate for learning new skills.

We will continue to build on the new comprehensive performance reporting and quality assurance framework, ensuring we are data driven and make full use of the management information system to drive practice development. We will be building two reoffending cohorts; one for children receiving OOCDs and one for children sentenced by the court. We will also explore the use of Power BI to further enhance our performance reporting capability and liaise with the OPCC and Cheshire Constabulary on the potential of ARC software to generate a bespoke Serious Youth Violence dashboard.

We will refine our internal governance processes to ensure management and back-office functions help facilitate the delivery of high-quality services including enhanced training monitoring and a training needs assessment to inform the staff training plan.

The new Business and Performance Manager in YJS will be reviewing methods of internal communication following the transition into CWCC including use of Teams channels.

We will continue to enhance our offer to victims to ensure all victims, including child victims, are considered in all circumstances, and are delivered well. We are planning to hold a wellbeing day in partnership with Cheshire Cares for victims of youth crime. It will include offers of therapeutic support and enable victims to give honest feedback on their experience of the justice system in Cheshire and influence how YJS work with victims and other agencies.

YJS will also seek to recruit a lay member who has lived experience as a victim to act as critical friend to the Board and service – in a similar way to the lay member role on MAPPA Boards. They will also represent victims of youth crime on a new lived experience Victims' Panel to be established by the OPCC as a sub-group to the CCJB.

We will undertake comprehensive audits and report findings to Board in the following thematic areas; custody and resettlement, the quality and impact of Education and Training support offers and the effectiveness of work with children on OOCDs.

We will also undertake a comprehensive deep dive into a sample of children to look at the quality of assessment, planning and intervention to support the safety and wellbeing of children and those they may harm.

We will successfully support 60 children through the Turnaround project in 2025-2026 by developing an area-based delivery model.

We will establish a Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, ensuring the services provided are inclusive to all, whether under-represented or over-represented.

For 2025-2026, this will have a particular focus on the experiences and needs of girls because they are an increasing proportion of justice-involved children in Cheshire and children from different ethnic, faith or cultural background – because they represent a very small cohort in Cheshire and we need to be inclusive and responsive to the very different lived experience of all children.

10.1 Standards for children

Cheshire YJS has developed a “conversational audit” methodology to undertake practice audits where managers visit or speak to children, families and (where appropriate) victims too. This is now a ‘business as usual’ audit methodology for the service and has been adopted by some of our partners in children’s social care. Direct quotes from children, caregivers or partner agency professionals obtained through conversational audit are illustrative of the kind of trauma-informed, relational practice Cheshire YJS is striving to provide to the children we work with.

The new participatory model also aims to gather the views and ideas of our children.

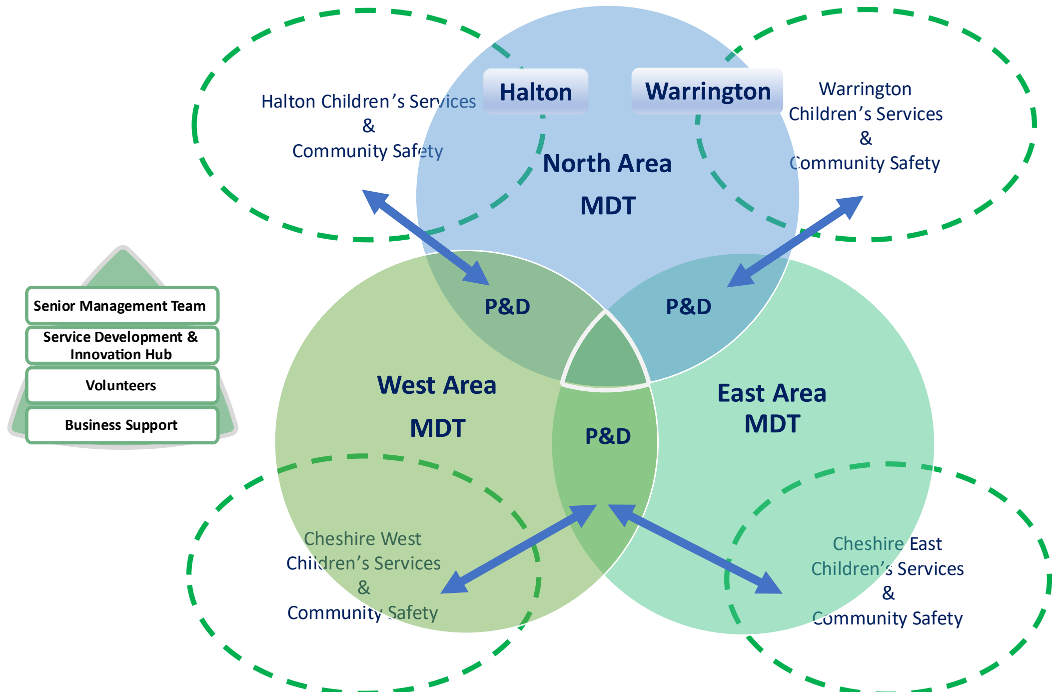
You’re nice and you talk calmly to me and you’re not quick to tell me off. We do doodling in sessions while we talk which gives me something to focus on rather than having to talk face-to-face because I’m not good with looking people in the eye when I talk.

(YJS Girls Focus Group)

10.2 New performance framework

Striking the right balance between local place-based and pan-Cheshire performance reporting is a challenge for YJS and disaggregating Cheshire-wide data to place often renders the data invalid because the volumes are so low. YJS now have a new performance management framework, using a mix of the recently introduced 10 national KPIs alongside better use of our case management system, Child View. The new performance report has been well received by the Management Board and enabled them to better understand the risk, needs and complexity of our children. A new Business and Performance Manager started with YJS in April 2025 and with the help of CWCC Insights and Intelligence team will explore the use of Power Bi to enhance the way the service and wider partnership use data to inform service delivery and commissioning.

10.3 Service development



P&D - Prevention and Diversion (funded mainly by PCC, MOJ and NHSE grants)
MDT – Multi-Disciplinary Team (social care, police, probation, education, health and victim/restorative justice professionals)

Figure 21. New Area-Based Service Design Model for YJS (from April 2024)

It is critical for a sub-regional youth justice partnership to work closely with statutory agencies and community organisations at a local level, to properly support children in their own communities. To better facilitate this, YJS implemented a modest service redesign in 2024-2025, enabling front-line professionals to work more closely and effectively with place-based partners. Figure 21 shows how YJS remains co-terminus with both police and probation footprints, while aligning closely to the four children's services and community safety partnerships. The Staff Structure in Appendix A also shows how our Area Teams align with place.

Sometimes feel safe - sometimes not as there are people in the community who are risky/commit offences. I have lots of family around who keep me safe
(YJS Girl's focus group)

The service redesign aligns with the shift toward restorative and participatory approaches and the importance of supporting children to connect (or reconnect) with their local community. Our new structure aims to empower front-line professionals and locality (area-based) operational managers to develop creative partnerships with the voluntary sector. By harnessing previously untapped human and social capital within communities (such as recruiting more local volunteers and establishing mutually beneficial partnerships with small local charities) we will be better able to help children, and some victims to move on positively beyond an offender (or victim) identity.

The Service Development Hub is functioning well as the central "engine room" for innovation within the service and the new leadership team will ensure quality of practice at a pan-Cheshire level, while empowering (through a distributed leadership model) creative area-based partnerships in the places where children, caregivers and victims live.

In 2025-2026, Cheshire YJS will refine some of our internal governance processes to ensure we are as productive as possible, with a lean service spanning a large geography and complex network of partners. The transition into CWCC was a major undertaking and the next 12 months will be a transitional period while the service beds in.

The new Business and Performance Manager will be reviewing multiple methods of internal communications to ensure key messages are getting through to dispersed teams in the simplest and most effective way.

11. National priority areas

11.1 Children from over-represented groups

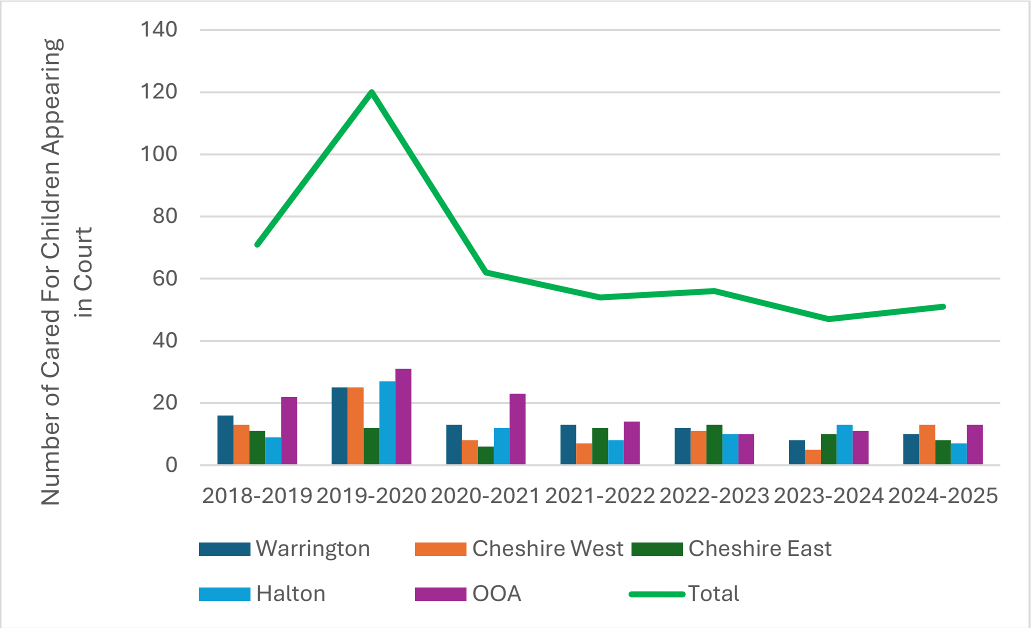


Figure 22. Number of cared for children appearing in Cheshire courts by local authority between April 2018-March 2025
(Data source: Local YJS data)

An over-represented group of children in the justice system are cared for children and care leavers. The YJS Management Board's response to data revealing disproportionality in this group was to agree a pan-Cheshire protocol. This aims to minimise the criminalisation of cared for children and care leavers and details a '3D' police and partnership response of *"Discretion, Delay and Diversion".*

Since the protocol was launched, there has been a clear downward trend of cared for children appearing in court (Figure 22). This shows the impact from a high point in 2019. The numbers of cared for children appearing in court in 2024-2025 has risen very slightly but this is because of a recent change in the counting rules. Children who only became cared for following the offence they had committed have been included in the 2024-2025 figures.

The data above also includes children placed in Cheshire under the care of local authorities outside the county (out of area [OOA]) who receive the same diversionary options.

Sustained lower volumes since the protocol was produced in early 2020 is good evidence of what can be achieved through collective commitment at scale across YJS and Children's Services.

The high prevalence of our children struggling with health or neurodevelopmental difficulties prompted the Health Sub-group of the YJS Management Board to commission the Public Health Research Institute at Liverpool John Moore University to look at the health needs of children open to YJS (see section Board Membership and Leadership).

The HNA (1) revealed a stark over-representation of neurodiversity in our children and a direct correlation between four or more adverse childhood experiences, school exclusion and entry to the justice system. Public health consultants on the Health Sub-group have used this analysis in both place-based Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) specific Strategic Needs Analyses. The HNA revealed there is a correlated trajectory for children who *'camouflage'* their SEND through disruptive behaviour, experience fixed-term or permanent exclusion and then enter the CJS some time thereafter. In 2025-2026, the Head of Service for YJS will continue to raise awareness at local Health and Wellbeing Boards and be a strong advocate for improved upstream identification and support for children with SEND.

Karen understands C's SEND. The team have been really understanding and flexible around C's appointments and Karen worked hard to earn his trust. She was approachable and down to earth, and I appreciate the work she is doing with my son

(Parent)

The alarming racial disparities in the youth justice system nationally are not replicated in Cheshire. Figures 23 and 24 show the most current data available (offences committed in the year ending March 2024 and drawing from 2021 census data).

Comparing the youth offending population with Cheshire's 10-17-year-old population as a whole, reveals that unlike most areas in the UK, it is actually white children who are very slightly overrepresented and ethnic minority groups slightly underrepresented. However, when separating ethnic minority groups into Black, Asian and Dual Heritage (Figure 24), we see Black children only represent 1% of children in Cheshire but 2% of the offending population. The volumes are too low to be statistically significant but YJS will continue to carefully monitor ethnic disproportionality.

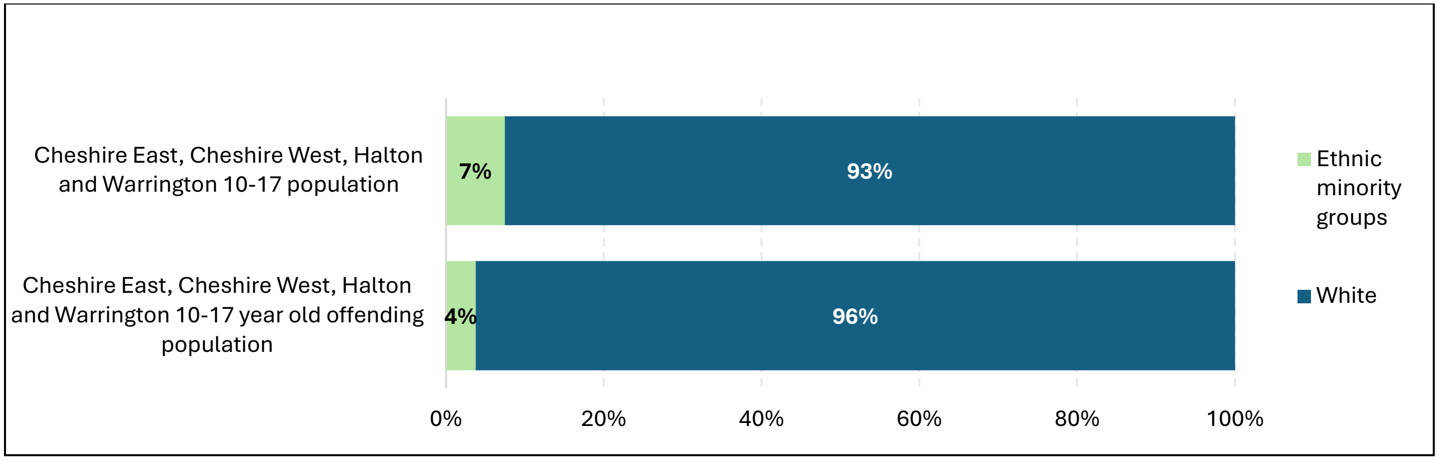


Figure 23. Ethnic minority groups vs white in the 10-17 population and offending population in Cheshire
(Data Source: YJAF)

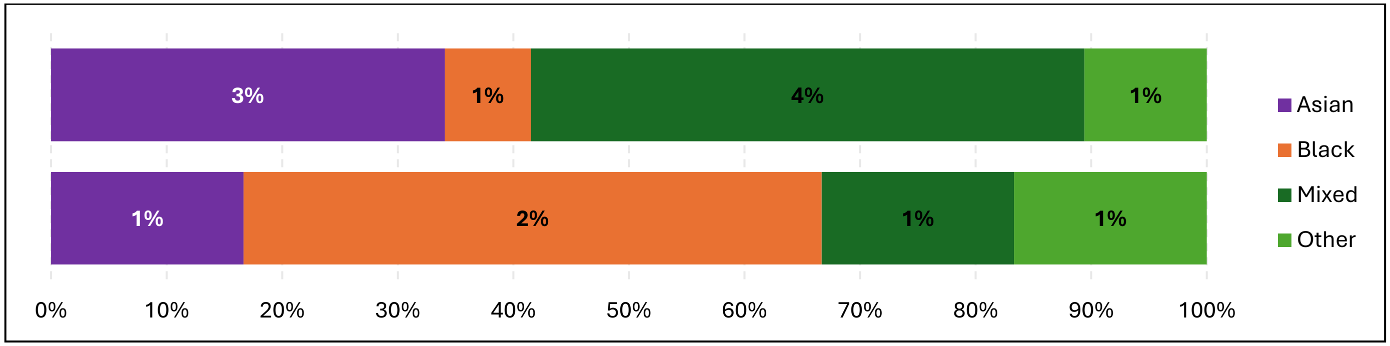


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Figure 24. Ethnic group proportions in Cheshire in the 10-17 population and offending population in Cheshire
(Data source: YJAF)

One potential area of *'invisible over-representation'* in Cheshire that YJS has raised with partners at the CJB's Disproportionality Sub-group, relates to children (or adults) from GRT communities. Anecdotal (and student) research suggests children from these communities are sometimes recorded on police and other criminal justice databases as White British, White Irish or White European.

There is a GRT self-identity classification, but some individuals choose not to identify themselves because of a cultural mistrust of authorities. Therefore, CJS data on arrest, detention, and sentencing in respect of GRT children may not be accurate. The cultural competence of staff is the key aspect here and Cheshire YJS do have an in-service GRT 'champion' who is well linked with specialist advocacy and support services. As well as planned staff training in GRT awareness for 2025-2026, we will ensure our data is as accurate as possible by hearing directly from the child about their identity.

Jess and Kevin were respectful of our culture (travellers) and that matters
(Caregiver)

11.2 Policing

A newly appointed Chief Superintendent, with the portfolio of protecting vulnerable people, sits on the Management Board and all four Children's Safeguarding Partnerships. This valuable connectivity provides useful constructive challenge and support, for example, renewed focus on detention of children overnight in police custody (Section 11.8).

Cheshire Constabulary delivered on the recommendations made by HMIP to place fully seconded police officers into YJS and have provided a fourth seconded police officer in 2025, so the service has one officer for each place as part of the multi-disciplinary team. They have participated in both police- and YJS-led training and have improved both the flow and response to intelligence in respect of harm to or from children.

The NPCC guidance on the role of police officers within youth justice was recently updated (6) and YJS and Cheshire Constabulary have reviewed the job descriptions of seconded officers to strengthen the focus on victims and prevention and diversion activity.

Cheshire Constabulary have recently restructured with changes in the Criminal Justice Outcomes Assurance Team and the previous Complex-Youths scheme is no longer operating but police continue to be very active in the local contextual safeguarding response to criminal and sexual exploitation. YJS seconded police officers and place-based police officers routinely share intelligence to help safeguard children and disrupt criminal groups. YJS and Cheshire Constabulary will continue to work closely together to refine and where necessary adapt the new OOCD joint decision making model to ensure the partnership remains firmly 'Child-First' in both principles and practices.

11.3 Prevention

Unlike many single local authority youth justice teams, YJS is not part of a wider adolescent and family support service providing a broader prevention offer. The funding and delivery model spanning four authorities means we are more of a purist youth justice service only working with children *after* they have been arrested. Prevention and targeted youth support form part of each local authority's early help offer with some sub-regional services, commissioned by Cheshire OPCC. YJS will seek to align our diversionary work to continue to divert ***away from*** formal criminal sanctions when it is safe and appropriate to do so and ***into prevention*** projects entirely outside the CJS. The principles of avoiding ‘net widening’ and the unintended consequences of ‘labelling’ or entrenching a criminal self-identity for a child are critically important and are evidenced principles underpinning this strategy and continue to apply across Cheshire.

11.4 Diversion

The Head of Service for YJS holds the national portfolio on Diversion for the Association of YOT Managers (AYM) and engages with ministers, national charities and think tanks, such as Centre for Justice Innovation, in roundtables on best diversionary practice. Cheshire will continue an evidence-based approach to diversion that avoids criminalising children for behaviours symptomatic of trauma, abuse, and unmet need. This not only provides better outcomes and improved prospects for children but because children diverted away from receiving formal sanctions are less likely to re-offend, it also results in fewer victims.

Figure 25 shows significant reductions in FTEs since the incremental introduction of Divert across Cheshire. The current operating model began in 2010 in Halton and Warrington and expanded into CWCC and Cheshire East in 2013 and 2015 respectively. FTE numbers have remained consistently low and below regional and national averages since 2016 when Cheshire became a pan-Cheshire shared service, covering the entire policing footprint. This contrasts with many of our geographical and statistical neighbours who, in recent years, have begun to see an increase in FTEs.

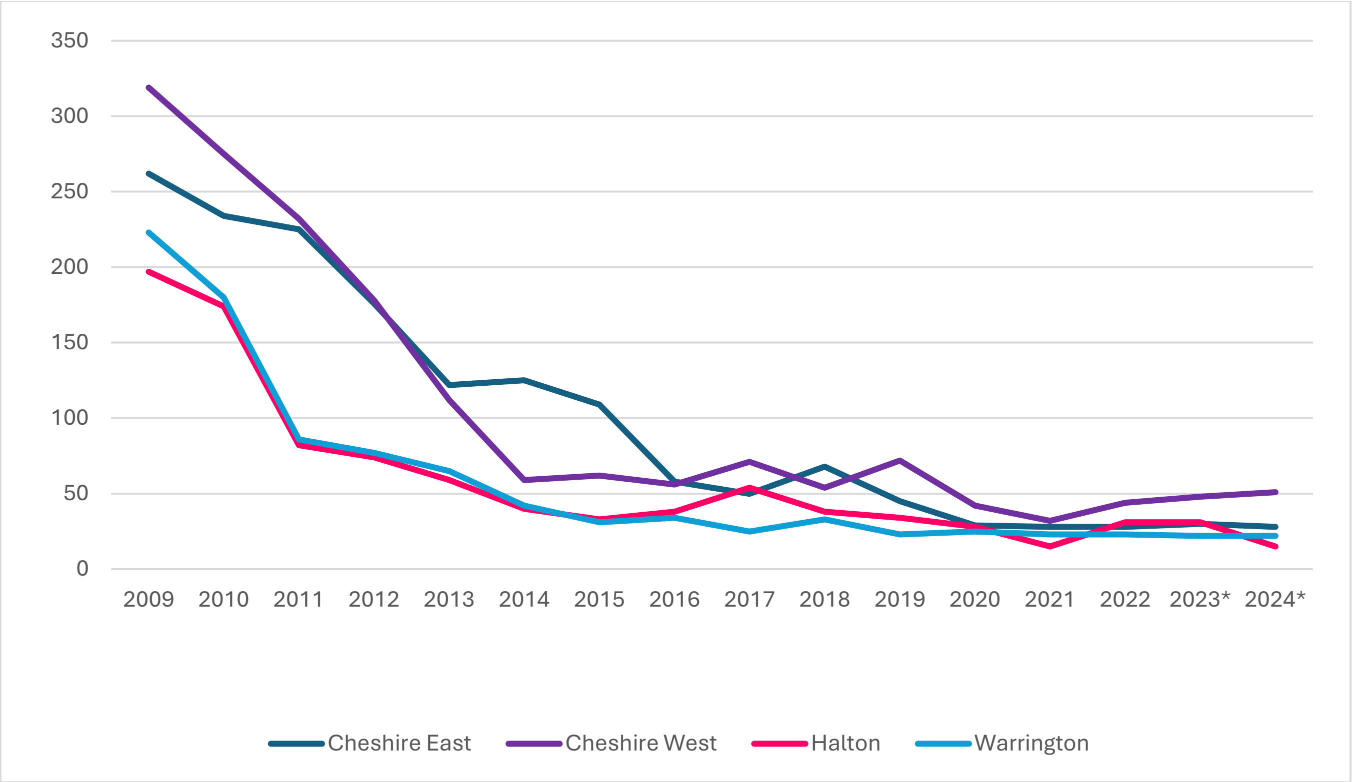

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Figure 25. Trends in FTEs in Cheshire by local authority 2009-2024
(Data source: PNC except for *local YJS data)

The helpful 4-year grant investment from the MOJ (Turnaround Programme) ends in March 2026. This investment has enabled YJS to get a little further upstream, while also enabling us to support children and families who needed longer or more intensive support. We will ensure individual children have transition plans in place where continued support beyond the end of the Turnaround programme is necessary and will be working with local authorities to prepare for the implementation of YFPPs, which for Cheshire local authorities will be from April 2027. As part of the serious violence duty, we will work with the OPCC to ensure VCS providers (Remedi and Queensberry Alternative Provision) are targeting help and support to the right children, in the right ways, at the right time.

11.5 Education

Our HNA chimes with national research in showing a correlation between educational exclusion and subsequent entry to the CJS. Children who are excluded from school tend to have lived experience of childhood trauma. There is a concerning trajectory (nationally not just in Cheshire) of early childhood exposure to violence and SEND being camouflaged as conduct issues, leading to educational exclusion (for some children). A sub-set of these excluded children then go on to use illicit drugs to self-medicate their trauma and criminal exploitation and criminality follows.

Audits and learning reviews show the powerful protective effect education can have on children who have suffered trauma. Positive self-identity and belonging are critical to helping children achieve desistance from offending, and the significant role education and training providers play in reducing risk through promoting prosocial identity cannot be overstated. Inclusive, trauma-informed-values-led-educational establishments not only manage risk well within their own environment, but also contribute hugely to reducing risk of harm in their communities.

Most children receiving YJS support are beyond school age, so the emphasis is more on helping them into post-16 training or employment, with flexible and bespoke support offers being most suitable for those children who have typically experienced considerable educational disruption. YJS has dedicated Education, Training and Employment specialists for each local authority area to support children directly or indirectly by brokering tailored support in partnership with the respective local offer. As an inclusive-employment lead for post-16, the educational representative on the Board is a good advocate for justice-involved children and provides both challenge and support to managers in the service.

Amazing help getting O back into education. Allowing O to see that his offence did not have to define him, which has helped him to move forward and start making better choices
(Parent)

In 2025-2026, YJS will be registering for the Unit Awards Scheme (15), through the nationally recognised organisation, AQA. Many justice-involved children have struggled in mainstream education and left without qualifications. This scheme will enable YJS practitioners to work collaboratively with children to meaningfully engage and support them in demonstrating skills, experience and knowledge in a wide range of subjects. The Unit Awards Scheme allows students to engage with learning and have their achievements formally recognised with a certificate each time they successfully complete a unit of learning. They can build up a portfolio of certificates to evidence their skills, knowledge and experience. The scheme promotes close collaborative working with children, boosts confidence, increases engagement and improves motivation, helping them to make progress on their lifelong learning journey, which can be sustained following the end of their involvement with YJS.

For a partnership covering four local authorities, with over 100 high schools and post-16 colleges, the majority of which are academies, YJS and even Directors of Children's Services have limited influence on admissions or exclusions. Promoting inclusion and supporting trauma-informed practice in educational settings is something Children's Trusts have pushed and YJS will continue to advocate for the needs of children. The Head of Service will continue to provide data to inform local joint strategic need analyses and deliver presentations to forums of educational leaders. Education as a protective factor is a stated priority for 2025-2026 in local safeguarding children partnerships.

11.6 Restorative approaches and victims

Reviewing victim processes and ensuring the support offer from Cheshire YJS is in line with the new Victims and Prisoners Act is a priority for 2024-2025.

Cheshire YJS will continue to work with victims and deliver the full range of restorative support:

- **Restorative Justice Conferencing** – a structured meeting between the victim and the child
- **Direct Reparation** – repairing any damage caused by the child
- **Shuttle Mediation** – similar to the conferencing model but where both parties do not meet but have someone as the go-between
- **Letter of Apology/explanation** – child is supported to write to the victim
- **Indirect reparation** – work done within the community on placements.

Janet was very empathetic and excellent to deal with
(Victim)

Figure 26 shows our children repainting a Family Centre in Cheshire. The activity repaired damage caused in the local community while also introducing a group of children (and their families) to this centre so they could access the supportive programmes and activities on offer.

I am really grateful for the time and patience my worker had for me and really understood me

(Victim)

Figure 26. Repainting at a family centre in Cheshire

11.7 Serious violence, exploitation, and contextual safeguarding

This plan draws from and is closely aligned with the Cheshire SVS, which covers a 5-year period from 2024-2029, with annual reviews to reflect on progress against planned outcomes and update delivery plans against emerging trends (2).

YJS contributed data and insights to the production of a Strategic Needs Analysis, to inform the SVS and the Head of Service is a core member of the SV Duty Leadership Group. Cheshire has relatively low levels of SV so does not have the infrastructure of a VRU. Lifting an approach from a large metropolitan city would be unlikely to deliver the same successes here so we have had to think differently about our approach. The Strategic Needs Analysis highlighted Domestic Abuse and Youth Intervention as two clear priority areas for reducing serious violence in Cheshire and revealed the extent to which serious violence affects children and young people. Amongst all forms of serious violence explored, children under 18 appear prominent amongst the victim and offender cohorts for possession of weapon offences and knife crime incidents. As part of the workforce development plan, YJS Senior Practitioners will be approaching the Ben Kinsella Trust to deliver a session on knife crime awareness to practitioners in 2025-2026.

Understandably, public concern about serious violence increases when people witness or experience it themselves – or when tragic events bring considerable media attention to it. Fear of knife crime and serious youth violence are also amplified by social media, with children being exposed to violent content that can distort their perceptions of safety in public spaces.

Table 4 below shows in 2024, 36 serious violent offences were committed in Cheshire by children (convicted by the courts). This is a slight increase on 2023 but the rate of serious youth violence in Cheshire is 3.4 (per 10,000 children) which is down from the peak of 4.5 in 2022 and is well below the rate for England and Wales as a whole. In fact only the South West of England has had a lower rate of serious youth violence in the last 2 years.

Table 4. Serious violence offences committed by children in Cheshire compared regionally and nationally

	2021		2022		2023		2024	
YJS region	**Number of SVO**	**Rate of SVO**	**Number of SVO**	**Rate of SVO**	**Number of SVO**	**Rate of SVO**	**Number of SVO**	**Rate of SVO**
Cheshire East, Cheshire West, Halton and Warrington	**32**	**3.2**	**47**	**4.5**	**27**	**2.6**	**36**	**3.4**
North West	**291**	**4.1**	**302**	**4.2**	**328**	**4.5**	**512**	**7.2**
East Midlands	207	4.6	193	4.2	195	4.1	202	4.2
Eastern	348	5.8	316	5.2	371	5.9	394	6.2
London	1,030	12.4	868	10.4	822	10.0	917	10.8
North East	32	1.3	88	3.6	106	4.2	111	4.8
South East	307	3.8	283	3.6	312	3.9	386	4.8
South West	102	2.0	143	2.8	169	3.3	169	3.3
Wales	60	2.1	64	2.2	94	3.2	104	3.6
West Midlands	315	5.4	386	6.5	322	5.3	382	6.6
Yorkshire	250	4.8	263	5.0	248	4.7	318	5.9
England and Wales	2,942	3.9	2,906	5.2	2,967	5.3	3,495	6.2

(Data source: SV toolkit in YJAF)

The data in Figure 27 relates to the number of arrests for knife crime across Cheshire and Figure 28 shows this by local authority. It confirms the number of children arrested for carrying or using knives increased slightly in 2022, yet reduced in 2023 and has remained at broadly low levels for the last 5 years.

Apart from two profoundly serious events with tragic outcomes in recent years, Cheshire has not seen the significant and sustained increase in knife crime experienced elsewhere in the country. It should also be noted that given the data starts in 2020 when the UK went into lockdown all recorded offences were artificially low for both 2020 and 2021, so if 2022 was taken as the starting point, then knife crime offences would be trending downwards in all areas of Cheshire and not just Warrington (Figure 28).

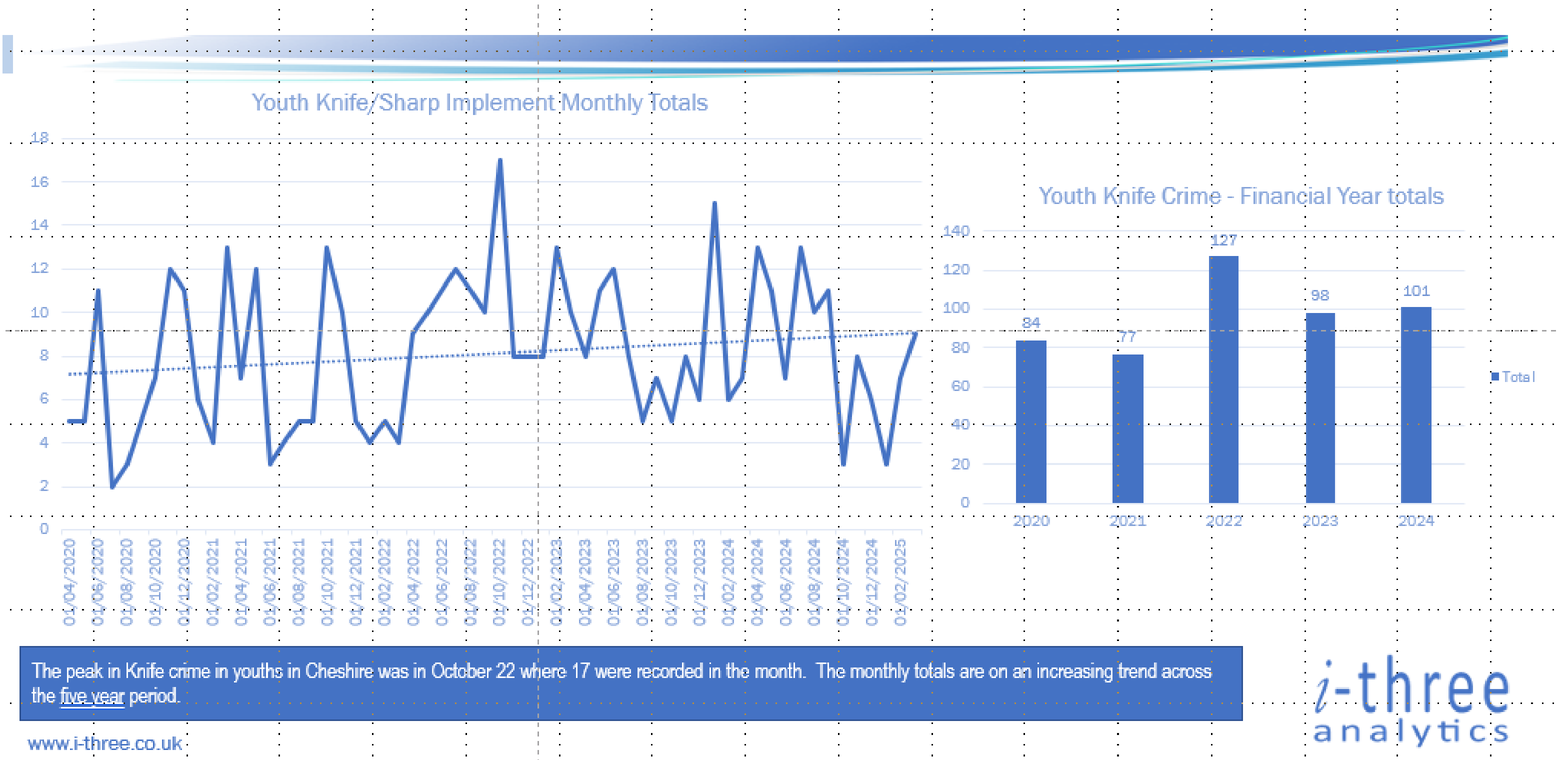
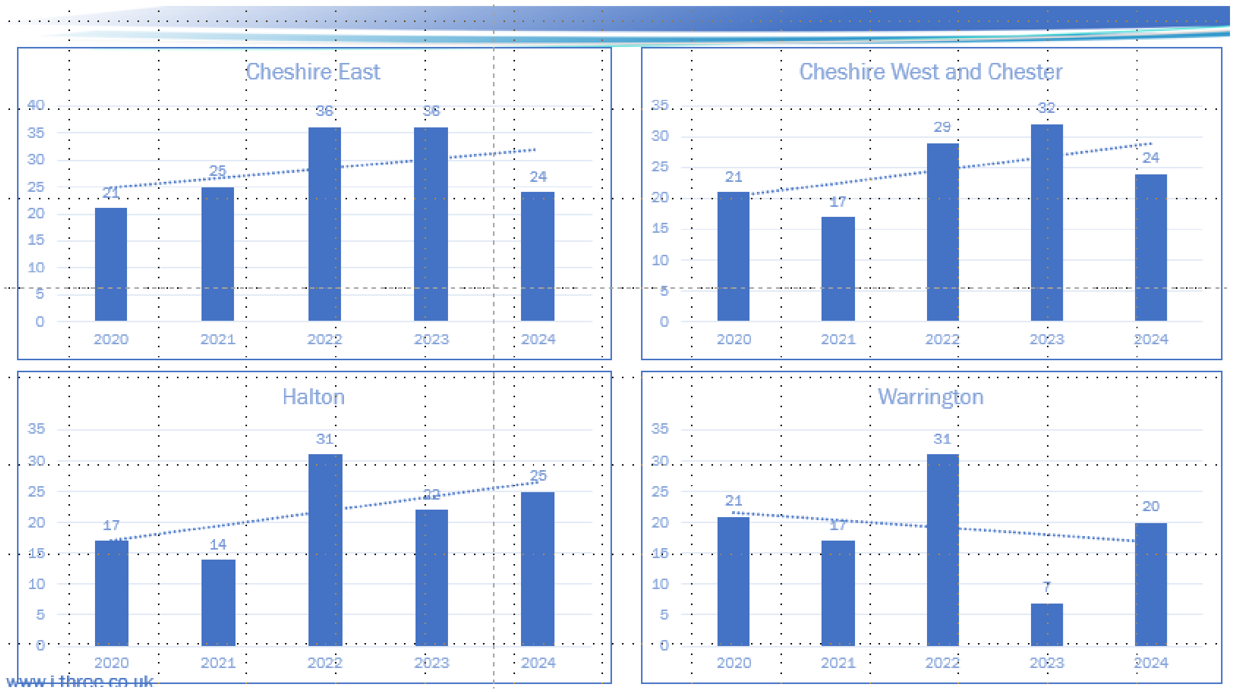


Figure 27. Youth knife/sharp implement crime trend for Cheshire 2020 - 2025
(Data source: Arc i-three analytics [Cheshire OPCC])



The comprehensive needs analysis that informed the Cheshire SVS (2) showed 73% of youth justice children had convictions for violent offences, but also revealed a similar proportion of these children had themselves experienced violent victimisation ***prior*** to the onset of their own offending. Violence breeds violence and needs to be 'treated' in a similar way to transmittable diseases, which is why the Cheshire SVS has adopted a public health approach.

Figure 28. Youth knife/sharp implement crime trend for Cheshire by local authority 2020 – 2025
(Data source: Arc i-three analytics [Cheshire OPCC])

Contextual safeguarding partnerships are established at place and the YJS is an integral partner of these arrangements in all four areas. Good partnership and intelligence sharing with police (including cross border with Merseyside in particular, which is the major 'exporter' of county lines into Cheshire) ensures the National Referral Mechanism is applied appropriately. There have been several cross-force-operational examples of sensitively managed police investigations to tackle organised crime and protect Cheshire children, who have been exploited to supply drugs for high tier Merseyside organised crime groups.

YJS managers will continue to contribute to the design and delivery of multi-agency, contextual safeguarding training at place, particularly in relation to child criminal exploitation. YJS also participates in safeguarding audits, rapid reviews, and independently-chaired learning reviews, when necessary.

11.8 Detention in police custody

Figure 29 shows the number of children detained overnight in Cheshire, is extremely low and equates to five children on average per month across the three custody suites or 6% of the total number of children arrested by Cheshire police over a 12 month period.

The low and unpredictable demand on local authorities for emergency Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) beds means they have not always been available when required, so occasionally children are detained in police custody as a last resort. Overnight detentions in custody continues to be a standing agenda item for scrutiny at the YJS Management Board and as a partnership, we are taking decisive action.

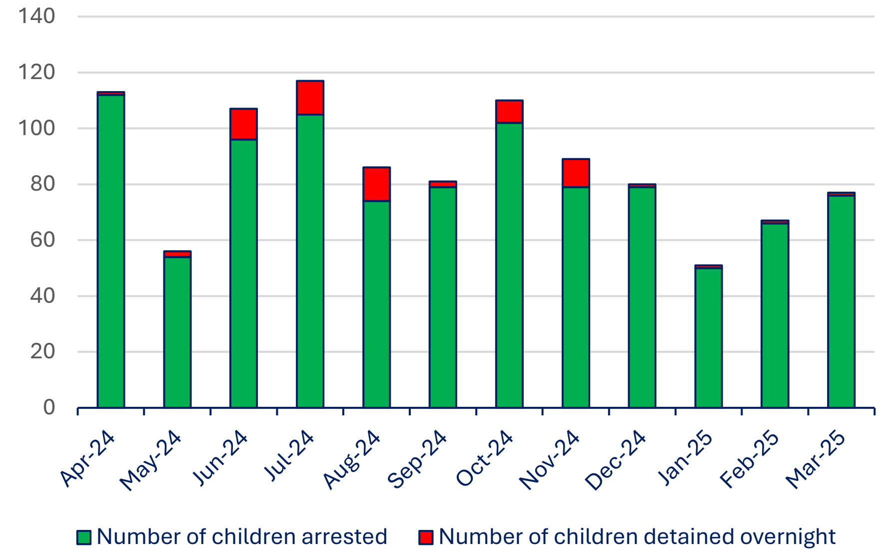


Figure 29. Numbers of children detained overnight in Cheshire compared to number of arrests from April 2024-March 2025
(Data source: Cheshire Constabulary)

From 2024, Directors of Children's Services have received a notification every time a child from their area is detained overnight due to an alternative PACE bed not being available. The police representative on the YJS Management Board is also the senior accountable officer for police on all four Children's Safeguarding Partnerships and has formally raised the paucity of PACE beds at executive partnership Boards. Cheshire and Merseyside Commissioners have been exploring shared PACE beds as part of the Commissioning Workstreams for both fostering and residential as there is a lack of sufficiency in both areas. Consideration is being given to residential and other safe spaces, but foster care is the preferred option. A collective solution could be viable due to the low numbers of children detained for each individual local authority. A commissioning manager in St Helens Council is leading this workstream on behalf of the Directors of Children's Services across Cheshire and Merseyside.

11.9 Remands

In 2024-2025, there were only six children in total across Cheshire remanded to Youth Detention Accommodation (Figure 30). All remands were for serious offences, where a community alternative to remand was not viable, due either to the seriousness of the offence and/or where the local authority were unable to source alternative accommodation on the day.

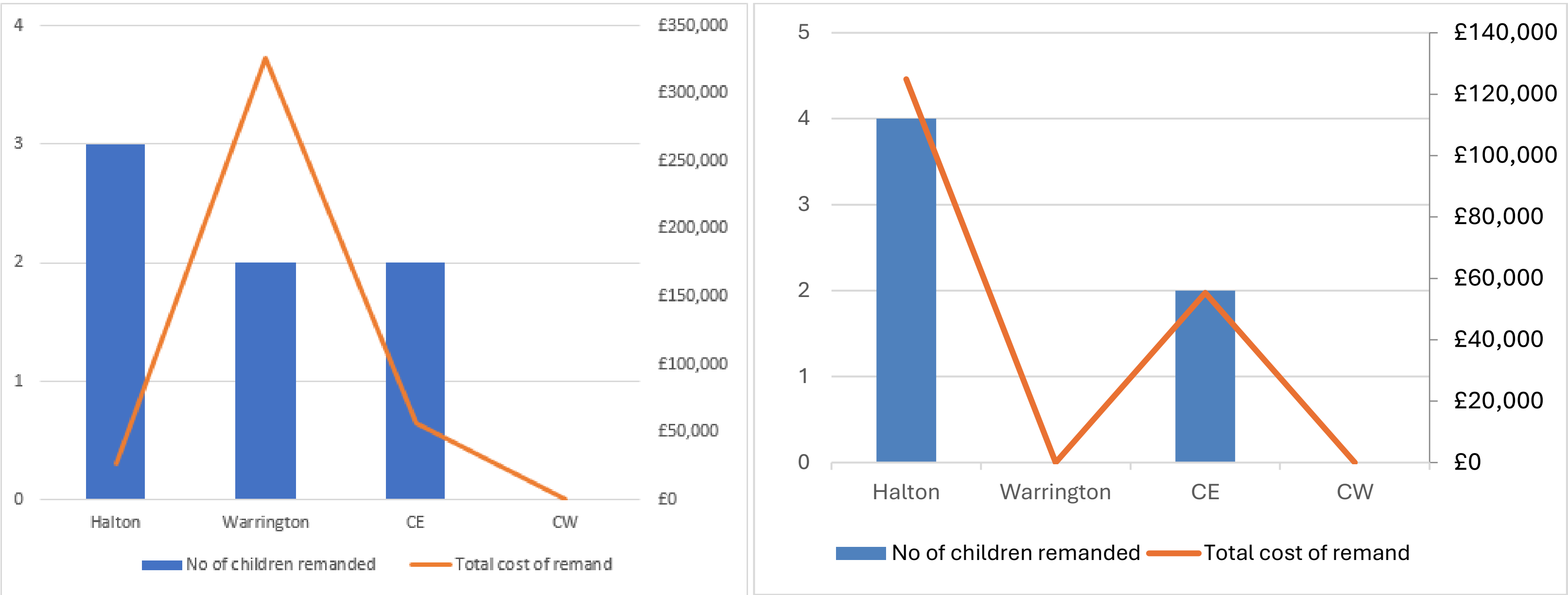


Figure 30. Children remanded into youth detention by local authority in 2024-2025 (right) compared to 2023-2024 (left)
(Data source: Local YJS)

Cheshire YJS retains the confidence of the courts by ensuring children are assessed promptly for robust packages of bail support as an alternative to remand. We have a proactive partnership with local children's social care and policing regarding remands into local authority care, but, as mentioned in Section 11.8, options are constrained by the paucity of safe, suitable accommodation where risk (to victim or wider public) and the child's own complex needs can be adequately managed. Placement sufficiency for local authorities is a national issue that the Association of Directors of Children's Services and others are very vocal on because accommodation for children facing serious criminal charges is an added complexity (and cost).

Through the current national framework for remands, the MOJ provides local authorities with a small financial contribution toward the costs of remands (Table 5) with the allocation based on historical bed night data. A consultation on the funding of remands to youth detention accommodation was published in early 2024 and Cheshire YJS responded on behalf of the partnership, highlighting Cheshire's low remand number. Table 4 shows the uncontrollable costs incurred by Cheshire local authorities (particularly for Halton in 2024) because local authorities have no control over length of time from initial charge through to conclusion of trial. A fundamental review and fairer funding formula for remands is still being worked on by the MOJ consultation with stakeholders such as the Association of Directors of Children's Services and AYM.

Table 5. Remand allocation from the MoJ for Cheshire East, Cheshire West, Halton and Warrington 2024-2025

Local Authority RIC	2024/25 Budget	2024/25 Actual Spend	2024/25 Remaining/Deficit
Cheshire East	£121,297	£55,272	£66,025
Cheshire West	£42,123	£0	£42,123
Halton	£1,883	£124,880	-£122,997
Warrington	£0	£0	£0
Total for YJS	£165,303	£195,038	-£14,849

(Data source: Local YJS)

Table 6 shows the number of bed nights of children remanded into youth detention accommodation.

Table 6. Number of custody bed nights 2024/2025

Local Authority	2024/25 Bed Nights
Cheshire East	168
Cheshire West	0
Halton	159
Warrington	0
Total Cheshire wide for YJS	327

(Data source: YJS local data)

11.10 Use of custody and constructive resettlement

The number of children in Cheshire who receive a custodial sentence is low, with typically fewer than 10 children across the whole of the county serving custodial sentences at any one time. Use of custody is rightly reserved for those children who have committed serious crimes, usually for serious violent or sexual offences.

Figure 31 shows custodial sentences were imposed on eight children from Cheshire in 2024, comprising four Cheshire East children, three Halton children and one CWCC child. In 2024-2025, no Warrington children were sentenced to custody.

All children released from custody before reaching aged 18 years have individual resettlement plans in line with the principles of constructive resettlement. The low number in Cheshire means we do not have a specialist resettlement team but our children do benefit from the continuity of multi-disciplinary support (YJS worker plus health and education professionals) that follows them from court, through their time in custody and after release. Custody and resettlement will be one of the thematic audits undertaken in 2025-2026 and because the volume is low, it means YJS will actually be doing a deep dive into the casework of every child sentenced to custody in Cheshire in the last 2 years.

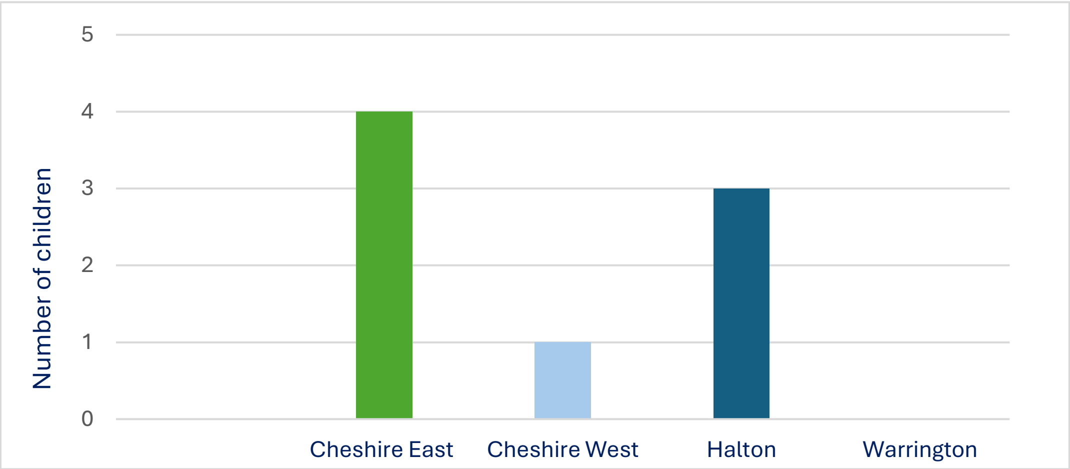


Figure 31. Number of children given custodial sentences in 2024-2025 by local authority
(Data source: Local YJS)

11.11 Working with families

YJS will be working with partners at place as the Families First programme is embedded. Frontline practitioners are encouraged to adopt a whole family approach in their work. YJS professionals work collaboratively with Early Help, Social Care and other locality-based services to ensure that families have access to help and support where this is needed.

As a service, we are committed to promoting this approach within practice and welcome the new Families First initiative and the opportunities to strengthen integrated services for children and families in the coming years.

Parents and Caregivers are also a key strand in our work to develop participation.

> *You really understand my son's challenges. Desire to help improve the behaviours for my son to provide a better home life balance and to influence positive changes*
>
> (Parent)

Sign off, submission and approval		
Amanda Perraton Chair of YJS Board Executive Director for Children and Families Cheshire West and Chester Council	Amanda Perraton	**27 June 2025**
Tom Dooks YJS Head of Service	T S Dooks.	**27 June 2025**

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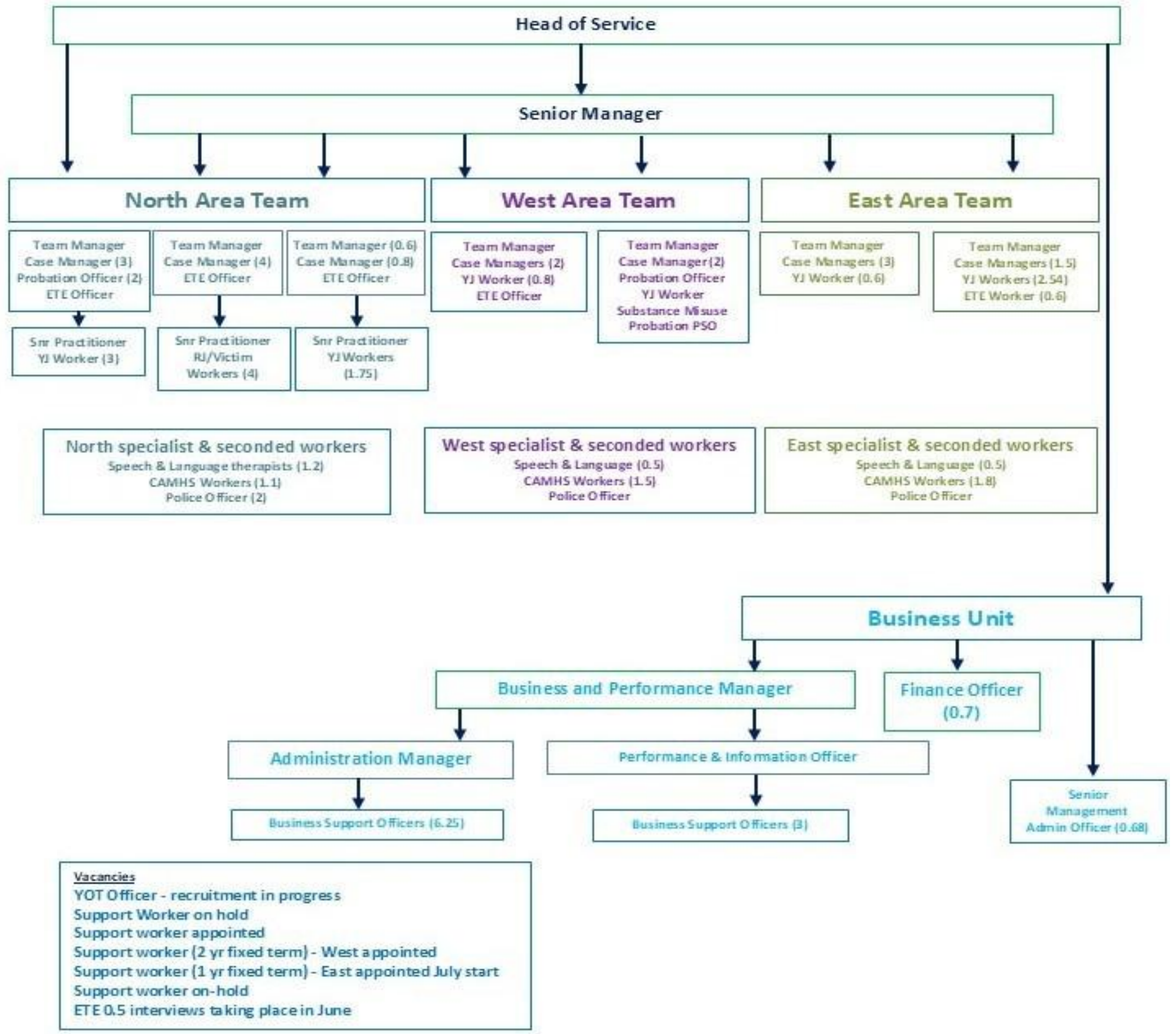
Appendices

Appendix A. YJS organisational structure



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Appendix B: Staffing of the YJS by sex and ethnicity; No. of individual people

Ethnicity	Managers Strategic		Managers Operational		Practitioners		Administrative		Referral Order Panel Volunteer		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Asian											0	0
Black						1					0	1
Mixed								1			0	1
White	1	1	1	6	9	44		15	9	32	20	98
Any other ethnic group											0	0
Not known											0	0
Total	1	1	1	6	9	45	0	16	9	32	20	100

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Cheshire Constabulary

Dan Price
Police & Crime Commissioner for Cheshire

Probation Service

NHS
Cheshire and Merseyside

Cheshire East Council

Cheshire West and Chester

HALTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

WARRINGTON Borough Council

Cheshire East Council

OPEN

Children and Families Committee

10 November 2025

Second Financial Review 25/26

Report of: Ashley Hughes, Executive Director of Resources, Section 151 Officer

Report Reference No: CF/03/25-26

Ward(s) Affected: Not applicable

For Decision or Scrutiny: Both

Purpose of Report

1 This report provides the Children and Families Committee an update on the current forecast outturn for the financial year 2025/26. This is the second financial review (FR2) and is based on the income, expenditure and known commitments as at the end of August 2025. It also identifies actions that are being taken to address adverse variances within the Children and Families services.

2 The report is structured into four parts:

(a) An Executive Summary of the Council's Financial Position

(b) A Summary of Recommendations

(c)A Children and Families Committee focused narrative

(d) An annex for the Committee that summarises the service level financial forecast and the detailed capital programme.

3 The Executive Summary of the Council's Financial Position provides the Committee with summary details of the Council's forecast outturn for all services. This provides the Committee with contextual information on the financial position of the Council. The Committee is asked to focus their scrutiny on the forecasts and supporting information relating to services within the remit of the Committee whilst understanding the overall financial position of the Council.

4 The Summary of Recommendations requests the Committee’s approval for amendments to the Committee’s budget, in line with the Committee’s authorisation levels.

5 The Committee focused narrative presents the current revenue and expenditure commentary with an update on the 2025/26 approved budgeted change items relating to the Children and Families services.

6 The annex includes the summary of the service level financial forecast and the individual projects within the Directorate’s capital programme.

7 As set out in previous Financial Reviews, the requirement to continue to identify further actions to bring the Directorate back to a position where we are living within our means remains, and it will be important that these actions are closely monitored, and appropriate action taken to manage our resources effectively. This report includes information on the actions that are currently underway.

8 The full report to Finance Sub Committee on 3 November 2025 includes additional information on debt, Council Tax and Business Rates collection, Treasury Management and Prudential Indicators. The full report can be found here Finance Sub Committee FR2 Report.

Executive Summary – Council Financial Position

9 This is the Second Financial Review monitoring report (FR2), showing the forecast outturn position for the 2025/26 financial year.

10 The summary provides the current forecast outturn position of the Council for the revenue budget, capital budget, Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and Transformation Programme for the financial year 2025/26.

11 The FR2 forecast revenue outturn for the Council is an **adverse variance of £2.345m** against a net revenue budget of £360.198m which is an improvement of £0.802m compared to the overspend reported at FR1 of £3.147m.

12 The current forecast is that services will be £12.904m over budget in the current year, whilst central budgets are forecast to be £10.559m under budget, resulting in the overall outturn overspend of £2.345m overspend.

13 This is after the application of planned use of conditional Exceptional Financial Support **£25.261m** as set out in the approved budget in February 2025. Please see Table 1 at the top of page 3 for details:

Table 1 2025/26 FR2	Revised Budget £m	Forecast Outturn £m	Forecast Variance £m	Forecast Variance FR1 £m	Movement from FR1 to FR2 £m
Service Committee					
Adults and Health	167.257	167.334	0.077	(0.295)	0.372
Children and Families	98.420	107.283	8.863	8.998	(0.135)
Corporate Policy	43.708	43.492	(0.216)	0.062	(0.278)
Corporate Policy - Cross Transformation	(13.452)	(3.821)	9.631	9.631	-
Economy Growth	28.756	25.996	(2.760)	(2.285)	(0.475)
Environment and Communities	43.618	40.921	(2.697)	(2.545)	(0.152)
Highways and Transport	17.151	17.159	0.008	0.114	(0.106)
Total Service Budgets	**385.458**	**398.364**	**12.906**	**13.680**	**(0.774)**
Finance Sub:					
Central Budgets	55.000	44.439	(10.561)	(10.533)	(0.028)
Funding	(415.197)	(415.197)	-	-	-
Total Finance Sub	**(360.197)**	**(370.758)**	**(10.561)**	**(10.533)**	**(0.028)**
Exceptional Financial Support	(25.261)	(25.261)	-	-	-
TOTAL	**-**	**2.345**	**2.345**	**3.147**	**(0.802)**

14 All Directorates continue to work on mitigation plans to improve the overall forecast overspend position and in doing so, are highlighting any risks associated with mitigations currently reflected in the reported £2.345m overspend. Each Directorate have plans underway to deliver approved budget changes (growth and savings) identified as part of the 2025/26 approved budget per MTFS line.

15 The value of additional mitigation plans not yet reflected as delivered at FR2 are estimated at £1.933m, giving a potential improved overall forecast of £0.412m overspend. However, should the current mitigations included in the FR2 forecast not materialise, alongside further risks identified, then the forecast overspend position could increase to £21.191m adverse.

16 The opening DSG deficit is £112.149m with an in-year projected movement of £33.829m to forecast a year end deficit of £145.978m – refer to paragraph 37 for further details.

17 The FR2 forecast outturn position against the approved Transformation budget changes for 2025/26 is outlined in Table 2 below:

Table 2 - Transformation Budget Saving	**Original Budget £m**	**Forecast Outturn £m**	**Forecast Variance £m**	**Forecast Variance FR1 £m**	**Movement from FR1 to FR2 £m**
Access to Services & Corporate Core (Cross cutters including Digital/Workforce/3rd Party Spend/Fees & Charges)	(13.452)	(3.821)	9.631	9.631	-
Service Delivery – Adults Social Care	(7.000)	(7.000)	-	-	-
Service Delivery – Children's	(3.788)	(0.868)	2.920	2.420	0.500
Service Delivery – Place	(0.175)	(0.175)	-	-	-
Total	**(24.415)**	**(11.864)**	**12.551**	**12.051**	**0.500**

18 The movement of £0.500m in the forecast variance is due to delays in the Children and Families Services Birth to Thrive Transformation project, which means that savings will now not be delivered in 2025/26.

19 The capital programme for the current year is forecasting expenditure of £167.700m in year, an underspend of £40.791m against a budget of £208.491m at FR2. This is an increase against the approved MTFS budget of £173.142m due to increases in Supplementary Capital Estimates (SCEs) of £23.031m as well as some reprofiling of projects.

20 The overall forecast revenue overspend of £2.345m remains a significant financial challenge for the Council when considered in addition to the planned use of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) of £25.261m.

21 Reserves at out-turn were £29.413m, being £6.299m of General Fund Reserves and £23.114m of Earmarked Reserves. A planned net use of Earmarked Reserves and the General Fund Reserve is forecast at £2.282m leaving £27.131m total available reserves. The Council's level of reserves is therefore insufficient to cover the current forecast revenue outturn for the year without further action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee to:

1. Note the overall Council's Financial Position as described within the Executive Summary – Council Financial Position.

2. To scrutinise the latest revenue forecast for Children and Families Directorate, review progress on the delivery of the MTFS approved budget policy change items (Table 3), the RAG ratings and to understand the actions to be taken to address any adverse variances from the approved budget.

3. Note the overall in-year forecast capital spending for Children and Families Directorate of £24.556m against a revised MTFS budget of £56.131m in Tables 4 and 5.

4. Note the Capital Virement above £500,000 up to and including £5,000,000 as per Table 6 to be approved in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

5. Note the latest DSG in year forecast and forecast cumulative year end position as described within paragraph 40.

6. Recommend to Council to approve the Supplementary Revenue Estimate Request for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding over £1,000,000 as per Table 7.

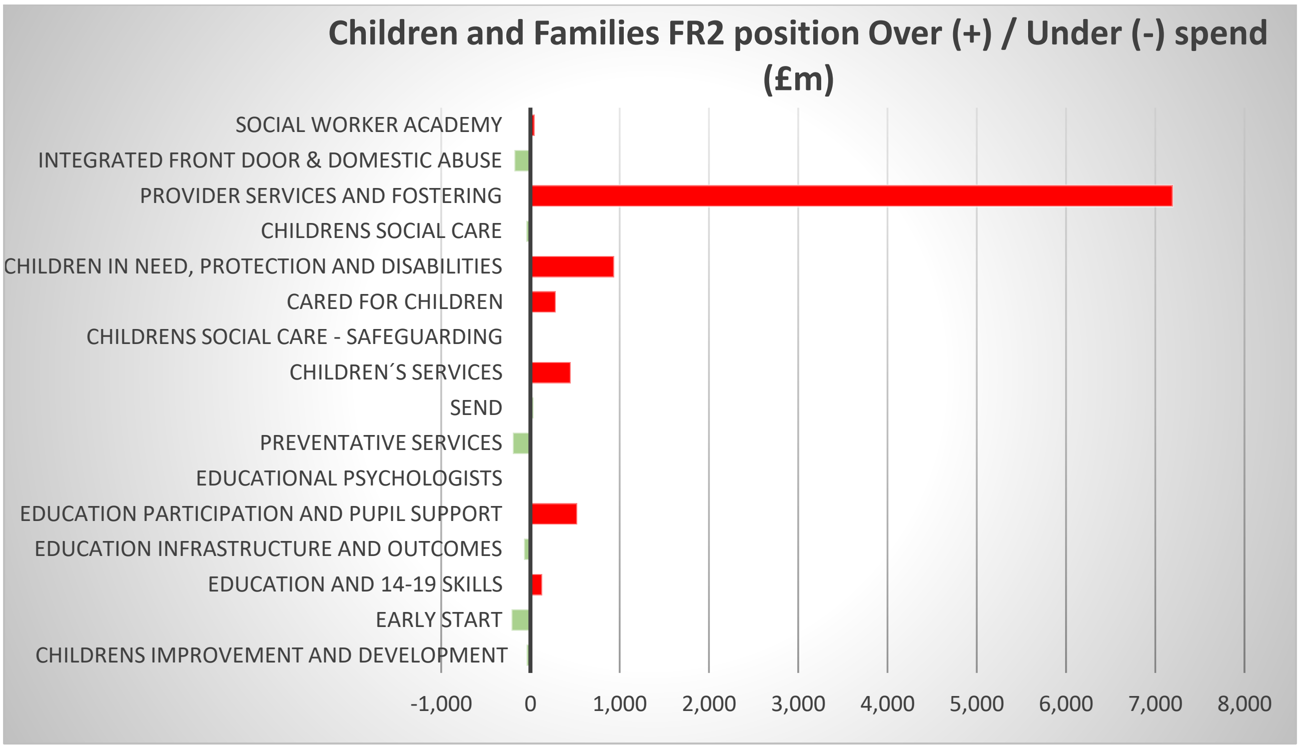
7. Note the reserves position as per Table 8.

Children and Families Committee Focused Narrative

Revenue and Expenditure Commentary including an update on the 2025/26 Approved Budget Change Items

22 The Children and Families Directorate second financial review for 2025/26 presents a forecast overspend of £8.862m reflecting a reduction of £0.136m on the FR1 overspend position of £8.998m. The key pressures continue to be increased costs in placements and staffing, which are the focus of this commentary.

23 The graph below presents the service level position of the Directorate with the summary data available within Section 1 of Annex 1.



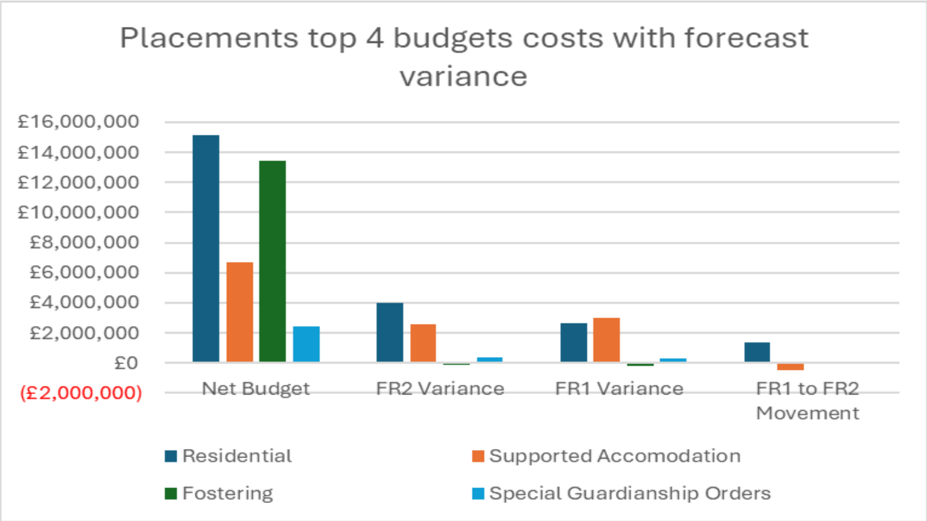
Change from FR1 (improvement of £0.136m)

24 The forecast placements cost for 2025/26 is updated to £7.979m adverse to budget. This is compared to £6.414m at FR1, an increase cost of £1.565m. Budgeted growth for care demand of £3.295m was built into the 2025/26 MTFS to address the pressure on placements that was based on 2024/25 evidence. The growth for fees increases in 2025/26 was included in the central contingency which FR2 includes a £0.400m virement to Children's Services.

25 Although the numbers of children in care are reducing, FR2 reporting of 539 (29 August 2025) compared to FR1 reporting of 549 (13 June 2025) and reporting of 550 at March 2025, the cost of placements in 2025/26 has

continued to increase, creating an un-budgeted cost pressure. These statistics excludes Care leavers (Post 18), with FR2 reporting 88 placements in August and FR1 95 in June for young people in high-cost accommodation. Block commissioning plans are in place to secure better value long term support for care leavers.

26 The following diagram represents the categories of placements which represent 93% of the annual budget and the main elements of the £7.979m forecast variance. The residential placements FR2 variance is £4.022m, compared to a variance at FR1 of £2.669m, and Supported Accommodation of £2.538m showing an improvement compared to FR1 £3.005m.



27 The MTFS sets out savings in relation to placements for Right Child Right Home of £1.320m and New Accommodation with Support Offer for 16-25 Young People of £1.100m. Due to these increased placement costs the forecast has assumed these saving will not be met in 2025/26.

28 The updated forecast for the establishment staffing costs for 2025/26 is £1.190m (FR1 £2.145m) adverse to budget. The reduction from FR1, £0.955m, is due partly to the inclusion of the FR1 best case mitigation Family Help Grant funding of £0.514m. The key adverse variance at FR2 relates to Children in Need, Protection and Disabilities and Cared for Children which is then offset by forecasted underspend in Early Years and Preventative Services.

29 The Transport costs for 2025/26 has increased to £0.651m adverse to budget, an increase on FR1 of £0.197m. This continues to be a pressure for Home to School contracts and changes in fleet after the additional budget was included in the MTFS. In addition, the MTFS savings connected to Safe Walking Routes to School are not fully deliverable due to linking to capital projects.

Risks

30 The number of children in placements and the costs of placements is difficult to estimate. The worst-case forecast would add a further increase in costs of c£1.800m.

31 More generally, there are risks associated with the budget that relate to the nature of delivering services for children and young people. A single package of support for a young person with very complex requirements and dysregulation can cost up to £50,000 a week, or an annualised cost of £2.600m. Whilst rare, these costs and packages exist.

32 The Council's Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan describes how the in-year deficits will be brought back into balance with available funding by 2030/31. There are General Fund costs associated with Education, notably Passenger Transport between home and school (HST) where a young person is eligible. The factors that impact costs associated with HST are:

(a) Distance from school (parameters set by age in law)
(b) Unsafe routes to school, irrespective of distance
(c) A requirement in a young person's Education, Health and Care Plan

33 As the Council's EHCP numbers continue to increase, and more homes are built in the place, more young people may become eligible for HST beyond the planning assumptions made by the Council.

Mitigations

34 The Directorate are undertaking work to review and manage the placement governance with the aim to reduce the cost of this overspend in year. The Directorate are working to reduce the reliance on agency staff and are developing a long-term workforce plan.

Update on 2025/26 Approved Budget Change Items

35 The following section provides an explanation of the key drivers behind variances to the budget for the Children and Families directorate. Table 3 provides detailed commentary on the progress against the approved budget change items that were agreed as part of the approved budget in February 2025.

Table 3 – Detailed List of Approved Budget Change Items

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets	2025/26 MTFS £m	2025/26 Forecast Outturn £m	2025/26 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2025/26 (RAG rating and commentary)
Children and Families Committee 2025/26 Revised Budget as per Table 1		**98.420**	**107.283**	**8.863**	
Change from 2024/25 budget		**8.659**	**17.522**	**8.863**	
14	Pension costs adjustment	(0.050)	0.082	0.132	Red - Teacher's pension legacy costs are not reducing as anticipated.
14	Pension costs adjustment	(0.487)	(0.487)	-	Completed - CEC pension reduction.
15	Growth to deliver statutory Youth Justice service, and meet Safeguarding Partnership duties	0.203	0.195	(0.008)	Amber - It is incumbent upon the three statutory safeguarding partners, the police, health and the Local Authority, to ensure that adequate funding is allocated to the Children's Safeguarding Partnership so it can fulfil its statutory functions in delivering the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. An internal audit identified the Local Authority had not reviewed its contributions to the partnership and was insufficiently contributing to the delivery of the partnership arrangements. As a result, growth was approved by committee. This has been supported by an increase in contributions from all partner agencies. A vacancy has also been held in the business unit.
16	Growth in School, SEND and Social Care Transport budget	1.501	1.884	0.383	Red - Being reviewed as part of ongoing SEND improvement
17	Pay Inflation	2.624	2.874	0.250	Red - LGS pay offer for 2025.Full and final offers of 3.20% increase resulting in overspend of c.£1.7m across the Council.
18	Fully Funding current care demand levels 2024/25	3.295	8.854	5.559	Red - Will need to be closely monitored throughout the year to ensure that funding is sufficient to meet demand and complexity. This is also part of transformation work to ensure Edge of care/Right Child Right home.
19	Court Progression Improvement	0.023	0.023	-	Red - Some of this will be covered in the new structure build and re-design, there is increased oversight on applications court delays at Director level, to minimise delays to court work.

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets	2025/26 MTFS £m	2025/26 Forecast Outturn £m	2025/26 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2025/26 (RAG rating and commentary)
20	Growth for annual contribution to the Regional Adoption Agency	0.213	0.213	-	Green
21	Growth for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children due to emerging pressures	0.500	(0.013)	(0.513)	Green - Growth in Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
22	Reversal of a one year policy change for traded services	0.120	0.120	-	Green - Reversal of non-permanent 2023/24 policy change CF23-27 42.
23	Schools Improvement	0.175	0.175	-	Green - Due to staffing previously been paid out of the school improvement grant and this grant is now ceasing there is insufficient budget to cover the existing staffing in the service to cover our statutory duties.
24	Funding the staffing establishment	2.739	3.657	0.918	Red - A families First transformation area of work has commenced and the re-structure will be delivered as part of this.
25	Safe Walking Routes to School	(0.250)	(0.018)	0.232	Red
26T	New accommodation with support offer for 16-25 young people	(1.100)	-	1.100	Red - This reduction in expenditure relates to commissioning work that has identified lower cost accommodation for this group of young people. Savings will be achieved through accessing lower unit cost places. A paper has been approved at C&F committee on the 9th June & 15th September. There is a delay in this saving, for 2025/26.
27T	Birth to Thrive	(0.500)	-	(0.500)	Red - This is delayed by SRO capacity and needs a review by Transformation Board.
28T	Right Child, Right Home	(1.320)	-	1.320	Red - The oversight of placements now in place should now support the future savings. This is unlikely to be delivered in 2025/26.
29	Extended Rights to Free Transport	0.388	0.388	-	The Extended Rights to Free Travel grant is being rolled in to the Local Government Financial Settlement. This growth item is offset by additional grants within the central budgets. Amount confirmed and updated as at provisional settlement 18/12/2024.
30	Children's Social Care Prevention	0.905	1.033	0.128	Green - Expenditure relating to the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant.

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Approved Budget Changes – Service Budgets	2025/26 MTFS £m	2025/26 Forecast Outturn £m	2025/26 Forecast Outturn Variance £m	Progress 2025/26 (RAG rating and commentary)
	Grant – Expenditure				
31	Children's Social Care Prevention Grant – Grant Income	(0.905)	(1.033)	(0.128)	Green - Grant announced in 2025/26 financial settlement. Additional Funding now confirmed from Families First Partnership Programme Transformation Grant.
32	Foster4	0.114	0.057	(0.057)	Green - Grant Confirmation for 50% of costs.
33	Foster Carers uplift of National Minimum Allowance (NMA)	0.471	0.471	-	Green - 3.55% NMA foster carer uplift.
In-year	In year variances not included in MTFS Proposals.	-	0.058	0.058	FR2 In year variances mainly relating unallocated budget savings and ILAC Other staff related expenses.
In-year	In year variances not included in MTFS Proposals.	-	(0.194)	(0.194)	Quality Assurance, Commissioning and Partnership - Mitigations to balance back to Finance Review Position.
In-year	In year variances not included in MTFS Proposals.	-	(0.948)	(0.948)	Family Help & Children's Social Care - mitigations to balance back to finance review position.
In-year	In year variances not included in MTFS Proposals.	-	0.130	0.130	In year variances mainly relating to Early Start & Transport.

Capital Programme

36 **Table 4** overleaf sets out the Children and Families capital programme position for 2025/26 as at FR2, showing a forecast of £24.556m against a revised MTFS budget of £56.131m. There is reprofiling of some spend to 2026/27 mainly against schemes which are grant funded re Basic Need, High Needs Capital and School condition schemes where allocations have yet to be made:

37 Each Committee is being asked to recognise the need for capital restraint particularly if external borrowing is required. This is being monitored and tracked through the work of the Capital Programme Board.

Table 4 Capital 2025/26	MTFS £m	Out - turn £m	Actuals FR1 £m	Actuals FR2 £m	Forecast Spend £m	Gov Grants £m	Ext Contributions £m	Rev Contributions £m	Cap Receipt £m	Prud Borrow £m	TOTAL £m
Children & Families	37.723	56.131	0.030	1.161	**24.556**	18.997	4.196	-	0.050	1.313	**24.556**

38 **Table 5** shows the movement in the 2025/26 Capital budget since the MTFS Budget was approved in February 2025.

Table 5 Capital Movement 2025/26	MTFS Budget 2025-29 £m	SCE Outturn and FR1 £m	Carry Forward & Budget Reduction Outturn and FR1 £m	Virement Outturn and FR1 £m	Re profiled to future FR1 £m	SCE FR2 £m	Virement FR2 £m	Budget Reduction FR2 £m	Re profiled to future FR2 £m	FR2 2025/26 £m
Children & Families	37.723	4.624	5.584	0.308	(0.493)	-	(3.460)	-	(19.730)	**24.556**

Supplementary Capital Virements for Approval in line with the Constitution

39 **Table 6** shows Requests for Supplementary Capital Virements

Table 6 - Committee / Capital Scheme	Amount Requested £m	Reason and Funding Source
Service Committee are asked to approve the Supplementary Capital Virements above £500,000 up to and including £5,000,000 for approval by relevant member(s) of CLT and Chief Finance Officer in consultation with Chair of the relevant committee and the Chair of Finance Sub Committee.		
Children and Families		
Education and 14-19 Skills Shavington Planning Area- New Basford Primary School	3.460	To increase Capital budget required to progress with the new school proposal with the virement of funds from Basic Need Grant to support the scheme.
Total Capital Virements Requested	**3.460**	

Dedicated School Grant

40 The updated DSG Management Plan in July 2025, approved at Children and Families Committee in September 2025, reduces the growth rate of EHCP based on the lower in year deficit at the yearend outturn. The mitigated cumulative deficit forecast for 2025/26 is £145.978m after including mitigations of £14.792m. This seven-year plan reports a mitigated cumulative deficit by 2031/32 of £197.608m after including £792.689m mitigation.

Revenue Grants for Approval

41 Cheshire East Council receives two main types of Government grants; specific purpose grants and general use grants:

(a) Specific purpose grants are held within the relevant service with a corresponding expenditure budget.

(b) General use grants, also known as un-ringfenced grants, are funds provided by the Government to local authorities without specific restrictions on how the money is spent.

42 **Table 7** overleaf shows additional grant allocations that have been received over £1m that Council will be asked to approve and grant allocations that have

been received which are over £0.5m and up to £1m and are for Committee approval.

Table 7 - Committee	Decision	Reason	Type of Grant	£m	Details
Children & Families - Schools	Council	Core Schools Budget Grant (special schools)	Specific Purpose	2.459	A Department for Education initiative to support special schools, AP settings, and post-16 institutions with rising staffing costs. It consolidates previous grants and introduces new support for employer contributions and anticipated pay increases. Funding is distributed via local authorities with strict conditions on use and full pass-through to eligible settings.

Reserves Position

43 Table 8 below shows the Children and Families position on reserves by the end of 2025/26.

Table 8 Earmarked Reserves	Balance at 1 April 2025	Drawdown to Support Service Exp	Additional Contributions to Reserves	Balance Forecast at 31 March 2026	Notes
	£m	£m	£m	£m	
ILACS Spending Plan	(0.456)	0.456	-	-	To address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of local authority Children's Services.
Total Reserves	**(0.456)**	**0.456**	**-**	**-**	

Consultation and Engagement

44 As part of the budget setting process the Pre-Budget engagement process provided an opportunity for interested parties to review and comment on the Council's Budget principles.

Reasons for Recommendations

45 The overall process for managing the Committee's and the Council's resources focuses on value for money, good governance and stewardship. The budget and

policy framework sets out rules for managing the Committee's and Council's financial affairs and contains the financial limits that apply in various parts of the Constitution. As part of sound financial management and to comply with the constitution any changes to the budgets agreed by the Committee and Council in the MTFS require approval in line with the financial limits within the Finance Procedure Rules.

46 This report provides strong links between the Council's statutory reporting requirements and the in-year monitoring and management processes for financial and non-financial management of resources.

Other Options Considered

47 None. This report is important to ensure Members of the Committee are sighted on the financial pressure the Committee and Council are facing and the activity to date to try and mitigate this issue. This report gives Members of the Committee an opportunity to scrutinise this activity and identify any further actions that could be taken to learn to live within our means.

48 Do nothing. Impact – Members are not updated on the financial position of the Committee or Council. Risks – Not abiding by the Constitution to provide regular reports.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance

49 The Council must set the budget in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and approval of a balanced budget each year is a statutory responsibility. Sections 25 to 29 of the Local Government Act 2003 impose duties on the Council in relation to how it sets and monitors its budget and require the Council to make prudent allowance for the risk and uncertainties in its budget and regularly monitor its finances during the year. The legislation leaves discretion to the Council about the allowances to be made and action to be taken.

50 The provisions of section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, require that, when the Council is making the calculation of its budget requirement, it must have regard to the report of the chief finance (s.151) officer as to the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.

51 The Council should therefore have robust processes in place so that it can meet statutory requirements and fulfil its fiduciary duty. It must ensure that all available resources are directed towards the delivery of statutory functions, savings and efficiency plans. Local authorities are creatures of statute and are regulated through the legislative regime and whilst they have in more recent times been given a general power of competence, this must operate within that regime. Within the statutory framework there are specific obligations placed upon a local authority to support communities. These duties encompass general and specific duties and there is often significant local discretion in respect of how those

services or duties are discharged. These will need to be assessed and advised on as each circumstance is considered.

52 The financial position of the Committee and the Council must therefore be closely monitored, and Members must satisfy themselves that sufficient mechanisms are in place to ensure both that savings are delivered and that new expenditure is contained within the available resources. Accordingly, any proposals put forward must identify the realistic measures and mechanisms to produce those savings or alternative mitigations.

53 This report provides an update on progress for 2025/26 for the Council and the Committee.

54 It also provides updates and comments regarding the Council's use of Exceptional Financial Support under The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 which inserted an amended Section 12A as a trigger event within the Local Government Act 2003, in relation to capital finance risk management. The legislation also provides for risk mitigation directions to be given to the Council which limit the ability to undertake certain financial action. The limitations are based on identified risk thresholds.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

55 The Council's and Committee's financial resources are agreed by Council and aligned to the achievement of stated outcomes for local residents and communities. Monitoring and managing performance helps to ensure that resources are used effectively, and that business planning and financial decision making are made in the right context.

56 Reserve levels are agreed, by Council, in February each year and are based on a risk assessment that considers the financial challenges facing the Council. If spending associated with in-year delivery of services is not contained within original forecasts for such activity it may be necessary to vire funds from reserves.

57 The unplanned use of financial reserves could require the Council to deliver a greater level of future savings to replenish reserve balances and / or revise the level of risks associated with the development of the Reserves Strategy in future.

58 As part of the process to produce this report, senior officers review expenditure and income across all services to support the development of mitigation plans that will return the outturn to a balanced position at year-end.

59 Forecasts contained within this review provide important information in the process of developing the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Analysis of variances during the year will identify whether such performance is likely to continue, and this enables more robust estimates to be established.

60 The risk associated with the scale of these challenges is that the Council could act illegally, triggering the requirement for a s.114 report from the Chief Financial

Officer. Illegal behaviour in this context could materialise from two distinct sources:

1. Spending decisions could be made that exceed the available resources of the Council. This would unbalance the budget, which is unlawful.
2. Spending decisions to restrict or hide pressures could be made that avoid an immediate deficit, but in fact are based on unlawful activity.

61 The consequences of the Council undermining a budget with illegal activity, or planned illegal activity, is the requirement to issue a s.114 report. Under these circumstances statutory services will continue and existing contracts and commitments must be honoured. But any spending that is not essential or which can be postponed must not take place.

62 Further consequences would be highly likely and could include the appointment of Commissioners from the MHCLG, and potential restrictions on the decision-making powers of local leaders.

Human Resources

63 This report is a backward look at the Committee and Council activities at outturn and states the year end position. Any HR implications that arise from activities funded by the budgets that this report deals with will be dealt within the individual reports to Members or Officer Decision Records to which they relate.

Risk Management

64 Financial risks are assessed and reported on a regular basis, and remedial action taken if required. Risks associated with the achievement of the 2024/25 budget and the level of general reserves were factored into the 2025/26 financial scenario, budget, and reserves strategy.

Impact on other Committees

65 All Committees will receive the financial update of the Council and the Committee specific narrative report.

Policy

66 This report is a backward look at the Committee and Council activities and predicts the year-end position. It supports the Council’s vision of being an effective and enabling Council as set out in the Cheshire East Plan 2025-2029

67 The forecast outturn position, ongoing considerations for future years, and the impact on general reserves will be fed into the assumptions underpinning the 2026 to 2030 Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

68 The approval of supplementary estimates and virements are governed by the Finance Procedure Rules section of the Constitution.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

69 Any equality implications that arise from activities funded by the budgets that this report deals with will be dealt within the individual reports to Members or Officer Decision Records to which they relate.

Consultation

Name of Consultee	**Post held**	**Date sent**	**Date returned**
Statutory Officer (or deputy):			
Ashley Hughes	S151 Officer	31/10/2025	31/10/2025
Jennie Summers	Cover for Kevin O'Keefe - Interim Monitoring Officer	27/10/2025	28/10/2025
Legal and Finance			
Chris Benham	Director of Finance	31/10/2025	31/10/2025
Hilary Irving	Interim Head of Legal	27/10/2025	28/10/2025
Other Consultees: Executive Directors/Directors:			
CLT			

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Chris Benham – Director of Finance Chris.benham@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	**Annex 1 - Detailed Second Financial Review 2025/26:**
Background Papers:	The following are links to key background documents: MTFS 2025-2029 First Financial Review 2025/26

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ANNEX 1

Second Financial Review 2025/26

Results to end of August 2025

Children and Families Committee

Contents

Section 1: 2025/26 Forecast Outturn

1.1. The forecast outturn position is based on a full financial management review across the service and reflects the rising cost and number of placements. This is a continuing trend and the Directorate are reviewing governance in this area in order to mitigate the overspend.

1.2. The table below shows a detailed forecast of each service area within the Directorate:

Committee	Service Area Tier 3	Revised Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance	FR1 Variance	Movement from FR1
Children and Families	Childrens Improvement and Development Total	0.345	0.302	- 0.043	0.004	- 0.047
Children and Families	Early Start Total	3.192	2.979	- 0.213	-0.048	- 0.164
Children and Families	Education and 14-19 Skills Total	- 54.078	- 53.946	0.132	0.133	- 0.001
Children and Families	Education Infrastructure and Outcomes Total	0.498	0.427	- 0.071	0.000	- 0.071
Children and Families	Education Participation and Pupil Support Total	19.758	20.283	0.525	0.295	0.230
Children and Families	Educational Psychologists Total	1.804	1.804	- 0.000	0.000	- 0.000
Children and Families	Preventative Services Total	3.749	3.553	- 0.197	-0.245	0.048
Children and Families	SEND Total	59.682	59.719	0.037	0.003	0.034
Children and Families	Children´s Services Total	1.169	1.621	0.452	1.229	- 0.777
Children and Families	Childrens Social Care - Safeguarding Total	2.424	2.423	- 0.001	0.009	- 0.010
Children and Families	Cared for Children Total	9.204	9.490	0.285	0.046	0.240
Children and Families	Children in Need, Protection and Disabilities Total	9.874	10.812	0.938	0.947	- 0.009
Children and Families	Childrens Social Care Total	1.429	1.382	- 0.048	-0.065	0.017
Children and Families	Provider Services and Fostering Total	35.608	42.805	7.197	6.466	0.731
Children and Families	Integrated Front Door & Domestic Abuse Total	3.485	3.306	- 0.179	0.172	- 0.351
Children and Families	Social Worker Academy Total	0.276	0.323	0.047	0.054	- 0.007
Children and Families		**98.420**	**107.283**	**8.862**	**8.998**	**- 0.136**

Section 2: Capital

2.1 **Table 1** is a detailed list of Children and Families Capital schemes :

Children and Families — CAPITAL

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2025/26 - 2028/29													
	Forecast Expenditure							Forecast Funding					
Scheme Description	Total Approved Budget £m	Prior Years £m	Forecast Budget 2025/26 £m	Forecast Budget 2026/27 £m	Forecast Budget 2027/28 £m	Forecast Budget 2028/29 £m	Total Forecast Budget 2025/29 £m	Grants £m	External Contributions £m	Revenue Contributions £m	Capital Receipts £m	Prudential Borrowing £m	Total Funding £m
Committed Schemes in progress													
Childrens Social Care													
Foster Carer Capacity Scheme	0.534	0.468	0.067	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.067**	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.067	**0.067**
Crewe Youth Zone	5.135	0.570	3.718	0.847	0.000	0.000	**4.565**	3.718	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.847	**4.565**
Family Hubs Transformation (Early Years - C110120)	0.387	0.282	0.105	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.105**	0.105	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.105**
Children's Home Sufficiency Scheme	1.404	0.358	1.046	0.000	0.000	0.000	**1.046**	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.046	**1.046**
Strong Start, Family Help & Integration													
Early Years Sufficiency Capital Fund	1.036	0.985	0.050	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.050**	0.050	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.050**
Childcare Capital Expansion	0.749	0.009	0.640	0.100	0.000	0.000	**0.740**	0.740	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.740**
Education and 14-19 Skills													
Adelaide Academy	0.904	0.069	0.050	0.785	0.000	0.000	**0.835**	0.665	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.170	**0.835**
Basic Need Grant Allocation	3.941	0.017	0.500	3.424	0.000	0.000	**3.924**	3.924	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**3.924**
Congleton Planning Area - Primary (1)	2.209	0.179	0.000	2.030	0.000	0.000	**2.030**	0.764	1.266	0.000	0.000	0.000	**2.030**
Congleton Planning Area - Primary (2)	0.628	0.579	0.049	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.049**	0.049	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.049**
Congleton Planning Area - Primary (3)	7.504	0.004	0.010	0.539	2.000	4.950	**7.499**	4.299	3.200	0.000	0.000	0.000	**7.499**
Devolved Formula Grant - Schools	1.143	0.443	0.391	0.310	0.000	0.000	**0.701**	0.701	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.701**
Energy Efficiency Grant - Schools	0.541	0.541	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.000**	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.000**
Future Schemes - Feasibility Studies	0.400	0.124	0.100	0.126	0.050	0.000	**0.276**	0.276	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.276**
Gainsborough Primary - Flooring	0.304	0.017	0.287	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.287**	0.287	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.287**
Handforth Planning Area - New School	13.003	0.010	0.040	0.500	4.000	8.453	**12.993**	0.129	12.864	0.000	0.000	0.000	**12.993**
Leighton Academy – Resourced unit (New SEN places	0.193	0.141	0.052	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.052**	0.052	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.052**
Leighton SEND Reception Adaptations	0.026	0.000	0.026	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.026**	0.026	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.026**
Little Angels Satellite Sites	0.029	0.021	0.008	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.008**	0.008	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.008**
Macclesfield Planning Area - Secondary New	0.531	0.006	-0.175	0.700	0.000	0.000	**0.525**	0.525	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.525**
Macclesfield Planning Area - New School	4.001	0.002	0.000	0.000	4.000	0.000	**4.000**	0.000	4.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**4.000**
Malbank High School	1.922	1.897	0.025	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.025**	0.025	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.025**
Mobberley Primary School	1.208	0.037	0.050	0.861	0.259	0.000	**1.170**	0.870	0.000	0.000	0.300	0.000	**1.170**
Nantwich Planning Area (Primary Schools - 210	9.061	0.793	6.091	2.177	0.000	0.000	**8.268**	5.308	2.960	0.000	0.000	0.000	**8.268**

Children and Families — CAPITAL

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2025/26 - 2028/29

Scheme Description	Total Approved Budget £m	Prior Years £m	Forecast Budget 2025/26 £m	Forecast Budget 2026/27 £m	Forecast Budget 2027/28 £m	Forecast Budget 2028/29 £m	Total Forecast Budget 2025/29 £m	Grants £m	External Contributions £m	Revenue Contributions £m	Capital Receipts £m	Prudential Borrowing £m	Total Funding £m
	Forecast Expenditure							Forecast Funding					
New AP Free School	0.525	0.003	0.005	0.516	0.000	0.000	**0.521**	0.521	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.521**
New Satellite school - 2	9.000	0.013	0.050	2.000	6.937	0.000	**8.987**	8.987	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**8.987**
New SEN Free School	0.998	0.010	0.010	0.978	0.000	0.000	**0.988**	0.988	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.988**
New SEN places - 1	1.089	0.004	0.400	0.685	0.000	0.000	**1.085**	1.085	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**1.085**
Oakfield Lodge & Stables	0.050	0.013	0.037	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.037**	0.037	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.037**
Poynton Planning Area	1.500	0.021	0.479	1.000	0.000	0.000	**1.479**	0.676	0.803	0.000	0.000	0.000	**1.479**
Provision of Sufficient School Places - SEND	7.182	6.974	0.100	0.108	0.000	0.000	**0.208**	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.208	**0.208**
Sandbach Primary Academy	1.583	0.912	0.671	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.671**	0.671	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.671**
Schools Condition Capital Grant	6.497	1.037	3.460	2.000	0.000	0.000	**5.460**	5.460	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**5.460**
SEN/High Needs Capital Allocation	4.860	0.187	0.500	4.173	0.000	0.000	**4.673**	4.673	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**4.673**
Shavington Planning Area - New Primary School	11.500	0.162	0.300	7.352	3.687	0.000	**11.338**	9.009	2.329	0.000	0.000	0.000	**11.338**
Springfield Satellite Site (Dean Row)	6.112	5.820	0.100	0.192	0.000	0.000	**0.292**	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.292	**0.292**
Springfield Satellite Site - Middlewich	5.999	0.017	1.500	4.483	0.000	0.000	**5.983**	5.983	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**5.983**
The Dingle PS Expansion (Was Haslington PA-	1.395	1.373	0.022	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.022**	0.022	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.022**
Tytherington High School	3.005	0.208	2.200	0.597	0.000	0.000	**2.797**	2.797	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**2.797**
Various SEN Sites - Small Works/Adaptations	0.150	0.001	0.079	0.070	0.000	0.000	**0.149**	0.149	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.149**
Wheelock Primary School	2.411	0.890	0.521	1.000	0.000	0.000	**1.521**	1.062	0.460	0.000	0.000	0.000	**1.521**
Wilmslow High School BN	14.179	12.788	0.100	1.291	0.000	0.000	**1.391**	0.193	1.150	0.000	0.000	0.048	**1.391**
Wilmslow Primary Planning Area	0.626	0.001	0.025	0.600	0.000	0.000	**0.625**	0.125	0.500	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.625**
Total Committed Schemes	**135.454**	**37.986**	**23.686**	**39.445**	**20.932**	**13.403**	**97.467**	**64.959**	**29.531**	**0.000**	**0.300**	**2.677**	**97.467**
New Schemes													
Education and 14-19 Skills													
Chelford Primary School	0.340	0.000	0.300	0.040	0.000	0.000	**0.340**	0.340	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.340**
Park Lane Refurbishment additional SEND places	0.200	0.005	0.195	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.195**	0.195	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.195**
Alderley Edge Primary - 25-26 Condition Project	0.050	0.000	0.050	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.050**	0.050	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.050**
Rainow Primary - 25-26 Condition Project	0.025	0.000	0.025	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.025**	0.025	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.025**
Ruskin - 25-26 Condition Project	0.200	0.000	0.200	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.200**	0.200	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.200**
Styal primary - 25-26 Condition Project	0.100	0.000	0.100	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.100**	0.100	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	**0.100**
Total New Schemes	**0.915**	**0.005**	**0.870**	**0.040**	**0.000**	**0.000**	**0.910**	**0.910**	**0.000**	**0.000**	**0.000**	**0.000**	**0.910**
Total Children and Families Schemes	**136.369**	**37.991**	**24.556**	**39.485**	**20.932**	**13.403**	**98.378**	**65.869**	**29.531**	**0.000**	**0.300**	**2.677**	**98.378**

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Cheshire East Council

OPEN

Children and Families Committee

10 November 2025

Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 - 2029/30

Report of: Ashley Hughes, Executive Director of Resources, Section 151 Officer

Report Reference No: CF/04/25-26

Ward(s) Affected: Not applicable

For Scrutiny

Purpose of Report

1 The Children and Families Committee is being asked to provide feedback, as consultees, on the development of the Cheshire East Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 to 2029/30. Feedback is requested in relation to the responsibilities of the Committee.

2 The report sets out the latest budget position for 2026/27 to 2029/30 and the list of budget savings proposals. relevant to the remit of this Committee. that has been included in the public consultation which was launched in November 2025.

Executive Summary

3 The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for Cheshire East Council for the four years 2025/26 to 2028/29 was approved by full Council on 26 February 2025.

4 The MTFS is underpinned by a set of assumptions around income, expenditure and core funding that result in a 4-year position. The budget could only be balanced for the 2025/26 financial year by use of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) by way of a capitalisation direction. This is not sustainable in the medium to long term and needed to be addressed urgently for the Council to be financially sustainable. The gaps forecast in later years were addressed as part of the business planning process this year, as well as the Council learning to live within its means by delivering all savings and containing approved growth within 2025/26,

otherwise there will be increased pressures in future years and preparing a balanced budget/ MTFS will continue to be challenging.

5 The budget gap in the last update paper received by Corporate Policy Committee and Finance Sub Committee, without mitigations, was £33.3m on the General Fund Revenue budget for 2026/27. This is the year, by law, that elected members must set a legal budget by no later than the 11 March 2026.

6 Since that budget assumptions report there have been further changes identified that needed to be worked towards, and details are set out in the Corporate Policy Committee report of 30 October 2025.

7 The proposals are those being consulted on, are not necessarily the final budget items that Corporate Policy Committee will recommend to Budget Council in February 2026. Discussions are ongoing around a bespoke MTFS for Children and Young People aligned to the Children's Improvement Plan, with an expectation that this updated Children's MTFS would be recommended to this Committee and Corporate Policy Committee in the next round of Committee meetings.

8 It is important that Committee members note the MTFS proposes a substantial multi-year investment of £20m into Children's Services improvement. This will be held in Corporate Contingency, and subject to Cabinet approval for its use, in the Council's revised governance arrangements from May 2026. This is on top of a smaller investment into Children's Services from the Council's transformation reserves in 2025/26 to provide additional wraparound resources into Children's Services under the direct supervision of the Executive Director of Children's Services and their leadership team. These resources have been drawn from Finance, HR, Legal and Programme Management.

9 Finance Sub-Committee have received a further update highlighting risks and issues that have not been taken into account at this point due to uncertainty or inability to quantify those risks. The risks relating to Children and Families' Committee remit include:

(a) Potential adverse inspection results and the cost of rectification and permanent improvements

(b) Dedicated Schools' Grant accumulated deficit statutory override ending March 2028, with the Council's current deficit of £113m being larger than available reserves and balances both now and forecasted to 2028.

(c) The delay in publication of the Schools' White Paper to 2026 and the impacts that policy changes proposed therein may have.

10 A programme of public engagement during November and December will be undertaken to support the 2026/27 budget setting and consultation.

11 The Council must ensure the conditions for successful delivery of budget proposals are in place. Without the following conditions, it will be difficult to confirm the robustness of estimates under Section 25 of the Local Government Finance Act 2003.

- A robust, consistent, corporate Programme and Project Management approach in a suitably resourced Programme Management Office.
- Delivery plans for proposals must consist of the cost of change where it is appropriate to do so, including those from services not involved directly in delivery.
- A strong culture of owning performance and delivery, underpinned by monthly officer-led Performance Boards.
- Elected members agree to oversee delivery through quarterly Star Chambers and apply the same methodology to challenge the budget process into 2027/28.
- Delivery, in full, of the Financial Leadership Improvement Plan, particularly around the Enterprise Resource Programme and budget holder accountability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is asked to:

1. Note the updated budget position for the period 2026/27 to 2029/30 as set out in Table 3.
2. Note the proposals to invest significantly in Children and Families over a multi-year timeframe and the governance arrangements around the use of that investment.
3. Scrutinise and feedback on the list of Children and Families budget savings proposals that are contained in the budget consultation launched in November 2025 as contained in Annex 1.
4. Note the conditions for successful budget delivery, as approved by Corporate Policy Committee on 30 October 2025, which are set out in paragraph 11.

Background

12 The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for Cheshire East Council for the four years 2025/26 to 2028/29 was approved by full Council on 26 February 2025.

13 As a reminder, Table 1 below sets out the revenue budget estimates for the four years from 2025/26 to 2028/29 as at February 2025.

Table 1: Summary position for 2025/26 to 2028/29	Approved Net Budget 2025/26 £m	Estimated Net Budget 2026/27 £m	Estimated Net Budget 2027/28 £m	Estimated Net Budget 2028/29 £m
Adults & Health	159.449	157.245	158.761	160.240
Children & Families	97.290	97.226	97.025	96.767
Corporate Policy	42.786	47.182	49.072	50.557
Economy & Growth	28.442	29.137	29.569	29.897
Environment & Communities	45.702	48.971	49.953	56.745
Highways and Transport	16.901	17.053	17.121	17.151
Council Wide Transformation savings	(13.452)	(34.182)	(45.212)	(45.212)
Total Service Budgets	377.118	362.632	356.289	366.145
CENTRAL BUDGETS:				
Capital Financing	35.039	38.758	41.860	43.248
Flexible use of Capital Receipts	(1.000)	(1.000)	(1.000)	(1.000)
Bad Debt Provision (change)	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.050)
Contingency Budget	15.953	30.861	42.783	55.709
Risk Budget	-	3.800	1.960	0.750
Pension adjustment	(0.727)	(0.727)	(0.727)	(0.727)
Use of (-) / Top up (+) Reserves	1.304	5.000	8.898	8.898
Total Central Budgets	50.519	76.642	93.724	106.828
TOTAL: SERVICE + CENTRAL BUDGETS	427.637	439.274	450.012	472.972
FUNDED BY:				
Council Tax	(307.264)	(325.591)	(344.983)	(365.498)
Business Rate Retention Scheme	(57.122)	(57.122)	(57.122)	(57.122)
Revenue Support Grant	(0.849)	(0.849)	(0.849)	(0.849)
Specific Unring-fenced Grants	(37.140)	(34.098)	(34.098)	(34.098)
TOTAL: FUNDED BY	(402.375)	(417.660)	(437.052)	(457.567)
Exceptional Financial Support - Capitalisation Directi	(25.261)			
Funding Position (+shortfall)	-	21.614	12.961	15.406

14 The table above highlighted the fact that the Council continued to face a significant four-year funding gap at that time and was only able to balance in 2025/26 with the use of EFS. There continues to be the requirement to increase general reserves to more appropriate levels, to support the future financial sustainability of the Council and the above four-year budget built this level to £20m.

Budget assumption updates – base scenario (September/early October)

15 There was further refinement to some of the assumptions and resulting values since the MTFS approved in February 2025 (Table 1). These changed the overall funding position for 2026/27 onwards as per Table 2 below. A list of updates included in this table can be found in the previous report.

Table 2: Base Scenario position for 2026/27 to 2029/30	Approved Budget 2025/26 £m	Estimated Net Budget 2026/27 £m	Estimated Net Budget 2027/28 £m	Estimated Net Budget 2028/29 £m	Estimated Net Budget 2029/30 £m
Adults & Health	159.449	**167.450**	**172.795**	**178.074**	**188.074**
Children & Families	97.290	**101.130**	**104.805**	**108.395**	**118.395**
Corporate Policy	42.786	**45.812**	**46.132**	**46.008**	**46.008**
Economy & Growth	28.441	**28.707**	**28.699**	**28.577**	**28.577**
Environment & Communities	45.701	**47.590**	**47.163**	**52.519**	**52.519**
Highways and Transport	16.901	**16.942**	**16.896**	**16.809**	**16.809**
Council Wide Transformation savings	(13.452)	**(34.182)**	**(45.212)**	**(45.212)**	**(45.212)**
Transformation pump priming	-	**15.000**	**5.000**	**-**	**-**
Total Service Budgets	377.116	**388.448**	**376.277**	**385.169**	**405.169**
CENTRAL BUDGETS:					
Capital Financing	35.039	**34.997**	**37.637**	**38.932**	**38.690**
Flexible use of Capital Receipts	(1.000)	**(10.000)**	**(5.000)**	**(1.000)**	**(1.000)**
Bad Debt Provision (change)	(0.050)	**(1.000)**	**(0.050)**	**(0.050)**	**(0.050)**
Contingency Budget	15.953	**44.661**	**49.743**	**61.459**	**69.453**
Pay inflation	-	**10.154**	**18.382**	**26.746**	**35.110**
Pension adjustment	(0.727)	**(0.727)**	**(0.727)**	**(0.727)**	**(0.727)**
Use of (-) / Top up (+) Reserves	1.304	**5.000**	**8.898**	**8.898**	**5.000**
Total Central Budgets	50.519	**83.085**	**108.883**	**134.258**	**146.476**
TOTAL: SERVICE + CENTRAL BUDGETS	**427.635**	**471.533**	**485.160**	**519.427**	**551.645**
FUNDED BY:					
Council Tax	(307.264)	**(326.341)**	**(345.769)**	**(366.323)**	**(388.069)**
Business Rate Retention Scheme	(57.122)	**(47.084)**	**(46.767)**	**(46.919)**	**(47.048)**
Revenue Support Grant	(0.849)	**(63.851)**	**(79.786)**	**(85.300)**	**(86.161)**
Specific Unring-fenced Grants + DAMPING	(37.140)	**(0.929)**	**2.251**	**3.936**	**(0.929)**
TOTAL: FUNDED BY	**(402.375)**	**(438.205)**	**(470.071)**	**(494.606)**	**(522.207)**
Exceptional Financial Support - Capitalisation Directi	(25.261)				
Funding Position (+shortfall)	**-**	**33.328**	**15.089**	**24.821**	**29.438**

Budget assumption updates – latest base scenario

16 Further work has been undertaken to reduce the £33.3m gap, demonstrating to MHCLG and our Assurance Panel that we are doing what we have been charged with and working towards a route out of EFS.

17 Therefore, there has been further refinements to some of the assumptions and resulting values since this time. These change the overall funding position for 2026/27 onwards as per Table 3 below. The current shortfall in 2026/27 is now estimated to be £18.2m. The full list of

updates and all savings proposals can be found in the Corporate Policy Committee paper:

Table 3: Base Scenario position for 2026/27 to 2029/30	Approved Budget 2025/26 £m	Estimated Net Budget 2026/27 £m	Estimated Net Budget 2027/28 £m	Estimated Net Budget 2028/29 £m	Estimated Net Budget 2029/30 £m
Adults & Health	159.449	**162.601**	**162.435**	**164.189**	**166.697**
Children & Families	97.290	**94.245**	**92.766**	**91.194**	**96.194**
Corporate Policy	42.786	**44.537**	**44.536**	**44.172**	**44.172**
Economy & Growth	28.441	**26.235**	**25.771**	**25.051**	**24.801**
Environment & Communities	45.701	**45.673**	**45.065**	**50.228**	**52.234**
Highways and Transport	16.901	**18.084**	**18.175**	**18.083**	**17.815**
Council Wide Transformation savings	(13.452)	**(26.943)**	**(37.973)**	**(37.973)**	**(37.973)**
Transformation pump priming	-	**10.000**	**5.000**	**5.000**	**-**
Total Service Budgets	377.116	**374.432**	**355.775**	**359.943**	**363.939**
CENTRAL BUDGETS:					
Capital Financing	35.039	**34.997**	**37.637**	**38.932**	**38.690**
Flexible use of Capital Receipts	(1.000)	**(15.000)**	**(10.000)**	**(10.000)**	**-**
Bad Debt Provision (change)	(0.050)	**(1.000)**	**(0.050)**	**(0.050)**	**(0.050)**
Contingency Budget	15.953	**48.538**	**53.620**	**65.336**	**73.330**
Pay inflation (moved from service budget to contingency budget from 2026/27 until final pay agreement reached)	-	**10.223**	**18.451**	**26.815**	**35.179**
Pension adjustment relating to ASDVs only	(0.727)	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**
Use of (-) / Top up (+) Reserves	1.304	**5.001**	**15.456**	**14.479**	**12.011**
Total Central Budgets	50.519	**82.759**	**115.114**	**135.512**	**159.160**
TOTAL: SERVICE + CENTRAL BUDGETS	**427.635**	**457.192**	**470.889**	**495.456**	**523.100**
FUNDED BY:					
Council Tax	(307.264)	**(327.119)**	**(346.587)**	**(367.173)**	**(388.962)**
Business Rate Retention Scheme	(57.122)	**(47.084)**	**(46.767)**	**(46.919)**	**(47.048)**
Revenue Support Grant	(0.849)	**(63.851)**	**(79.786)**	**(85.300)**	**(86.161)**
Specific Unring-fenced Grants + DAMPING	(37.140)	**(0.929)**	**2.251**	**3.936**	**(0.929)**
TOTAL: FUNDED BY	**(402.375)**	**(438.983)**	**(470.889)**	**(495.456)**	**(523.100)**
Exceptional Financial Support - Capitalisation Direction	(25.261)				
Funding Position (+shortfall)	**-**	**18.209**	**-**	**-**	**-**

Next Steps

18 There has been further work carried out to challenge this updated position. Business case submissions for future planned savings were presented to Corporate Leadership Team on 13 October. Further changes that could be made to the above position (Table 3) have been included in the latest figures and a list of savings proposals is included at Annex 1 relevant to this Committee. For a full list of proposed budget savings please see the Corporate Policy Committee paper.

19 Further work to support Children's Services to review the demography and complexity permanent growth budgets of £10m with a target to reduce it by at least £5m per annum to 2030. This work began after the Ofsted inspection on Monday 20 October.

20 Savings still need to be delivered through service redesign and as part of the wider transformation programmes and should be considered as

stretch deliverables where possible. This work will form part of the final set of proposals for February 2026. As such, stretch transformation numbers in relation to redesign are being completed by December 2025. It is important to note that Families First implementation is part of service redesign, and the Council has not attached any budget reductions to its delivery.

21 The Council will continue to review its MTFS and budget reductions programme going forward. The assumptions included within this report will be refreshed through November and December to take account of available information on Government funding decisions as well as the macro-economic environment.

22 Over the period November to January, these proposals will be further developed to ensure robust delivery plans are in place and work will commence, with a view to maximising the full year effect of delivery in 2026/27. Priority will be placed on income maximisation across all service areas to reduce the burden on expenditure reductions, however there will be a need for efficiencies in costs alongside a genuine requirement to invest in transformation where the return on investment delivers long-term improvements in outcomes for residents in line with the Cheshire East Plan alongside recurrent reductions in costs that support the MTFS.

23 The draft budget savings proposals will be subject to consultation and engagement both online and in person sessions with various stakeholders – the full details of Public Engagement in Support of the 2026/30 Budget Consultation are set out in paragraphs 22- 24 of the Corporate Policy Committee paper. These sessions will likely be prior to the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement so would be updated with changes as a result of those announcements.

24 This position includes the list of savings proposals as contained in Annex 1 and summary Table 4 has been provided below.

25 This Committee is being asked to review and feedback on the list of items pertaining to this committee only.

TABLE 4 - DRAFT BUDGET SAVINGS PROPOSALS 2026/27 TO 2029/30	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m
	(57.781)	(14.562)	(8.158)	7.086
Children and Families	(3.826)	(0.725)	(0.725)	-
Adults and Health	(11.769)	(5.984)	(4.537)	(2.961)
Corporate Policy	(5.988)	(1.423)	(1.517)	-
Corporate Policy - Council Wide Transformation	(13.491)	(11.030)	-	-
Economy and Growth	(2.885)	(0.543)	(0.597)	(0.250)
Environment and Communities	(4.615)	(0.653)	(0.544)	0.580
Highways and Transport	(0.257)	(0.154)	(0.238)	(0.283)
Finance Sub Committee - Central Budgets	(14.950)	5.950	-	10.000

Consultation and Engagement

26 The annual business planning process involves engagement with local people and organisations. Local authorities have a duty to consult on their budget with certain stakeholder groups and in Cheshire East we include the Schools Forum as well as business rate payers. In addition, the Council chooses to consult with other stakeholder groups. The Council continues to carry out stakeholder analysis to identify the different groups involved in the budget setting process, what information they need from us, the information we currently provide these groups with, and where we can improve our engagement process.

27 All committees will receive reports during the November cycle of meetings for them to scrutinise proposals relating to the remit of the committee. There will be a further opportunity during the January 2026 committee meeting cycle to comment further as feedback is received.

Reasons for Recommendations

28 In accordance with the Constitution Committees play an important role in planning, monitoring and reporting on the Council’s finances. Each Committee has specific financial responsibilities.

29 The Council’s annual budget must be balanced. The proposals within it must be robust and the strategy should be supported by adequate reserves. The assessment of these criteria is supported by each Committee having the opportunity to help develop the financial proposals before they are approved by Full Council.

Other Options Considered

30 The Council has a legal duty to set a balanced annual budget taking regard of the report from the Chief Financial Officer. As such options cannot be considered that would breach this duty. Any feedback from the consultation process and individual committee feedback must still recognise the requirement for Council to fulfil this duty.

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	Not an option as the council must legally set a balanced budget for the coming financial year	The Council would be acting unlawfully if budgets are not aligned to available resources

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance

31 The Council must set the budget in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and approval of a balanced budget each year is a statutory responsibility. Sections 25 to 29 of the Local Government Act 2003 impose duties on the Council in relation to how it sets and monitors its budget and require the Council to make prudent allowance for the risk and uncertainties in its budget and regularly monitor its finances during the year. The legislation leaves discretion to the Council about the allowances to be made and action to be taken.

32 The provisions of section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, require that, when the Council is making the calculation of its budget requirement, it must have regard to the report of the chief finance (s.151) officer as to the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.

33 The Council should therefore have robust processes in place so that it can meet statutory requirements and fulfil its fiduciary duty. It must ensure that all available resources are directed towards the delivery of statutory functions, savings and efficiency plans. Local authorities are creatures of statute and are regulated through the legislative regime and whilst they have in more recent times been given a general power of competence, this must operate within that regime. Within the statutory framework there are specific obligations placed upon a local authority to support communities. These duties encompass general and specific duties and there is often significant local discretion in respect of how those services or duties are discharged. These will need to be assessed and advised on as each circumstance is considered.

34 The financial position of the Council must therefore be closely monitored, and Members must satisfy themselves that sufficient mechanisms are in place to ensure both that savings are delivered and that new expenditure is contained within the available resources. Accordingly, any proposals put forward must identify the realistic measures and mechanisms to produce those savings or alternative mitigations.

35 This report provides an update on progress towards the setting of the 2026/27 budget.

36 It also provides updates and comments regarding the Council’s use of Exceptional Financial Support under The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 which inserted an amended Section 12A as a trigger event within the Local Government Act 2003, in relation to capital finance risk management. The legislation also provides for risk mitigation directions to be given to the Council which limit the ability to undertake certain financial action. The limitations are based on identified risk thresholds.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

37 Please see all sections of this report.

Human Resources

38 Any HR implications that arise from activities funded by the budgets that the budget report deals with will be dealt with in the individual reports to Members or Officer Decision Records to which they relate.

Risk Management

39 Financial risks are assessed and reported on a regular basis, and remedial action taken if required. Risks associated with the achievement of the 2025/26 budget and the level of general reserves were factored into the 2025/26 financial scenario, budget, and reserves strategy.

Impact on other Committees

40 All committees will work towards bringing forward budget change proposals to assist with the medium-term financial strategy.

Policy

41 The Cheshire East Plan sets the policy context for the MTFS and the two documents are aligned. Any policy implications that arise from activities funded by the budgets that this report deals with will be dealt with in the individual reports to Members or Officer Decision Records to which they relate. This contributes to Commitment 3: An effective and enabling Council.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

42 Any equality implications that arise from activities funded by the budgets that this report deals with will be dealt within the individual reports to Members or Officer Decision Records to which they relate.

Consultation

Name of Consultee	**Post held**	**Date sent**	**Date returned**
Statutory Officer (or deputy):			
Ashley Hughes	S151 Officer	23/10/2025	24/10/2025
Jennie Summers	Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer	27/10/2025	28/10/2025
Legal and Finance			
Chris Benham	Director of Finance	23/10/2025	23/10/2025
Hilary Irving	Interim Head of Legal Services	23/10/2025	23/10/2025
Other Consultees: Executive Directors/Directors:			
CLT			

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Chris Benham – Director of Finance Chris.benham@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Annex 1 – Proposals Budget Savings for Consultation
Background Papers:	The following are links to key background documents: MTFS 2025-2029 Financial Review 1 2025/26 Corporate Policy Committee – MTFS Consultation full report

Prev MTFS Ref	ANNEX 1 - DRAFT BUDGET SAVINGS PROPOSALS 2026/27 TO 2029/30		2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m
	Children and Families		**(3.826)**	**(0.725)**	**(0.725)**	**-**
26T	**New accommodation with support offer for 16-25 young people**	This reduction in expenditure relates to commissioning work that has identified lower cost accommodation for this group of young people. Savings will be achieved through accessing lower unit cost places.	(0.700)	-	-	-
28T	**Right Child, Right Home**	This saving refers to work that actively reviews placements for cared for children and young people and agrees actions that meet the identified needs of children and young people but at a lower unit cost, and also identifies alternatives to being 'in care'.	(1.300)	(0.725)	(0.725)	-
NEW	**5% vacancy factor**	To contribute to the Council's overall savings target through a managed reduction in staffing costs, achieved by holding a proportion of vacant posts unfilled for a defined period. This is being applied across all staffing areas at 5% of pay budgets. This approach assumes that a portion of staffing budgets will remain unspent due to natural turnover and strategic vacancy management	(1.826)	-	-	-

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Cheshire East Council

OPEN

Children and Families Committee

10 November 2025

Holiday Activity and Food Programme 2026 to 2029

Report of: Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director of Children's Services

Report Reference No: CF/36/25-26

Ward(s) Affected: All

For Decision

Purpose of Report

1 Approval of the Holiday and Activity Food Programme (HAF) to run an open procurement procedure to spend the total amount of the HAF grant as allocated by the Department for Education (DfE) each financial year.

Executive Summary

2 On the 28 August 2025, the DfE announced an extension to the HAF programme, with a total allocation of £200m worth of funding across England. As of 02 Sept 2025, we do not have grant conditions or a final budget allocation for Cheshire East, but we expect it to be in line with previous years.

3 Since 2021, the HAF programme has been delivered in Cheshire East by open procurement, which has amassed a total of 29 providers, providing over 100 clubs each year to over 10,000 income related free school meal (IRFSM) young people.

4 So far, in 2025/26, this has resulted in over 74,000 hours of provision being accessed by over 2,746 IRFSM young people.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Children and Families Committee are recommended to:

1. Approve the Supplementary Revenue Estimate Request for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding over £500,000 up to £1,000,000 relating to the 2026/27 Holiday Activity and Food Programme. The estimated amount based on previous years is £900,000.

2. Approve the HAF to be delivered via open procedure from April 2026 to March 2029 plus optional extensions of 3 years.

3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Families Committee, for the dispersal of funds and contract awards to providers for the delivery of the Holiday Activity and Food Programme up to the allocated HAF grant amount each financial year.

Background

5 The HAF programme has the purpose of providing healthy meals and enriching activities for income related Free School Meal (FSM) eligible young people during the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays, with current eligibility for the programme requiring a minimum of 85% of the programme to be delivered to income related FSM eligible young people and 15% of the programme available for young people with identified needs and vulnerabilities by providers/professionals who aren't eligible for FSM. The funding is available to support clubs and organisations in offering comprehensive, inclusive, and accessible offers in line with grant conditions.

HAF Proposal

6 Commission the future HAF programme on behalf of Cheshire East through an open procurement exercise.

7 We would like to commission up to the entire HAF budget through this process, which would come to a maximum of £2.46m for the 3 years of secured funding, with a further 3-year optional extension subject to funding. The full value including optional extensions would be approximately £4.9m. The purpose of the optional extension is to provide the local authority flexibility in procuring in the future.

8 Take 10% admin fund each year for a total of £90k per annum, which will be used to fund the project team. This team is responsible for delivery of the HAF programme, which includes:

(a) Project Finances, safeguarding, procurement, payments, advertising, provider vetting, booking platform management, provider visits, council governance, grant returns, management of HAF inboxes, liaise DfE advisors and attend DfE national meetings, as well as other tasks inherent to running a project of this scale.

9 In addition to this, we suggest we continue to use EEQU, commissioning them for the entirety of the programme for a total cost of £60k (+£60k for optional extensions). EEQU is our online booking platform which manages eligibility checking by automatically checking a user against their FSM eligibility as well as providing a user-friendly experience for HAF attendees, where they can easily access activities and book on. The platform then provides Cheshire East with a gold standard of live data to indicate on provider performance and log necessary information.

10 Recommission the marketing provider, as recommended by the Cheshire East communications team, to support marketing and awareness campaigns throughout the lifetime of the grant. In 2025/26 the HAF team commissioned marketing support which resulted in over 1m impressions, 200k unique users and 12,530 clicks onto the HAF booking page.

11 Please note, the above costings are currently predictive as we are yet to receive our official grant.

Other Options Considered

12 Grants – we could go out to deliver the programme through a grant process, but this would provide significantly less protection for commissioners in comparison to a contract. For example, we would have no legal basis to be able to challenge how the monies were spent once granted. For this level of spend this would not be advised.

13 Not deliver – return the money to the DfE and not deliver the programme, although this would mean we were not supporting the most vulnerable children and young people in Cheshire East in line with the council’s priorities.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

14 The Department for Education (DfE) has announced that the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) programme will be extended for 2026/29. Despite the fact that this is an extension to the previous HAF scheme, it is a new grant subject to its own grant conditions which have not been provided to CEC. CEC must nominate a HAF coordinator who will assume responsibility for the delivery of the HAF programme for the local authority.

15 The DfE has yet to provide the grant conditions for the HAF programme 2026/2029. However, the DfE has now (as of 18/09/2025) been provided with email confirmation on 28 August 2025 from the Department of Education for the period 2026/29. CEC's allocation of HAF funding - £908,330 will be paid to CEC and must be spent in compliance any grant conditions that are provided to CEC.

16 The HAF has been determined by the Secretary of State for Education in exercise of the powers conferred by section 31 Local Government Act 2003. The HAF programme will provide funding for health meals, enriching activities and free childcare places to children from low-income families, benefiting their health, wellbeing and learning. The HAF will be used throughout the Easter, summer and Christmas school holidays during the period of 01/04/2026 to 31/03/2029. Underspends from previous schemes will have been returned to DfE and cannot be carried forwards or utilised. Funds not spent or committed before 31/03/2029 will be returned to DfE upon conclusion of the programme.

17 Local authorities are expected to provide funding to benefit eligible children and families within their area. Local authorities should provide assistance to school aged children who receive benefits-related free school meals. A maximum of 10% of the expenditure can be spent on administration costs for coordinating the HAF programme. The remaining 90% must be spent on the provision of assistance for eligible children.

18 The service must ensure that spend is in line with eligible expenditure as well as the grant conditions which will be provided by the Department of Education and should not exceed CECs allocation of funding. CEC will ultimately be held accountable for the reporting of spend to DfE. Consequently, any contracts awarded (or support given) by way of HAF funding to third parties must contain obligations pertaining to record management/sharing & reporting requirements so that CEC may in turn comply with the reporting obligations outlined within the grant conditions that the Department of Education will provide.

19 CEC must abide by any reporting requirements that may be provided as part of HAF. CECs HAF coordinator should ensure that the associated data and costs of the HAF programme are submitted to DfE in time to prevent a breach of the grant determination provisions and to mitigate any risk of clawback of grant funding.

20 We anticipate that the grant conditions that will be provided pursuant to the HAF will contain clawback provisions for recovery of the grant monies by DfE. The service must ensure that grant monies are not distributed in contravention of the provisions within any such grant conditions. We expect that in the event of a breach, DfE may request a reduction in the grant monies to CEC, suspend any such payment, withhold grant

payments or require repayment of the whole or any part of the grant monies paid to CEC. Please note that Legal will be able to confirm the exact requirements of any grant conditions when these are received from the Department of Education.

21 [Further legal comments may be provided upon receipt of the grant conditions for HAF programme 2026/29.]

Section 151 Officer/Finance

22 The council has received allocations of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme over the last four years as tabled below. The grant has been received on an annual basis. However, for the last two years the confirmation that the grant is continuing has been received in March of the previous year. This has left little time for planning and making changes to the programme that Cheshire East offers. The short term notice and limited time period has meant that the council has not been able to reconsider the offer and enter into a procurement tender process.

Year	Amount
2022/23	£878,640
2023/24	£896,470
2024/25	£906,480
2025/26	£908,330

23 The DfE have now committed to a further three years funding for 2026/27 to 2028/29 which now gives local authorities certainty around the future of the programme.

24 Allocations for individual local authorities have not been provided yet but the national level is just over £200m. This is comparable to the £205m allocation for 2024/25 so reasonable to assume the allocation for Cheshire East will be in the region of £900,000.

25 The second recommendation is dependent on funding being in place and approval of the budget at the first recommendation. Committee are therefore being asked to approve the revenue supplementary estimate on the basis of the expected grant amount from the information that has been published.

26 Expenditure on the Holiday Activity Fund will be fully funded by the government grant allocation. Grant allocations are expected later in the

year following the autumn budget and will be included in the 2026-2030 Medium Term Financial Strategy.

27 The council will spend the grant in accordance with the conditions and not exceed the amount advised by the DfE. There will not be any unfunded ongoing commitments as a result of this expenditure. Any unused grant at the end of the grant period will be returned to the DfE.

28 If the council has not spent the grant in accordance with the conditions, then there is scope for clawback. The service will manage that risk.

29 It is expected that the council will be required to provide a return outlining their grant spend and data on attendance following each holiday period in-line with previous grant conditions.

30 This is a revenue-based activity and income, and expenditure relates to specific financial years. The risk of underspend occurs due to take up of activities.

Policy

31 The HAF grant is part of the government's package of support, targeted at those vulnerable families who are most in need, to help them to cope with food poverty and inequality.

An open and enabling organisation **Open**

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

32 An EIA is currently in place which explores all equality, diversity and inclusion aspects. The EIA can be found here.

Human Resources

33 The grant conditions enable Cheshire East to take a portion of the grant for administration. We have already taken steps to extend temporary contracts to ensure the programme is staffed going forward.

Risk Management

34 Risks are routinely assessed and reported on at the monthly holiday activity and food programme multi-agency steering group, chaired by the Head of Service responsible for the programme, and remedial action is taken, as required.

35 We regularly review provider data and performance through the data provided by EEQU, we then report on this data at our steering group, and if appropriate, remedial action is taken with the provider directly. This ensures attendance and value for money are achieved.

36 The HAF team also visit providers whilst sessions are underway. They ensure provider insurance meets children's procurement stipulations, safeguarding policies are in place and being adhered to including named designated safeguarding leads. All staff delivering HAF must have the appropriate DBS checks. Providers must confirm they have health and safety policies that complies with current legislative requirements, a behaviour policy, a member of staff who is first aid trained and that they are signed up to OFSTED as appropriate, as well as risk assessments are in place regarding the venue. They also observe activities and speak to the children and young people.

Rural Communities

37 Children, families, and adults in rural areas of the council will directly benefit from receipt of the new grant in line with financial need. There is no restriction on funding decisions dependent on where service users live.

38 The programme is primarily focussed on areas of the highest need, but the HAF team do endeavour to ensure the programme is as accessible as possible, with activities being in areas where public transport is available.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

39 Children and young people who suffer the greatest inequality in terms of lack of household income will directly benefit from the HAF grant.

Public Health

40 Poverty poses a threat to the public health of our residents as they are less likely to be able to access the conditions that promote a healthy physical and mental lifestyle. An adequate income can help people to avoid stress and feel in control, to access experiences and material resources, to adopt and maintain healthy behaviours, and to feel supported by a financial safety net.

Climate Change

41 There are not expected to be any climate change implications from the Holiday Activity and Food Programme.

42 Consultation

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
Statutory Officer (or deputy) :			
Ashley Hughes	S151 Officer	09/10/25	20/10/25
Kevin O'Keefe	Interim Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)	09/10/25	09/10/25
Legal and Finance			
Diane Green	Finance Manager	09/09/25	16/09/25
Adrian Lesley	Principal Lawyer	18/09/25	18/09/25
Other Consultees: *Executive Directors/Directors*			
Dawn Godfrey	Executive Director of Children's Services	15/10/25	16/10/25
Tracy Stephen	Director of Family Help & Children's Social Care	15/10/25	21/10/25

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Douglas Hubbert, Business Development Manager Douglas.hubbert@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – HAF Eval

	Appendix 2 - Table 1 – LSOA Mapping Appendix 3 - Table 2 – Recipient Feedback Appendix 4 - Table 3 – HAF Feedback Statements
Background Papers:	HAF DfE Grant Conditions – TBC Full Council item 88 - Delivery Proposal for the Holiday Activity and Food Programme 2025/26. Agenda for Council on Wednesday, 26th February, 2025, 11.00 am | Cheshire East Council

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Appendix 1 – HAF Eval

The HAF (Holiday Activities and Food) programme has demonstrated significant growth and impact across the 2025/26 period. In the summer of 2025, the programme supported a total of 2,384 unique learners, representing 26% of the Free School Meals (FSM) population in Cheshire East. These learners accessed over 20,964 booked sessions, which translated into more than 83,000 hours of support. On average, each attendee received approximately 35 hours of engagement, highlighting the depth of provision offered.

In 2025 to date, the programme has already reached 2,746 young people, with October, Christmas and February delivery still to come. This figure accounts for approximately 29% of the current FSM population, indicating a continued upward trend in reach and participation. So far, 18,607 sessions have been delivered, equating to 74,428 hours of support.

A particularly notable aspect of the programme is its inclusivity, with 30% of attendees identified as having Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This demonstrates the programme’s commitment to supporting children with additional needs and ensuring equitable access to enriching activities. The delivery network has also expanded, with 29 providers currently involved in the programme. During the summer alone, these providers delivered over 113 sessions, showcasing the scale and diversity of the offer.

Overall, the data reflects a strong trajectory of growth and impact. The increase in participation, hours of support, and provider engagement all point to a programme that is not only expanding but also responding effectively to the needs of the community. These outcomes affirm that the strategic direction and delivery model are achieving the intended goals and making a meaningful difference in the lives of children and families across Cheshire East. Please refer to table 2 and table 3 for additional qualitative feedback from HAF users.

Our provider map can be seen in table 1, which maps out where our HAF providers are in relation to the LSOAs.

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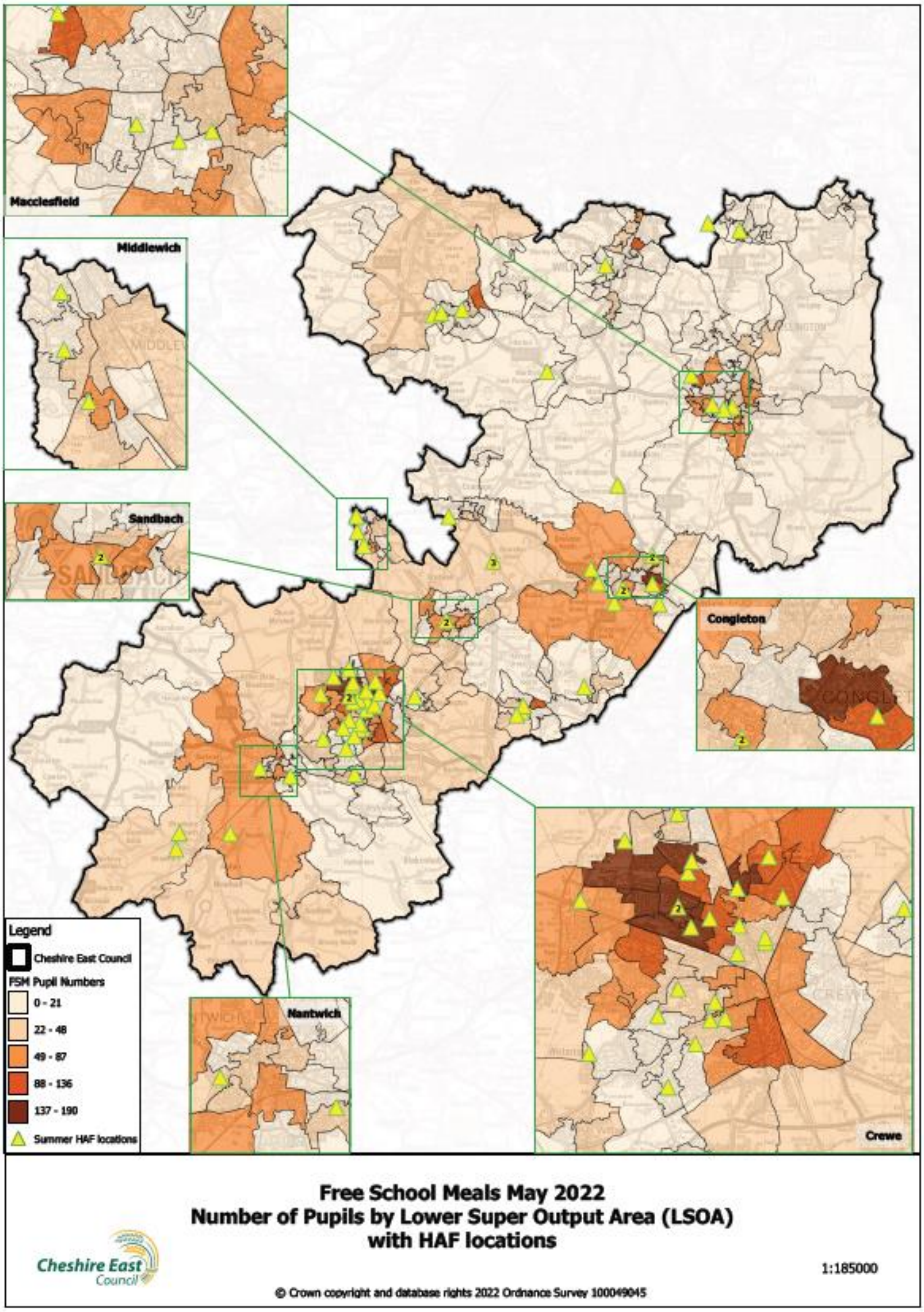
Appendix 2 - Table 1 – HAF LSOA Mapping



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Appendix 3 - Table 2 – Survey feedback from HAF recipients

Answer Choices	Yes	Sort of	No	Don't know
I was happy at this club	92.59%	7.41%	0.00%	0.00%
I had fun at this club	92.59%	7.41%	0.00%	0.00%
I looked forward to going to this club	85.19%	7.41%	7.41%	0.00% 0
I felt safe at this club	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
I enjoyed the food at this club	74.07%	14.81%	7.41%	3.70%
I want to go back to this club	88.89%	7.41%	3.70%	0.00%

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Appendix 4 - Table 3 – HAF Feedback Statements

Statement 1	The HAF program has been amazing for my grandson. X had a fabulous time learning new things and making new friends. He always arrives home with a smile on his face.
Statement 2	Working from home and having a son with ADHD who needs constant attention is hard work and puts a lot of pressure on me whilst I try and work. Children X's age can be left alone or entertain themself. However, having HAF has been an absolute blessing to help with the cost but most importantly it has given my son something to look forward to daily.
Statement 3	It made it possible for me to continue working without it actually costing me money to go to work! I would have had to give up my full-time job to be available for my children had it not been for HAF.
Statement 4	I have 4 children that are in primary / high school - it's not always easy or affordable to be able to keep them entertained during the summer holidays. Of course there are free days out etc., but they soon get bored of seeing the park every day or going for a walk. I booked them on the summer holiday club and it was the best thing I did. It broke the holidays up a bit and gave them something else to look forward too because although the summer holidays are great kids need to be kept busy & doing something fun. They had a great time and couldn't wait for the end of the day to tell me all the different sports activity's they got to do.
Statement 5	The HAF programme has been a great support for our family. It provided my children with safe, fun, and engaging activities during the summer, which kept them active and helped them make new friends. The healthy meals included were also very helpful, as they ensured my children had nutritious food each day. The programme also gave me peace of mind as a parent, knowing they were well looked after, and it helped to ease childcare pressures during the long school holidays.
Statement 6	Without the HAF holiday club, my children would have had fewer opportunities to take part in structured activities, socialise with other children and stay active. They would have spent more time at home, and it would have been more challenging for me to balance work and childcare. We would probably have had to limit activities to free local parks or stay indoors, which would not have provided the same level of learning, fun, and support that the HAF programme offered.

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Cheshire East Council

OPEN

Children and Families Committee

10 November 2025

Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual report 2024/2025

Report of: Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director Children's Services

Report Reference No: CF/20/25-26

For Scrutiny

Purpose of Report

1 The statutory guidance Working Together 2023 requires each area to produce and publish an Annual Report on the effectiveness of the arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in their local area. This contributes to the strategic aims and objectives of the corporate plan to protect and support our communities and safeguard children.

Executive Summary

2 This report evidences the work undertaken by the partnership throughout the reporting year and evaluates the effectiveness of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. It aims to demonstrate the impact the partnership has had on improving outcomes for children, young people, and their families, while transparently sharing the lessons learned. The annual report also provides an opportunity to reflect on areas where the partnership will focus its efforts in the coming year.

3 The Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership priorities contribute to the Councils Corporate Plan aimed to protect and support our communities and safeguard children from abuse, neglect and exploitation. This includes protecting adults at risk and families from abuse and the objective that children receive the right support, by the right people, at the right time, so they are effectively protected from harm, and are supported to stay within their families and communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to

1. Scrutinise the progress by Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership, and the impact for children and young people, recognising the achievements and progress made, and to seek assurance around ongoing areas for further development.

Background

4 Over the past year, the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership has implemented new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements to identify and respond to the needs of children in Cheshire East. These new arrangements have provided a clear line of sight to frontline practice, and through our efforts this year, we are confident in our compliance with Working Together 2023.

Consultation and Engagement

5 The annual report is a Partnership document, and various stages of consultation has taken place through the Partnership governance structure. Ultimately, this has also been approved by the partnership, the Delegated Safeguarding Partners, the Lead Safeguarding Partners and the Partnership Independent Scrutineer.

Reasons for Recommendations

6 The Partnership has identified a set of strategic priority areas that will guide its work over the coming year. These priorities have been shaped through active contributions from key multiagency forums, in response to both emerging themes and ongoing challenges. Recommendations for the committee to have oversight and scrutiny of the annual report so that it can understand the progress and impact of the Partnership over the last 12 months and the areas of focus for next year.

Other Options Considered

7.

Option	Impact	Risk
Do Nothing	The council will not be compliant in its statutory duty to produce an annual report for the safeguarding children's partnership	Committee will not have oversight of the partnership business

Scrutinise and have oversight of the annual report	In line with Working Together 2023, the partnership will have provided oversight and scrutiny to the children and families committee	If the committee have further questions or comments, this will need to be returned to the partnership board, Delegated Safeguarding Partners and the Lead Safeguarding Partners

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance

8. The Council is defined by Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 and the Children Act 2004 (as amended by the Children and Social Work Act, 2017) as a Lead Safeguarding Partner in partnership with the Cheshire ICB, and chief officer of police for Cheshire. This partnership operates within that legal guidance.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

9. The Financial Contributions to the Safeguarding Children's Partnership are set out on page 7 of the report and shows Cheshire East Council as the largest contributor of the three Lead Safeguarding Partners.

Income	**24/25**
East Cheshire Trust	£ 5,000
PCC	£ 27,825
NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB	£ 44,215
Cheshire & Wirral Partnership	£ 4,093
HMP Styal	£ 2,520
Wirral Community NHS Trust	£ 5,500
Mid Cheshire Hospital NHS Trust	£ 6,772
CEC	£ 169,968
Schools	£ 50,000
Total Income	£ 315,893

10. The CEC 2025/26 budget and forecast contribution has remained at £169,968.

11. The current forecast total expenditure for 2025/26 is £340.4k against a budget of £380.5k an underspend of £40.1k. Income forecast for 2025/26 is on budget at £320k. The forecast shortfall utilises part of the partnership surplus brought forward from 2024/25 of £20.1k, resulting in a carried forward surplus balance of £49.3k into 2026/27.

Human Resources

12. The Council is defined by Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 and the Children Act 2004 (as amended by the Children and Social Work Act, 2017) as a Lead Safeguarding Partner in partnership with the Cheshire ICB, and chief officer of police for Cheshire. This partnership operates within that legal guidance. There are no direct human resources implications because of this report.

Risk Management

13. There is a risk that if the Safeguarding Children's Partnership is not effective in driving improvements to services that we will not be meeting our statutory requirements under Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023. This could lead to the work of the partnership to be judged as not being of the required quality during any inspection. We know that when services receive a negative judgement in inspection this impacts on team morale, can result in workforce turnover, and makes it more challenging to recruit. Addressing any significant deficits identified during an inspection can also require investment so there is also a financial risk to a negative inspection. A negative inspection also poses a reputational risk to the council

Impact on other Committees

14 The work of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership aims to improve outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people. It is vital that we provide high quality support to these children and young people as we know that for some, the experiences they have that lead them to require our support can have an impact on their long-term outcomes, health, and wellbeing. There is no direct impact on other committees.

15.

Commitment 3: An effective and enabling council

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

16 There are no equality, diversity and inclusion implications – children and young people's diverse individual needs, experiences, culture and backgrounds are considered as part of our support to them.

Other Implications

17 The Council is defined by Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 and the Children Act 2004 (as amended by the Children and Social Work Act, 2017) as a Lead Safeguarding Partner in partnership with the Cheshire ICB, and chief officer of police for Cheshire. This partnership operates within that legal guidance. There are no other implications because of this report.

Consultation

Name of Consultee	**Post held**	**Date sent**	**Date returned**
Statutory Officer (or deputy):			
Ashley Hughes	S151 Officer	13/10/25	20/10/25
Kevin O'Keefe	Interim Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)	13/10/25	17/10/25
Legal and Finance			
Diane Green	Finance Manager	10/10/25	10/10/25
Angela Bosiacki	Principal Lawyer (Childcare)Legal Services	10/10/25	13/10/25
Other Consultees: *Executive Directors/Directors*			
Dawn Godfrey	Executive Director	22/10/25	22/10/25

	Children's Services		

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Jen Atkinson Jennifer.atkinson@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1- CESCP Annual report 2024/25
Background Papers:	NA

Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership

Annual Report **2024/25**

Contents

Foreword from the Chair of the Cheshire East Children’s Safeguarding Partnership

I am pleased to introduce the annual report of the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children’s Partnership for the period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. This report evidences the work undertaken by the partnership throughout the reporting year and evaluates the effectiveness of our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. It aims to demonstrate the impact we have had on improving outcomes for children, young people, and their families, while transparently sharing the lessons learned. The annual report also provides an opportunity to reflect on areas where we should focus our efforts in the coming year.

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to all involved in the partnership for their dedication and hard work. Your wisdom and diligence have been instrumental in helping us strive to provide the best possible care for children. Your collaborative efforts across the partnership to meet the needs of all children, alongside the close attention given to children at greatest risk of harm, have resulted in increased safety.

Since joining the partnership in March 2024 and assuming the role of chair in June 2024, I have witnessed the active measures taken by the partnership to protect children from abuse, prevent harm to their health or development, and take action to enable them to achieve the best outcomes.

A considerable amount of work has been carried out to strengthen the governance, process and systems with more collaborative leadership and new systems put in place which provide greater oversight. It is important to acknowledge the Partnership has had a challenging year, with changes in DSPs and changes in governance, and agencies being on improvement journeys. Agencies have worked hard, and their commitment is underpinned by robust governance and oversight arrangements. The new governance structure affords collaborative leadership and systems that provide greater oversight. Moving forward, we have an opportunity to focus further on quality and measuring impact around how the Partnership is making a difference for children, young people and their families.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. In Cheshire East, all our partners are committed to working together to make children, families, and communities safer. This annual report highlights the extensive activities undertaken across our partnership to protect our most vulnerable children and ensure they can be as healthy as possible.

Over the past year, the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children’s Partnership has implemented new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements to identify and respond to the needs of children in Cheshire East. These new arrangements have provided a clear line of sight to frontline practice, and through our efforts this year, we are confident in our compliance with Working Together 2023.

We have continued to focus on four key areas:

- Contextual Safeguarding
- Education as a Protective Factor
- Child Sexual Abuse
- Child Neglect.

We have refreshed our training offer to the partnership for 2024/2025 and held a highly successful multi-agency learning week; our third such event which this year introduced practice observations by senior leaders.

Throughout 2024/25, the partnership has worked to strengthen the learning culture in Cheshire East. We conducted four Rapid Reviews and commissioned one Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review. Within our updated governance structure, we have established a dedicated Child Safeguarding Practice Review group to focus specifically on single and multi-agency learning, ensuring it drives improved practice across the partnership.

Cheshire East Safeguarding Children’s Partnership

Josette Nyokindi, Interim Associate Director of Quality and Safety Improvement, Chair of the Partnership

The Cheshire East Safeguarding Children’s Partnership is fully aware of the new reforms and the updated statutory guidance issued in December 2023: "*Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023*" and the "*Children’s Social Care National Framework*." These guidance documents provide clarity on how safeguarding partners, relevant agencies, and others can collaborate towards the vision of supporting children, young people, and families set out in the national strategy, "*Stable Homes Built on Love*." We have identified Lead Safeguarding Partners and Delegated Safeguarding Partners, with Education named as the fourth statutory partner, represented at DSP level by the Director of Education.

The partnership has engaged independent scrutiny through Melanie John Ross, ensuring our core safeguarding functions are effective and subject to continuous evaluation. By reviewing current practice and adhering to multi-agency expectations, principles for working with children, young people, parents and carers, and child protection standards, we remain focused on improving outcomes for children and young people. Our commitment is to ensure that every child and young person is safeguarded, supported, and given the best possible opportunity to thrive, with our collective practice shaped by what makes the most difference to their safety, wellbeing, and life chances.

The Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership

The Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership arrangements intend to support and enable local organisations and agencies to work together in a system where:

- Children are safeguarded and their welfare promoted.
- Partner organisations and agencies collaborate, share and co-own the vision for how to achieve improved outcomes for vulnerable children.
- Organisations and agencies challenge appropriately and hold one another to account effectively.
- There is early identification and analysis of new safeguarding issues and emerging threats.
- Learning is promoted and embedded in a way that local services for children and families can become more reflective and implement changes to practice.
- Information is shared effectively to facilitate accurate and timely decision making for children and families.

The Partnership has a wide membership of partners and 'relevant agencies', including schools, the faith and voluntary sector, probation services, public health, health providers, the police and representatives from the Local Authority. These executive members work together to keep children and young people safe from harm. The partnership is responsible for scrutinising the work of its partners to ensure that services provided to children and young people make a positive difference.

Shared vision and values to improve partnership working

S. — Safe, Supportive, Secure, Sustainable

A. — Accountable, Ambitious, Adaptable, Achieving

F. — Family-Focused, Free From Harm, Flexible, Fair

E. — Effective, Empowering, Engaging, Evidence-based

R. — Resilient, Relational, Respectful, Responsive

In line with the revised governance arrangements, this is our partnership vision. Our vision is firmly child centred, recognising that effective safeguarding depends on a strong, two-way relationship between frontline practitioners and strategic leaders. Practitioners are supported to understand and deliver the strategic plan in ways that improve outcomes for children, while their experiences and insights shape the partnership's priorities. These arrangements place children at the heart of our work, ensuring effective communication, stronger collaboration, and the safeguarding of every child.

We remain ambitious that our partnership will enable us to work **TOGETHER** to make children, families and communities **S.A.F.E.R.**

Governance Structure for the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership

The updated structure provides clear opportunities for LSP and DSP oversight of the partnership work. The Local Authority Chief Executive holds the responsibility as the Local Authority statutory Safeguarding Partner and Social Care representative as Delegated Safeguarding representatives to take decisions

Meets 3 times a year, LSPs and DSPs

Lead Safeguarding Partners

Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSP) hold the multi-agency safeguarding responsibilities. Chief Executive of the LA, Director of Nursing and Care of the ICB and Chief Constable. Meeting three times a year. This is a pan-Cheshire meeting with other Chief Executives and DSPs to limit duplication and any join up where appropriate. Includes the DSPs as part of the Working Together 2023 requirement of challenge to the LSP.

DSPs share Chairing on a rota

Cheshire East Safeguarding Children Partnership Board (CE SCP)

The LSPs delegate responsibilities to **Director of Children's Services, Detective Chief Superintendent, Head of Protecting Vulnerable People & Associate Director of Quality and Safety Improvement** and deliver responsibilities through the Partnership Board meeting 6-8 weekly.

Meets 6 weekly

Multi Agency Quality Assurance Group (MAQA)

The MAQA Group drives the Cheshire East safeguarding partnership responsibilities providing rigour and challenge to the system where information will feed up and be informed by the subgroups as well as directing activity to have assurance of the effectiveness of the partnership. **Attended by direct reports of the DSPs or equivalent seniority and they may request Chairs of the subgroups to attend.**

- Child Safeguarding Practice Review Sub-group
- Child Death Overview Panel
- Learning and Improvement Group
- Strategic Safeguarding groups
- Education Board

A new strategic education safeguarding group – with representatives from across the education system

The addition of the new education board. *Note – New education reps will also attend all sub-groups

Partnership Budget Considerations

In 2024/25, in line with Working Together (2023), Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSPs) have agreed the level of funding needed to deliver the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. This includes consideration of business and analytical support, independent scrutiny, infrastructure, and core functions including local children safeguarding practice reviews, multi-agency training and learning events. LSPs have responsibility to ensure that adequate funding is allocated and spent in line with agreed priorities.

Funding contributions from the statutory safeguarding partners should be equitable and agreed by the LSPs. Funding for the arrangements are reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that they can meet the financial needs of the arrangements.

In 2024/25 there was an underspend in staffing due to the vacant Business Support Officer post. In addition, the partnership had an allocated budget for 3 LCSPRs. Only one has been commissioned in 2024/25, however, due to when the work will be completed, the costs will show in 2025/26.

In 2025/26, further work is required to ensure the partnership is funded appropriately.

Expenditure	24/25
Staff Salaries	£ 235,512
Training Expenses	£ 300
Transport	£ 862
Supplies & Services	£ 4,250
Professional Fees	£ 5,254
Telephone/ICT	£ 283
Total Expenditure	**£ 246,461**

Income	24/25
East Cheshire Trust	£ 5,000
PCC	£ 27,825
NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB	£ 44,215
Cheshire & Wirral Partnership	£ 4,093
HMP Styal	£ 2,520
Wirral Community NHS Trust	£ 5,500
Mid Cheshire Hospital NHS Trust	£ 6,772
CEC	£ 169,968
Schools	£ 50,000
Total Income	**£ 315,893**

OFSTED Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services

We have an improvement plan to address the findings from the [Ofsted inspection of children’s services in February and March 2024.]

This year we have:

- Enhanced line of sight to frontline practice through a new performance framework and strengthened audit process
- Launched new care leaver hubs and an app for the local offer for care leavers – Junction 16+
- Recruited 5 care leaver ambassadors to represent and seek the voice of care experienced young people and ensure their views shape services
- Created new corporate parenting governance arrangements and workstreams
- Improved support for care leavers to access employment, education and training (EET).
- Launched a new training offer tailored to the areas for improvement.
- Launched a new workforce strategy for children’s social care.

Significant progress continues to be made in delivering the improvement plan with almost all actions on target. **As of March 2025, 27% actions have been signed off as complete.**

External review of our services has confirmed that we are continuing to make progress, and that staff at all levels are committed to making improvements:

- **Ofsted monitoring visit in February 2025** on the front door found that pace of change had accelerated with the introduction of a new leadership team, and that there is robust senior leader oversight of practice.

- **DfE progress review in April 2025** found that the pace of improvement in the past 6 months has accelerated, there is a more consistent understanding of children’s services strengths and challenges, and there is significant political and corporate commitment to children and families. It found there was a robust approach to service improvement.

- Our sector led improvement partner, North Tyneside, carried out a **review of services supporting care leavers in May 2025**, which found that the quality of practice in this area has improved since the inspection, and that care leavers are supported to make or stay in contact with their families.

Although services have improved, we know we still have more work to do to achieve consistently good quality services and this will continue to be a priority for 2025-26, and the Partnership have oversight of children’s services improvement plans through the CESCP Board.

CESCP Priorities 2024/25

Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership set these four priorities for our activity through 2024/25.

1. Contextual Safeguarding
2. Sexual Abuse
3. Education as a Protective Factor
4. Neglect

1. Contextual Safeguarding Strategy

Aims

In 2024/2025, the Contextual Safeguarding Serious Organised Crime (SOC) Strategic Group has continued to develop a partnership strategy which will set out our ambitious vision and priorities where we, our partners and communities, will continue to work together to protect and support children and young people from exploitation and harm outside the home.

In recognition of the changing nature and scale of the harm children can experience outside of their homes, we remain committed to respond through implementing a strategic response to harm focused on relationships with children, families, and the communities in which they live.

Whilst harm outside the home can take many forms, the priority for the partnership continues to be children who are exploited.

There has been a significant increase in intelligence shared with the Police by Social Care, leading to direct action that has improved the safety and wellbeing of children. Positive outcomes include the demolition of an abandoned building in Crewe that was being used by young people, removing associated risks, and the arrest of an unlicensed tattooist who had been tattooing children, thereby preventing further harm.

There is strong evidence of a significant correlation between low self esteem and self worth in young females who experience exploitation. This underlines the urgent need to invest in targeted support that promotes emotional wellbeing, resilience, and a positive sense of self. By addressing these underlying vulnerabilities, we can reduce both the risk of exploitation and its long term impact, empowering young women to feel safer, more confident, and better able to thrive.

These examples highlight how effective information sharing and joint working are making a tangible difference in protecting children and young people

Key achievements

Children missing over 48 hours (incidents) has reduced in 24/25 with a total of **63** compared to **90** in 2023/24.

There has been a steady increase in NRM applications in 2024 highlighting a child's victim status from exploitation.

The partnership has helped facilitate more Contextual Safeguarding training which was delivered throughout 2024 on four separate dates. This training focused on enhancing knowledge and awareness of child exploitation in Cheshire East.

There has been a considerable increase in mapping meetings – which increased knowledge and awareness of peer groups and places of interest. In 2024/2025 there were **34** compared to **12** in 2023.

June 2024 there were **32** children and young people flagged as high risk of exploitation with 20 at risk of CCE and 13 at risk of CSE. As of 3 June 2025, there are **53** flagged as high risk with 19 at risk of CSE and 40 at risk of CCE.

Early identification and intervention really makes a difference – ACE support has continued to achieve fantastic changes for children who require support for harm outside the home/exploitation when open to Early Help. **There have been no re-referrals during its 2-year span.**

The missing from home service has been brought in house by the Local Authority which has enhanced knowledge and understanding about why children in Cheshire East are going missing. This has also created additional opportunities for direct work with young people due to positive relationships with workers of this team.

During the last 12 months (April 24 – Mar 25), average length of time children are supported is 5 months, this allows time for the relationship to be built, targeted support given, and an effective planned end.

During the last 12 months (April 24 – Mar 25), 70% closed due to successful completion – the goals were achieved in the views of the child, parents and worker.

During the last 12 months (April 24 – Mar 25), of the children referred where ASB was an identified indicator at the point of referral, 81% of those closed with no further involvement in ASB or criminality.

1. Contextual Safeguarding Strategy

Challenges

- Not all children who are stopped and searched/linked to adult crime have a Vulnerable Person Assessment (VPA) submitted – This would allow the level of threat risk or harm to be considered by the Vulnerability Hub and then Children's Social Care where necessary.
- National Referral Mechanism – Tracking and accurate data is difficult to obtain.
- Low attendance of social workers at Contextual Safeguarding training.
- Over half of children who have a flag for exploitation (high risk) have an EHCP for a Neurodivergence which is either Autism/ADHD or both.
- Limited support services for victims of exploitation in Cheshire East.
- Different protocols exist between North and South districts with regards to supporting high risk children to gain access to assessments for ASD and ADHD.
- Cross border information sharing

Priorities for 2025/26

- Youth participation and partnering with parents.
- Transitional safeguarding and support for care leavers (number of care leavers experiencing exploitation and harm outside the home is increasing).
- Understanding the impact of neurodiversity on children/young people and how this impacts risks outside the home.
- Commission an independent scrutineer to work with the Partnership around areas of improvement for contextual safeguarding.

Focus on Young People Week, 17-21 March 2025

One of the key priority work areas for Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership is 'Contextual Safeguarding and Serious Organised Crime'. This area of practice involves working to support young people who may be navigating a difficult community landscape where they are exposed to potential harm outside the home.

In tandem with Child Exploitation National Awareness Day (18 March), CESCP ran a dedicated '*Focus on Young People Week*'. To reach a broad audience of professionals from across Cheshire East we hosted 3 fascinating on-line webinars covering '*Financial Exploitation*' and '*Making Assumptions About Gender*', generously offered by The Children's Society; and '*County Lines and Cuckooing*' kindly hosted by the NW Regional Organised Crime Unit with Manchester University.

We also held five incredibly motivating in-person events featuring local guest experts, some of whom spoke with qualified authority and others with important childhood lived experience to share. ***"The guest speakers were so brave and inspirational, they put practical learning from this morning into real life".*** In a variety of creative ways, all our speakers captivated and enthralled audiences whilst sharing hard-hitting facts and sometimes difficult to hear messages, ensuring the underlying concept of developing meaningful relationships shone through. ***"Hands down the most informative training I have ever attended. My mind is blown. Thank you".***

'Lads Like Us', Holmes Chapel Community Centre

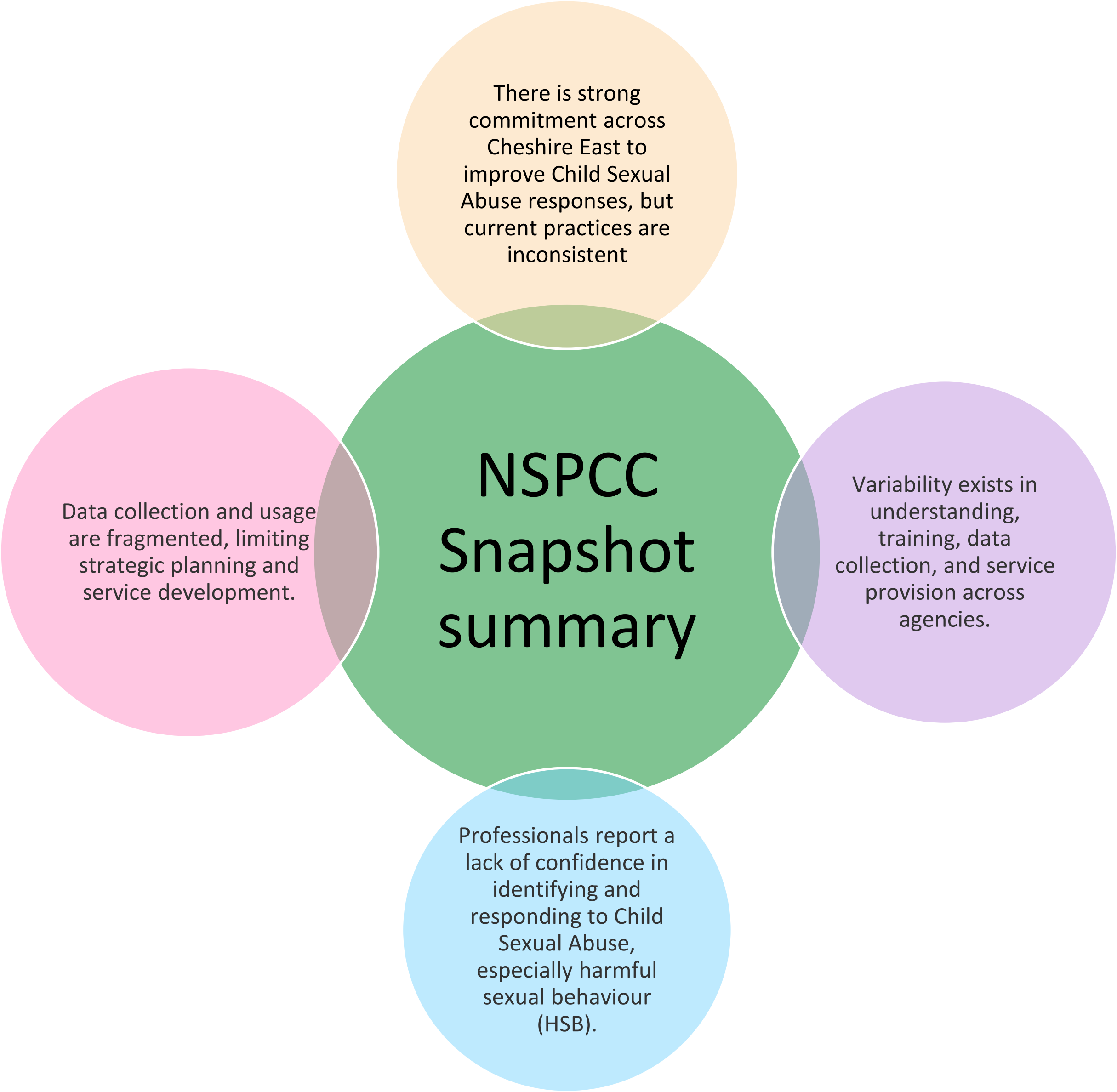
'Exploring the Teenage Brain: working with risk and building positive relationships', Middlewich Canalside Centre

2. Child Sexual Abuse

Aims

Last year, the partnership held a multiagency learning hub on child sexual abuse and agreed to continue prioritising this area to drive sustained improvements in practice. The focus is on building a coordinated multiagency response that prevents sexual abuse and ensures children and young people remain at the centre of all interventions. Our goal is to reduce the likelihood of children experiencing abuse through effective prevention, early identification, and awareness raising across the locality. We are committed to creating an empowered workforce and community, trained together to recognise the signs and indicators of sexual abuse and to respond with confidence, so that children and young people are better protected, supported, and able to recover and thrive.

This year, the partnership has worked closely with the NSPCC to undertake a Snapshot assessment. The NSPCC snapshot is a comprehensive system-wide review of Cheshire East's multi-agency response to child sexual abuse, facilitated by the NSPCC. It combines insights from a strategic session held in October 2024 and survey responses from 33 professionals across health, education, social care, police, and voluntary sectors. A summary of the key findings and recommendations is shown to the right.



2. Child Sexual Abuse: NSPCC Snapshot outcome

1. Awareness and Training

- Child Sexual Abuse is included in safeguarding training.
- Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB) is a notable gap in understanding and response.
- Education and health sectors show some structured training, but early years and social care need more targeted support.
- The ERASE tool and AIM assessments are used inconsistently.

2. Data and Intelligence

- Child Sexual Abuse data is not systematically collected or shared across agencies.
- Health and education sectors collect some data, but it is not integrated or used strategically.
- There is a need for a multi-agency Child Sexual Abuse data plan to improve recording, sharing, and analysis.

3. Public and Family Engagement

- Public awareness campaigns are limited and inconsistent.
- Parents often lack understanding of Child Sexual Abuse processes and support pathways.
- Family Hubs and school websites provide some information, but access and engagement are low.

4. Prevention and Education

- Schools deliver Relationships & Sexual Education , but content and impact vary.
- Youth services and early years settings offer some targeted interventions.
- Children not in mainstream education may miss out on key messages.
- Preventative initiatives for vulnerable children and those displaying harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) are inconsistent.

5. Protection and Initial Response

- Children may not understand what happens after disclosure.
- Professionals report children often have to retell their stories multiple times.
- Referral processes are inconsistent and terminology varies across agencies.

6. Assessment and Multiagency Working

- Holistic assessments are not consistently applied.
- There is a lack of structured training and shared responsibility for assessing those who harm.
- Referral pathways and processes are unclear and not always reviewed with input from children and families.

7. Recovery and Therapeutic Support

- Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (RASASC) provides therapeutic support but is limited in capacity and scope.
- Transition to adult services is inconsistent.
- There is limited trauma-informed support and coordination across services.
- Directory of services and referral clarity are needed.

2. Child Sexual Abuse

NSPCC

Safeguarding All Children Matter

Priorities 2025/26

Develop a Local Child Sexual Abuse Strategy and Framework

- Set clear priorities and actions.
- Define referral pathways and shared language.
- Clarify commissioning arrangements.

Improve Data Collection and Use

- Create a multi-agency child sexual abuse data plan.
- Share existing data more widely.
- Use data to inform workforce development and service planning.

Enhance Public and Family Awareness

- Launch targeted campaigns for parents and carers.
- Improve website content and accessibility of information.

Strengthen Training and Confidence

- Conduct a training needs analysis.
- Establish a tiered training offer, including mandatory elements.
- Promote tools like the NSPCC's "*Developing an Understanding of Child sexual abuse.*"

Improve Prevention and Education for Children

- Ensure consistent, high-quality Relationships & Sexual Education.
- Address gaps for children outside mainstream education.
- Promote safe disclosure and understanding of what happens next.

Address Gaps in Harmful Sexual Behaviours Response

- Review and update harmful sexual behaviours policies.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities.
- Develop a formal multi-agency harmful sexual behaviours framework.

Expand Recovery Support

- Conduct a needs analysis for therapeutic services.
- Ensure trauma-informed, age-appropriate support.
- Improve transition planning to adult services.

3. Education as a Protective Factor

Aims

The 2022 Joint Targeted Area Inspection by Ofsted reported the following in relation to education as a protective factor:

- Multi-agency partners need to secure appropriate education for exploited children as a protective factor.
- The safeguarding children in education settings (SCIES) team is highly valued by schools. School leaders find the advice and support they receive from the SCIES team beneficial in helping them make safer decisions for children.
- The role of education as a protective factor is not high profile enough in multi-agency work. Partners do not challenge each other or have sufficiently robust plans to address low engagement in education. In addition, the impact of placement moves on children's education is not sufficiently considered by multi-agency partners.

The partnership established a Learning Hub in 2023/2024 to ensure a clear line of sight into practice across the landscape of provision for the most vulnerable children and to support the partnership to be able to learn from practice more effectively. 2024/2025 activity has been based around the outputs from the Learning Hub and putting new ways of working into practice.

Key achievements

- Awareness raising session with GP representatives focused upon education as a protective factor, attendance and access to tuition support for children unable to access school due to ill health.
- Integrated education as a protective factor into CESCP child protection training to reach professionals who have not signed up for the spotlight sessions
- Integrated an education lens into multi-agency CESCP audit to ensure education as a protective factor is considered and identifies individuals, teams, services that may require targeted awareness raising and support.
- Database put in place to capture school attendance data and to identify children and young people with persistent and severe absence on child in need and child protection plans.

3. Education as a Protective Factor:

Evidence of impact

March 2024: Joined up working to ensure key Elective Home Education (EHE) principle is considered. Of the 11 children identified as being electively home educated and on child protection and child in need plans, 9 have move into onsite education provision. School actively using education a protective factor by not suspending vulnerable young person.

August 2024: Improved attendance for vulnerable children, joined up working to ensure key EHE principle is considered.

CESCP multi-agency audit of 12 children and young people on repeat child protection plans found that of the 12 children, attendance data shows:

- 8 had good attendance over 90%; 5 of the 8 had excellent attendance over 95%
- The mean average attendance of the group is 85%, the median average of the group is 96%
- 3 had persistent absence under 90%; 1 had severe absence under 50%

October 2024: Multi-agency partners escalating when education is not a protective factor in 2 cases:

- 6 young people at medium/high risk of being exploited.
- A child on a child protection plan being offered one hour per day access to education. A SMART action plan is being developed to enable the child to access suitable full-time education. Joined up working with the school has resulted in the transition timetable being increased and the child stepping down to a child in need plan.

January 2025: Multi-agency focus on school attendance. Social media article by Crewe PCSO on understanding the root cause of school absence and working directly with young people and families to overcome.

February 2025: Multi-agency focus upon Elective Home Education. Case concern raised by Cheshire East IRO to Interim Head of Pupil Participation and Support of a year 11 EHE young person on a child protection plan. Resulted in swift action with alternative provision sought to build the young person's confidence in order to start at a local college in September 2025.

March 2025: Multi-agency focus upon school attendance. Vital signs attendance report card under scrutiny in the Improvement Board shares persistent absence concerns for vulnerable children on assessment and plans. This will require focus in the Education Board to drive focus around this

- Education data shared and scrutinised in CESCP scorecard
- Safeguarding children's partnership training covering education as a protective factor in termly child protection training and with spotlight sessions on attendance, elective home education, tuition and admissions.
- Oversight of vulnerable children missing education and who are electively home educated in vulnerable pupil panels.
- Oversight of escalations from the partnership to education and between partners in the Partnership Board
- Weekly opportunities to explore the barriers to attendance of young people in commissioned alternative provision

3. Education as a Protective Factor

Priorities 2025/26

Develop notification pathways with partners for children becoming Electively Home Educated

Collect themes and develop task and finish activity from CESCP Education Board

Continue to deliver awareness raising and focused training, shaped by emerging themes from data and feedback

Termly slot on child protection training

Priorities 2025/26

Widen offer to multi-agency partners - 1 day child missing education training

Develop new offer of single agency Education as a Protective Factor session

Multi-agency audit activity

Education themed slots throughout learning week

4. Child Neglect

Aims

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 defines Neglect as the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development.

Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership (CESCP) previously identified child neglect as a priority in 2021/22, and last year agreed to maintain this focus for at least the next three years. This long term commitment ensures the partnership can dedicate meaningful time and resources to strengthening practice, with a particular emphasis on early identification and intervention.

We recognise that neglect can be a complex and challenging issue for both practitioners and families to understand. The terminology itself is not always restorative, which is why the partnership is promoting the use of clear, direct language to describe concerns, making them easier to recognise, communicate, and address.

To support this, a series of multiagency workshops have been delivered to build a shared understanding and consistent approach to neglect across services. This collaborative effort is designed to improve professional confidence, strengthen early support for families, and ultimately reduce the risk and impact of neglect on children's lives

Key Achievements

CESCP hosted a conference in February 2025 on Neglect, featuring the following :

- **Educational Psychology Team:** the significance of parent-child bonding, exploring the clues that might lead to neglectful parenting.
- **SEND 0-19 Service:** the implications of neglect with special educational needs and disability, '*Neglect with a difference*?'
- **The Neglect Screening Tool:** an update on the changes and progress being made with the partnership multi-agency neglect screening tool.
- **THE Family Hub Approach to Neglect:** tackling neglect with early intervention and using the Solihull Approach to increase emotional health and wellbeing of children & families.
- **i-THRIVE:** a programme update on progress made promoting good mental health and wellbeing for children in Cheshire East. How does this affect you and your role.
- **Education as a Protective Factor:** the implications of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill recently passed in the House of Commons, what does this mean for CE children.

4. Child Neglect

Child Neglect Strategy

In line with the partnership priority, the partnership have collaborated to develop a Child Neglect strategy. The following principles and values guide our approach to tackling neglect:

Child-Centred: The needs and well-being of the child are at the heart of our practice. We prioritise the safety and welfare of children and young people in all our actions and decisions.

Family-Focused: We recognise the importance of supporting families to provide a nurturing and safe environment for their children. We work with families and their wider members to build their strengths and address any challenges they may face.

Collaborative: We work in partnership with children, families, their networks and other agencies to achieve the best outcomes. We value the contributions of all partners and strive to maintain open and effective communication.

Evidence-Based: Our interventions and practices are informed by research and evidence of what works from the family and, from established and respected organisations that promote government advice and guidance. We continuously seek to improve our knowledge and understanding of neglect through ongoing learning and development.

Inclusive: We ensure that our services are accessible and responsive to the diverse needs of our community. We respect and value diversity and work to promote equality and inclusion in all our activities.

Priorities for 2025/26

Launch and implement the partnership child neglect strategy.

Develop a multi-agency child neglect toolkit.

Evidence impact of strategy implementation.

Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (reviews) are undertaken on ‘serious child safeguarding cases’ to learn lessons and improve the way in which local professionals and organisations work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel has emphasised the responsibility of safeguarding partners to decide upon whether a review is needed or not. The partnership adhere to the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel guidance for safeguarding partners (September 2022).

All of the Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review reports can be found on the partnership’s website www.cescp.org.uk

The most recent Rapid Review was held at the end of the year, where the threshold was met for a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review. The findings from this review will be reported in detail in the 2025/26 Annual Report.

Over the course of the year, the partnership undertook four Rapid Reviews, each offering important learning about how agencies can work together more effectively to safeguard children.

The first review concerned a teenager who tragically died as a result of unintentional suicide. Although previously briefly known to Children’s Social Care following a disclosure of abuse, which was appropriately acted upon by her caregiver, at the time of her death she was being electively home educated. The review highlighted valuable reflections on how agencies might have worked in a more coordinated and joined up way to provide support.

The second and third reviews focused on very young babies who had suffered physical abuse. In one case, the child had previously been known to Children’s Social Care with concerns around physical harm, while the other was only known to health services through maternity care. Both reviews reinforced the importance of professional curiosity, early identification, and clear communication across agencies to protect infants from harm.

The final review involved a child at high risk of exploitation who had experienced long standing neglect by his primary caregiver. The child had been known to multiple partner agencies throughout his life and the review emphasised the need for stronger coordination and earlier, more robust responses to neglect and exploitation risks.

Together, these Rapid Reviews underline the critical role of partnership learning, scrutiny, and challenge in driving improvements to safeguarding practice. Each review contributes to our shared commitment to strengthening multi agency working so that children in Cheshire East are better protected and supported.

The partnership also undertook one Learning Review during the year, initiated as a recommendation following a complaint made to the Local Authority. The review involved two children and generated important learning for all agencies.

Key findings reinforced the importance of:

- Strong communication between practitioners, families, and all agencies involved in a child’s care.
- Exploring the wider family network to develop a holistic understanding of the child’s circumstances and to inform robust planning.
- Addressing professional disagreements openly and respectfully and ensuring the escalation process is followed where concerns remain.
- Using clear, non-judgemental language, free from personal values, to avoid misinterpretation or bias in assessments and records.
- Information sharing that is relevant, contextualised, and evidence based, enabling practitioners to build a full picture of the child’s needs.
- Cross referencing information across agencies to strengthen assessments and ensure decisions are well-informed and child-focused.

This Learning Review has strengthened the partnership’s commitment to ensuring that professional practice is collaborative, respectful, and firmly centred on the needs and experiences of children.

Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group

Within the new governance structure, updated as part of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements, there is a dedicated Child Safeguarding Practice Review group. The group members develop, deliver and test the impact of action plans arising from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs) and to seek assurance that local CSPR pathways are efficient and effectively meeting the requirements as set out in Working Together 2023.

The group holds delegated responsibility on behalf of the Delegated Safeguarding Partners, bringing both strategic and operational perspectives from their respective organisations. Members have played an active role in discussions, providing updates on completed actions and ensuring learning is embedded within their agencies. They champion a culture of continuous improvement by disseminating information, sharing examples of good practice, and highlighting barriers to progress, demonstrating how partnership learning translates into tangible impact.

As the group continues to develop, members will be called upon to act as subject matter experts, advising on best practice and shaping partnership priorities. They will also lead or contribute to key workstreams, ensuring responsibility is shared equitably and that collective expertise drives improvement in safeguarding outcomes for children.

Closing the loop activity

- There are monthly sessions for the partnership which provide information and the learning and recommendations from Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, Rapid Reviews and case audits, essential learning for everyone. We consider events we know are happening across the partnership to ensure colleagues are aware of all there is to offer to update your knowledge and skills, supporting your practice and wellbeing. Feedback from the monthly session has included 'Training attended is shared by attendees at our weekly team briefings, Thanks, useful as always, Interactive sessions are beneficial, Very interesting and informative.
- 7-minute briefings are developed following every review and shared across the partnership

Key achievements

The Learning and Improvement subgroup has oversight of all recommendations from Local Child Safeguarding Practice reviews and Rapid Reviews. The Learning and Improvement subgroup has:

- Regularly reviewed the tracker which details the recommendations and learning from the Local Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Rapid Reviews.
- Contributed to the progression of the partnership priorities.
- Had oversight of Children's Social Care Improvement journey following Ofsted inspection.
- Supported the development of the quality assurance framework.
- Contributed to the development of the partnership training programme.

Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews: Key achievements

Hospital safeguarding teams in the South of the borough are informing paediatric services of any young people attending the emergency department following self-harm who may be open to or on a waiting list for neurodevelopmental pathways such as autism and ADHD assessments. This enables the child to be re-triaged and seen sooner if clinically required. There is currently work to look at rolling this out in the North of the county.

SEND marketplaces have been established in family hubs to provide accessible communication of services to parent around SEND support services. Additionally SEND key workers are now based in family hubs which is improving communication with parents and professionals.

When the SEND panel decline an EHCP request for assessment or plan, they now refer into appropriate other services to support the child, recent examples have been the elective home education team, or the medical tuition service who have been able to provide support to the child and their family.

How to sessions on ''How to have difficult conversations with parents'' have been delivered to practitioners across the partnership

The voice of the child has been included within the audit framework and there is evidence of improvement within recent multiagency audits of the child's voice being captured and responded to.

When decommissioning services, the importance of existing relationships with children and is being considered and responded to. Key workers from a recently decommissioned service have been moved into roles within youth support and exploitation teams to enable them to continue with those relationships.

Significant work has been undertaken with schools around child sexual abuse by the Safeguarding Children in Education team including training and awareness raising which has resulted in an increase in school utilising tools such as ERASE and the Child Sexual Abuse signs and indicators tool.

The child protection medical process has been reviewed and updated to improve the timeliness and quality of the experience for children and young people.

As part of the two-year self harm and suicide prevention action plan, over 500 professionals across the borough have attended a half day suicide prevention training session, through evaluation attendees reported feeling more knowledgeable and confident to respond than prior to the training. There has also been significant work across partnerships around the issue of domestic abuse and suicidality.

An NSPCC spotlight on Child Sexual Abuse was completed and the recommendations have been picked up by the Child Sexual Abuse task and finish group. The Signs and Indicators tool has been identified as the multiagency tool of choice and work is ongoing with developing a new Child Sexual Abuse strategy.

A spotlight session on the Family Nurse Partnership was held to raise awareness of the criteria for the service which in Cheshire East includes an enhanced offer up to the age of 25 for young parents with additional vulnerabilities.

Recent audit has evidenced that following work completed by the Safeguarding Children in Education task and finish group there has been a significant increase in the recording of lateral checks completed for children who are electively home educated and home visits are now routinely offered to these families.

New practice guidance around information sharing has been developed with our colleagues across pan-Cheshire and has been rolled out to professionals.

The Critical Incident Pathway has been redesigned and as such there is a robust multi-agency response to supporting schools and communities following incidents. Examples include the provision community support from a number of partners following the death of a child, including police, youth support and mental health support and an immediate response to a school with multiple children self-harming within one week.

Multi-Agency Audits 2024/2025

We actively foster a robust learning culture that promotes both individual and organisational growth. As part of this commitment, we are collaborating with partners to implement the Learning Hub model across the partnership. This initiative underpins the development of a comprehensive learning framework that ensures insights from audits, data analysis, rapid reviews, and local safeguarding practice reviews lead to meaningful action, effectively 'closing the loop' on learning and driving continuous improvement.

Contact Audits of the 'Front Door' occur fortnightly.
A different theme is explored at each meeting eg, unaccompanied asylum seekers, unexplained injuries etc. The contact is scrutinised by a multi-agency panel that identifies good practice and actions to improve practice. The SCP ensure that the learning from these audits is shared across the partnership.

Contextual Safeguarding Audit, July 2024

This identified several strengths in practice. Five cases were considered in the Contextual Safeguarding forums and all the relevant professionals from services attended, the sixth was low risk.

- Strengths were identified, contextual safeguarding assessments were evident on three cases and a screening tool on one.
- Youth Justice Service (YJS) assessments were good quality with a child first approach.
- Vulnerable Person Assessments were submitted for all incidents involving a young person or reports by parents of concerns.
- Two cases had Children & Families (C&F) assessments completed, a third case was awaiting an update which was attributed to a change of social worker, areas for improvement were also identified.
- There had been no C&F assessment completed since 2022 on the Cared For young person. An EHCP had been completed, and the young person had contributed to it.
- The cared for case had minimal management oversight with supervision taking place slightly out of timescales.
- Not all children were seen on their own to ascertain their wishes and feelings by health.
- There were variable levels of safeguarding supervision, several services i.e. YJS, cared for Nurse, Police, school nurses receiving it, with a missed opportunity for specialist safeguarding nurse for child exploitation on one case.

Neglect Audit, November 2024

Several strengths in practice were identified.

- The Police, schools and 0-19 service effectively shared information during multi-agency meetings.
- Two cases had good practice examples of multiple attempts in by health practitioners to contact and share information with carer/parents.
- Health engagements with families remained child focused.
- The voice of the child is evident throughout 0-19 service, school files and child protection records informing the planning process.
- In one case there was appropriate consideration of cultural differences including the use of an interpreter.
- Health safeguarding supervision was evident in 2 out of the 3 cases that required it; the trigger process for that requires strengthening.

Several areas for improvement were also identified.

- GCP2, the assessment tool for neglect, was only evident on one case and there was no evidence of it being considered in the others.
- None of the cases had a chronology, the 0-19 service and a school could extract that from their systems if required.
- Where meetings have not taken place in timescales there was no evidence of that being escalated.

The audit identified impacts:

- A carer reported positive changes in relation to a child's lived experience. Also, school indicate that the child is presenting as more regulated in the school environment than previously.
- A case was deescalated and then closed after concerns regarding a sibling's health and the mother's approach to this have been addressed, dental health and asthma review supported by school nurse.
- Effective information sharing informed care planning decisions.

Multi-Agency Audits 2024/ 2025

Police Protection powers

Across the audit, the following were identified.

- Five incidents where the parent(s) were arrested for neglect – police have national recommendations around the use of PPO's over informal arrangements with parents where threshold is met and did not consider that it would have been possible to negotiate with parents in those situations to make alternative arrangements i.e. support from the wider family. They considered that without arresting and bailing with conditions that the parents may have gone and removed the child.
- In the period prior to the PPP Health visiting services provided evidence of professional curiosity, observations of baby parents interactions and managed most cases within their contact standards. There was no explanation for the extra visits in on one case record and a child who moved into the area would have benefited from a transfer in visit.
- Two examples of children not being brought for developmental checks, however neither were statutory. A school completed two screening tools, submitted those to CHECS and liaised with Early Help. However, the family would not engage. Early Help identified that a more robust management oversight to this was a missed opportunity to consider escalation.

Early Help cases

- In one case there was no evidence to escalate as other services involved i.e. health and tuition.
- In the second Health services were in place alongside an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor.
- There was some evidence of missed opportunities to support families which would have also benefitted from management oversight and communication with other agencies.
- It was observed that identification of support requirements in education settings can be the most effective and efficient way of escalating needs.
- Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust did not have of significance within their adult mental health records for any of the families that would indicate any missed opportunities to refer in or take any action prior to the PPP.

Section 175 audits

The Section 175 Report 2024 provides a comprehensive overview of safeguarding practices across education settings in Cheshire East, based on self-audits submitted by 170 schools. The audit, coordinated by the SCiES Team, evaluates compliance with statutory safeguarding responsibilities and highlights areas of strength and development.

- The **submission rate** has **increased** over the last 2 years and is now at **99%**.
- All schools who have identified ineffective/partially effective areas have made proposals to address these. The 2025 S175 will provide an update on this.
- When **SCiES** conduct a schools review they **review the s175 submission**, in **2024 11%** of the submissions.
- Changes of governors and staff mean that safer recruitment training needs to be completed in 9% of schools
- All schools keep their Safeguarding Policy up to date
- SCiES continue to remind schools, through updates and training, of the KCSiE 2024 expectations for school around filtering and monitoring and that systems are regularly monitored and tested.
- CESCP/SCiES need to review the wording of the question 11 regarding de-scalation and positive handling to provide context.
- Actions identified in the 2023 S175 submissions have been completed.

Key Findings:

General Performance

- Most schools rated themselves as Fully Effective across safeguarding areas.
- All schools maintain up-to-date safeguarding policies.
- Safer recruitment practices are generally strong, though 9% of schools need updated training due to staff/governor changes.
- Filtering and monitoring of online activity is in place, but some systems require upgrades or more regular testing.

Areas for Improvement

- Prevent Duty Training: Some schools had staff pending training, though plans were in place to complete it.
- Safeguarding Action Plans: A few schools lacked formal written plans or alignment with CESCP priorities.
- Supervision for DSLs: Inconsistent across settings; some rely on informal or sporadic arrangements.
- Positive Handling & De-escalation: Some schools self-rated as partially effective despite strong evidence; question wording may need revision.
- Alternative Provision (AP): 58 settings rated Fully Effective; 109 marked it as Not Applicable.
- Attendance Monitoring: Generally strong, but some schools are still refining processes and policies.

Voice of the Child

- Most schools actively gather pupil voice through various tools and strategies.
- Some settings are seeking more creative or inclusive methods, especially for neurodiverse pupils.

Actions:

- All schools that identified ineffective/partially effective areas complete their proposals to address that.
- As part of their safeguarding schools' SCiES to review individual school S175 submissions.
- The 9% of schools where changes of governors and staff mean that safer recruitment training needs to be completed do so.
- All schools to keep their Safeguarding Policy up to date
- Remind schools of the KCSiE 2024 expectations for filtering and monitoring and this is regularly monitored and tested.
- Review the wording of S175 template question 11 *"Staff are trained and respond appropriately to incidents requiring de-escalation or (more rarely); positive handling / restraint around de-scalation and positive handling to provide context."*
- Contact the one post 16 setting that used a different format to understand what the reason are and identify any further action required.
- Contact the one specialist provision did not submit a response to understand what the reason are and identify any further action required.
- Contact the 3 primary schools that did not did not provide evidence to understand what the reason are and identify any further action required.

Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership

Working Together 2023 Implementation Plan

Following the release of *Working together to safeguard children 2023*, statutory guidance on multi-agency working to help, support and protect children, CESCP has conducted a structured self-assessment across five key domains

Domain	Overall Rating	Key Issues Identified
A Shared Responsibility		The partnership is aware of the need to strengthen child voice, middle management engagement, and accessible communications.
Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements		There is a clear governance structure in place but needs broader understanding and engagement, especially with education, which is anticipated through the Education board and additionally, the voluntary and faith sector.
Help, Support and Protection		The partnership are awaiting feedback from the Pathfinders regarding a lead practitioner model and for Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership, this is yet to be developed.
Decisive Multi-Agency Child Protection		There is a participation strategy under development which will detail how we work better with children and families to act on their views
Learning Culture		Whilst there is learning from reviews, the partnership have identified that this is not yet consistently embedded or evidenced in improved outcomes. This will be developed through the Child Safeguarding Practice Review group.

Working Together 2023 Implementation Plan

The implementation plan outlines actions aligned to each chapter of Working Together23. Key progress and evidence include:

Chapter 1: A Shared Responsibility

Training and Awareness: Multi-agency training sessions delivered; further sessions planned. Presentations developed and disseminated.

Information Sharing: Guidance being updated and aligned with WT23; to be published on TriX.

Think Family Approach: Paused pending further assessment by the new DCS.

Chapter 2: Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements

Funding and Governance: Budget discussions scheduled; governance structure approved at DSP level.

LSP/DSP Roles: Definitions clarified; website updates in progress; frontline visits planned to test understanding.

Education and VCSE Engagement: Education board being developed; VCSE representation at the CESCP Board; Section 11 audits planned.

Independent Scrutiny: Strategy under development; scrutiny plan required.

Chapter 3: Help, Support and Protection

Thresholds and Lead Practitioner Role: Threshold document under review; training sessions scheduled; procedures being designed.

Early Help: Training revised and delivered; paperwork under review; dataset development underway.

Harm Outside the Home: Specific training scheduled; JSNA and multi-agency dataset to support identification.

Information Sharing with Probation: Strategic Coordinating Group convened to address changes in prison release schemes.

Practice Standards and Family Meetings: Standards embedded in training; family meeting model under review.

Chapter 4: Organisational Responsibilities

Section 11/175 Audits: Tools updated to reflect WT23; audit cycle underway.

Chapter 5: Learning from Serious Child Safeguarding Incidents

Review Processes: Updated to reflect WT23; pathway for care leaver death notifications being developed.

Chapter 6: Child Death Reviews

CDOP Procedures: Being updated to reflect legislative changes and new guidance.

Key Strengths Evidenced

Strong commitment to training and awareness raising.

Governance structures (LSP/DSP) are defined and operational at strategic levels.

Engagement with education is progressing well.

Independent scrutiny is embedded in governance, with plans to strengthen its impact.

Areas Requiring Further Development

Implementation of the lead practitioner model and joint pathways for early help.

Embedding learning from reviews into practice and evidencing impact.

Strengthening participation and engagement strategy, especially with children, families, and the VCSE sector.

Finalising and publishing updated threshold documents and MASA arrangements.

Training Offer

The partnership’s training offer is reviewed annually to ensure it remains responsive, relevant, and informed by participant feedback and evidence of 'what works'. Training topics and learning themes are identified through a comprehensive process involving consultation with services, analysis of the current programme, review of national and local research, and findings from audits and practice case reviews.

Our training offer continues to include a diverse range of learning formats:

- ‘How to...?’ sessions provide practical guidance on the use of shared tools, policies, and practices to support consistent multi agency working.
- ‘Spotlight on...’ sessions create space for relationship building across agencies and sectors, offering a platform for services to introduce themselves, promote their expertise, and highlight their child centred support.
- ‘CESCP Learning from Reviews’ sessions enable the Partnership team to share key learning from audits and case reviews, promote new services and policy developments, and highlight examples of good practice. These sessions help strengthen evidence-based understanding of effective multiagency safeguarding practice.

The training programme continues to evolve in response to emerging service needs. It is promoted through our monthly newsletter and website, ensuring wide visibility and accessibility across the partnership.

Up to date information is available via our website [CESCP Training web page]

Training Programme

The training plan for 2024/25 was developed through analysis of the previous years training offer, regular discussion across the partnership and in the Learning and Improvement group and oversight of the reviews undertaken by the partnership.

APRIL 2024

AREAS OF WORK FOCUS | EXAMPLE TOPICS | DELIVERY & RESOURCES | DYNAMIC THREADS | INFORMED BY

Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership
Safeguarding All Children Matter

Neglect
- Complex Neglect
- Graded Care Profile 2 [NSPCC]
- Fundamental Safeguarding
- Safeguarding Children with a Disability
- ICON

Contextual Safeguarding and Serious Organised Crime
- Contextual Safeguarding & Serious Organised Crime
- Digital Safeguarding
- Forced Internal Concealment

Education as a Protective Factor
- Trio of Vulnerabilities
- ACEs and Trauma Informed Practice
- School Attendance
- Safeguarding Children with a Disability
- Neurodiversity

Sexual Harm
- Intrafamilial Sexual Abuse
- Harmful Sexual Behaviours
- Sexual Assault and Violence
- Harmful Traditional Practices
- Persons who pose a risk of Harm

WORKING TOGETHER: listening to The Child's Voice
- Professional Curiosity, Critical Thinking and Challenge
- Managing Allegations - LADO
- Child Protection Processes
- Multi-Agency Assessment Tools
- Working Together 2023

DELIVERY & RESOURCES

Interactive
- E-Learning
- Webinars
- How to...?
- Spotlight on...
- LCSPR updates
- Online via Teams
- In person groups
- Learning Hubs

Remote/Directed
- Website easy reach information, guidance and materials
- Online Resource Library
- Signposting: access to free courses elsewhere e.g. ChESS Hub, CHAMPS, CEDAH, Research in Practice, The Children's Society

DYNAMIC THREADS

Practitioner:
- Our Impact?
- Critical Thinking
- Assess & Evidence Risk
- Think Strengths, Restorative approach, be Trauma Informed
- Cultural Competence
- Information Sharing
- Roles & Responsibilities
- Confidence & Awareness
- Professional Challenge & Escalation
- Professional Judgement
- Reflect & Review

Child:
- The Child's Voice
- Think Sibling
- Child Development
- Individualism & Diversity
- Lived Experience
- Accessible & Inclusive Planning
- Recording and Language

Parent:
- How do they access services?
- Wider Family & Support Network
- Gender Specific Parenting
- Parent Needs Over Child?
- Accessible Language
- Inclusive Planning

INFORMED BY

Practice Principles:
- **Professional curiosity**: not being fixed to one hypothesis, ask 'what else?'
- **Keeping the child central:** bringing their perspective in on *everything* we do
- **Relationship building:** communicating to develop a shared understanding
- **Slowed down thinking**: analytical - consider potential and actual impact

Evidence Base:
- **Case Reviews**: *all types, national and local*
- **Case Audit Findings**
- Feedback, Impact, Evaluations
- Research Developments
- Working Together 2023
- Gaps in knowledge: supervision and service requests

Safeguarding Principles:
- Empowerment
- Prevention: act early
- Proportionality: least intrusive
- Protection: understand best ways
- Partnership
- Accountability

CESCP Training Offer - Programme Report 2024/ 2025

Short sessions and special events continue to be delivered at no cost to participants, the majority of whom are frontline practitioners working with children and families across Cheshire East. This accessible model supports widespread engagement and helps to embed learning across the workforce.

While the training programme has achieved several positive outcomes and strengthened multi-agency practice, significant challenges remain, particularly in relation to capacity. The programme currently operates with minimal administrative support, which limits the ability to develop, monitor, and refine key operational systems. As a result, progress in areas such as collecting and analysing evaluation data, enhancing the training website, and advancing e-learning opportunities has been reduced.

Event and attendance summary

- **170 individual 'in house' events were delivered**, showing a **46% increase on the 2023-24 programme offer**
- There were 55 external events promoted by CESCP including eight e-learning modules accessible to multi-agency professionals through the local authority Learning Lounge facility.
- The 170 in-house events attracted **6,499 multi-agency attendees,** a **28% increase** from the previous year. As in previous years, the focussed Learning & Practice Observation Week 2025 generated a huge amount of interest, again constituting almost a third of overall attendance (1,837+).
- **Average attendance** has decreased in relation to online events in tandem with a greater appetite for in-person training as we move further from the post covid period. However, both styles of delivery have increased in event number to accommodate the larger variety of courses on offer, with a **60% rise for in-person events** versus a **30% rise for those delivered on-line**.
- **Attendance following registered bookings averaged 84%,**
- **Cancelled training events remain at a minimum** (3 this year vs 5 last year)

Effectiveness, efficiency and cost to produce:

Efficacy has been achieved through deployment of minimum working hours to manage a full and varied programme offer. The Training and Development Manager is salaried to work a 30-hour week (4 days) and, a business support officer is seconded to work most Mondays on administrative tasks. This generates the capacity to provide on average, the equivalent to one event per working day over a 42 week (active) cycle. However, in reality, the delivery pattern is not uniform. Rather, there are significant peaks which create bursts of high demand in time and effort. The Learning Week is has become an established and now expected part of the professional learning calendar in Cheshire East.

Feedback, Evaluation and Impact:

Feedback is an integral part of developing the training programme offer as it informs implementation and content. Unfortunately, evaluations currently remain at the 'classroom' level as there is no pathway for a more in-depth organisational feedback mechanism, for instance involving communicative supervision practices. Therefore, following last years' methods, feedback continues to be collected in very simplistic and direct ways, only being able to record immediate responses to events. Resources to support a more complex and analytical follow up methodology remain unavailable due to limited administrative capacity.

CESCP Training Offer - Programme Report 2024/25

Communications Plan, Newsletter & website:

Work during 2024-25, supported by the CE Communications Team included promotion of safeguarding national and local events such as the ICON week in September and Child Exploitation Awareness Day in March.

Monthly Training Newsletter developed to publicise courses. Bulletins and updates posted in between the monthly communications to boost interest. There are more than 1000 recipients on the distribution list, with a further 1000+ gaining access in schools via the SCiES team.

Having established the newsletter and created stability and reliability within the programme, delegates rightly expect the same standard of service when attempting to access information via the website. Sadly, there has been less than expected success in launching the refreshed website. This is becoming an urgent issue that may only be resolved when substantial administrative support is in place for the CESCP team.

Collaborations:

Training alignment across Cheshire East is being developed to understand the various service offers and provisions for practitioner learning as a whole. Work on collaborative projects such as cost-effective joined up course delivery and support for development days for NW trainers. Cheshire East is a proactive member in driving progress to benefit the local area eg development of shared protocol for the ERASE tool in relation to Harmful Sexual Behaviours and reducing 16 individual repeated sessions on 'Responding to Sexual Violence' in collaboration with SARC and RASASC.

Forecast for 2024-2025:

The revised Training programme Core Offer 2025-26 is attached in draft form for review and approval. Dynamic responses to LCSPR and Rapid Review outcomes will remain central to the programme alongside networking and practical learning opportunities through continued delivery of the short on-line sessions which have become an enduring positive feature of the total training offer.

Recommendations:

- Continue to consolidate and stabilise the training offer following the current programme trajectory
- Develop a transparent 'mission statement' to capture the aims of the training programme
- Reinstate administrative support to enable (as a minimum): a) improved data evaluation, b) more efficient course processing, c) follow up work re attendance, d) managing the CESCP website
- Collaboration to focus on completing the revised website as a supplementary learning tool and valuable resource for all professionals
- Develop communication loops with strategic leads for areas of work priority to create stronger training links
- Continue joined up work with pan-Cheshire and wider areas to build relationships and shared perspectives

Learning & Practice Observation Week 2025

The third annual Partnership Learning Week took place on 3-7 February 2025. The theme this year was Children's Mental Health, where together, we explored associated risks, vulnerability, safety and support in Cheshire East. We covered many key aspects of the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership work priorities, including Contextual Safeguarding & Serious Organised Crime, Education as a Protective factor, Neglect and Sexual Harm.

Alongside more than 25 individual events, a further 21 practice observations took place with senior leaders, frontline practitioners, families and support teams all getting involved across a range of services to enable better understanding of current systems and processes.

Overall, over 1,600 people attended a range of online sessions and face-to-face events, including our Networking Event, the Neglect Is Child Abuse conference, and The Reign Collective.

Practice observations

Purpose

- To summarise learning from practice observations conducted between 3–7 February 2025, involving both Safeguarding Children's Partnership (SCP) representatives and Children's Services (CS) managers.

Overview of Observations

- **24 observations** were conducted: 11 by SCP representatives and 13 by CS managers.
- Activities observed included child protection conferences, home visits, supervisions, legal advice meetings, and more.
- Observers included professionals from health, education, police, housing, and local government.

Themes for Learning and Development

1. **Professional Curiosity**: Encourage deeper exploration in discussions and reviews.
2. **Legal Advice Meeting Preparation**: Develop a checklist to ensure thorough, evidence-based decision-making.
3. **Threshold Understanding**: Improve partner agency awareness of child protection thresholds.
4. **Meeting Format**: Consider when in-person vs. virtual meetings are most appropriate.
5. **Restorative Practice**: Promote respectful, relationship-based approaches and open-ended questioning.

Key Findings by Activity

Supervisions

- All five observed sessions followed up on previous actions.
- Demonstrated strong preparation, two-way communication, and reflective practice.
- One session adapted well when IT systems failed.

Cared For Reviews

- Structured, purposeful, and inclusive.
- Although children did not attend, their voices were represented.
- Observers praised the focus on the child's needs and future planning.

Home Visits

- One visit completed; well-prepared and thorough.
- Covered child's daily life, foster carer's needs, and home environment.

Legal Advice Meetings (LAM)

- Three cases observed; generally well-managed.
- Some concerns about lack of evidence triangulation and missing child background details.
- Suggested development of a LAM checklist.

Child Protection Conferences

- Professionally managed with inclusive and respectful dialogue.
- Some areas for improvement: social worker engagement, professional attendance, and clearer guidance on thresholds for child protection plans.

Front Door Screenings

- Staff were knowledgeable and enthusiastic.
- Some suggestions for streamlining processes.

PEP Meeting

- Well-attended and informed, but lacked the child's voice.
- Face-to-face format may have been more appropriate.

Contextual Safeguarding Meeting

- Despite IT issues, decisions were made effectively.
- Agencies were well-prepared and collaborative.

MARAC

- First meeting under new process.
- Positive engagement and prompt safeguarding actions.

Core Group Meeting

- Child-centred and well-managed.
- Virtual format enabled broader participation.

Vulnerable Person Assessment (VPA)

- Effective multi-agency collaboration.
- Fast-paced; observer questioned if more time was needed per case.

Family Group Conference

- Respectful, restorative language used.
- Strong family engagement and emotional support observed.

Direct Work in School

- Calm, nurturing interaction.
- Child-led session with creative tools, though more open-ended questions were recommended.

Feedback from Learning & Practice Observation Week 2025

"Thank you so much for such an amazing learning week! I have learnt so much and I particularly enjoyed Tuesday at Middlewich and then today (Thursday). It will definitely improve my practice and the amount of resources and signposting has been great. I have already referred one of my parents so 'Thank you' for all the hard work and to all the wonderful, knowledgeable speakers".

Ann was fantastic, I took away so much information, I can put to good practice. The handout is brilliant, and I felt the whole afternoon was explained so well. Thank you (*JDI Youth MH First Aid workshop*).

We really enjoyed it and one of our YP (although she is nearly 20) came along and is going to get involved with supporting other YP via the Voice and Youth Service. *(Networking Event)*

Really informative session and sensitively delivered. Will definitely be advising our Practitioners to utilise the suggested resources, thank you! *(Online short sessions)*

I feel I have a better understanding of the impact of child sexual abuse and exploitation. This includes inter-familiar and extra-familiar harm which has allowed me to understand the different types of abuse. I will use knowledge in practice as part of my assessment writing but also how to approach direct work/1-1 sessions with children. *(The Reign Collective)*

I really enjoyed the presentation from the specialist ed psychologist, that was extremely useful and I thought I learnt a lot to take forward for practice. *(Neglect is Child Abuse Conference)*

Hearing the voice of the child and their lived experience

As a partnership, we are committed to meaningful engagement with children and young people, ensuring they have a genuine voice in decisions that affect their lives. To support this, the Partnership has developed a Participation and Engagement Strategy and formally adopted the Lundy Model of Participation. This model is grounded in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which affirms that: "Children have the right to express their views freely on issues that affect them, and adults should listen and take children seriously."

Our approach to participation is being embedded through four key principles:

Co-Involvement: Children and young people will be engaged from the outset, with clear communication about changes to services and policy. Their needs and views will be actively sought and valued at every stage of development.

Co-Design: We will work collaboratively with children and young people to shape the design of services, individual support, and policy. This ensures that children, young people, families, and professionals are all central to service development and delivery.

Co-Delivery: Services will be planned and delivered in partnership with children and young people, ensuring their voices and lived experiences are embedded and acted upon throughout the process.

Co-Evaluation: We will create regular opportunities for feedback and reflection, enabling continuous improvement. Importantly, we will provide timely, accessible feedback to children and young people, showing how their contributions have influenced change, responding in a way that is full, fast, and friendly.

Key Achievements

- Young people were part of interview panels for various posts across the partnership including Executive Director of Children's Services and Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care. They received recruitment and selection training before the panel took place to ensure they were confident and prepared.
- 5 Care Leaver Ambassadors have been recruited to be involved in service design and improvement, they advocate and gather feedback on behalf of cared for children and care leavers. Care Leavers Ambassadors delivered training about the impact of positive relationships, also what makes a good relationship.
- Participation groups are thriving and represent diverse views and experiences across the borough e.g. Cheshire East Youth Council, Jigsaw, My VOICE, Care Leaver Ambassadors and Care Leaver Cooking and Voice Sessions. Experiences and backgrounds include SEND, Care Experienced, Poor Mental Health, Home Educated, LGBTQ+, Domestic Abuse and more.
- Children and young people have contributed feedback to develop the Contextual Safeguarding Screening Tool – various youth and participation groups.
- Children and Young People have given feedback to inform the Drug and Alcohol Strategy – various youth and participation groups.
- After over 7,500 11 to18 year olds took part in Make Your Mark and voted for "Crime and Safety" as the most important topic, Cheshire East Youth Council launched a Hate Crime and Discrimination Campaign called Hate Stops Here in November 2024 helping to educate professionals and young people on safe spaces, hate crime and discrimination.
- Further embedding our Voice of the Child and Lived Experience Guidance and Lundy Model Approach through training to frontline practitioners across the partnership.

Hearing the voice of the child and their lived experience: The difference we have made

Young people are equipped with work ready skills and have the right to say who is or isn’t employed in key positions. Young people feel empowered and have sense of self-worth.

Professionals across the partnership have improved understanding of rights-based approach to participation and can use this in practice.

Local leaders have a better understanding and relationship with young people on how they would like to be involved in decision making.

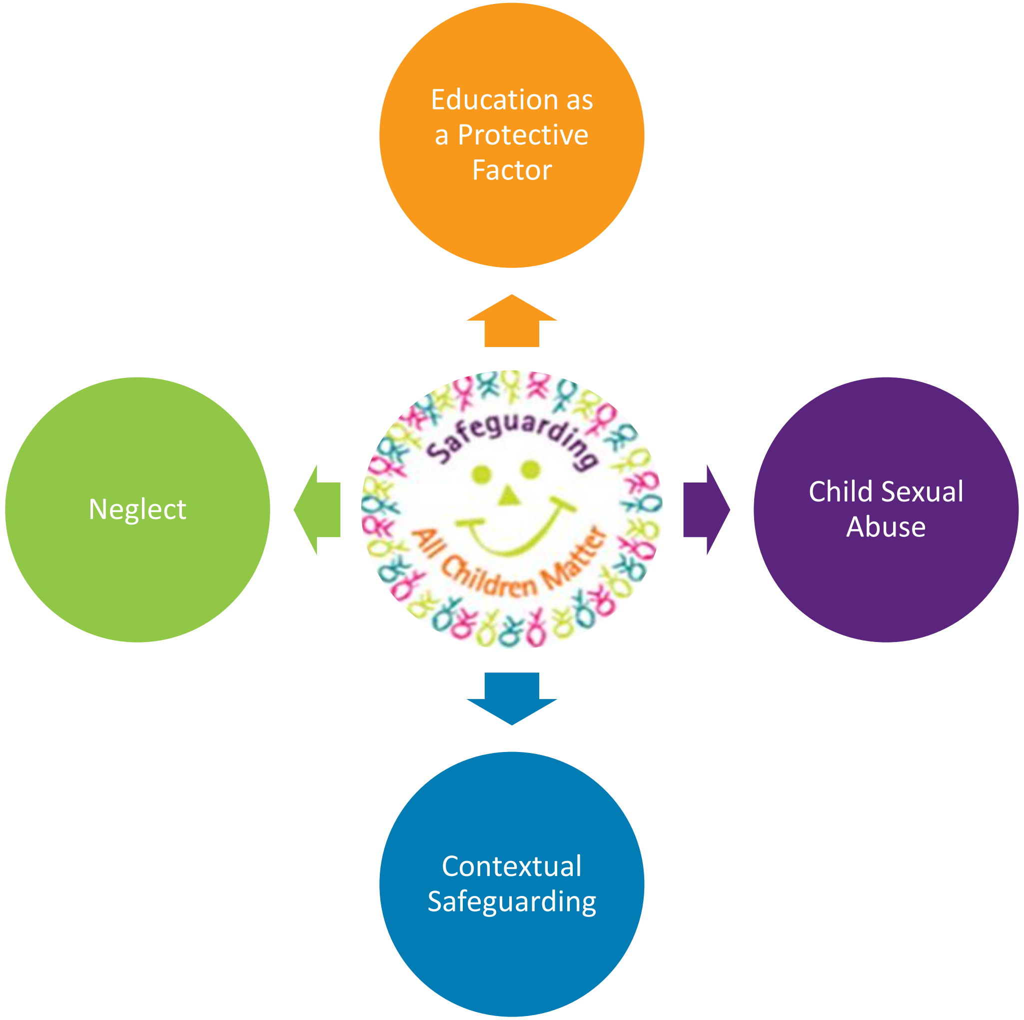
Supporting and facilitating opportunities for children and young people to lead, develop and shape their own campaigns.

Ensuring children and young people have been part of improving the language that we use in assessments, screening tools.

Ambassadors gave positive feedback *"people are much happier with Cheshire East lately“, "it’s so good to be actually making things better“, "things are going to actually be good"*

Providing space and opportunity for young people to have their voices heard in a range of engaging ways e.g. online, in person, group, 1-1s, digital, events, panels, boards, committees.

Skills for children and young people – life skills, listening, communication, confidence, self-esteem, sense of belonging, working with others, problem solving.



Partnership Priorities 2025/26

Looking ahead to 2025/26, the Partnership has identified a set of strategic priority areas that will guide its work over the coming year. These priorities have been shaped through active contributions from key multiagency forums, including the Learning and Improvement Group, Education Board, Multi Agency Quality Assurance Group, and the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership Board. In response to both emerging themes and ongoing challenges, the Partnership will maintain focused activity in the following areas:

- Contextual Safeguarding: Continued development and implementation of the updated Contextual Safeguarding Strategy, informed by independent external scrutiny, to better address extra familial risks to children and young people.
- Child Sexual Abuse: Delivery of a coordinated response to child sexual abuse, including the implementation of recommendations from the NSPCC snapshot report, the National Review, and emerging practice from the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse.
- Education as a Protective Factor: Strengthening the role of education in safeguarding through the work of the recently established Education Board, with a specific focus on children who are electively home educated, in line with national reform and statutory guidance.
- Neglect: Roll out of an updated multiagency Neglect Strategy, supported by the development and launch of a new partnership toolkit to support consistent and early identification, assessment, and intervention.

Alongside these priorities, the Partnership will continue to embed the Participation and Engagement Strategy, working to ensure the voices of children, young people, and families are central to the design, delivery, and evaluation of services.

Key values for the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership in 2025/26

All the work within the Partnership will continue to uphold the following core values:

- Listening to and acting on the voice of the child to place them at the heart of the partnership
- Embedding the new arrangements to ensure strategic oversight and line of sight to frontline practice
- Improving quality assurance and routine, robust performance scrutiny and challenge
- Creating a learning culture that takes action to improve practice
- Ensuring there is transparent, decisive and evidence-based decision making in all partnership meetings to support improved outcomes
- Create a highly effective partnership with communication based on positive relationships, shared values and clear vision

Independent scrutineers report

The Independent Scrutiny Report for the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership (CESCP) covers the period from April 2024 to March 2025. It outlines the role of the Independent Scrutineer in evaluating the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. The report is framed within the context of significant national reforms, including the publication of updated statutory guidance such as Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 and the Children's Social Care National Framework. These reforms aim to improve collaboration among safeguarding partners and ensure better outcomes for children and families.

Since the autumn of 2024 there has been considerable progress in reviewing and strengthening statutory safeguarding arrangements for the CESCP. Governance structures, systems and processes have been strengthened, including the appointment of a rotating chair among Delegated Safeguarding Partners and the establishment of a Multi-Agency Quality Assurance Group. The frequency of CESCP meetings have increased and the revised multi-agency arrangements were published in December 2024.

Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership Board agreed the following, dual process for independent scrutiny:

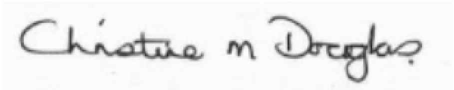
- A lead scrutineer role to provide overarching scrutiny of the CESCP across the entire system, with oversight of any/all items presented at the Board, including commissioned scrutiny activity, holding the Partnership to account and supporting effective multi agency partnership arrangements.
- Commissioned scrutiny against the Partnerships priorities, providing assurance of progress, impact and outcomes.

The timetable for commissioned independent scrutiny activities for 2024/25 have not progressed but have been carried forward into 2025/26.

The Independent Scrutineer welcomed the Participation and Engagement Strategy, introduced to amplify the voices of young people in shaping safeguarding priorities and activities. Equally, an integrated data set has been developed, which will support the Partnership to identify areas which they seek to understand and interrogate on a deeper level, informing the Partnerships quality assurance and multi-agency audit cycle. This will strengthen assurance of the quality of multi-agency practice and importantly, children's experiences of services.

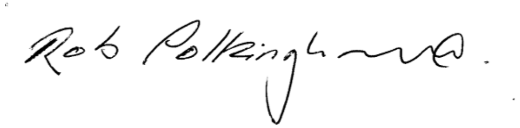
There is the opportunity moving forward to strengthen multi-agency relationships, focusing more on the quality of multi-agency practice, the impact of learning and crucially, the outcomes for children and families.

Approval and signatures of the Lead Safeguarding Partners and Delegated Safeguarding Partners

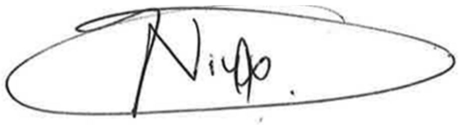


Christine Douglas MBE
Director of Nursing & Care
Cheshire & Merseyside NHS
(LSP)

Mark Roberts
Chief Constable
Cheshire Police
(LSP)

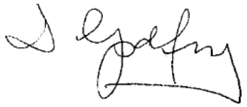


Rob Polkinghorne
Chief Executive Officer
Cheshire East Council
(LSP)



Josette Nyokindi
Interim Associate Director of
Quality and Safety Improvement,
Chair of the Partnership

Carlos Brunes
T/Detective Chief
Superintendent
Cheshire Police
(DSP)



Dawn Godfrey
Executive Director of
Children's Services
Cheshire East Council
(DSP)

Cheshire East Council

OPEN

Children and Families Committee

10 November 2025

Improvement Plan Progress Report

Report of: Dawn Godfrey Executive Director of Children's Services

Report Reference No: CF/23/25-26

Ward(s) Affected: All

For Scrutiny

Purpose of Report

1 This report is part of our regular updates to committee on the progress of the children's services improvement plan. The improvement plan addresses the findings from the Ofsted inspection in February and March 2024.

2 This report also includes the findings from the councillor visits to frontline services which took place in September 2025.

3 The third Ofsted monitoring visit on cared for children, planning and achieving permanence was underway at the time of writing this report. The monitoring visit concluded on 15 October, and the report of the findings is expected to be published on 13 November.

Executive Summary

4 We are continuing to make progress in delivering our improvement plan; since the last report to committee in September, the percentage of actions completed has increased from 49% to 56%.

5 The new arrangements for councillor visits to frontline services commenced in July, enabling councillors to have oversight of the quality of practice and people's experiences of working for the council. This report includes the findings from the councillor visits to frontline services which took place in September 2025.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the progress against the improvement plan.
2. Note the findings from the councillor visits to the cared for IRO service, child protection chair and LADO service and family group conferencing team in September 2025.

Background

6 Improvement governance arrangements are continuing to monitor progress against the plan and provide scrutiny and challenge monthly. Changes to the plan since the last report which have been agreed through these arrangements are included in Appendix 3 for transparency.

Progress against the improvement plan

7 The improvement plan at Appendix 2 was updated on 30 September 2025. Appendix 1 shows an overview of the RAG ratings for each action.

8 Key improvement activity which has taken place since the last update to committee includes:

- The member development training programme was approved at the Audit and Governance Committee; corporate parenting is included annually from September for all councillors as mandatory training.

- A new child in need and child protection plan was launched on 11 August. Training was delivered to support the plan roll out and feedback on the new plan has been positive.

- A new permanence tracker and panel has been put in place over August which will strengthen our approach to achieving permanence.

- The Care Leaver Ambassadors have filmed videos to support other young people with advice and information for when they move into their first homes.

- The Care Leaver Health Group is working on developing sleep packs for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people as national evidence suggests this is a significant factor in good mental health for this cohort. The focus of the September Good Health and Wellbeing Workstream is emotional health of cared for children including unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people.

- Proactive Support resources are fully launched, over 300 individuals accessed the website in June alone with over 800 individual hits. Feedback so far has been positive, and resources have been adopted (and adapted where required) by Place teams across the broader Cheshire and Merseyside sub-region.

- The early help strategy has been launched and is available across the partnership.

- Attendance at our Summer Designated Teacher training days was very good and the training on offer was really well received, particularly around the sessions on improving the quality of personal education plans (PEPs).

- Additional HR capacity has now been secured to work alongside the Children's Services leadership team.

- An audit on emergency accommodation reviewed 12 care leavers identified at risk of homelessness or who were homeless in the last 3 months. 11 of the 12 cases were rated good which demonstrates our support in this area has significantly improved.

Findings from Councillor visits to frontline services

9 This report covers the findings from the second round of visits which took place in September to the Cared for IRO Service, Child Protection Chair and LADO Service and Family Group Conferencing Service.

10 A visit was unable to be arranged to the Safeguarding Children in Educational Settings (SCiES) team. This visit will take place in the next round of visits in November.

11 The visits support councillors to understand:

- The quality of frontline practice

- How we support teams to deliver good quality practice.

12 The visits involved:

- Introduction and context from the service manager

- A one to one session with a practitioner

- A one to one session with a team manager

- A focus group with practitioners

- Feedback discussion with the service manager and head of service.

13 The findings are summarised below.

14 Strengths:

- Strong, trusting relationships are built with children and families, which support change.
- Children's voices are sought and children are supported to be involved in their plans.
- Practitioners and managers are knowledgeable, experienced and passionate about improving outcomes for children, and articulated the improvements that had been made to services since the ILACS inspection in February and March 2024.
- The Family Group Conferencing Service has doubled in size since April, allowing all children on child protection plans to receive support from the service, which is having a positive impact on supporting children to stay within their family networks.
- The new IRO resolution policy uses a restorative approach to resolving issues.
- The new child in need and child protection plan is more accessible for families and was positively received by Ofsted.
- The LADO service is now fully staffed and improvements have been made to the service since the work with our sector led improvement partner in April 2025.
- The new post of the Director for Quality Assurance, Partnerships and Commissioning was welcomed by teams. Teams were positive about the support they received from their managers and head of service.
- Teams noted a positive change in culture with more openness and honesty.

15 Areas for development:

- Restorative practice is still embedding and is not yet used consistently in all areas.
- Family Group Conferences could be held earlier with families to provide earlier help and support.

- Some referrals to LADO don't require LADO involvement, support is needed for partners to increase confidence and understanding in this area.
- Challenges with the Unit4 system impact on timescales for recruitment.
- The LiquidLogic system can be unreliable; sometimes going down during work hours.
- Teams raised the need for dedicated space within offices to have private conversations.

Consultation and Engagement

16 Practitioners' views on improvements are sought through the councillor frontline visits, sector led improvement programme work, Ofsted monitoring visits, and DfE progress reviews. Feedback was sought from the councillors who conducted frontline visits in July which informed changes to improve the arrangements for the visits in September.

Reasons for Recommendations

17 Cheshire East Council's children's services received an inadequate judgement in the Ofsted inspection in 2024. The inspection demonstrated that there are areas we need to address at pace to improve outcomes for children. The council needs to ensure the findings from the inspection are addressed in a timely way to ensure we achieve good outcomes for children and young people and councillors need to be assured that the arrangements in place to address the shortcomings and make the necessary improvements are sufficiently robust and will deliver good or better outcomes for our children within a reasonable timeframe.

Other Options Considered

Option	Impact	Risk
Do not scrutinise the improvement plan	Committee will not have oversight of progress against the plan so cannot be assured that outcomes will be improved for children and young people	There is a risk that improvements are not achieved at the pace needed.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance

18 This is a further update report for the committee on the children's improvement plan. It is within the committee remit to monitor improvement within the service and ensure compliance with the improvement notice served by the DfE.

19 Members of the committee therefore need to be assured that all requirements and recommendations within the ILACS report and the improvement notice (served upon the council by the DfE on the 24 July 2024 resulting from the Ofsted inspection findings), are complied with and that the plans in place deliver the improvements required are within the timescales set by the DfE.

(a) Failure to comply or poor progress against the Improvement Plan can result in the imposition of directions to secure performance, which can include DfE intervention and nomination of a person to act on its behalf to secure performance.

20 The protection of vulnerable people is a council responsibility. Continued regular oversight by members of the Children and Families Committee, alongside the overall approach to improving service provision, aligns with this obligation.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

21 The improvement plan to address the findings from the inspection was agreed at the Children and Families Committee on 16 July and Full Council on 17 July, which included the approach to the funding of the plan.

22 The overall funding was approved totalling £1.987m across the 2 financial years 2024/25 and 2025/26 with an additional £13.4k budget increasing the total budget to £2.000m

23 Included in the FR2 forecast position was an overspend for 2025/26 of £0.467m. The 2025/26 forecast is £1.923m as detailed in the table below and the combined two year cost of £2.467m.

Expenditure Group	2025/26 Budget (Original Planned)	2025/26 Actuals End of August	2025/26 Forecast
Edge of Care Support Workers	£208,100	£0	£0
Team Leader	£133,434	£26,997	£66,287
QA Officer	£66,717	£15,273	£60,932
Project Manager (grade 11) to lead 18-25 accommodation recommission	£66,717	£30,761	£67,512
Connected Care Assessor	£114,702	£34,351	£82,668
Independent Reviewing Officer	£133,434	£58,397	£166,666
Personal Advisor	£124,860	£68,558	£150,022
2.00 FTE Agency Social Worker (initial plan 6.00 FTE Direct Employees	£344,106	£68,242	£165,975
2.00 FTE Agency Team Managers	£0	£65,348	£180,069
Family Group Conference Support Worker	£166,480	£104,737	£263,562
Specialist Expert Support	£0		£0
Specialist Expert Support - External Consultant to work on Health programmes	£0	£52,898	£147,874
Service Manager - Children with Disabilities	£0	£58,437	£136,116
Specialist Expert Support - Dorset Council Peer Review of Front Door	£0		£0
Children's Home for Children with Complex Mental Health Needs and Challenging Behaviour - c	£0	-£1,292	-£1,292
Executive Assistant to the Improvement Programme	£0		£0
Head of Service - Integrated Front Door	£0	£66,557	£157,628
Project Lead	£0	£63,769	£87,758
Relationship Support Service	£0	£15,000	£15,000
Safeguarding Quality Assurance Manager		£43,230	£137,153
Specialist Capital Consultant		£0	£9,000
Childrens Staff Event		£250	£250
Childrens Improvement Plan Workstream x 3		£0	£30,000
Grand Total	£1,358,550	£771,514	£1,923,179

24 This position continues to be monitored through in-year forecast reporting.

Human Resources

25 HR are supporting improvement work and attend and report to each Improvement Board.

Risk Management

26 There are reputational and financial risks to not providing good quality services, as well as risks to individual children and young people. The council must continue to ensure that these risks are mitigated by ensuring effective plans are in place to improve and that these make an impact on children’s outcomes.

Impact on other Committees

27 None.

Policy

	Commitment 2: Improving health and wellbeing	

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

28 Good quality practice with families ensures that all children and young people's needs are considered and supported.

Other Implications

29 The improvement plan aims to improve the outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people.

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
Statutory Officer (or deputy) :			
Ashley Hughes	S151 Officer	20/10/25	21/10/25
Kevin O'Keefe	Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer	20/10/25	20/10/25
Legal and Finance			
Diane Green	Finance Lead Children's	13/10/25	16/10/25
Tessa Williams	Interim Principal Child Care Lawyer (People Team)	16/10/25	17/10/25
Other Consultees: *Executive Directors/Directors*			
Dawn Godfrey	Executive Director of Children's Services	20/10/25	20/10/25
Caroline Tote	Interim Director of Quality,	13/10/25	20/10/25

	Partnerships and Commissioning		
Vonni Gordon	Director of Quality, Partnerships and Commissioning	13/10/25	14/10/25

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Vonni Gordon, Director of Quality, Partnerships and Commissioning Vonni.Gordon@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1: RAG rating overview Appendix 2: Improvement Plan Appendix 3: Changes to improvement plan actions Appendix 4: Vital Signs Scorecard
Background Papers:	Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 15 September 2025 Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 9 June 2025 Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 7 April 2025 Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 13 January 2025 Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 11 November 2024 Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 16 September 2024 Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 16 July 2024 Report on the Ofsted inspection findings to the Children and Families Committee on 3 June 2024

	Cheshire East's Ofsted Inspection Report published 16 May Ofsted ILACS Framework

Improvement Plan Rating Overview

Ratings as at 30 September 2025

Key

Colour	Action Definition
Grey	Not started yet/ action closed and replaced with new action
Red	Not on track
Amber	On track to be completed within timescales
Amber E	Completed but we need to embed and evidence impact
Green	Completed and embedded with evidence of impact

Chapter 1

Senior Leaders' Oversight

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
SL1	Reporting and governance arrangements	Jan 25	Complete
SL2a	Internal Family Feedback Strategy	Apr 25	Amber E
SL2b	Partnership Family Feedback Strategy	Mar 25	Amber E
SL3	Improvement Board	July 24	Complete
SL4	Children's Services Strategic Quartet	July 24	Amber E
SL5	Corporate parenting strategic board	Nov 24	Amber E
SL6	Corporate parenting training	Sept 25	Amber E
SL7	Care leaver champions	Apr 25	Amber E
SL8	Cared for children and care leavers strategy	TBC	Reviewing
SL9	Quality assurance activity against improvement plan	Feb 25	Amber E
SL10	Service manager thematic audit group	Aug 24	Complete
SL11	Share audit findings with teams	Sept 24	Complete
SL12	Vital signs performance report	Sept 24	Complete
SL13	Councillor oversight of frontline practice	Sept 25	Complete
SL14	Children's social care national framework implications	Feb 25	Complete
SL15a	Practice guidance on timescales	Jun 25	Amber E
SL15b	Embed practice standards	Apr 25	Amber E
SL16	Examples of good practice	Aug 24	Amber E
SL17	Strengthen the audit process	Nov 25	On track
SL18	Family feedback implementation plan	Oct 25	On track

Care Leavers: Quality of Practice

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
CLA1	Practice standards	June 24	Complete
CLA2	Mandatory training plan	June 25	Complete
CLA3	Management structure	April 24	Complete
CLA4	New pathway plan format	May 24	Complete
CLA6	Arrangements for young adults where there are safeguarding concerns	Sept 24	Complete
CLA7	Recruit Care Leaver Ambassadors	Oct 24	Complete

Care Leavers: Planning for Adulthood

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
CLB2	Review Ignition Panel	Sept 24	Complete
CLB3	Preparing for adulthood in practice standards	June 24	Complete
CLB4	Care leaver hubs	July 24	Amber E
CLB6	Health histories development	July 25	Complete
CLB7	PA training on health histories	June 24	Complete
CLB8	Local offer app	Aug 24	Complete
CLB9	Review the local offer	Dec 24	Complete
CLB10	PA training on the local offer	July 24	Complete
CLB11	Participation opportunities at hubs	July 24	Complete
CLB12	Free bus pass for care leavers	Oct 24	Complete

Care Leavers: EET

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
CLC1	EET plans for young people	Sept 24	Complete
CLC2	Offer of EET opportunities	Mar 25	Complete
CLC3	Work with local businesses and organisations	Mar 25	Complete
CLC4	Support on employment preparation	Oct 24	Complete

Care Leavers: Accommodation

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
CLD1	Emergency accommodation protocol	Aug 24	Complete
CLD2	Review all young people who are/ at risk of being homeless or in emergency accommodation	June 24	Complete
CLD3	Temporary and emergency accommodation meeting	June 24	Complete
CLD4	PA training on housing support	July 24	Complete
CLD5	Project group for accommodation	July 24	Complete
CLD6	Review temporary and emergency options	Sept 24	Complete
CLD7	Proposals to address accommodation shortages	July 24	Complete
CLD8	Flexibilities in current contracts for 16-18 year olds' accommodation	Oct 24	Complete
CLD9	18-25 accommodation offer	July 26	On track

Care Leavers: aged over 21

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
CLE1	Contact all 209 care leavers over 21	Mar 24	Complete
CLE2	21+ offer protocol	July 24	Complete
CLE3	Review care leavers 21+ with a disability	June 24	Amber E
CLE4	Tracker for care leavers 21+	May 24	Complete
CLE5	Quality assurance of care leavers 21+	Aug 24	Complete
CLE6	Review the impact of 21+ offer with young adults	Mar 25	Complete

Quality of Plans

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
P1	Restorative practice model	Dec 24	Amber E
P2	Masterclasses	Apr 25	Complete
P3	Management session on planning	Sept 24	Complete
P4	Reflective case discussions for CP	July 24	Complete
P5	Permanence action plan	Nov 25	On track
P6	Best practice guidance on care planning	June 25	Amber E
P7	Review children's panels	Sept 25	Delayed
P8	Training on partnership challenge	Dec 24	Complete
P9	New forms in line with families first	Feb 26	On track
P10	Single assessment	Oct 25	Delayed
P11	Training plan for lead practitioners	Apr 25	Amber E
P12	Central place for resources	Sept 25	Delayed

Quality and Frequency of Visits

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
V1	Performance framework	Sept 24	Complete
V2	Masterclasses on visiting	Sept 24	Complete
V3	Visiting template	July 24	Amber E
V4	e-learning on visiting	Aug 24	Complete
V5	Training on recording	May 25	Amber E
V7	Review visiting in supervision	Jan 25	Amber E

Management Oversight and Supervision

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
MO1	Leadership development programme	June 25	Complete
MO2	CSC management programme	Apr 25	Closed
MO3	Supervision policy and guidance	Sept 24	Complete
MO4	Supervision training	Oct 25	Amber E
MO5	Permanence tracker	Oct 24	Amber E
MO6	Review plans for cared for children who are not in foster care or planning to return home	July 24	Amber E
MO7	Include children's views in the supervision form	Oct 24	Complete

Effectiveness of IROs

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
IR1	IRO performance management framework	Sept 24	Complete
IR2	IROs on management programme	April 24	Complete
IR3	IRO practice standards	Sept 24	Complete
IR4	Quarterly IRO development days	June 24	Complete
IR5	IRO quality assurance alert guidance	Aug 24	Complete
IR6	Challenge permanence performance	July 24	Amber E
IR7	Consult with children on the impact of the cared for IRO service	Mar 25	Amber E

Sufficiency of Placements

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
S1	Family led decision making	TBC	Closed
S2	Join Foster4	May 24	Complete
S3	Build Foster4 offer and front door	Oct 24	Complete
S4	Opportunities for fostering marketing	Oct 24	Complete
S5	Specialist foster carers to support step down from residential	TBC	Reviewing
S6	Third Mockingbird constellation	Sept 24	Complete
S7	Two council residential homes	Jun 25	Complete
S9	Joint commissioning high needs placements	Feb 26	On track
S10	Young people influence recruitment of foster carers	Sept 24	Complete
S11	Homes for cared for children workstream	Apr 25	Amber E

Chapter 2

The Front Door

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
FD1	Contact guidance	July 24	Amber E
FD2	Review LA MASH arrangements	Aug 24	Complete
FD3	Multi-agency workshop reviewing front door arrangements	Jan 25	Complete
FD4	Chapter 3 Working Together	Apr 25	Amber E
FD5	Establish a MASH	Mar 26	On track

Strategy Meetings

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
SM1	Workshop on strategy meetings	Aug 24	Closed
SM2	Minute-taking training	Aug 24	Closed
SM3	Management analysis box	June 24	Complete
SM4	Partnership and managers training	Oct 24	Delayed

Life-story work and later-life letters

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
LS1	Commission training	Mar 25	Amber E
LS3	Monitoring for life-story work and later life letters	Aug 24	Amber E

Health of Cared for Children

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
H1	Prioritisation for vulnerable children for CYPMHS support	Mar 25	Amber E
H2	Waiting well initiatives	Mar 25	Amber E
H3	Review emotional support for UASC	Aug 25	Amber E
H4	Joint health and CSC reviews of health assessments timeliness	May 24	Closed
H5	LA single point of contact	May 24	Closed
H6	Quarterly reporting to NHS England	May 24	Closed
H7	Health and wellbeing workstream	Jun 25	Amber E
H8	Review and streamline health assessment process	May 25	Amber E

Education for Cared for Children

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
ED1	Education advisor attendance meetings	Apr 24	Complete
ED2	Attendance forum	Apr 24	Complete
ED3	Multi-disciplinary attendance meetings	Apr 24	Complete
ED4	PEP training	Dec 24	Amber E
ED5	Review PEP form	Sept 24	Amber E
ED6	Benchmark cared for attainment against their peers	Feb 25	Amber E

ED7	Audit young adults who are NEET at 20	Mar 25	Complete
ED8	Use RONI to identify at risk of NEET	Nov 24	Complete

Workforce

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
W1	Financial support for the plan	July 24	Complete
W2	Capacity for the care leaver service	July 24	Complete
W3	Review IRO capacity	July 24	Complete
W4	Recruitment and retention group	Sept 24	Amber E
W5	Recruitment and retention strategy	Dec 24	Amber E
W6	Recruitment campaign	Nov 25	On track
W7	Reporting on caseloads	Aug 24	Complete
W8	Masters apprenticeship scheme	Mar 25	Complete
W9	Seek practitioner views	Qrtly review	On track
W10	Communicate improvement progress	Qrtly review	Complete
W11	Seek children's views through audit	Monthly	Complete
W12	Base build children's services	Dec 25	On track

Chapter 3

Entries to Care

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
C1	Review children's experiences to see if early help could have been offered	Feb 25	Amber E
C2	Early Help Strategy	June 25	Complete
C3	Joint protocol for police protection	July 25	Closed
C4	Neglect Strategy	June 25	Complete

Children's home inspection

Ref	Action	Due by	RAG
CH1	Weekly management reviews	Mar 25	Complete
CH2	Strengthen reg 44 visits	Mar 25	Complete
CH3	Review the recording system for residential provision	Mar 25	Complete

Children’s Services Improvement Plan

Cheshire East Council

Contents

Introduction

This is our action plan to address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of children's services in Cheshire East which took place in February and March 2024. The findings from the inspection are available in a report on the Ofsted website. The inspection gave Cheshire East's children's services an overall grading of inadequate and found that although some improvements had been made since our last inspection in 2019, the quality of practice and the experience and progress of children and young people was too variable, and for care leavers this was inadequate. We need to make significant improvements, and this plan sets out how we will do this.

We are committed to improving outcomes for children and young people. We will use the inspection and monitoring visit findings to continue to improve the support we offer. This plan responds to all the areas identified in the inspection report. Immediate action was taken to improve services, starting during the inspection, and this is reflected in the plan alongside longer-term actions and ambitions.

Through the delivery of our plan and our programme of improvement, we will continue to embed a culture of high support and high challenge and be a **child-focused** organisation that works **together with** people, through effective relationships that support positive change. We know our workforce is our most important asset and we will continue to support and regularly communicate with frontline practitioners and managers so everyone understands their role in improvement and we co-produce, deliver, evaluate and celebrate changes together.

Context

This inspection, and previous inspections, have shown that Cheshire East's children's services have not provided consistently good quality support to our children and young people. We were judged inadequate in 2013 and 2024. In developing this plan, we have critically considered what barriers have prevented us from achieving good quality services to date. We have recognised that in the past we have moved from fixing problem to problem, which has led to a 'stop/start' approach. We now need to embed a systemic approach to improvement; changing our culture, developing the right systems and processes to ensure we routinely evaluate impact, and holding our shape around the changes we expect to see – holding the right people accountable consistently at every level.

We will be reviewing and changing our services in line with the children's social care national framework to ensure that we deliver consistently good quality practice that achieves strong outcomes for children and young people.

Cheshire East Council, like councils across the country, has been experiencing unprecedented financial pressures. In February 2024, the council approved a balanced budget for 2024/25, which included spending money from reserves to cover the impact of additional financial pressures. The level of reserves is now insufficient to adequately protect the council against future risks. Forecasts indicate there is four-year funding gap of £100m to balance the budget and hold an appropriate level of reserves.

Alongside the improvement programme in children's services, Cheshire East Council has embarked on a significant transformation programme. The council-wide transformation plan will aim to address the funding gap and will be submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) as part of the criteria for exceptional financial support from the government.

We calculate that £1.986m of additional investment will be required to support children's services to deliver our improvement plan at pace. A costed proposal for additional capacity and expertise to support improvement was received and agreed by the Children and Families Committee and Full Council in July 2024.

Challenges for children's services are challenges for the whole council, and there is whole-council commitment and support for delivering this plan. This improvement plan is part of the council's transformation and has been informed by the findings from the LGA corporate peer review in March 2024.

The council's transformation plan will also support us to achieve our improvement plan. Cheshire East Council's transformation will include changes to the organisation's culture - embedding high standards, and effective challenge and performance management where these are not met, focusing on outcomes, not process. These messages will be echoed through our children's leadership and management programme.

The council's transformational plan will also support improved working between council services and improve the support to services from enablers.

This plan also feeds into our wider strategy for developing the council's children's services, the Together Strategy, which has the following building blocks:

- **Together supporting and enabling our workforce:** we have the right people, with the right skills and support to improve the outcomes of our children and young people
- **Together connecting as one team:** we work as one team across children's and adult services with shared skills, processes and communication to focus on the needs and experiences of children, young people and their families
- **Together improving and innovating our services:** our children, young people and their families have consistently good/ outstanding experiences of our services
- **Together collaborating with our families, colleagues and partners:** we adopt an 'experts by experience' approach that ensures that those receiving or delivering our services help to shape them.

Coproduction

In Cheshire East, we aim to work TOGETHER and adopt an 'experts by experience' approach that ensures that those receiving or delivering services help to shape them.

We will engage children and young people throughout our improvement journey in developing and delivering improvements. Children and young people's views will influence our delivery on a child, service, and strategic level. We are developing new Corporate Parenting governance arrangements that will include care experienced young people as key members. Young people will also be involved in shaping and evaluating services through our young people's participation groups, through our audits, young people's surveys, and the local offer app.

We will also continue to engage with practitioners and managers within our frontline teams to ensure we are all delivering improvements together, and we will ensure their feedback, and feedback from our partners, informs our evaluation of impact.

Support and Challenge

We are committed to delivering this plan and achieving consistently good and better services that achieve strong outcomes for children and young people. We know that we cannot deliver this plan alone, and that we need to work together with our children, young people and families, with our teams, across the partnership and throughout the council.

Throughout the development of the plan, we have engaged with frontline practitioners and managers on the inspection findings and what support they need moving forwards, and we will continue to engage with our workforce throughout the delivery of the plan to ensure we are all on this journey together.

This plan has been developed together with and provided with scrutiny and challenge by:

- service managers and service leads, including partners
- the children's services leadership team
- the council's leadership team
- the Safeguarding Children's Partnership
- the Improvement and Impact Board
- elected members on the Children and Families Committee and Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee.

The final plan was endorsed by full Council.

We will continue to invest in our workforce through training, development, and management and leadership support and challenge. Training has been tailored to the areas for improvement raised during the inspection and will continue to be responsive to development needs throughout the year as identified in quality assurance and monitoring activity. This includes a bespoke leadership programme for all leaders within children's services to embed a culture of high support and high challenge, and embedding restorative practice as our practice model so we build strong relationships that support effective change. The impact of training and support on practice will continue to be evaluated through the delivery of this plan so we can adapt and respond to areas for improvement.

We will also seek to 'infect our system' with good practice by collecting and sharing examples of good practice with teams.

We also recognise the enormous value from learning from other areas. We will work through the sector led improvement programme (SLIP) to support improvements. We have reviewed successful improvement plans in other areas and sought advice from other authorities and external bodies with specialist expertise, including the LGA and DfE, to support the development of this plan and will continue to use these sources throughout out improvement journey. We will continue to learn from innovative and best practice in other areas to improve our offer for children and young people in Cheshire East.

Monitoring Impact

The first chapter of the plan is structured under the seven areas for improvement highlighted in the 2024 Ofsted inspection report. It starts with senior manager oversight, to ensure this drives continuous improvement, followed by care leavers, as this is the area requiring the greatest improvement. The second chapter considers the additional areas for development from the inspection report. The third chapter covers additional actions identified through internal assurance activities.

The plan sets out the actions we will take to improve services. What is most important is that what we do makes a difference, so each month we will report on impact against the inspection findings. Progress against actions and impact against the inspection findings will be rated using the following:

Colour	Definition
Grey	Action not started yet, no risk to implementation anticipated
Red	Action not on track
Amber	Action not yet completed, but on track to be completed within timescales
Amber E	Action completed but we need to embed and evidence impact
Green	Action completed and embedded with evidence of impact

The sources we will use to assess our impact for each area of the plan are outlined in each section. These include:

- Seeking and listening to children and young people's experiences

- Single agency and multi-agency audits
- Performance indicators
- Listening to practitioners and managers, including within partner agencies
- Recruitment and retention information.

Our impact on work with children and young people will also be evaluated through Ofsted and DfE monitoring visits.

The plan will be a live and responsive plan, so will adapt to incorporate new actions as needed.

Governance and Accountability

Progress against the plan will be driven by senior leaders and will be assessed and monitored through specific workstreams that report into a Partnership Oversight Group.

An independently chaired Improvement and Impact Board will formally scrutinise progress and impact. Key members of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership and the council's senior leadership team are members of the Improvement and Impact Board.

The Corporate Parenting Executive Board will drive developments for cared for children and care leavers, and so will contribute to delivering improvements in relation to the inspection findings. The Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee will scrutinise progress pertinent to care experienced young people.

The Safeguarding Children's Partnership will receive six monthly updates on progress enabling all members to scrutinise and challenge progress.

The Children and Families Committee will scrutinise impact against the plan at every committee meeting.

The Children's Services Strategic Quartet, chaired by the council's chief executive, will scrutinise progress for children and young people. Progress will also be reported into the corporate assurance panel, an external panel monitoring the council's transformation.

Key stakeholders, including our workforce, will be kept informed of progress through regular communications. Feedback from our workforce will continue to be sought through existing forums/ mechanisms such as team meetings, senior leaders walking the floor, councillor frontline visits, and #talktogether staff sessions.

Glossary

The legal definition of a care leaver comes from The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 which states that a care leaver is someone who has been in the care of the local authority for a period of 13 weeks or more spanning their 16th birthday.

Care leavers can also be referred to as care experienced young people or young adults, as they have had experience of being in care. This term tends to be preferred by young people/ young adults. Both terms are used interchangeably within this plan.

Abbreviation	Expansion
CINCP	Child in Need and Child Protection
CYPMHS	Children and young people's mental health services
DfE	Department for Education
DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
EET	Education, employment or training
ICB	Integrated Care Board
IRO	Independent Reviewing Officer
LGA	Local Government Association
MASH	Multi-agency safeguarding hub
NEET	Not in education, employment or training

NHS	National Health Service
PAs	Personal Advisors
PEPs	Personal education plans
RONI	Risk of NEET indicators
SLIP	Sector led improvement programme
SMART	Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-based
UASC	Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

Children's Services Improvement Plan on a Page

Our improvement plan sets out how we will address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) in February and March 2024. It covers the 7 areas inspectors highlighted:

Senior leaders' oversight	Care leavers	Quality of plans	Quality and frequency of visits	Management oversight and supervision	Effectiveness of IROs	Sufficiency of placements
What the inspection found: We need to improve how we monitor if children are getting the right support, as some children were not getting support that was good enough	**What the inspection found:** We need to improve the quality and consistency of support to care leavers, including those who are homeless and those who are over 21	**What the inspection found:** We need to improve the quality of plans for children so they are child-focused and drive timely change	**What the inspection found:** We need to improve the quality and frequency of visits to children to ensure they are purposeful and in line with children's assessed needs.	**What the inspection found:** We need to improve the quality of management oversight and supervision to ensure this supports consistently good practice	**What the inspection found:** We need to improve the effectiveness of child protection chairs and IROs to escalate, challenge, and scrutinise plans for children	**What the inspection found:** We don't have sufficient placements to meet children and young people's needs
What we will do: Review reporting and governance arrangements Develop a Family Feedback Strategy Monitor progress against the improvement plan through an independently chaired Improvement Board Embed our practice standards 'Being Brilliant at Best Practice' Revise quality assurance arrangements Step up a new Corporate Parenting Executive Board to ensure there is a whole council and partnership approach to improving outcomes for care experienced young people Commission corporate parenting training for senior leaders and elected members Develop corporate parenting champions across the council	**What we will do:** Develop practice standards Roll out a mandatory training plan specific to the care leavers service Change the management structure Revise the format of the pathway plan with young people Formalise arrangements around young adults where there are safeguarding concerns Develop care leavers hubs in Crewe and Macclesfield Launch an app for the local offer Develop EET plans for all young adults who are NEET and able to work Increase apprenticeships and other route to work opportunities Refresh the protocol for care leavers in emergency accommodation Mobilise additional accommodation options for 16-18 year olds Implement a wider 18-25 accommodation offer Review the 21+ offer and approach	**What we will do:** Embed restorative practice Continue to run masterclasses on plans Hold a management and leadership session on plans Establish reflective case discussion meetings to progress outcomes for children on longer child protection and repeat plans Develop a permanence action plan Review permanence decision panels Explore what partnership training is needed to support effective challenge Develop a new child protection plan in partnership with children, young people and families Review the cared for plan in partnership with children, young people and families	**What we will do:** Strengthen the performance framework to ensure there is robust performance management of visits to children Deliver masterclasses on purposeful visits Reissue the visiting template to support consistent recording Develop and roll-out e-learning on visiting Team managers to review visiting schedules in supervision, and IROs and CP chairs to have oversight of frequency visits to children	**What we will do:** Commission a bespoke leadership development programme for all leaders in children's services Deliver an in-house leadership and management programme for children's social care tailored to our areas for improvement Update the supervision policy and develop practice guidance on reflective supervision All managers to complete supervision training Embed the permanence tracker Review the care plans for all cared for children who are not currently in foster care or planning to return home	**What we will do:** Review the performance management framework for IROs Include IROs in the in-house and commissioned leadership and management programmes Review and refresh the IRO best practice guidance Hold an IRO service development day every 3 months Revise the guidance on IRO quality assurance alerts to support outcome-focused practice Explore and challenge performance around permanence in performance clinics	**What we will do:** Develop a system which enables family led decision making including training and a family network procedure Join Foster4 Work in partnership with the other Foster4 LAs to build our offer – ensuring there is an effective front door to support those who make an enquiry about becoming a foster carer Explore opportunities within the council to increase fostering marketing and raise awareness of fostering Develop specialist foster carers to support children to step down from residential care Develop our third Mockingbird constellation Open two council residential children's homes Carry out a deep dive on reunification and step down for children from care Investigate the potential for joint commissioning of high needs placements

Children’s Services Improvement Plan Timeline

Our improvement plan set out how we will address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of local authority children’s services (ILACS) in February and March 2024. This is the timeline for what we will achieve by delivering our plan.

What we achieved by the end of June 2024

1. All 209 21+ care leavers contacted and offered support. Tracker in place to monitor engagement with 21+ care leavers
2. New management structure in the care leavers service
3. Developed and started delivering a bespoke training programme for the care leavers service
4. New best practice guidance for the care leavers service
5. Coproduced new pathway plan
6. Foster4 – we joined and launched new service
7. Opened a new residential home – Flude House
8. Revised quality assurance framework
9. New Improvement and Impact Board to drive and evaluate progress against the improvement plan
10. New Children’s Services Strategic Quartet to provide improved leadership and accountability for children’s services
11. Director level project group for accommodation for cared for young people and care leavers

What we achieved by the end of September 2024

12. Care leaver hubs (safe spaces) in Crewe and Macclesfield
13. Local offer app launched
14. Proposals in place to address 16-18 and 18-25 accommodation shortages
15. Revised protocol for care leavers in emergency accommodation
16. All young adults who are NEET and able to work will have an EET plan
17. Reflective case discussions established for longer child protection and repeat plans
18. Third Mockingbird constellation
19. Senior leaders and first tranche of managers trained in our bespoke management and leadership programme
20. Revised supervision policy
21. Vital signs performance report in place to support evaluation of the improvement plan

What we achieved by the end of December 2024

22. Additional capacity in place to deliver the improvement plan
23. First meeting of the multi-agency corporate parenting executive board
24. LGA corporate parenting training rolled out for senior leaders and elected members
25. Local offer reviewed together with young people and partners
26. Additional accommodation options in place for young people aged 16-18 using flexibilities/ modifications in current contracts
27. Refreshed workforce strategy

What we achieved by the end of March 2025

28. Strengthened performance framework
29. Increased apprenticeship opportunities and other route to employment opportunities in place for care leavers
30. Approaches in place to ensure the most vulnerable children and young people are prioritised for mental health support
31. ‘Waiting well’ initiatives developed with key health providers and third sector provision
32. Level 7 apprentice scheme to support people to train as social workers with Cheshire East

Improvement Plan

All ratings are accurate as at 30 September 2025.

Chapter 1

1. Senior Leaders' Oversight

What needs to improve				
Senior leaders' oversight of performance to ensure that there is a coherent approach to continuous improvement.				
What inspectors found	• Senior leaders had not recognised, until this inspection, the extent of improvement required in services for care leavers. Systems to monitor and track groups of individual children have not been effective in identifying vulnerable care leavers who are not receiving the services they need. As a result, too many vulnerable care leavers are not getting the right level of help, support or protection. • Despite improvements, the quality of practice is still too variable. Improved timeliness has not been achieved for all children. Implementation of improvement plans needs to accelerate across teams but in particular within the care leavers service. • Leaders have recognised in their self-evaluation that more needs to be done to ensure that quality assurance activity is identifying all areas of poor practice and that it is consistently having an impact on outcomes for children. • Not all young people are informed of, or understand, the pledges contained within the cared for children and care leavers' strategy.			
Ref	**Action**	**Action Owner**	**Due by**	**Action Rating**
SL1	Ensure there is effective line of sight from frontline practice through to the Executive Director of Children's Services through a review of reporting and governance arrangements, including a review of the performance framework.	Executive Director of Children's Services	January 2025	Complete
SL2a	Develop a Family Feedback Strategy to ensure our services develop in response to what our families tell us.	Head of Service Children's Development and Partnerships	April 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact

SL2b	Develop a partnership child and family Engagement strategy that describes how and when to facilitate co-production and will be linked to the family feedback strategy.	Safeguarding Children's Partnership	March 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact
SL3	Refresh the terms of reference for the Improvement and Impact Board, and expand the board to incorporate partners, to ensure there are robust arrangements in place to drive and scrutinise impact for children and young people in response to the inspection findings.	Executive Director of Children's Services	July 2024	Complete
SL4	Establish a Children's Services Strategic Quartet to provide improved leadership and accountability for children's services in line with best practice in the LGA guide for Chief Executives, and for council leaders, and DfE statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services.	Executive Director of Children's Services	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
SL5	Step-up a multi-agency corporate parenting executive board to drive and scrutinise progress for cared for children and care experienced children and young people and ensure there is a whole council and partnership approach to supporting our young people.	Executive Director of Children's Services	November 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
SL6	Commission LGA corporate parenting training for senior leaders across the partnership and all elected members.	Executive Director of Children's Services	September 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact
SL7	Develop Corporate Parenting champions across the council to increase awareness and support for care experienced young people and young adults.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	April 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact
SL8	Refresh the cared for children and care leavers strategy 2022-26 and action plan together with our care leaver ambassadors.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	TBC	Reviewing
SL9	Develop quality assurance activity to evaluate the impact of the improvement plan.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	February 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact

SL10	Establish service manager thematic audits to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas and drive improvements.	Service Managers CINCP	August 2024	Complete
SL11	Develop mechanisms to ensure audit findings and feedback from children and young people are routinely shared with teams to strengthen the impact of audits on practice.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	September 2024	Complete
SL12	Develop a vital signs performance report in line with the improvement plan areas to support effective evaluation of improvement activity and drive improvements.	Business Intelligence Manager	September 2024	Complete
SL13	Ensure councillors have oversight of practice and receive feedback from frontline practitioners through a variety of opportunities.	Business Manager	September 2025	Complete
SL14	Review the children's social care national framework and its implications for practice and processes, to embed consistently good practice that achieves strong outcomes for children and young people.	Principal Social Worker	February 2025	Complete
SL15a	Develop practice guidance on timescales to ensure expectations are clear to practitioners and managers.	Business Development Officer	June 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact
SL15b	Embed the practice standards ('Being Brilliant at Best Practice') through our culture, leadership, and developing and sharing key communications on practice. Continually evaluate impact and reinforce messages through monthly performance meetings and quality assurance activity.	Principal Social Worker	April 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact
SL16	Collate and share examples of good practice to embed understanding of good practice across teams and to celebrate good work.	Principal Social Worker	Start sharing practice by August 2024 and continue throughout the year	Complete but need to evidence impact
SL17	Strengthen the audit process – revise the audit tool and integrate audit and reporting within the child's record.	Quality Assurance Improvement Lead	November 2025	On track
SL18	Develop an implementation plan for the family feedback strategy.	Participation Lead	October 2025	On track

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	The pace and impact of changes will be evaluated through: • monthly reports against the improvement plan • monthly performance indicators in the vital signs performance report • practice review audits which assess the quality of practice across services • thematic audits to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas • feedback from children and young people from our participation groups and through audits. • Ofsted monitoring visits will demonstrate whether our understanding of improvements are accurate.	**What we will see when we've addressed this area**	• Improvements result in consistently good quality practice - over 80% of audits will be good or better quality. • Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of children's outcomes and areas for development. • Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the practice and development needs of staff on both an individual and workforce level. • Quality assurance activity drives improvements to the quality of practice, resulting in improved outcomes for children. • 90% young people tell us they understand the pledges contained within the cared for children and care leavers' strategy. • The council will have at least 20 care leaver champions across all the directorates.

Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people

The member development training programme was approved at the Audit and Governance Committee and corporate parenting is included annually from September for all councillors as mandatory training.

Councillor frontline visits took place in July and September and have been reported to the September Children and Families Committee. The findings from the September visits will be reported to the November Committee.

An implementation plan for the family feedback strategy has been drafted but needs to be approved to align with new improvement plan and participation strategy.

2. Care Leavers

What needs to improve
The quality, consistency and responsiveness of support, advice and guidance for care leavers, including those who are homeless, with additional vulnerabilities, and those who are over 21 years of age.

A. Quality of practice

What inspectors found	The quality of practice for care leavers is inadequate. **Relationships and transition to the care leavers' service** • Not all children in care have the opportunity to get to know their personal advisers (PAs) to build a relationship with them before they are 18 years old. Planning for young people who transition to the leaving care service is not always robust. For some, their voice is not evident and plans lack detail which means their individual needs are not always sufficiently understood. This means that there are some young people who leave care with too much uncertainty about how they will be supported. • Not all PAs know their young people well enough to have trusted and meaningful relationships with them. For some young people, PAs do not know their stories of why, or when, they came into care. • Case records do not reflect the work undertaken with young people. **Pathway plans** • Pathway plans do not consistently cover all the important elements of young people's lives. Wishes and feelings are not always clearly expressed. They do not consistently include other professionals, they are not sufficiently ambitious for young people and they do not always capture young people's voices. • Plans for unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers do not consistently acknowledge their unique cultural heritage, or identify how young people can access support for the trauma they have experienced. • Plans are not always effective in helping young people to make meaningful change in their lives. • Support for care leavers is not effective enough, which means that many do not access employment, further education or training. **Recognising and responding to risk** • Risk of harm is not always recognised or responded to effectively. • For some young people, there is a lack of professional curiosity about their day-to-day lives and living arrangements. This has resulted in a lack of understanding of risk, or a clear recognition of how best to support young people when they are at their most vulnerable.

	• When potential risk of harm for care leavers is identified, it is difficult to see how this risk is managed or mitigated effectively. This means that some care leavers may be exposed to risky situations and people. This was not fully understood by senior leaders until this inspection. **Management oversight** • PAs receive supervision, however the quality of supervision was variable. Most supervision is brief and task focused. Significant gaps in supervision exist on some young people's care files meaning there is a lack of consistent management grip on driving young people's plans forward and ensuring they are safe.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
CLA1	Develop and launch practice standards for the care leavers service to support consistently good practice. This will include clear standards on recording, visiting, transitions, and responsibilities when cases are jointly held.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Complete
CLA2	Develop and roll out a mandatory training plan that is specific for the care leavers service to support practitioners to deliver consistently good practice. This will include planning, professional curiosity, adult/ transitional safeguarding and culture/diversity.	Principal Social Worker Service Manager Care Leavers	Launch in June 2024 and deliver over the year	Complete
CLA3	Change 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.	Service Manager Care Leavers	April 2024	Complete
CLA4	Revise the format of the pathway plan with young people to ensure it supports good practice. The new plan will include sections for multi-agency professionals' views, and contingency plans.	Service Manager Cared for Children	May 2024	Complete
CLA6	Formalise arrangements around young adults where there are safeguarding concerns to ensure senior leaders have oversight of these young adults and that multi-agency team around the adult meetings are held to develop safety plans with them.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers	September 2024	Complete
CLA7	Recruit Care Leaver Ambassadors to work together with us to improve services, and to represent the experiences of cared for children and care leavers to the Corporate Parenting Strategic Board and corporate parenting workstreams.	Participation Lead	October 2024	Complete

Please also see the section on management oversight and supervision			
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	• Practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and plans and will assess if PAs can tell young people's stories. • Thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas, for example UASC young people. • Some of the thematic audits will involve phone calls to young people to understand their experience of services, the impact of their plan, and their relationships with their PAs. • The percentage of young people with PAs and pathway plans at 16.	**What we will see when we've addressed this area**	• Practice to support care leavers will be of consistently good quality and will support young people to achieve good outcomes. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality. • Management oversight is good quality and drives improved outcomes. Over 80% of management oversight in audits will be good or better quality. • 100% of young people will get to know their PAs from age 16. 90% young people will tell us they have good relationships with their PAs and know how they will be supported once they leave care. • 100% PAs will be able to tell young people's stories. • 100% case records will accurately reflect work with young people. • Pathway plans will cover all the important elements of young people's lives, and will reflect their voices and their individual needs, including their cultural heritage. Plans will consistently include other professionals and will be ambitious for young people. Over 80% plans audited will be good or better quality. • There is appropriate professional curiosity, which means risk of harm is recognised and responded to swiftly and effectively. When potential risk of harm is identified, it is managed or mitigated effectively. 100% audits will show appropriate professional curiosity and that risk of harm is responded to.

B. Planning for Adulthood

What inspectors found	• Transition planning into adulthood for most care leavers is variable. There is some proactive planning for disabled care leavers with complex physical needs, and young people with neurodiverse needs. However, for other care leavers such as those with complex mental health and emotional needs, proactive transition planning does not always take place. This means that these care leavers do not access the help and support that they need. • Not all care leavers have access to their full health history. This means important information that could be used to provide ongoing support to them as they transition to adulthood is not available or used to inform care planning for them.

- Not all PAs spoken to by inspectors could describe the local offer to care leavers or explain how care leavers could benefit from it. Not all young people are accessing the full range of entitlements or services available to them. The local offer is not communicated effectively to all care leavers, which means that they are not all aware of, nor do they access, their full range of entitlements.
- Care leavers can access community-based resources but do not have a dedicated place they can go to which provides a safe space for them to receive support. The plan is for the newly opened family hubs to provide this in the coming months but at present this is not available.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
CLB2	Review terms of reference and membership for Ignition Panel to ensure young people's post 18 plans are effectively tracked and reviewed from age 16 to ensure proactive transition plans are in place.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	September 2024	Complete
CLB3	The practice standards will specify which preparing for adulthood roles should be undertaken by social workers and which by PAs and will set clear expectations on what care leavers should receive/ have in place.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Complete
CLB4	Develop care leavers hubs, with our care leavers, as a safe space for care leavers to access support and advice. Advice sessions will be offered from the hub to support preparation for adulthood, including housing, finances, drug and alcohol support, parenting support, careers advice, CV workshops, and interview preparation. Emotional health and wellbeing support will be available at the hub through Pure Insight and health support through the cared for nurse.	Service Manager Care Leavers Area Delivery Manager Targeted Youth Work	Interim hubs in Crewe and Macclesfield by July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
		Head of Service for Education Participation and Pupil Support	Consider suitable options for a long-term care leaver hub in Crewe by the end of 2025	On track
CLB6	Engage and consult with care experienced young people on how they want to understand their health histories and adapt the current process in line with their feedback.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	July 2025	Complete
CLB7	Deliver training to PAs on arrangements to support young people to understand their health histories.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	June 2024	Complete
CLB8	Launch an app for the local offer. This will ensure all care leavers have immediate access to the local offer and their entitlements through their	Service Manager Care Leavers	August 2024	Complete

	mobile. It will also support us to keep in touch with young people and gain their feedback and allow young people to develop peer support groups.			
CLB9	Review the local offer together with young people and partners.	Service Manager Care Leavers	December 2024	Complete
CLB10	Deliver training on the local offer to all PAs.	Service Manager Care Leavers	July 2024	Complete
CLB11	Develop regular participation opportunities for care leavers through the care leaver hubs, to ensure their views shape services.	Participation Lead	July 2024	Complete
CLB12	Launch a free bus pass for care leavers aged up to 22.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	October 2024	Complete

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	• Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be planning for adulthood. • The thematic audit will involve phone calls to young people to understand their experience of services, what they know about the local offer, and how their plan is preparing them for adulthood. • The percentage of young people who have access to their health histories. • PAs can describe the local offer and explain how care leavers can benefit from it. • Feedback from young people accessing the care leaver hubs.	**What we will see when we've addressed this area**	• Proactive planning takes place for all care leavers ensuring they are prepared for adulthood. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality. • 90% young people tell us they feel well supported and have the information they need to be prepared for adulthood. 90% tell us they know about the local offer, the care leavers hub, and their entitlements. • 100% care leavers have access to their health histories. • 100% PAs can describe the local offer and explain how care leavers can benefit from it.

Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people
A survey is being carried out to review how young people feel about the hubs. 100% of attendees who completed the training evaluation for the health histories training reported that the training was good or excellent and that their knowledge had improved.

C. Education, Employment and Training

What inspectors found	• Too many care leavers are not in education, employment or training (NEET). They are not being encouraged and well supported to improve their life chances in order to achieve their aspirations for a better future.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
CLC1	Work together with young adults who are NEET and able to work to develop an EET plan to support them towards gaining EET. Plans will be reviewed every 12 weeks.	Service Manager Care Leavers	September 2024	Complete
CLC2	Develop an offer of EET opportunities, including apprenticeships, that support young people to gain employment or training in their chosen field.	Service Manager Care Leavers	March 2025	Complete
CLC3	Work with local businesses and organisations, including the chamber of commerce, to secure additional corporate parenting support for cared for children and care leavers and to prepare employers for supporting young people in employment.	Service Manager Care Leavers	March 2025	Complete
CLC4	Provide bespoke support to enable young people to be prepared for entering employment through job readiness training, CV and interview support.	Service Manager Care Leavers	October 2024	Complete

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	What we will see when we've addressed this area
• The percentage of young people who are in EET. • Thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas, including EET.	• The percentage of care leavers who are in EET will increase – we want to increase to above 75% in EET. • By April 2025, we would have at least 10 new apprenticeship opportunities for young adults. • 90% young people will tell us they are encouraged and well supported to improve their life chances and access EET.

D. Accommodation

What inspectors found	• For care leavers who live out of the area, accessing suitable housing is challenging and some wait for extended periods in supported accommodation until suitable permanent accommodation becomes available.

	• A small number of care leavers are homeless. This group includes some care leavers with the greatest needs, including those who struggle with their mental health, those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or those who are in unsuitable accommodation, or have no fixed abode. • Information about where young people are living is not routinely updated. This means that the local authority cannot be assured that these vulnerable young people are safe and well cared for.

Ref	**Action**	**Action Owner**	**Due by**	**Action Rating**
CLD1	Refresh and relaunch the protocol for care leavers in emergency accommodation, with clear escalation requirements, to ensure all practitioners are working to expected practice standards and there is senior leadership oversight of any young adults in emergency and unsuitable accommodation.	Service Manager Care Leavers	August 2024	Complete
CLD2	All young people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or in emergency accommodation will be reviewed in weekly performance clinics and by the monthly risk management forum to ensure effective plans are in place to support and protect them.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Complete
CLD3	The weekly temporary and emergency accommodation meeting will consider any care leavers who need accommodation.	Housing Options Manager	June 2024	Complete
CLD4	Deliver training for PAs on supporting young adults with housing concerns, including how to support young people to meet the criteria for housing allocation in other areas, so they can provide bespoke support tailored to young adults' needs.	Housing Options Manager	July 2024	Complete
CLD5	Establish a director level project group for accommodation for cared for young people and care leavers to drive increased sufficiency.	Interim Director of Commissioning	July 2024	Complete
CLD6	Explore and review the suitability of temporary and emergency accommodation options across Cheshire East to increase options for care leavers. Identify gaps in provision to inform commissioning to ensure we can meet young people's needs.	Service Manager Care Leavers Head of Housing Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	September 2024	Complete
CLD7	Develop proposals to address 16-18 and 18-25 accommodation shortages.	Head of Housing	July 2024	Complete

		Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs		
CLD8	Mobilise additional accommodation options for cared for young people aged 16-18 using flexibilities/ modifications in current contracts.	Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	October 2024	Complete
CLD9	Implement a wider 18-25 accommodation offer, ensuring this is shaped by our care experienced young adults.	Head of Housing Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	July 2026	On track

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	• Thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas, including care leavers in unsuitable accommodation. • The thematic audit will involve phone calls to young people to understand their experiences. • The number of young people who are homeless. • The number of young people in unsuitable accommodation.	**What we will see when we've addressed this area**	• Over 80% care leavers who live out of area access suitable housing in a timely way. • 90% care leavers tell us they are well supported. • Effective plans and contingency plans prevent care leavers from needing to access emergency or unsuitable accommodation. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality. • Records on where young people are living are accurate and there is effective oversight of young people's accommodation.

Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people

Plans for procurement 'lotting' and approach for the 18-25 accommodation offer were agreed at the Children and Families Committee in September.

An audit on emergency accommodation reviewed 12 care leavers identified at risk of homelessness or who were homeless in the last 3 months. 11 of the 12 cases were rated good. Strengths identified included:

- Persistent efforts by PAs and Team Managers to engage and support young people
- Homeless and at risk of homeless young people were closely monitored through the weekly B&B meetings, risk management forums, and supervisions.
- There is evidence of care planning meetings being held and IRO oversight.
- Clear escalation to senior managers in complex or high-risk cases.

E. Care leavers aged over 21

What inspectors found	- For care leavers over the age of 21, persistent efforts to engage them are not routinely made. - When young people become 21, unless they are in education or highly vulnerable, they are no longer provided with a PA or leaving care services unless they contact a duty worker and explicitly request help. At the time of this inspection, there were over 200 young people in this category, and this included very vulnerable disabled young people. Some of these care leavers have not been receiving the services they need, or are entitled to, and the local authority cannot be assured that they are safe. - It was not evident on young people's records that discussions had taken place to inform a decision as to young people's informed choice to move from having a personal advisor to the 21+ offer. - Disabled care leavers who are open to the 21+ offer are not prioritised as a vulnerable group and as such the local authority cannot be assured that their needs are being met. In cases seen there was not enough evidence of persistence or curiosity in where they may be now, despite histories of having extensive engagement with services as children. - The quality assurance of the care leaver cohort aged 21+ needs strengthening.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
CLE1	Contact all 209 care leavers aged over 21 to ensure they are aware of the support available to them and offer them an allocated worker.	Service Manager Care Leavers	March 2024	Complete
CLE2	Review the 21+ offer and approach, formalising this in a protocol and ensuring it is clear on the local offer. The protocol will include continued proactive communication post 21 so young people know what support is available.	Service Manager Care Leavers	July 2024	Complete
CLE3	Review cases for care leavers with a disability who are open to the 21+ offer to ensure their needs are being met.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLE4	Develop a tracker for care leavers aged over 21 and monitor through weekly performance clinics to ensure there is regular oversight of engagement and support with these young people.	Service Manager Care Leavers	May 2024	Complete
CLE5	Establish regular quality assurance around care leavers aged over 21 to ensure there is effective oversight of their outcomes and that this drives improvement.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers	August 2024	Complete

CLE6	Review the impact of the revised 21+ offer with young adults, involving them in shaping any changes to services.	Service Manager Care Leavers	March 2025	Complete

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	• Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be support to those 21 and over, including those with a disability. • The thematic audit will involve phone calls to young adults to understand their experience of services. • The percentage of care leavers over 21 who we were in touch with within the last 3 months.	**What we will see when we've addressed this area**	• Persistent efforts to engage young adults over 21 are routinely made. We are in touch with over 90% of care leavers over 21 in the last 3 months. • Over 90% young adults will tell us they know that support is available if they need it. • There is effective oversight of young adults aged 21+ and their outcomes, including young adults with a disability.

Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people
An audit on care leavers over 21 with a disability is being carried out in September.

3. Quality of plans

What needs to improve				
The quality of plans for children to ensure that they are more child-focused and drive forward positive change in a timely way.				
What inspectors found	**Child in need and child protection** • The quality of child protection plans is inconsistent. Some are outcome focused although some lack purpose and urgency. Some children have been subject to protracted child protection planning. • The quality of safety plans is inconsistent, mostly relying on vulnerable parents and are overly optimistic. The use of jargon makes it difficult for parents to understand what is required. • Multi-agency core groups meet regularly to review progress however social workers do not routinely update children's experiences against the child protection plan. • For some children who have been known to services for several years and have been the subject of repeat child protection and child in need plans, the quality of practice is too variable. Contingency thinking and planning are not strong enough for these children. This means that, for some children, plans are not effective in improving their outcomes. • When child in need and child protection plans do not progress, there was drift and delay for children, and ineffective challenge from the chair and multi-agency group in child in need meetings, core groups and review conferences. **Cared for children** • The quality of care plans for children is inconsistent. • Consideration is not routinely given to permanence planning for children from an early stage. • Some children are subject to statutory intervention for longer than they need to be. This is due to delays in the discharge of care orders.			
Ref	**Action**	**Action Owner**	**Due by**	**Action Rating**
P1	Embed the agreed restorative practice model approach to support requirement for consistently good practice.	Principal Social Worker	December 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact

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P2	Continue to provide masterclasses – short in-house training sessions for practitioners and managers on specific topics. This will include planning. The masterclass programme will continue to be responsive to audit findings to support improved practice.	Principal Social Worker	Starting in April 2024 and running throughout the year	Complete
P3	Hold a management and leadership session on planning to ensure there is a shared understanding on what constitutes a good quality plan, and that the role of team managers and IROs is clear in scrutinising plans to ensure all plans are good quality.	All Service Managers	September 2024	Complete
P4	Establish reflective case discussion meetings to progress outcomes for children on longer child protection plans and repeat plans.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager, Child Protection	July 2024	Complete
P5	Develop a permanence action plan to ensure permanence planning is considered and progressed from an early stage, with permanence plans being in place at the second cared for review. The permanence action plan should consider all routes to permanence, including reunification.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers	November 2025	On track
P6	Develop best practice guidance on care planning to ensure expectations to support permanence and life story work are clear.	Service Manager Cared for Children	June 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact
P7	Review children's panels and they outcomes they achieve for children (including permanence) to ensure they are effective and streamlined.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	September 2025	Delayed
P8	Explore within the multiagency safeguarding group what training is needed to support effective partnership challenge.	Children's Safeguarding Partnership Training Manager	December 2024	Complete
P9	Review and refresh forms within the child's record in line with families first and remove references to Signs of Safety.	Business Development Officer	February 2026	On track
P10	Develop a new C&F assessment.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	October 2025	Delayed
P11	Develop a clear training plan for the lead practitioners to support improved quality practice.	Lead Practitioners	April 2025	Complete but need to

				evidence impact
P12	Develop and launch a new central point for children and families resources, practice guidance and training.	Business Development Officer	September 2025	Delayed

Please also see action MO5 - Embed the permanence tracker to monitor achieving permanence planning within statutory and children's timescales.

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	• Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of plans across all service areas. • Multi-agency audits will tell us about the quality of multi-agency challenge in supporting plan progression. • Permanence planning will be a focus of thematic audits. • The percentage of plans judged good or better. • The percentage of plans within timescales. • The percentage of children on repeat child protection plans. • Number of children on CP plans over 15 months. • The percentage of permanence plans in place by the second review. • The number of children on care orders and number of care orders discharged.	**What we will see when we've addressed this area**	• Plans will be consistently good quality, with effective contingency plans, child-focused and result in good outcomes for children and young people. It will be easy for everyone to see what needs to happen from the plan. Over 80% plans audited will be good or better quality. • Drift and delay is prevented through effective management oversight and partnership challenge. • Consideration is routinely given to permanence planning for children from an early stage and children achieve permanence in a timely way. • Repeat child protection plans will be under 15%. • 100% permanence plans will be in place by the second review.

Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people

The next steps meeting with key colleagues from ICT and comms on a central resource platform has been postponed to the start of October. Our ICT colleagues have advised that this is due to an on-going service restructure and required technical and strategic discussions taking place before they can reconvene with us. Background work on our current systems and with practitioners is taking place to help inform what our requirements/asks will be.

Work is taking place to review children's panels, this is now expected to be complete by the end of November.

The C&F assessment is being aligned with families first to ensure it is future proofed.

4. Quality and frequency of visits

What needs to improve	
The quality and frequency of visits to children so that they are purposeful and in line with assessed needs.	
What inspectors found	**Child in need and child protection** • Visits to children in need and those subject to child protection plans are not always carried out at a frequency reflecting assessed need. Not all visits are carried out within local authority prescribed or statutory timescales. There is a lack of clarity on the expected visiting times for children in need. • Some children are not visited often enough for social workers to build trusting relationships with them. Changes in social workers impacts this. • Visits to children do not always have purpose and do not link to their plans clearly enough. Records of visits vary in depth and quality of detail. Some visits are very brief, and their contribution towards the assessment or progress of the plan is limited. **Cared for children** • Visits to children in care are not always carried out in line with statutory visiting schedules or their assessed need.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
V1	Strengthen the performance framework to ensure robust performance management of visits to children.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	September 2024	Complete
V2	Support improved visiting practice through the masterclass training programme and briefings to team meetings.	Principal Social Worker	September 2024	Complete
V3	Reissue the visiting template to practitioners to ensure consistency in recording.	Principal Social Worker	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
V4	Develop and roll out e-learning on visiting to support purposeful visits that are carried out with a frequency that reflects children's needs.	Principal Social Worker	August 2024	Complete

V5	Deliver training to the children's social care workforce on the impact of recording and how this impacts on children's understanding of their experiences.	Principal Social Worker	May 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact
V7	Team managers to review visiting schedules in supervision, and IROs and CP chairs to have oversight of frequency visits to children.	All Team Managers and IROs	Evaluate in January 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	• Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and visits, and the quality of relationships with children and young people. • Timeliness of visits.	**What we will see when we've addressed this area**	• Visits to children are carried out at a frequency reflecting assessed need and this is clearly recorded on their files. Over 80% visits will be in line with need as shown through audit. • Children are visited often enough for social workers to build trusting relationships with them. 90% of young people will tell us they trust their social workers. • Visits to children are purposeful and clearly link to their assessments or plans.

Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people

The visiting template will be built into LiquidLogic to increase consistency of recording.

Positive feedback on visits to cared for children and writing to the child was received through the SLIP visit in August, however this only covered a small number of cases.

5. Management Oversight and Supervision

What needs to improve				
The quality of management oversight and supervision to ensure that consistent, good social work practice is in place.				
What inspectors found	• Management oversight and challenge are not fully embedded across all service areas. Management oversight across all service areas does not provide sufficient challenge or reflection to improve social work practice. For some children, this has led to their needs not being recognised or acted upon in a timely way. • The quality of supervision is too variable. Supervision is not always sufficiently analytical or reflective. Supervision is not consistently driving children's plans forward, actions although timebound roll over for many months without completion. This means not all children's circumstances are sufficiently understood. • For a small number of young children who live in children's homes there have been significant delays in driving their care plans forward to secure long-term permanence. This is because there has not been effective management oversight and supervision of children's care plans, and IROs do not routinely challenge drift and delay. • Recent arrangements to track permanence for children have been introduced, but it is too soon to see the impact of this, and some children continue to experience drift and delay.			
Ref	**Action**	**Action Owner**	**Due by**	**Action Rating**
MO1	Commission a bespoke leadership development programme to support all leaders in children's services (from team leaders and above) to develop their leadership, reflective skills, and confidence in effective challenge to improve practice and outcomes for children.	Principal Social Worker	Running between March 2024 - June 2025	Complete
MO2	Deliver an in-house leadership and management development programme for children's social care, tailored to our areas for improvement, to support a culture of high support and high challenge and embed consistently good quality practice.	Principal Social Worker	To commence in April 2024 and run throughout the year	Closed
MO3	Update the supervision policy and develop practice guidance on reflective supervision based on best practice.	Principal Social Worker	September 2024	Complete

MO4	All managers to complete supervision training to support them to deliver reflective supervision that considers children's lived experiences, supports learning and improves practice.	Principal Social Worker	Training to be delivered between November and March 2025 Commission a final cohort by end of October 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact
MO5	Embed the permanence tracker to monitor achieving permanence within statutory and children's timescales.	Service Manager Cared for Children	Evaluate impact in October 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
MO6	Review the care plans for all cared for children who are not currently in foster care or planning to return home to ensure they are on the right plan.	Head of Service Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
MO7	Revise the supervision form to ensure that children and young people's views are included and considered as part of reflective supervision.	Head of Service Child in Need and Child Protection	October 2024	Complete

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	• Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and management oversight. These audits include a review of case supervision which informs the judgement on management oversight. • The percentage of supervision within timescales.	**What we will see when we've addressed this area**	• Management oversight and challenge are embedded across all service areas. Over 80% of management oversight in audits will be good or better quality. • Supervision is consistently good quality, analytical and reflective. • Management oversight improves social work practice, leading to children and young people receiving timely support and experiencing good outcomes. • Children achieve permanence in a timely way. • 100% children will have a permanence plan by their second review. • Over 90% supervision will be within timescales.

Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people
A new permanence tracker and panel has been put in place over August which will strengthen our approach to achieving permanence.

6. Effectiveness of IROs

What needs to improve

The effectiveness of child protection chairs and independent reviewing officers (IROs) to escalate, challenge and scrutinize plans for children.

What inspectors found

- Child protection chairs are not consistently effective in driving forward plans for children. Some children have been subject to protracted child protection planning, some plans lack purpose and urgency. They do not consistently advocate for children. Consequently, there are missed opportunities to act when risks increase, or changes have not happened within the child's timeframe. For example, for children who experience long-term neglect.
- Child protection chairs recognise they need to be more specific about what needs to change within the timeframe for children. Some plans are lengthy and opaque, the use of jargon makes it difficult for parents to understand what is required.
- Permanence plans are not routinely identified by the time of children's second reviews, leading to drift and delay of children's plans. For some children, IROs were not seen to actively raise this within the cared for children's review.
- IROs do not always robustly challenge the appropriateness of plans, which are not always-outcome focused, or challenge drift.
- The quality and impact of care planning for cared for children was variable. For some children, the impact of multiple social workers and IROs has resulted in drift and delay of their plans and permanence.
- For a small number of young children who live in children's homes there have been significant delays in driving their care plans forward to secure long-term permanence. This is because there has not been effective management oversight and supervision of children's care plans, and IROs do not routinely challenge drift and delay.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
IR1	Review the performance management framework for IROs to ensure that we can evidence their impact in children's plans and children's lives.	Head of Service for Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	September 2024	Complete
IR2	IROs will be included in the in-house and commissioned leadership and management development programme. This will ensure we have a consistent understanding of quality and expectations on practice and joint approach to improvement.	Principal Social Worker	IROs to be included by April 2024	Complete

IR3	Review and refresh the IRO practice standards to embed consistently good quality practice.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers	Review quarterly at service development days	Complete
IR4	Hold an IRO service development day every 3 months to embed consistently good practice.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers	Every 3 months from June 2024	Complete
IR5	Revise the guidance on IRO quality assurance alerts to support improved outcome-focused practice in line with our key improvement areas, e.g. planning, tailored visiting, and preventing drift and delay.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers	August 2024	Complete
IR6	Explore and challenge performance around permanence in performance clinics with IROs to ensure this is achieved within children's timescales.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager, Cared for Children	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
IR7	Carry out consultation and engagement sessions with cared for young people to evaluate the impact of the cared for IRO service and redesign the consultation forms for older young people.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager, Cared for Children	March 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	• Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and plans. • Themes and impact of IRO quality assurance alerts. • Percentage of plans that are good or better quality. • Number of children on CP plans over 15 months. • Percentage of repeat child protection plans. • Percentage of permanence plans at the second review.	**What we will see when we've addressed this area**	• IROs consistently drive forward plans and advocate for children. Plans are good quality, outcome-focused, and result in good outcomes for children. Over 80% plans audited will be good or better quality. • Children achieve long-term permanence in a timely way. • 100% children will have a permanence plan by their second review. • Repeat child protection plans will be under 15%.

Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people
The SLIP work in August found that IRO oversight and footprint is improving.

7. Sufficiency of placements

What needs to improve	
The sufficiency of suitable placements that can meet children and young people's assessed needs.	
What inspectors found	• When children cannot remain in the care of their birth parents, there is variability in how quickly potential carers from within the extended family are identified. • Challenges to sufficiency impact on the choice of placements and the quality of children's experiences. Some children still live in homes that do not match their needs, due to a lack of choice. Sufficiency of in-house foster carers is a challenge. • Some children experience multiple placement moves, which are unsettling for them. There are inconsistencies in management oversight and recording as to the rationale for this. • A small number of young children who now live in children's homes have experienced frequent moves in foster care placements and too many changes in social worker. Some young children live in residential children's homes for long periods of time.

Ref	**Action**	**Action Owner**	**Due by**	**Action Rating**
S1	Deliver a system which enables family led decision making to support children and young people to stay safely within families: - Develop a family network procedure - Develop training for the workforce to deliver family network meetings	Head of Service Child in Need and Child Protection	TBC	Closed
S2	Join Foster4, which will provide additional resources for fostering recruitment and training.	Head of Service Children's Provision	May 2024	Complete
S3	Work in partnership with the other local authorities to build our Foster4 offer, ensuring there is an effective front door to the fostering service so we can effectively support those who make an enquiry and increase the number of foster carers within Cheshire East.	Head of Service Children's Provision	October 2024	Complete
S4	Explore opportunities within the council to increase fostering marketing and raise awareness of fostering to increase the number of people considering fostering.	Head of Service Children's Provision	October 2024	Complete

S5	Develop specialist foster carers to support children and young people to step down from residential care.	Head of Service Children's Provision	TBC	Reviewing
S6	Develop our third Mockingbird constellation to increase support for foster carers and children and young people in foster care.	Service Manager for Fostering	September 2024	Complete
S7	Open two Cheshire East Council residential children's homes to increase the placement options for Cheshire East's young people.	Head of Service Children's Provision	Flude House to open in April 2024	Complete
			Cherry Tree House to open in July 2025	Complete
S9	Establish effective processes with relevant system partners for consideration of joint commissioning and funding arrangements of placements where there is a combination of health, education and social care needs.	Health Consultant	February 2026	On track
S10	Young people to develop recruitment questions to ask foster carers, and deliver training to the fostering panel, to ensure children and young people's voices and experiences are included in the recruitment and selection of foster carers.	Participation Lead	September 2024	Complete
S11	Develop a 'Good Homes for All' workstream and action plan to improve outcomes for cared for children. This workstream will include a care leaver ambassador to ensure the views of care experienced children and young people shape our priorities and service development.	Head of Housing Participation Team	April 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	• Increase in in-house fosters and increase in range of foster carers to support different groups, for example older young people. • Percentage of children and young people in foster care with Cheshire East carers. • Reduction in the timeframe to bring in new foster carers. • Number of children and young people with 3 or more placement moves.	**What we will see when we've addressed this area**	• When children cannot remain in the care of their birth parents, their networks are explored at an early stage to support them to remain with their wider family where possible. • There is sufficient choice of placements to meet children and young people's needs, which means children are placed in a home that is right for them.

	• Children and young people will report that their placements meet their needs and they feel safe and supported.		• Children and young people experience stable homes and placement moves are prevented/ limited wherever possible.

Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people
The Charter launch meeting with registered providers, Care Leaver Ambassadors, Children's Services and Housing will take place on 3 October. A mandatory training session for PAs on the 'to be' pathway for pre and post tenancy actions, information and support will take place on 2 October with mop up sessions planned as required. There will be a presentation of the changes at the full Housing Options and Homelessness Team meeting in November. The Care Leaver Ambassadors have been storyboarding and filming videos to support other young people with advice and information for when they move into their first homes.

Chapter 2

1. The Front Door

What inspectors found	• For some children and families, there is a delay in the step-up from early help services to statutory services. The step-up process is not as streamlined as it should be. • For a small number of children, obtaining information from partner agencies and the voice of the child can lead to a delay in decision-making when the threshold is clearly met. • Issues relating to parental consent are not always well recorded. • The multi-agency partnership is not routinely included in social care decisions about next steps to help and protect children, or, when managers make decisions to close referrals.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
FD1	Update the contact guidance to include that where the threshold for a referral is clearly met, cases must be actioned immediately. This guidance will also include ensuring consent is clearly recorded. Embed the guidance to support consistently good practice.	Service Manager Integrated Front Door	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
FD2	Review multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) arrangements in other local authorities to learn from good practice and inform the development of multi-agency decision making in the front door.	Head of Service Early Help, Prevention and Domestic Abuse Service Manager Integrated Front Door	August 2024	Complete
FD3	Hold a collaborative workshop to review the current front door provision and agree actions to establish multi-agency decision-making, informed by the inspection findings and observation of good practice in other areas.	Head of Service Front Door	January 2025	Complete
FD4	Consider chapter 3 of Working Together 2023 in the safeguarding partnership to establish agreed multi-agency working arrangements.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	April 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact

		Chair of the Safeguarding Partnership and statutory partners within the partnership		
FD5	Establish a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH), supported by effective partnership governance arrangements.	Head of Service for the Front Door	March 2026	On track

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	• Monthly multi-agency front door thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be step up to social care. These audits also consider consent and timeliness of decisions. • The percentage of contacts that are referred to children's social care completed within 24 hours.	**What we will see when we've addressed this area**	• Families stepping-up from early help services to statutory services will swiftly receive support. Over 90% of referrals to children's social care will be within 24 hours. • 90% parental consent will be well recorded. • All decisions for referrals to children's social care will be made swiftly. Over 80% referrals audited will be good quality. • The multi-agency partnership is routinely included in social care decisions about next steps to help and protect children and when managers make decisions to close referrals.

Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people
A detailed report on the progress of the front door will be received by the Improvement Board in November.

2. Strategy Meetings

What inspectors found	• Strategy meetings do not consistently capture the discussion about risk, which means that the rationale for decisions made, and next steps, is not always clear.

Ref	**Action**	**Action Owner**	**Due by**	**Action Rating**
SM1	Deliver a workshop on strategy meetings for team managers to support consistently good practice.	Service Managers CINCP	August 2024	Closed
SM2	Deliver training for unit coordinators on minute taking to support consistently good practice across the team in capturing discussions on risk.	Children and Family Service Business Support Lead	August 2024	Closed
SM3	A management analysis box to be added to the strategy discussion form to ensure a clear rationale for decisions is included.	Service Managers CINCP	June 2024	Complete
SM4	Develop partnership and managers training to strengthen partnership contributions during strategy discussions, what is recorded, and how minutes are signed off.	Partnership Training Manager Service Manager Front Door Lead Practitioners	October 2025	Delayed

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	• Strategy discussion audits within the 8-weekly multi-agency liaison meetings will tell us about the quality of strategy discussions and whether the rationale for decisions is clearly recorded.	**What we will see when we've addressed this area**	• Strategy meetings consistently capture the discussion about risk which means that the rational for decisions and next steps is clear. 90% strategy discussions will have a clear rationale for decisions.

Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people
Internal training on strategy discussions is being carried out through the practice lead training programme.

3. Life-story work and later-life letters

What inspectors found	• Life-story work and later-life letters are not usually started in a timely way. This means that children have limited opportunities to understand their journey into care at a time that is right for them.			
Ref	**Action**	**Action Owner**	**Due by**	**Action Rating**
LS1	Commission external training on life-story work to ensure practitioners understand the expectation, importance, and how to complete it.	Principal Social Worker	March 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact
LS3	Establish a process for monitoring and reviewing life-story work and later-life letters.	Service Managers Cared for Children	August 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	• Feedback from children and young people, and their carers – children will tell us they have a better understanding of their life stories.	**What we will see when we've addressed this area**	• Life-story work and later-life letters are started early so children understand why they are in care.

Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people
The new practice guidance for cared for services includes guidance on life story work.

4. Health of Cared for Children

What inspectors found	
	• Waiting lists result in some delay in children accessing emotional support services. • A small number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and young people wait too long to access emotional support and counselling due to waiting lists. • Initial and review health assessments are not always completed within appropriate timescales.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
H1	Develop prioritisation matrices/ approaches to ensure the most vulnerable children and young people are prioritised for mental health support based on an understanding of the additional and differing needs and risks for children with experience of the care system.	Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs Programme Lead for Mental Health and Neurodiversity – Cheshire East NHS ICB	March 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact
H2	Develop 'waiting well' initiatives with key health providers and third sector provision to support children and young people while they wait based on an understanding of protective factors and how they can be increased and developed in response to needs.	Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs Programme Lead for Mental Health and Neurodiversity – Cheshire East NHS ICB	March 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact
H3	Review the current emotional support offer for UASC young people in Cheshire East, taking into account any recommendations/ good practice from the Cheshire and Merseyside scoping exercise on support to UASC young people.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	August 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact
H4	Health and children's social care to jointly review the timeliness of health assessments on a six-weekly basis to support improved timeliness.	Service Manager Cared for Children Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	May 2024	Closed
H5	Develop a single point of contact for health assessments within the local authority to support increased timeliness.	Service Manager Cared for Children	May 2024	Closed
H6	Report quarterly to NHS England on out of area initial and review health assessments that are out of timescale to drive improved timeliness.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	May 2024	Closed

H7	Develop a health and wellbeing workstream and action plan to improve health outcomes for cared for children and care leavers. This workstream will include a care leaver ambassador to ensure the views of care experienced children and young people shape our priorities and service development.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	June 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact
H8	Review and streamline the process around initial health assessments to improve timeliness.	Head of Service Child in Need and Child Protection	May 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	• Waiting lists for children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS). • Timeliness of annual health assessments, initial and review health assessments.	**What we will see when we've addressed this area**	• Children and young people access children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS) without delay. 90% of non-urgent referrals receive an assessment within 6 weeks. 90% wait no more than 6 weeks between assessment and treatment. • 90% annual health assessments will be completed within timescales.

Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people

Review of initial feedback on the web based proactive support resources will be undertaken during October. Feedback so far has been positive, and resources have been adopted (and adapted where required) by Place teams across the broader Cheshire & Merseyside sub-region.

The Care Leaver Health Group is working on developing sleep packs for UAS young people as national evidence suggests this is a significant factor in good mental health for this cohort. The focus of the September Good Health and Wellbeing Workstream is emotional health of cared for children including UASC.

5. Education for Cared for Children

What inspectors found	- Too many primary-aged children in care experience attendance issues as they move into secondary school. - Personal education plans (PEPs) contain the required information, but outcomes for children in care overall are low. - Many children in care are ill-prepared for adulthood and struggle to cope with the challenges that they face when they leave care. - The identification of children and young people who are at risk of not being in employment, education or training (NEET) does not begin early enough.

Ref	**Action**	**Action Owner**	**Due by**	**Action Rating**
ED1	Review attendance through education advisors' fortnightly attendance meetings and determine clear actions for young people to improve their attendance.	Head of Service for Inclusion	April 2024	Complete
ED2	Review the plans for those with lower than 50% attendance, in alternative provision, or not in full time education, in a forum chaired by a head of service, to ensure there are clear actions on what needs to happen and there is senior leader oversight of these young people.	Head of Service for Inclusion	April 2024	Complete
ED3	Hold multi-disciplinary team meetings for individual children and young people when required to improve attendance. These meetings develop a plan to improve attendance and continue to meet until attendance has improved.	Head of Service for Inclusion	April 2024	Complete
ED4	Improve the quality of PEPs through delivering training, ensuring we are ambitious for young people, targets are SMART, and there is a clear early planning for preparing young people for adulthood and securing EET. Involve young people in the development and delivery of the training to ensure the impact of a good quality PEP is clear.	Head of Service for Inclusion	Delivery from September - December 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
ED5	Review the PEP form to ensure that this supports improvement in areas where care experienced young people attain less well than their peers, for example reading.	Head of Service for Inclusion	September 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
ED6	Report cared for children's attainment against their peers within scorecards and performance reports to drive improved performance.	Head of Service for Inclusion	February 2025	Complete but need to

				evidence impact
ED7	Audit young adults who are NEET at 20 and look what learning can be taken from their preparation for adulthood to improve our support.	Head of Service for Inclusion Service Manager for Care Leavers	March 2025	Complete
ED8	Use the risk of NEET indicators (RONI) to identify which cared for young people in Year 11 are at risk of NEET and ensure that the right support is in place to support them into EET.	Area Delivery Manager Youth Support Service – NEET and Preparing for Adulthood	November 2024	Complete

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	• Percentage attendance for cared for children. • Educational outcomes for cared for children. • PEP audits will tell us about the quality of PEPs and impact, and how well they support preparation for adulthood and prevent young people becoming NEET. • Percentage of PEPs that are good or better quality. • Percentage of young people in care in Year 12 and 13 that are NEET.	**What we will see when we've addressed this area**	• 95% attendance for all cared for children • Educational outcomes for cared for children are good and in line with their peers. • Cared for young people are well prepared for adulthood. • Identifying children and young people who are at risk of NEET begins early and helps to prevent them becoming NEET. • 95% of PEPs are graded as good or better • 90% of young people in care in Year 12 and 13 are EET.

Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people

We now have clearly established ways in which we can review attendance and determine clear next steps, ensuring there is senior management oversight of pupils with low attendance.

Our MDT process has a positive impact on the attendance of our young people over the last academic year with an average of +8% attendance from the start of the MDT process to the end. Equally, our pupil panel meeting is a forum whereby we can bring low attenders to the attention of our colleagues in social care and provides a valuable thinking space for us to discern possible ways forwards.

6. Workforce

What inspectors found	• Frequent changes in social workers impact on the quality of relationships and the progress of plans for some children, leading to delay. • Too many children have experienced changes in social worker, which means they must retell their story, and this prevents them from being able to build trusting relationships. • The impact of multiple social workers and IROs on care planning has resulted in drift and delay for some children in achieving permanence.

Ref	**Action**	**Action Owner**	**Due by**	**Action Rating**
W1	Review capacity across children's social care and supporting services to deliver the improvement plan and develop a costed proposal to the Children and Families Committee.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	July 2024	Complete
W2	Assess demand to the care leavers service and determine what capacity is needed to support allocation at 15 years 9 months and to increase support to care leavers aged 21+.	Service Manager Care Leavers	July 2024	Complete
W3	Review capacity across the two IRO teams to look at how we can create dedicated time for supporting and driving improved outcomes for care leavers.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	July 2024	Complete
W4	Reestablish a workforce, recruitment and retention group for children's social care.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	September 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
W5	Refresh the workforce strategy.	Head of HR Principal Social Worker	December 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
W6	Develop and launch a refreshed recruitment campaign to attract high quality practitioners and managers to Cheshire East.	Head of HR Principal Social Worker	November 2025	On track

W7	Develop reporting on caseloads specific to each service on what we would expect to see to support effective oversight.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care Business Intelligence Manager	August 2024	Complete
W8	Launch a level 7 apprentice scheme (a masters equivalent programme, so a shorter programme than our current BA equivalent level 6 apprenticeships) to supplement our current scheme supporting people to train as social workers with Cheshire East.	Principal Social Worker	To start in March 2025	Complete
W9	Seek practitioners' views on the support they receive to deliver good practice, workloads, and progress to date, through the practice review audits, elected member frontline visits, and walking the floor.	Executive Director of Children's Services	Quarterly review	On track
W10	Keep the children's workforce updated on developments around the inspection findings through the monthly children's newsletter and monthly talk together sessions with the DCS to ensure there is a joined up approach to improvement.	Executive Director of Children's Services	Quarterly review	Complete
W11	Seek children, young people and families' views of the support they have received through our audit process.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	Monthly	Complete
W12	Deliver a base build of children's services to ensure there is the right support to meet children's needs.	Executive Director of Children's Services	December 2025	On track

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	• Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice across all service areas and include feedback from children and families on their relationships with their workers. • Caseload data. • The percentage of social worker vacancies and the percentage turnover rate for social workers.	**What we will see when we've addressed this area**	• Social workers build effective and trusting relationships with children and families, which supports improved outcomes for children and young people. 90% young people tell us that they trust their social workers. • Teams are stable, meaning children and young people don't experience frequent changes in social worker or IROs. • Average caseloads are 15 for AYSEs, 20 for cared for, and 22 for CINCP. • 80% practitioners tell us that their caseloads are manageable and they feel well supported by managers.

Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people

A baselining activity of the children's services workforce has been completed by Heads of Service. Directors are now working with their respective Heads of Service to confirm structures. A Directors Away Day is planned for late October to progress.

The Children and Families Committee Elected Members Families First Task and Finish Group has now concluded and reported to Committee on 15 September. Reporting included sharing the proposed 4 localities that have been informed by the detailed work to support the implementation of Family Hubs and Collaboratives. The localities will form the basis of the Families First place-based multi-disciplinary model.

Services are currently looking at how they can 'lean in' to localities, and how teams might be deployed - the detail of this will be worked up during the Autumn.

Additional HR capacity has now been secured to work alongside the Children's Services leadership team to support implementation of the new shape.

We are keeping connected with Trade Unions and updates on progress are being shared with staff through webinars. A detailed plan of staff engagement regarding re-design will be developed with the support of the HR lead.

Final approval of the artwork for the refreshed recruitment campaign will take place at children's DLT on 24 September.

Chapter 3

Actions from internal assessment activities from September 2024

Entries to Care

Source	Focus on Care Planning and Children who have become Cared for since April 2024 – Report to the Improvement Board on 7 November 2024
Areas for improvement	• Too many children were coming into care in an unplanned way (58 of 116 in Q1 and Q2 2024-25). • There were 25 children who were not open to children's services before becoming cared for. • 7 children were open to early help when they came into care. • The number of unplanned entries to care include a high percentage from the use of Police Protection Powers. • Interim care orders were granted for 18 children where the Court did not endorse the care plan.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
C1	Review children's experiences and identify if there were opportunities where early help could have been offered to support them.	Head of Service for Early Help and Protection	February 2025	Complete but need to evidence impact
C2	Refresh and relaunch the early help strategy to ensure there is a strong partnership approach to delivering early help.	Head of Service for Early Help and Protection	June 2025	Complete
C3	Agree a joint protocol for responding to and managing police protection, including how police protection paperwork is shared and recorded on a child's electronic file.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	July 2025	Closed
C4	Develop a neglect strategy to ensure all agencies are responding appropriately to neglect and earlier intervention is considered where necessary.	Children's Safeguarding Partnership Business Manager Head of Early Help and Prevention	June 2025	Complete

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	• Increase in the number of children coming into care in a planned way. • Reduction in the use of Police Protection. • Reduction in the number of care plans not endorsed by the court.	**What we will see when we've addressed this area**	• Children will come into care in a planned way. There will be no unplanned entries into care unless there are legitimate reasons which the partnership feel is acceptable (by exception). • Children and families will have their needs identified early and will receive effective support that prevents issues from escalating. Children who do come into care in a planned way will have evidence of earlier intervention having taken place.
Key improvement activities delivered this month and what impact we are achieving for children and young people			
The early help strategy has now been launched across the partnership. The partnership is continuing to review the use of police protection powers.			

Children's home inspection

Source	Children's home monitoring visit – 4 February 2025
Areas for improvement	• Three requirements were restated from the last inspection in November 2024 as they were not met: ○ Written plans need to contain all known risks to children and have clear strategies for staff to follow to keep children safe. ○ Monitoring and review systems need to ensure that shortalls in the quality of care are identified and addressed. ○ Case records need to be up to date and include the information and documents listed in Schedule 3.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
CH1	Implement weekly management reviews of compliance with standards to drive improved management oversight and improved quality of practice.	Registered Manager	7 March 2025	Complete
CH2	Strengthen the regulation 44 visits and reports through delivery of training to ensure there is effective oversight of the quality of care.	Head of Service Children's Provision	March 2025	Complete
CH3	Review the recording system for residential provision within LiquidLogic to ensure this supports best practice and recording holds appropriately.	Registered Managers and Business Intelligence	March 2025	Complete

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	• Monthly regulation 44 visits and reports, considering the quality of practice and compliance with standards. • Audit by Head of Service to test monitoring and review systems in place and quality of practice.	**What we will see when we've addressed this area**	• Children's plans will contain all known risks to children, there will be clear strategies in place for staff which are followed and support children to be kept safe. • Monitoring and review systems accurately identify shortfalls in the quality of care and actions is taken swiftly to address these. • Case records are up to date and include all the information and documents listed in Schedule 3 so there is a accurate record of the child's experiences and support.

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Appendix 3 – Changes to the improvement plan actions agreed through improvement plan governance arrangements

The timescales for the following have been revised to ensure these are suitable:

Ref	Action	Original timescale	Revised timescale	Reason
CLD9	Implement a wider 18-25 accommodation offer, ensuring this is shaped by our care experienced young adults.	March 2026	July 2026	As discussed at committee in September, procurement has been delayed by 3 months due to commissioning capacity. This will delay the implementation of the new offer until July 2026. Existing contracts with our providers will be extended for this period to ensure there is no gap in our accommodation offer.
W6	Develop and launch a refreshed recruitment campaign to attract high quality practitioners and managers to Cheshire East.	August 2025	November 2025	A revised approach is being taken to the recruitment campaign which has required additional time.

The following actions are delayed:

Ref	Action	Original timescale	Reason
P7	Review children's panels and the outcomes they achieve for children (including permanence) to ensure they are effective and streamlined.	September 2025	Work is taking place to review children's panels, this is now expected to be complete by the end of November.
P10	Develop a new C&F assessment.	October 2025	The C&F assessment is being aligned with families first to ensure it is future proofed.
P12	Develop and launch a new central point for children and families resources, practice guidance and training.	September 2025	A demo of a new engagement and communication platform has been delivered. The new platform is likely to be adopted across council services which has delayed implementation.

SM4	Develop partnership and managers training to strengthen partnership contributions during strategy discussions, what is recorded, and how minutes are signed off.	October 2025	Internal training on strategy discussions has been provided by the practice leads. Partnership training has not taken place yet due to staffing capacity.

The following actions are under review:

Ref	Action	Reason
SL8	Refresh the cared for children and care leavers strategy 2022-26 and action plan together with our care leaver ambassadors.	We will be working to create a single children's services plan, so this work will be considered as part of that.
S5	Develop specialist foster carers to support children and young people to step down from residential care.	Our approach to sufficiency will be reviewed as alternative actions may have more impact.

Cheshire East TOGETHER for Children and Young People

RAG rating for actuals against targets (it is not appropriate to have targets for all indicators)	On target	Within 15% of target	More than 15% from target
Direction of travel shown between current and previous month (green indicates an improvement and amber indicates a decline)		▲	▼

Indicators of Success

The indicators below will demonstrate change achieved

Rates are calculated using the 2023 ONS mid year population estimate 0-17 of 81,634 (Office of National Statistics) and are calculated as a rate per 10,000 children aged 0-17.

ID	Early Help and Front Door Responses - Early Help and Front Door information only	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Target	SN av	Direction of travel
2	Percentage of Early Help Assessments completed within 45 working days (in month)	73.0%	84.0%	87.4%	94.0%	99.0%	96.0%	99.0%	95.0%	97.8%	98.4%	99.3%	**100%**	90.0%	N/A	▲
3	Percentage of Early Help episodes closed within the last 12 weeks who have been referred to Social Care (in month)	3.8%	4.4%	4.2%	4.5%	3.2%	7.5%	8.8%	5.5%	4.9%	4.8%	5.6%	**5.7%**	Below 8%	N/A	▲
4	Number of children stepped down from Child In Need to Early Help (in month)	29	41	18	20	9	27	31	20	22	23	27	**17**	Monitor	N/A	▼
5	Number of ChECS Contacts (in month)	865	935	747	817	933	912	1083	910	931	893	1186	**951**	Monitor	N/A	▲
6	Percentage of repeat contacts where previous contact was within previous 12 months (in month)	53.1%	53.8%	50.8%	44.5%	46.1%	45.4%	43.1%	44.9%	41.1%	41.8%	40.6%	**39.0%**	45%	N/A	▼
7	Percentage of ChECS Contact decisions made within one working day (in month)	95.3%	77.2%	89.6%	91.7%	93.3%	84.7%	82.1%	87.8%	74.2%	71.2%	69.4%	**78.5%**	90.0%	N/A	▲
8a	Number of Referrals (in month)	214	226	181	216	223	255	272	180	229	330	229	**172**	Monitor	N/A	▼
8b	Percentage of referrals leading to 'No Further Action' (in month)	9.8%	10.2%	2.8%	0.5%	1.8%	0.3%	0.3%	2.8%	2.6%	7.3%	9.6%	**10.5%**	below 10%	N/A	▲
9a	Percentage of visits within 5 working days of referral (in month)	61.8%	68.4%	58.3%	57.7%	50.8%	65.2%	55.2%	64.5%	66.7%	46.9%	59.0%	**51.7%**	90.0%	N/A	▼
9b	Percentage of referral visits within 10 working days of referral (in month)	75.0%	84.0%	79.0%	77.0%	74.0%	83.0%	83.0%	88.0%	82.0%	77.0%	85.0%	**71.0%**	90.0%	N/A	▼
10	Percentage of re-referrals within previous 12 months (rolling 12 months)	17.0%	16.0%	16.0%	16.0%	16.0%	16.0%	16.0%	16.0%	15%	16%	15%	**15%**	below 18%	19%	◀ ▶
11	Percentage of single assessments leading to closure (in month)	53.7%	52.5%	43.0%	42.8%	48.6%	46.9%	47.7%	57.1%	57.1%	50.5%	58.4%	**48.6%**	45%	N/A	▼
12	Percentage of single assessments closed with outcome of Early Help	7.8%	16.4%	13.6%	21.1%	6.9%	17.5%	10.9%	12.4%	23.1%	12.9%	19.8%	**16.8%**	25%	N/A	▼
13	Percentage/ number of strategy discussions held within 48 hours of referral date	71.1%	80.6%	69.6%	83.7%	67.8%	60.8%	57.8%	47.6%	45.7%	50.0%	70.6%	**76.9%**	90.0%	N/A	▲
14	Percentage of strategy discussions with the outcome 'Section 47 enquiry required' (in month)	59.7%	75.9%	78.5%	62.2%	68.5%	71.7%	67.3%	59.1%	64.5%	57.9%	73.8%	**60.0%**	60%	N/A	▼
15	Percentage of authorised Section 47 Enquiries with the outcome 'Convene initial child protection conference' (in month)	27.1%	24.4%	16.1%	21.7%	24.1%	20.0%	30.4%	33.6%	16.2%	31.7%	24.2%	**32.4%**	35%	N/A	▲

Narrative:

ID 5 and 8a: There is normally a seasonal dip in August of both contatcs and referrals primarily due to schools being off, and as such this is not an immediate cause for concern.

ID 8b: The % of referrals resulting in NFA has increased and relates to 18 individuals. There is one family of 7 and a further of 3 together with 4 UASC age assessments inflating the figures.

ID 13: There is a continued improvement in the % of strategy discussions (when an immediate one is required at referral) being completed within 48 hrs.

ID	Robust and effective social work practice - All of CYPFS	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Target	SN av	Direction of travel

16	Rate of Children in Need (CIN) per 10,000 children (month end snapshot)	109.4r	100.4r	106.2r	108.4r	126.4r	135.9r	134.9r	122.7r	127.4r	133.8r	122.5r	**113.1r**	105-135	N/A	▼
17	Rate of Children subject to a Child Protection Plan (CP) per 10,000 children (month end snapshot)	34.8r	34.3r	32.4r	30.4r	29.3r	28.9r	30.0r	30.6r	29.2r	30.4r	29.3r	**29.6r**	34-35	38r	▲
18	Rate of Cared for Children (CIC) per 10,000 children (month end snapshot)	68.5r	68.6r	68.6r	67.5r	67.3r	67.3r	67.4r	67.6r	66.8r	66.4r	66.3r	**66.0r**	64-66	64r	▼
19a	Percentage of single assessments completed within 45 working days (in month)	61.6%	74.4%	82.0%	66.5%	65.2%	76.0%	72.2%	86.4%	86.7%	88.8%	86.4%	**91.2%**	90.0%	87%	▲
19b	Percentage of single assessments completed within 45 working days (year to date)	72.8%	73.1%	74.0%	73.2%	72.5%	72.8%	72.7%	86.4%	86.5%	87.3%	87.0%	**87.8%**	90.0%	87%	▲
19c	Percentage of single assessments completed within 45 working days (rolling 12 months)	81.8%	80.2%	80.1%	78.4%	75.7%	74.0%	72.7%	73.4%	74.5%	76.6%	77.4%	**78.6%**	90.0%	87%	▲
20	Percentage of children seen during assessment (completed in month)	95.0%	97.80%	96.2%	99.1%	97.60%	98.2%	96.5%	96.0%	96.0%	90.1%	96.3%	**95.4%**	95.00%	N/A	▼
21	Percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 working days of Strategy Discussion (in month)	80.0%	93.9%	64.7%	66.7%	82.9%	71.4%	91.4%	87.8%	100.0%	79.4%	86.7%	**88.9%**	90.0%	79%	▲
22	Percentage of current children subject to Repeat Child Protection Plans within 2 years (month end snapshot)	11.3%	9.2%	9.8%	9.7%	8.4%	7.2%	8.2%	10.8%	11.3%	10.9%	10.0%	**10.3%**	below 15%	N/A	◀ ▶
23	Percentage of children who have a closed Child Protection plan open for 2 years or more (year to date)	2.7%	4.6%	4.1%	3.6%	3.1%	2.9%	2.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.5%	**4.5%**	below 4%	4%	◀ ▶
24	Number of children with a missing episode(s) in month	47	59	53	49	46	44	57	56	76	84	68	**44**	below 50	N/A	▼
25	Contextual Safeguarding - Number of Current Children with an active exploitation Flag (month end snapshot)	43	44	47	48	53	52	51	54	52	56	59	**56**	Monitor	N/A	▼
26	Percentage of PLO (Public Law Outline) concluding within 16 weeks	28.6%	66.7%	66.6%	40.0%	14.3%	12.5%	33.3%	35.7%	16.6%	14.2%	40.0%	**50.0%**	90.0%	N/A	▲

Narrative:
ID 17. The rate of young people being supported under a Child Protection Plan is possibly lower than we would expect given our demography.
ID 19 a - c: There has been an increase in the timeliness of assessment in Aug which has also had a positive impact on the year to date position.
ID 24: There has been a further positive reduction in the number of young people reported missing in the month of Aug. Alongside this we continue to closely monitor the take up of return to home interviews and how they inform revisions in plans to better support our young people.
ID 26: There has been a further improvement in the % of PLO concluding within 16 weeks

ID	At risk of Care, Cared for and Care Experienced Children and Young People - All of CYPFS	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Target	SN av	Direction of travel
27	Number of admissions to care in month	29	13	26	12	23	15	20	17	14	18	23	**18**	15	N/A	▼
28	Number of discharges from care in month	13	13	24	20	24	13	17	15	21	21	24	**15**	Monitor	N/A	▼
29	Number of unregistered placements – Under 16 (month end snapshot)	2	1	2	2	3	3	4	4	3	2	3	**3**	0	N/A	◀ ▶
30	Number of unregistered placements – Age 16+ (month end snapshot)	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	3	3	3	**3**	0	N/A	◀ ▶
31	Number of residential placements (month end snapshot)	40	41	42	44	49	50	51	50	45	46	51	**54**	43	N/A	▲
32	Number of children subject to Police Protection Powers (PPP) who entered care in month	8	7	8	4	5	3	4	4	3	4	8	**1**	0	N/A	▼
33	Percentage of discharges from care to Special Guardianship Order (rolling 12 months)	10.3%	9.0%	10.3%	10.6%	13.4%	12.9%	13.4%	14.5%	15.2%	16.0%	16.0%	**16.4%**	13.0%	10%	▲
34	Number of Special Guardianship Orders in place													Monitor	N/A	
35a	Number of Children in "in house" foster care provision (inc Kinship)	246	251	249	241	239	235	233	230	230	223	224	**209**	240		▼

35b	Number of Children in IFA Placements	115	121	118	114	124	121	119	130	126	131	126	**133**	Monitor		▲
35c	Percentage of children placed with 'in house' foster carers (month end snapshot)	68.1%	67.5%	67.8%	67.9%	65.8%	66.0%	66.0%	63.9%	64.6%	63.0%	64.0%	**61.1%**	70.0%	N/A	▼
35d	Total number of Mainstream Fostering Households		74	75	73	73	73	76	77	75	75	75	**74**	Monitor	N/A	▼
35e	Total number of approved Kinship Households		65	56	56	52	48	50	53	52	52	52	**54**	Monitor	N/A	▲
35f	Total number of Fostering Households		138	131	128	124	121	125	130	127	127	127	**128**	Monitor	N/A	▲
36	Short Term Placement Stability (month end snapshot)	13.3%	12.4%	11.5%	11.1%	11.7%	11.1%	11.5%	10.3%	11.0%	11.3%	12.2%	**11.0%**	11.0%	N/A	▼
37	Long Term Placement Stability (month end snapshot)	62.9%	65.3%	66.1%	67.4%	67.6%	67.6%	68.9%	69.5%	67.7%	68.6%	67.7%	**65.1%**	70.0%	N/A	▼
38a	Percentage of Initial Health Assessment Reports completed within month where paperwork was received from CE within 5 working days of admission to care	35.0%	30.0%	60.0%	77.8%	66.7%	27.3%	17.6%	53.8%	54.5%	23.5%	40.0%	**NYA**	85.0%	N/A	▲
38b	Percentage of Initial Health Assessment Reports completed within month that were completed within 20 working days of admission to care	36.0%	36.4%	60.0%	81.8%	61.9%	23.0%	20.0%	43.8%	57.1%	23.5%	52.4%	**NYA**	85.0%	N/A	▲
39	Percentage of children in care with health checks up to date	84.0%	83.0%	83.0%	86.0%	90.0%	92.0%	89.0%	88.0%	86.0%	84.0%	85.0%	**87.0%**	90.0%	85%	▲
40	Percentage of children in care with dental checks up to date	62.0%	62.0%	59.0%	57.0%	68.0%	62.0%	66.0%	86.0%	94.0%	96.0%	95.0%	**95.0%**	80.0%	75%	◀ ▶
41	Percentage of children in care with optical checks up to date														N/A	
42	Percentage of children in care with immunisations up to date	57.0%	55.0%	54.0%	53.0%	53.0%	54.0%	54.0%	81.0%	78.0%	76.0%	76.0%	**85.0%**	70%	N/A	▲
43	School attendance rate for children known to Social Care - statutory school age in Cheshire East schools only (month end snapshot for academic year)	87%	87%	87%	86%	86%	86%	86%	85%	85.4%	84.8%	84.1%	**84.0%**	89.0%	N/A	▼
44	Number of Children in Care without a School Placement - statutory school age	5	3	3	3	5	7	8	8	7	5	6	**6**	0	N/A	◀ ▶
45	Number of Children in Care with a Current Suspension - statutory school age	11	15	27	32	36	38	40	40	44	47	47	**47**	below 20	N/A	◀ ▶
46	Number of Children in Care with a Current Permanent Exclusion - statutory school age	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	N/A	◀ ▶
47a	Percentage of Care Leavers aged 17 to 18 in Education, Employment or Training (month end snapshot)	75.0%	70.0%	74.0%	76.0%	74.0%	69.0%	65.0%	69.0%	67.0%	67.0%	67.0%	**65.0%**	77.0%	66%	▼
47b	Percentage of Care Leavers aged 17 to 18 in Suitable Accommodation (month end snapshot)	93.0%	93.0%	99.0%	97.0%	97.0%	98.0%	96.0%	97.0%	93.0%	93.0%	95.0%	**97.0%**	95.0%	87%	▲
48a	Percentage of Care Leavers aged 19 to 21 in Education, Employment or Training (month end snapshot)	55.0%	59.0%	61.0%	66.0%	68.0%	66.0%	63.0%	63.0%	64.0%	65.0%	64.0%	**65.0%**	60.0%	56%	▲
48b	Percentage of Care Leavers aged 19 to 21 in Suitable Accommodation (month end snapshot)	86.0%	92.0%	95.0%	97.0%	97.0%	95.0%	96.0%	97.0%	97.0%	96.0%	95.0%	**95.0%**	95.0%	87%	◀ ▶

Narrative:
ID:29 & 30: As at the end of Aug the 6 unregistered placements relate to specialist provision. 3 currently inspected by CQC and all notified to Ofsted.
ID 33: There is a continued increase in the numbers of individuals being able to leave care and be supported in homes via special guardianship orders.
ID 47a-48b:In the main we are demonstrating improved outcomes for our Care Leavers however there is still more to do to increase the % of 17-18 year olds in EET.

ID	Quality Assurance and Audit (safeguarding) - All of CYPFS	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Target	SN av	Direction of travel
49	Timeliness of Reviews of Child Protection Plans (month end snapshot)	75.0%	93.4%	92.9%	97.0%	91.9%	90.0%	100.0%	100.0%	97.60%	100.0%	100.0%	**100.0%**	90-95%		◄ ►
50	Timeliness of Reviews of Children in Care (month end snapshot)	63.4%	68.4%	78.0%	74.0%	77.1%	71.1%	91.3%	80.2%	80.0%	81.9%	91.7%	**90.3%**	90-95%		▼
51	Number of Informal quality assurance practice alerts	3	0	1	3	7	11	2	0	0	0	0	**0**	Monitor		◄ ►
52	Number of formal quality assurance practice alerts	0	1	0	1	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	**0**	Monitor		◄ ►
53	Number of good practice alerts	3	8	9	5	4	7	5	5	2	9	10	**8**	Monitor		▼

Narrative:
ID 49: Child protection plan review timescales has remained at 100% for 3 consecutive months which is the best possible outcome for our young people.
ID 50: Although a slight dip, the timeliness of children in care reviews remains in line with target.

ID	Quality Assurance and Audit (auditing) - All of CYPFS	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Target	SN av	Direction of travel
54	Overall number of collaborative or thematic audits completed	6	6	6	6	6	4	14	12	16	18	24	**47**	6 per month	N/A	▲
55	Overall percentage of audits completed within timescale	100%	100%	83%	100%	83%	67% (4)	74% (14)	41%(5)	31%(5)	50% (9)	54%	**74% (35)**	100%	N/A	▲
56	Overall percentage of audits graded as good or better following moderation	17% (1)	0%	50% (3)	17% (1)	33% (2)	25% (1)	38% (3)	33% (4)	14% (2)	28% (5)	38% (9)	**28% (13)**	80%+	N/A	▼
57	Overall percentage of audits graded as 'does not yet meet good' following moderation	83% (5)	100% (6)	50% (3)	83% (5)	67% (4)	75% (3)	62%(5)	67% (8)	86% (14)	72% (13)	62% (15)	**72% (34)**	40.0%	N/A	▼
58	The % of audits that were down graded at moderation	83% (5)	17% (1)	0%	0%	33% (2)	25% (1)	13% (1)	25% (3)	14%(1)	33% (4)	17% (4)		10%	N/A	
59	Overall number of family help audits completed	6			7			9	6	6	5	6	**5**	6	N/A	▼
60	Overall percentage of family help audits graded as good or better following moderation	83%			43%			43%	0%	33%	40%	67%	**40%**	55%	N/A	▼
61	Overall percentage of family help audits graded as 'does not yet meet good' following moderation	17%			57%			57%	100%	67%	60%	33%	**60%**	30%	N/A	▼
62	The % of family help audits that were down graded at moderation	0%			0%			22%	0%	33%	20%	0%	**20%**	15%	N/A	▼
63	Overall number of Multiagency audits completed	5			27						6	15		25	N/A	

Narrative:
ID 54 & 58: In August thematic audits were completed which were not moderated
ID 55: There is a positive improvement in both the number and % of audits being completed in a timely manner.

ID	A Stable and able workforce - All of CYPFS	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Target		Direction of travel
64	Early Help / Targeted Support - Average Caseload													20		
65	Children's Social Work - CIN/CP Average Caseload	24	19	19	20	21	22	21	20	20	22	20	**20**	17		◄ ►
66	Children's Disability Team - Average Caseload	23	21	25	22	21	22	20	17	15	20	20	**19**	20		▼
67	Cared for Children Service - Average Caseload (not inc Fostering Service))	17	17	17	17	17	17	16	16	16	16	15	**16**	17		▲

68	Care Leavers - Average Caseload	14	14	15	14	16	16	13	13	13	13	13	**13**	18		◄ ►
69	Unallocated cases at month open where referral is over 3 working days	9	10	1	11	1	4	6	8	5	2	5	**4**	4		▼
70	Percentage of Social Workers with more than 20 children allocated (month end snapshot)	55.6%	36.7%	37.4%	42.4%	39.6%	48.4%	43.0%	41.0%	33%	45%	30%	**32%**	35%		▲
71	Percentage of Case Supervisions in time – CIN/CP Teams (month end snapshot (all workers))	79.0%	73.0%	66.0%	59.0%	62.0%	65.0%	68.0%	88.0%	80.0%	79.0%	77.0%	**80.0%**	95%		▲
72	Percentage of Case Supervision's in time – Cared for Team (month end snapshot (all workers))	64.0%	56.0%	60.0%	52.0%	58.0%	55.0%	51.0%	71.0%	**72.0%**	75.0%	83.0%	**64.0%**	95%		▼
73	Percentage of Case Supervision's in time – Care Leavers Service (month end snapshot (social workers))	98.0%	67.0%	66.0%	43.0%	61.1%	40.0%	12.0%	62.0%	**43.0%**	41.0%	48.0%	**78.0%**	95%		▲
74	Percentage of Case Supervision's in time – Care Leavers Service (month end snapshot (PA's))	94.0%	74.0%	75.0%	69.0%	68.0%	78.0%	68.0%	59.0%	**66.0%**	68.0%	82.0%	**76.0%**	95%		▼
75	Percentage of Case Supervision's in time – Children's Disability Team (month end snapshot (all workers))	68.0%	79.0%	70.0%	73.0%	76.0%	63.0%	61.0%	71.0%	94.0%	98.0%	70.0%	**89.0%**	95%		▲
76	Percentage of Case Supervision's in time – Court team (month end snapshot (all workers))						34.0%	20.0%	10.0%	95.0%	78.0%	24.0%	**26.0%**	95%		▲
77	Percentage of Foster Carer Supervision – Fostering Service (month end snapshot)	89.0%	79.6%	90.0%	82.4%	76.0%	87.2%	90.9%	80.0%	86.8%	85.0%	78.0%	**70.0%**	95%		▼
78	Turnover rate for Social Workers (month end snapshot)	24.7%	16.7%	18.5%	18.5%	21.1%	24.2%	25.3%	26.2%	25.8%	22.2%	17.4%	**24.1%**	15%		▲
79	Vacancy rate for Social Workers (month end snapshot)	28.8%	26.5%	26.5%	25.6%	23.6%	28.7%	32.0%	29.9%	28.7%	27.4%	20.7%	**28.5%**	25%		▲
80	Sickness Average Days Lost Per FTE (Rolling Year) - CYPFS department as a whole	6.76	11.26	10.57	10.85	10.05	12.42	13.42	13.82	13.83	14.19	14.47	**15.22**	10		▲

Narrative:
ID 65 & 70: Whilst we continue to remain steady, the average caseloads in CIN/CP is higher than we would like. Together with the upward trend in the % of workers with more than 20 allocated we just need to ensure this doesn't impact on young people being supported. It is also crucial that these workers remain supported via supervision so it is positive to see the number completed in timescales improving in the CIN/CP teams.
ID 78&79: Both turnover and vacancy rates have increased which can have a detrimental impact on both the young people we work with and pressures on the teams themselves.
ID 80: Whilst there has been an increase this is due to a reduction in overall FTE numbers rather than significantly more individuals off sick.

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Children and Families Committee
Work Programme 2025 - 26

Report Reference	Title	Purpose of Report	Lead Officer	Consultation	Equality Impact Assessment	Part of Budget and Policy Framework	Exempt Item	Comments
19 January 2026								
CF/06/25-26	Medium Term Financial Strategy Consultation 2026/27 to 2029/30 Provisional Settlement	To provide feedback in relation to their financial responsibilities as identified within the Constitution and linked to the budget alignment approved by the Finance Sub-Committee in March 2025.	Executive Director of Resources, Section 151 Officer	No	No	Yes	No	Scrutiny and Decision
CF/24/25-26	Improvement Plan Progress	To update committee on progress against the improvement plan to address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) in February and March 2024, and to ensure committee can scrutinise impact on outcomes for children and young people To update committee on the findings of the third Ofsted monitoring visit	Director of Commissioning, Quality Assurance and Partnerships	No	No	No	No	Scrutiny
CF/35/25-26	Crisis and Resilience Fund 2026 - 2029 - Delivery Plan	Approval of the Crisis and Resilience Fund Delivery proposal for 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29.	Executive Director Children's Services	No	Yes	Yes	No	Decision
CF/40/25-26	SEND, AP and Sufficiency Strategy	To update committee on the proposal to refresh the SEND, AP and Sufficiency Strategy and to present revised options regarding the expansion of Specialist provision within Cheshire East.	Director for Education, Strong Start and Integration	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	Decision
CF/44/25-26	Formal Consideration of the Local	To present the findings of the Ombudsman's investigation and seek formal consideration and noting of the	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	No	No	No	No	Scrutiny

	Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Report	conclusions, including the Council's response and amended practices.						
16 February 2026								
CF/05/25-26	Third Financial Review 2025/26	To scrutinise and comment on the Third Financial Review and Performance position of 2024/25, and (if necessary) approve Supplementary Estimates and Virements.	Executive Director of Resources, Section 151 Officer	No	No	Yes	No	Scrutiny
CF/33/25-26	Schools Funding Formula and Early Years Funding Formula 2026/27	This report will provide committee with an update on the Dedicated School Grant (DSG) for 2026/27 and request approval for the allocation of each sub block making up the DSG. It will request approval of the schools funding formula and early years funding formula following recommendations from the Schools Forum. It will also request approval to provide delegated authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to use the funds in accordance with the relevant guidance and proposed funding formula methods.	Executive Director Children's Services	Yes	No	TBC	No	Decision
CF/46/25-26	New Primary school at Basford East, near Weston, Crewe - Update for members on the recent public consultation.	Report to Note - As detailed in the 15th September committee report, an update to be provided for members on the recent public consultation for the new Primary school at Basford East, near Weston, Crewe	Director for Education, Strong Start and Integration	Yes	Yes	No	No	Scrutiny
13 April 2026								
CF/07/25-26	Service Budgets 2026/27	To set out the allocation of approved budgets for 2025/26 for services under the Committee's remit, as determined by Finance Sub Committee	Executive Director of Resources, Section 151 Officer	No	No	Yes	No	Scrutiny
CF/45/25-26	Home to School Transport Task	To update committee on the findings from the Home to School Transport Task & Finish Group	Executive Director of Children's Services	No	No	No	No	Decision

	& Finish Group Scrutiny Report							

Task and Finish Groups

Group	Membership	Established	Purpose
Review of Home to School Transport - This is a cross-directorate Task & Finish Group with Highways & Transport Committee	C & F - Cllrs M Beanland, L Crane, E Gilman, B Puddicombe H & T -	April 2025	This project will enable members of both Highways & Transport Committee and Children & Families Committee to jointly scrutinise the Councils' arrangements for provision of Home-to-School Transport, including SEND. The Council provides transport for approximately 4000 students to educational establishments in the borough and beyond. The MTFS provides an increase in budget (FY2025-26) of £1.5 million with further growth expected in future years. Transport services make up 17% of the overall children's revenue budget. There have been recent planned changes to the council's policies, procedures and procurement arrangements for home-to-school transport and members are interested to understand the effectiveness of these and what else can be done to ensure services provide value-for-money.
Families First Programme	Cllrs L Crane, S Bennett-Wake, E Gilman, G Hayes, G Smith, Cllr J Saunders	May 2025	The objectives of this project are: • To understand the rationale and evidence base for place-based locality working and locality proposals for multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working for children and families in Cheshire East. • To understand how this links to the Families First Partnership approach and the requirement to implement the reforms and be up and running by 31st March 2026. • To contribute towards the development of the Families First Partnership plans.
Review of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's)	TBC	TBC	TBC

Children and Families Committee
Work Programme 2025 - 26

Briefing Reports/Reports for noting

Title	Purpose of Report	Lead Officer	Expected Circulation Date via the Members Hub
Information Briefing on the recently submitted 2025 Schools CAPacity Return (SCAP)	To report on the outcome of the 2025 primary and secondary mainstream and specialist placements forecasts which will be submitted to the Department of Education (DfE). The forecasts will ultimately inform the amount of Basic Need grant awarded to the authority for the 2028/2029 academic year. Notification of any award is usually received around April / May of the following year.	Jo Prophet	September 2025.

Note: These reports will be circulated outside of committee meetings - Library folder - Reports for Noting - Reports for Noting | Cheshire East Council