

Cared For Children and Care Leavers Committee

Agenda

Date: Tuesday 24th June 2025
Time: 2.00 pm
Venue: The Capesthorpe Room - Town Hall, Macclesfield SK10 1EA

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 top of each report.

It should be noted that Part 1 items of Cheshire East Council decision making meetings are audio recorded and the recordings will be uploaded to the Council's website.

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

1. **Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair**

To appoint a Chair and Vice Chair for the 2025/26 municipal year.

2. **Apologies for Absence**

3. **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.

4. **Minutes of Previous Meeting** (Pages 3 - 6)

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2025.

For requests for further information

Contact: Jennifer Ashley

E-Mail: CheshireEastDemocraticServices@cheshireeast.gov.uk

5. **Review of the Terms of Reference** (Pages 7 - 12)

To review the committee's terms of reference as required on an annual basis.

6. **Update from the Corporate Parenting Executive Board** (Pages 13 - 16)

To receive an update from the April 2025 meeting of the Corporate Parenting Executive Board.

7. **Fostering Service Annual Report** (Pages 17 - 40)

To receive the Fostering Service Annual Report 2024/25.

8. **Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee Quarter 4 Scorecard**
(Pages 41 - 52)

To consider the performance of the Cared for Children and Care Leavers service for quarter 4 of 2024-25.

Membership: Councillors M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, D Clark, L Crane, R Fletcher, E Gilman, G Hayes, S Holland, R Moreton, B Posnett, B Puddicombe and J Saunders (Vice-Chair)

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the
Cared For Children and Care Leavers Committee
held on Tuesday, 4th March, 2025 in the Capesthorne Room - Town Hall,
Macclesfield SK10 1EA

PRESENT

Councillor C Bulman (Chair)

Councillors M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, E Gilman, G Hayes, S Holland,
S Adams, H Seddon, L Wardlaw and J Snowball

Officers:

Josie Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer
Richard Nash, Interim Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care
Lisa Davies, Interim Improvement Director Children's Services
Theresa Leavy, Interim Executive Director of Children's Services (joined
remotely via Microsoft Teams)
Annemarie Parker, Head of Service – Cared for Children and Care Leavers
Annie Britton, Participation Lead
Nicola Wycherley, Designated Nurse Cared for Children, Integrated Care
Board

28 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Clark, B Posnett,
B Puddicombe and J Saunders.

Councillors H Seddon, S Adams, J Snowball and L Wardlaw attended as
substitutes.

29 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

30 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2024 be agreed as a
correct record.

31 UPDATE FROM THE SHADOW CARED FOR CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS COMMITTEE

The committee received a presentation from the Care Leaver Ambassadors from the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Shadow Committee.

The presentation provided an overview of the participation in the Children's Services improvement plan. Key points included:

- That the care leaver ambassadors have reviewed the Pathway Plan and provided feedback to the Care Leaver Service, such as ensuring it is easily understandable, making the questions relevant to the young person, the need to listen to young people and their pathway plans, and the importance of asking young people who they would like to attend their review
- The care leaver ambassadors have been working with the Commissioning Team to gather views of care experienced young people about supported accommodation to be included in the upcoming contract tender process
- The ambassadors met with Peter Cartledge to discuss the Junction 16+ app which was designed to communicate and provide information and support to care leavers in Cheshire East
- Young people had participated in the supported accommodation feedback survey

32 UPDATE FROM THE CORPORATE PARENTING EXECUTIVE BOARD

The committee received an update on the work of the Corporate Parenting Executive Board.

It was highlighted that there was an overview of workstreams 1, 2 and 3 on the first page of the update document within the agenda pack. With regard workstream 1, Good Homes for All, it was acknowledged that it was essential to be joined up on accommodation at every stage.

The update document included data around areas that the Executive Board wanted to understand more and improve.

The Chair congratulated officers on 86% of PEPs rated as good or outstanding, included within the virtual school scorecard.

33 CHILDREN IN CARE ANNUAL REPORT

The committee received the Children in Care Annual Report for 2023-24. The report on Health Outcomes for Cheshire East Cared for Children and Care Experienced Young People was also presented alongside this report.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

34 HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR CHESHIRE EAST CARED FOR CHILDREN AND CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

The committee received the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside report on health outcomes.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

35 INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT

The committee received the Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report for 2023-24.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

36 CARED FOR CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS COMMITTEE QUARTER 3 SCORECARD

The committee received the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee Q3 scorecard for 2024-25.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

37 HEALTH REPORT FOR CHESHIRE EAST CARED FOR CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS COMMITTEE

The committee received the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside quarter 3 report for 2024/25.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 3.10 pm

Councillor C Bulman (Chair)

OPEN

Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee

24 June 2025

Review of the Terms of Reference

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

Ward(s) Affected: All wards

Purpose of Report

- 1 To review the committee's terms of reference as required on an annual basis.
- 2 The Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee contributes to delivering the priority in the council's Corporate Plan 2025-29 to ensure that Children and young people thrive and reach their potential with targeted support when and where they need it.

Executive Summary

- 3 This report requests that the committee's terms of reference are reviewed as this is required on an annual basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee is recommended to:

1. Review and approve the terms of reference for the committee (appendix 1)

Reasons for Recommendations

- 4 The constitution requires that the terms of reference (appendix 1) are reviewed on an annual basis.

Other Options Considered

Option	Impact	Risk
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Do not review or approve the terms of reference	Committee will not be compliant with its own terms of reference within the constitution	There is a risk that the committee is not fulfilling its terms of reference
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Implications and Comments

5 *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

The constitution requires that the terms of reference (appendix 1) are reviewed on an annual basis.

6 *Section 151 Officer/Finance*

There are no financial implications or changes required to the MTFS as a result of the recommendation in this report.

7 *Human Resources*

There are no Human Resources implications.

8 *Risk Management*

The Committee has a role in overseeing and scrutinising the quality of services to cared for children and young people and care leavers, and ensuring that risks that could impact on the quality of services are prevented or effectively mitigated.

9 *Impact on Other Committees*

This committee is a sub committee of the Children and Families Committee and will report to them as necessary.

10 *Policy*

Commitment 1: Unlocking prosperity for all	Commitment 2: Improving health and wellbeing	
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11 *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

There are no implications for equality, diversity or inclusion.

12 *Other implications*

The Committee aims to improve the outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people. Children and Young People including Cared for

Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are present in all communities in Cheshire East.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Jennifer Ashley
Appendices:	Appendix 1: Terms of Reference
Background Papers:	None

Appendix 1

Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee (formerly the Corporate Parenting Committee)

Membership: 12 Councillors

Additionally the Committee is informed by representative young people from My Voice (Cheshire East's Children in Care Council) to advise the Committee.

The Chair is the Lead Member for Children and Families Committee.

Functions

1. The purpose of the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee in its role as an advisory committee to the Children and Families Committee is to ensure that the Council effectively discharges its role as Corporate Parent for all children and young people in care and care leavers from 0- 25 years of age and holds partners to account for the discharge of their responsibilities.
2. The Committee's responsibilities include:
 - 2.1 acting as advocate for cared for children and care leavers, ensuring that their needs are addressed through key plans, policies and strategies throughout the Council and its commissioned services;
 - 2.2 ensuring key strategic plans relating to children in care and care leavers are in place and are delivered including the Cared for Children and Care Leavers' Strategy, Sufficiency Statement and Children and Young People's Plan;
 - 2.3 overseeing the implementation of Cheshire East's Cared for Children and Care Leavers' Strategy and action plan and monitoring the quality and effectiveness of services to ensure that they fulfil the Council's responsibilities;
 - 2.4 oversight and scrutiny of the quality of care delivered in residential children's homes for Cheshire East children and young people through visits and reports, including summary reports of Ofsted inspections;
 - 2.5 reviewing the performance of the Council in relation to outcomes for children and young people in care via the scrutiny of both quarterly performance reports and annual reports including the Health of Cared for Children and Care Leavers, the Virtual School, Fostering and the Independent Reviewing Service;
 - 2.6 establishing an environment whereby Councillors and young people work together to address the needs and aspirations of Cheshire East's

children and young people in care and empower children and young people to participate in decision making with adults;

- 2.7 overseeing with the Children and Families Committee the implementation of best practice principles in all aspects of service delivery, with the aim of producing positive outcomes for children and young people in care;
- 2.8 supporting the work of foster carers and adopters in making a difference to the care and support they provide;
- 2.9 making sure that staff and partners commit to follow the pledges to cared for children and young people and care leavers set out in the Cared for Children and Care Leavers' Strategy.

Governance

- 3. The Committee will:
 - 3.1 meet quarterly;
 - 3.2 report to the Children and Families Committee on at least an annual basis; and
 - 3.3 review its terms of reference annually.
- 4. The Committee will be serviced by Democratic Services.
- 5. Minutes and agendas will be distributed and published no later than 5 clear working days prior to the meeting.

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Corporate Parenting Executive Board Update – June 2025

Overview

The most recent Corporate Parenting Executive Board meeting took place on 28th May 2025. The meeting covered updates from the three workstream areas and performance updates from the virtual school and corporate parenting scorecard. The board also approved the document in relation to care leavers entitlements, subject to some minor amendments.

Workstreams Overview

1. Good Homes for All

A housing workshop took place on 22 May with 10 of our housing providers to develop a Charter for Care Experienced Young People. 4 of our youth ambassadors attended to share their experiences. It was a positive workshop, and providers were keen to support the charter. A review of the Tenancy Ready training is being planned, which will review the existing provision, and consider alternative options and internal and external delivery methods. A dedicated Officer within Cheshire Homechoice has been identified to be the key contact for care experienced young people.

The area of focus for the next period is pre and post tenancy information and support, mapping out the existing offers, looking for gaps and improvements and developing the charter for care experienced young people. The review of the Tenancy Ready training will form a key part of the group's activity, as well as responding to feedback from the Local Offer where this is not currently being considered in other groups.

2. Good Health and Well-being

The first 2 meetings of this group have taken place with good engagement and attendance and the focus areas agreed are:

- Communicating our local offer for health
- Health assessment timeliness
- Migrant young people
- Substance and alcohol misuse

Positive impact was reported to the last board in relation to health and wellbeing, including:

- 100% uptake of care leaver summaries to ensure timely identification of health needs and better-informed care planning.
- Improved dental health tracking includes a new system implemented since August/September to track which cared for children have a dentist and have been seen in the last 12 months. This supports early intervention and better oral health outcomes.
- Pure Insight's wraparound service—including mentoring, trauma therapy, and wellbeing support—is being incorporated into the improvement plan. This flexible model supports young people aged 16–28 with short waiting times and tailored care.

- Tailored UASC Support: Continued engagement with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) has helped reduce isolation and improve access to health services. Feedback mechanisms are being developed to further tailor support.
- Substance Misuse Awareness and Action: Concerns over ketamine and synthetic opioid use have led to the development of a training plan for staff and plans to disseminate drug education through family and care leaver hubs. The Local Drug Information System (LDIS) is being promoted for real-time intelligence.

3. Good Education and Skills

An action plan workshop took place I with partners to map out priorities in relation to this workstream. Task and finish groups will then be established to progress actions. This will be reported to the next board, along with progress against the plan.

Key Data Exceptions & Next Steps

The meeting reviewed two key scorecards – the Virtual School Scorecard and the Corporate Parenting Scorecard – to assess service performance and outcomes for children and young people.

Virtual School

The group discussed some of the issues in being able to access some data, including for under 5's, which is not easily reportable, particularly if they are out of area. There will be a data workstream as part of our Education and Skills workstream to address these issues.

Data for “Number of Primary pupils with less than 50% and 90% attendance” has stayed consistent and actions are clear with schools. Further work is needed to understand secondary school attendance as this has recently increased and we need to understand why. A report will also be provided to the next board on whether children who have a long-term placement/ SGO/ adoption order impacts positively on school attendance at the next meeting.

We continue to have no permanent exclusions; a team around the school has been established to support and understand what we need to do together to keep this number at zero.

Corporate Parenting Scorecard

The group discussed the percentage of children and young people involved in their reviews, which is very good at 96%.

The number of 16–18-year-old care leavers that are NEET has doubled in the last quarter. Further work is underway to understand this and will be reported to the next board.

The number of children in care living with relatives and friends has decreased slightly. We would want to support children staying with extended family members when they are placed away from parents.

The percentage of currently cared for children who have had a C&F assessment in the last 12 months is currently down to 61%. Work is under way to improve practice in this area.

It is positive that the percentage of 17-18 former relevant care leavers in suitable accommodation and 19-21 former relevant care leavers in suitable accommodation are currently at 96%. However, we are ambitious for our young people and would want this to be 100% so are looking at what barriers there are to achieve this.

The 2025/26 scorecard is being updated to reflect the new corporate parenting priorities.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Executive Board will take place on 30 July 2025.

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Cheshire East

TOGETHER for Children and Young People

Together we will make Cheshire East a great place to be young

Cheshire East Fostering Service Annual Report

April 2024– March 2025



Contents

Section	Page
1. Background	3
2. Overview	3
3. Foster4	3-4
4. Staff Overview	4
5. Cared for Children Data	4-6
6. Foster Carer Recruitment, Reviews and Resignations	7-10
7. Recruitment and Marketing	11-13
8. Training	14-18
9. Fostering Family Events and Community Engagement	19
10. Kinship and SGO	19-20
11. The Mockingbird Family Model	20-21
12. Complaints	21
13. Service summary	22
14. Action Plan	22-23

1. Background

This report provides an overview of the work of Cheshire East Council Fostering Service, during the financial year April 2024 to March 2025. The report provides information on our work as a fostering service, including the kinship service, mockingbird and in-house placement service. The report aims to give an overview of the last 12 months and recommendations for the coming year ahead.

2. Overview

Cheshire East is a well-established, dynamic local authority fostering service, offering a comprehensive range of services, from the recruitment and assessment of mainstream foster carers to the evaluation, training, support, and supervision of family and friends (kinship) carers. The fostering service has offices in Crewe and Macclesfield, though most staff maintain a flexible working arrangement, with a mix of 50% office-based presence and 50% remote work. The service operates across the entire Cheshire East area, covering a large geographic region.

The fostering service recruits, trains, and supports both mainstream and kinship carers, ensuring that children and young people are placed in high-quality foster homes near their family, friends, and schools. It is a regulated service, subject to inspection under the Care Standards Act 2000. Our goal is to provide stable, high-quality internal placements for children, with carers who can meet their needs and receive ongoing support, supervision, and training.

Our service is built on strong relationships between foster carers, children, and social workers. We actively work in partnership with foster carers, ensuring they have a voice in the development of the service. This year, we have continued to make strides in enhancing our consultations with foster carers and improving their involvement in service development through a number of groups and walk and talk sessions.

Where possible, we aim to support children within their own families by providing the necessary services to keep them safe. When this is not feasible, children are placed with extended family members as kinship carers in their community, whenever it is safe and appropriate to do so.

The Head of Service is responsible for the strategic direction of the fostering service, including overseeing the Fostering Service Manager and is the Agency Decision Maker. The Fostering Service Manager ensures that the service complies with statutory duties and meets the National Minimum Standards (NMS) and Fostering Regulations. These standards, together with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, form the regulatory framework for fostering services under the Care Standards Act 2000.

3. Foster4



In May 2024, Cheshire East Council partnered with seven other local authorities, Cheshire West and Chester, Warrington, Liverpool, Knowsley, Halton, St. Helens, and Wirral, under the Foster4 initiative. This pioneering regional recruitment strategy highlights a strong commitment to ensuring

that children from Cheshire East are placed with carers from within Cheshire and neighboring areas. It also emphasises the importance of working together to support cared for children, ensuring they stay within their local authority, rather than moving to independent fostering agencies. Keeping children within Cheshire helps achieve key goals, such as maintaining strong ties with their birth families, allowing children to stay at their current school, and ensuring they remain connected to their community. After completing the first year of this collaboration, we are starting to see significant improvements in fostering referrals.

4. Staff Overview

The fostering service is supported by the Head of Service for Children's Provision alongside the Service Manager who is the operational lead alongside four Team Managers. The team operates across a broad remit, with key areas of focus including mainstream and kinship assessments, marketing and recruitment, the Mockingbird programme, fostering panel coordination and advice, carer support and supervision, training and development, placement matching, and out-of-hours support, which is delivered through our dedicated Family Support Workers.

Administrative and logistical support is provided by our Unit Coordinators, who are responsible for tasks such as taking minutes at panel meetings and managing email and telephone communications.

Of the 42 team members, 10 are currently agency staff. However, one agency Team Manager has recently been appointed to a permanent role following a successful recruitment process. Over the past year, there has been an increased reliance on agency staff due to maternity leave cover and staff sickness. Additionally, the volume of kinship care work, much of it driven by court-directed timescales, has grown substantially, prompting an expansion in staffing establishment to meet demand.

The team brings a wealth of professional experience and demonstrates strong commitment and passion in supporting children, carers, and families.

Looking ahead, the service will prioritise strengthening the Team Manager role to ensure consistent leadership and enhanced support for the Service Manager. There is also a focus on securing specialist training to promote staff resilience and enhance performance management across the service.

There also needs to be on-going conversations around the growth on the kinship work, to meet demand. To try and proactively address this, we have merged the mainstream and kinship assessors to enable them to be multiskilled and create one team. Whilst the team will have their specialisms, the creation of one assessment team, aims to share court directed work more fairly and ensure caseloads remain manageable.

5. Cared for Children data

At the end of the 2024/25-year Cheshire East had 550 cared for children. During the year this has been as low as 526 and as high as 562, however has generally remain quite stable.

Month	Number		Age Band	28-Mar
Apr-24	528		0 to 4	114
May-24	526		5 to 10	131

Jun-24	534		11 to 15	184
Jul-24	545		16+	121
Aug-24	540		TOTAL	550
Sep-24	556			
Oct-24	556			
Nov-24	562			
Dec-24	547			
Jan-25	547			
Feb-25	547			
Mar-25	550			

Of the 550 children at the end of March 2025, 235 (66.19%) children were placed with Cheshire East Foster Carers either through mainstream carers or kinship carers, compared with 119 children placed with Independent Foster Carers (IFAs).

Placement Type	0 to 4	5 to 10	11 to 15	16+	Total 31/03/25
Relative/Friend	23	21	21	6	71
CE Foster Care	32	31	37	20	120
External Foster Care (IFA)	18	30	51	20	119
Regulation 24 placement (going through assessment process)	7	18	15	4	44

The number of children who are long term matched with their foster carers is as follows:

Long term Matched	Number	%
CE Foster Care	33	28%
Family & Friends Foster Care	52	73%
External Foster Care	31	26%

We know that by placing children with Cheshire East mainstream carers or with kinship carers increases the chance of children remaining within the borough and enables them to continue to be apart of their communities, with better outcomes. Of the 354 (52.26%) children placed within foster care, 185 children remain within Cheshire East in in-house provision, compared with 31 (8.75%) children placed with IFAs demonstrating

Placement Type	IN	OUT	Total
Relative/Friend	54	17	71
CE Foster Care	104	16	120
External Foster Care	31	88	119
Regulation 24 placement	27	17	44

The Ethnicity of our cared for children:

Ethnicity	0 to 4	5 to 10	11 to 15	16+	Total
White British	101	109	142	77	429
White Other	4	4	13	5	26
Any other asian background	0	1	3	10	14
Pakistani	0	1	0	0	1
African	0	0	2	9	11
Black Caribbean	0	1	0	1	2
Any other black background	0	0	0	1	1
Chinese	0	1	0	1	2
Other Mixed Background	3	5	5	2	15
White asian	1	2	5	1	9
White & Black African	0	0	1	2	3
White and Black Caribbean	0	2	4	2	8
Information Not Yet Obtained	1	1	0	0	2
Other Ethnic group	0	0	4	6	10
Bangladeshi	1	1	0	1	3
Traveller of Irish Heritage	0	0	0	1	1
Gypsy / Roma	2	2	4	1	9
Indian	1	1	1	1	4
Total	114	131	184	121	550

6. Foster Carer Recruitment, Reviews and Resignations

During the last year the service has successfully recruited 45 new carers to our fostering service. The types of carers recruited and registered were 10 new foster carers within our mainstream provision, 35 new kinship carers.

Year to date summary Mainstream

Foster carers:

<i>Conversion to EOI</i>	23.86%
<i>Conversion to Initial Visit</i>	12.18%
<i>Conversion to Assessment</i>	13.71%
<i>Conversion to Approval</i>	5.08%

These figures represent a **50%** increase in respect of mainstream fostering approvals compared to the previous year, however the increase is not as much as the service would have liked, this is **in-line** with the experience of other Local Authorities and assessed as being linked to the cost-of-living crisis. Whilst the rate of recruitment and registration of new mainstream foster carers has increased, we have had some deregistration of carers throughout the year. Over the course of the year there were a total of 40 foster carers deregistered (mainstream 13 and kinship 27) due to varying reasons which are summarised below, which then only gives a net gain of 5 fostering households.

The Fostering Panel is critical to the business of the Fostering Service and is a legal requirement. The Panel meets approximately three times per month to consider panel business. Our Independent Fostering Panel Chair, Reshma Kodampur took over responsibility for chairing the Panel in January 2022 and remains in this role. The Panel is assisted by the interim Panel Advisor, who is employed via an agency by Cheshire East. The service and Panel advisor undertakes the gatekeeping function for Panel to ensure that all matters placed before Panel meet the necessary minimum regulatory requirements. The panel advisor has experience of chairing other local authority panels and independent fostering agencies (IFAs) and brings that experience and knowledge to the role.

There is also a vice chair of panel who takes the chair when the usual panel chair is unavailable for some reason. The central list consists of a further eight panel members aside from the chair and vice chair. The panel advisor does not sit as a voting panel member, his role is to provide advice to panel and to the service.

Cases presented to Panel 2024-2025:

Case Type	Total Presented	Positive Recommendation	Recommended Case be Deferred	Negative Recommendation
Mainstream Assessments	10	10	0	0
Kinship Carers Assessments	39	33 (ADM deferred)	4	2

		1 assessment)		
Mainstream Reviews	17	14	3	0
Kinship Carers Reviews	21	21	0	0
Foster to Adopt Reviews	1	1	0	0
Regulation 25 Extension Requests	34	34	0	0
Long Term Matches	3	3	0	0
Mainstream Resignations	13			
Connected Carers Resignations	27			
Foster to Adopt Resignations	5			
TOTAL CASES	167	116	7	2

Mainstream Assessments

- 8 x New applications through Foster4
- 2 x IFA transfers
- 4 x Assessments presented within timescales
- 5 x Assessments presented out of timescales due to delays on checks with partners such as Medical checks and DBS checks.

Kinship Carers Assessments

- 1 x Negative recommendation
- 1 x Brief report also presented to panel
- 1 x Assessment deferred by ADM
- 14 x Assessments presented within timescales
- 10 x Assessments presented out of timescales, due to delays in checks and also a lack of staff allocated to the kinship team
- 2 x Assessments ADM did not agree with panel's recommendation of unsuitable to foster and therefore approved the Foster Carers
- 1 x Assessment ADM did not agree with panel's recommendation of negative decision and deferred their decision, upheld item through a Regulation 25 extension
- 1 x Assessment ADM did not agree with panel's recommendation of positive decision and deferred their decision for further work

Mainstream Reviews (completed by the Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer FIRO)

- 14 positive reviews consisted of:
 - 3 x Change of registration
 - 3 x LADO
 - 7 x First review
 - 1 x Agency concerns
- 1 x Reviews presented within timescales
- 5 x Reviews presented out of timescales
- 8 x No details if reviews within/out of timescales due to a change in the LCS system

Kinship Carers Reviews (completed by the Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer FIRO)

- 21 positive reviews consisted of:
 - 1 x Agency concerns
 - 16 x First reviews
 - 4 x Change of registration
- 7 x Reviews presented within timescales
- 6 x Reviews presented out of timescales
- 8 x No details if reviews within/out of timescales

Foster to Adopt Review (completed by the Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer FIRO)

- 1 positive review consisted of:
 - 1 x First review
- 1 x Reviews presented out of timescales

Long Term Matches

- 3 x IFA foster carers
- 3 x Children long term matched with 3 foster families

Mainstream Resignations

- 13 resignations consisted of:
 - 2 x Transferred to IFA
 - 3 x Personal circumstances
 - 3 x Foster carer retired
 - 3 x Young person turned 18 years old
 - 2 x 'Staying Put' placements

Connected Carers Resignations

- 27 resignations consisted of:
 - 14 x Special Guardianship Orders granted, which is extremely positive
 - 2 x Placement breakdowns
 - 4 x Children returned to birth parents, which is supportive of our work with the cared for children's service
 - 1 x Young person turned 18 years old
 - 2 x Young person moved to independent living
 - 2 x Personal circumstances of the carers changed
 - 2 x 'Staying Put' placements, which is again very positive

Foster to Adopt Resignations

- 5 resignations consisted of:
 - 5 x Adoption orders, granted which is extremely positive for permanency

De-registrations

- 1 x Kinship carer was de-registered
- 2 x Mainstream carers de-registered (1 x mainstream appealed to the IRM, but the Local ADMs decision was upheld in support of deregistration)

Brief Report that came to Panel

- 1 x Kinship carer

Number of Fostering Panels for Period April 2024 to March 2025

- 35 panels took place consisting of:
 - 28 x Virtually through Microsoft Teams
 - 7 x In person

Number of Development Days in Period April 2024 to March 2025

- 3 development days took place with the Fostering Service and Panel member dates were: 18th June 2024, 20th September 2024 and 05th February 2025. This highlights a continued commitment to improving our relationship with panel and working together to improve the overall process for our Foster Carers.

7. Recruitment and Marketing

Recruitment for 2024-2025 has been conducted primarily through Foster4, with a joint launch of the collaborative taking place at Chester Zoo in May 2024.

Since then, we have engaged in a wide range of marketing and engagement events including attending makers markets, pop-up stalls, gyms and supermarket presence, social media campaigns and also been involved with a new marketing video to raise awareness of the amazing work foster carers do.



BENEFITS

Being a Foster Carer is hugely rewarding on many levels, but it also takes lots of practical provision to make it possible. We are very proud of the role our foster carers play and in recognition of this we provide an extensive package of benefits and rewards.

We offer:



A professional fee for your time, skill and hard work dedicated to fostering plus a generous fostering allowance, to cover the cost of looking after a child.



Baby equipment for those foster carers caring for a baby/toddler.



A holiday, birthday, religious celebration allowance for each foster child based on their age.



A £500 bonus for every friend you refer to fostering, who is approved to foster.



Access for new carers to apply for the Guaranteed Income Scheme for the first 6 months in a 12-month period.



Free membership to the Fostering Network which gives discounts to legal expenses, mortgages, holidays, and family days out.



A leisure pass for 'Everyday Leisure' which can be used by foster children and all the foster family to access swimming, gym, and classes.



Annual events to recognise and support the foster carer role, including Family Fun days, festive celebrations, and long service awards.

Our current Foster Carer Offer includes:

- A professional fee for your time, skill and hard work dedicated to fostering plus a generous fostering allowance, to cover the cost of looking after a child.
- A holiday, birthday, religious celebration allowance for each foster child based on their age
- Baby equipment for those foster carers caring for a baby/toddler.
- A £500 bonus for every friend you refer to fostering, who is approved to foster.
- Access for new carers to apply for the Guaranteed Income Scheme for the first 6 months in a 12-month period

- Free membership to the Fostering Network which gives discounts to legal expenses, mortgages, holidays, and family days out
- A leisure pass for 'Everyday Leisure' which can be used by foster children and all the foster family to access swimming, gym, and classes.
- Annual events to recognise and support the foster carer role, including Family Fun days, festive celebrations, and long service awards
- Annual children celebration event 'Star Awards' to recognise the achievements our 'cared for' children make.
- Access to apply for the Fostering Capacity Scheme whereby foster carers can apply for a loan or grant to increase the capacity to offer more placements for children, by adapting their property
- Regular events and support groups for children of foster carers.
- Free or discounted tickets for family activities to make days out fun and accessible.
- Paid respite leave.

Foster4 data on recruitment:

Monthly Data												
	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25
Number of Enquiries	9	18	14	15	16	20	20	15	8	24	18	20
Number of EOIs completed	2	3	8	3	5	3	4	4	5	4	3	3
Number of Initial Visits	0	1	1	3	3	3	1	0	3	4	3	2
Number of Assessments Started	0	0	1	1	2	3	2	4	2	5	4	3
Number of Approvals	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	1
Year to date Data												
	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25
Enquiries YTD	9	27	41	56	72	92	112	127	135	159	177	197
EOIs YTD	2	5	13	16	21	24	28	32	37	41	44	47
IVs YTD	0	1	2	5	8	11	12	12	15	19	22	24
Assessments Started YTD	0	0	1	2	4	7	9	13	15	20	24	27
Approvals YTD	2	3	3	4	4	4	4	5	5	7	9	10
YTD Enquiry to EOI conversion	22.22%	18.52%	31.71%	28.57%	29.17%	26.09%	25.00%	25.20%	27.41%	25.79%	24.86%	23.86%
YTD Enquiry to IV conversion	0.00%	3.70%	4.88%	8.93%	11.11%	11.96%	10.71%	9.45%	11.11%	11.95%	12.43%	12.18%
YTD Enquiry to Assessment conversion	0.00%	0.00%	2.44%	3.57%	5.56%	7.61%	8.04%	10.24%	11.11%	12.58%	13.56%	13.71%
YTD Enquiry to Approval conversion	22.22%	11.11%	7.32%	7.14%	5.56%	4.35%	3.57%	3.94%	3.70%	4.40%	5.08%	5.08%

The data demonstrates that whilst enquires are high, conversion rates are not where we would like them to be, however these do reflect the 7 other LA's conversion rates. This has led us as a wider collective, to look at how we can attract the right carers and raised more awareness about the different types of foster care available e.g. weekend carers, emergency carers, mother and baby foster carers.

During 2024-2025 Foster4 has launched a new Fostering Recruitment Strategy. There are 4 main strands on the fostering recruitment strategy, which are:

1. Communications, Marketing and Campaigns
2. Partnerships and Engagement
3. Improving our offer of retention and support to existing foster carers
4. Changing the way, we work

These four strands all have their own dedicated workstream established and representatives from each local authority, Workforce Development, Cheshire East Foster Friendly are all involved, as well as Team Managers, external consultants and Supervising Social Workers. Plans are being made to also include our foster carers as part of this work to ensure their voices shape the future of the service. At present there is lots of work taking place by our corporate comms & marketing team, the fostering service and other services to support this key priority to recruit and retain foster carers.

Foster4 were successful in recruiting a family support worker that is allocated to Cheshire East, which is being jointly managed by the fostering service and Foster4 leads 'Warrington'. This post supports the activity above and the general recruitment and retention of foster carers. We have also refreshed and relaunch the Cheshire East website to ensure all enquires are redirected to the Foster4 website.

The fostering team has day to day responsibility for the website so can update it on a regular basis with news and events. The website promotes the benefits of becoming a foster carer and share detailed information about different types of fostering. The website includes a new focus on enrichment and retention activity. It will also host a 'blog/news' section where we can share more informal information e.g. interviews with foster carers and highlight specific events and activity such as the launch of new schemes. Foster4 website includes a refreshed 'Expression of Interest' form, which simplifies the process for prospective foster carers. The website and the form also have better data analysis functionality, which we hope to capitalise on in 2025-2026.

Additionally, Foster4 social media strategy ensures that free/organic posts can be as effective as possible to increase brand awareness and encourage people to take the first steps to consider becoming a foster carer. In order to reach a wider audience with the message about the urgent need for new foster carers in Cheshire East we are working towards engaging new ambassadors to be part of our Fostering Friendly campaign. We have developed a communications toolkit, which can be shared with partner agencies for them to feature adverts and communications within their own newsletters, social media posts and throughout their networks. Outside of this work there will be a renewed focus on who we target and approach to become foster carers areas.

Another area of focus for the coming year will be to try and attract more diverse foster carers, to meet the diverse needs of our cared for children. We recognise that children from ethnically diverse communities in foster homes are not always culturally matched, and we need more carers from these same groups of people to meet their needs. With that in mind we have developed a two-pronged approach that will be a clear focus in 2025/26. We will be working in conjunction with Foster4, elected members and the Fostering Recruitment Team to hold an ambassadors event targeting community groups and partners with good links to a range of diverse communities in order to support us to recruit more foster carers of diverse ethnicities.

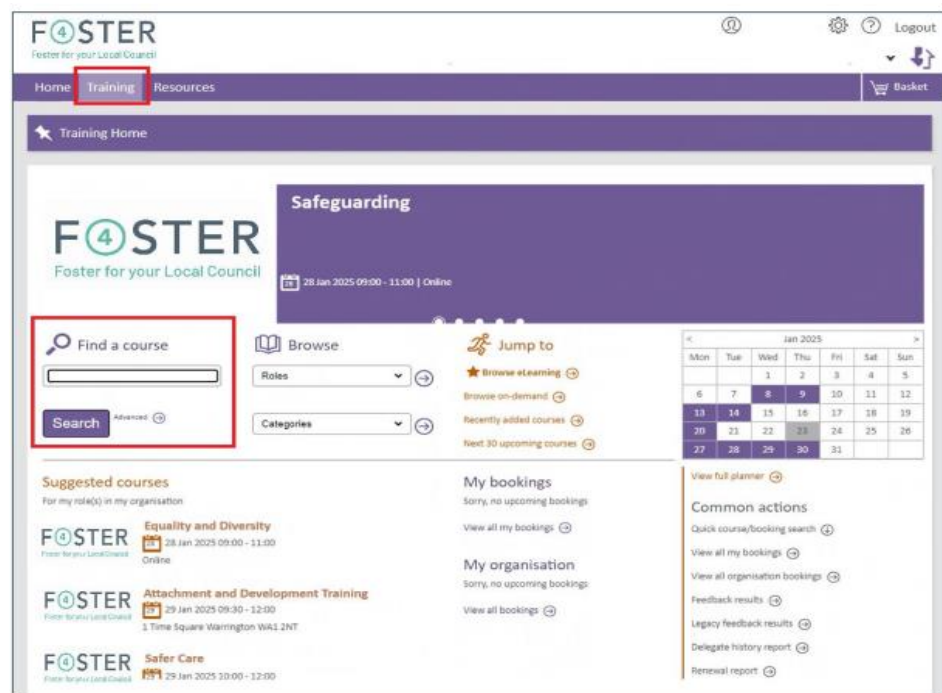
8. Training

All foster carers are required to adhere to the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care 2011. When designing and creating our training offer, we prioritise and consider these and ensure we support and work alongside these to give our foster carers a more holistic approach. All foster carers are required to complete a training, support and development standards (TSD) portfolio. This is to be completed within 12 months for mainstream carers and within 18 months for kinship carers. We want to ensure our foster carers have the skills for their role and they can demonstrate this in their TSD portfolio by connecting the dots of the training and the portfolio, this will give foster carers a more holistic view of their learning and skills together as one.

Throughout the year a blended approach to learning and development has continued, with offers of face-to-face sessions and virtual sessions for foster carers. The service has continued to run the foster care training calendar throughout the year with a range of learning and development opportunities to support the skills, knowledge, and confidence of carers.

Moving forward for 2025-2026 our training offer has become more diverse and accessible through our collaborative approach with Foster4 and a new digital app.

After consultation with foster carers across the 8 local authorities, feedback has been collated to design a training framework that will support foster carers by providing them with the skills, knowledge and training to successfully care for our most vulnerable children as an approved foster carer. Up until 2024, all foster carer training was being delivered at a local level. We all felt this posed a risk of potential inconsistent training for foster carers across the



Foster4 collaboration. By designing a framework for all foster carers across our various local authorities, it allows foster carers to have consistent and more accessible of training. The new app is extremely accessible and gives greater data and insight into effectiveness, which we hope will strengthen our support to foster carers in the coming year.

This framework outlines the expectations for foster carers and their learning pathways. This includes:

- Pre-Approval Training Guidelines
- Post-Approval Mandatory Training
- Carer Development Training

It allows foster carers to look at the full 'picture' when it comes to their learning pathway and the expectations for foster carers. We have outlined which National Minimum Standards 2011 and Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD) underpin the framework allowing foster carers to build a bigger picture and relate the training back to their portfolio work, rather than these existing as 2 separate entities.

THE FOSTER4 LEARNING FRAMEWORK

What does our training cover and what underpins it?

Our next section outlines the type of training (mandatory etc), what the course name is and what standards underpin to form our learning objectives and outcomes for each course.

We take a holistic approach looking at the standards that foster carers need to consider and how these play a part in the learning pathway. Each learner will be able to attend the course and be able to link it back to the requirements and paperwork they will be completing alongside their training. This gives a more joined-up approach to training and development.

All foster carers are required to adhere to the **National Minimum Standards for Foster Care 2011**. When designing and creating our training offer, we prioritise and consider these and ensure we support and work alongside these to give our foster carers a more holistic approach.

All foster carers are required to complete a **training, support and development standards (TSD)** portfolio. This is to be completed within 12 months for mainstream carers and within 18 months for kinship carers. We want to ensure our foster carers have the skills for their role and they can demonstrate this in their TSD portfolio by connecting the dots of the training and the portfolio, this will give foster carers a more holistic view of their learning and skills together as one.



Face to Face/Virtual Training

Time / Delivery	Course	Booked	Attended
Daytime Evening Virtual	Tax workshop	7	7
Daytime Virtual	Family time	20	18
Daytime Face 2 Face	Safer caring, recording skills, confidentiality & data protection	13	10
Daytime Virtual	Emotionally based school avoidance	13	13
Daytime Face 2 Face	Alternative provisions & transition timetables	10	10
Daytime Face 2 Face	Team teach de-escalation	14	10
Daytime Face 2 Face	Contextual safeguarding	15	12
Daytime Virtual	Equality & diversity	15	13
Daytime Virtual	ADHD & Conduct disorders	16	13
Daytime Virtual	Childhood bereavement	10	6
Daytime Virtual	SIDS & Safe sleep	33	33
Daytime Face 2 Face	Recording skills, confidentiality, data protection & managing allegations	10	6
Daytime Virtual	Phonics & early reading	Cancelled by facilitator	
Evening Virtual	Equality & diversity	24	19

Daytime Face 2 Face	Phonics & early reading	13	9
Daytime Face 2 Face	Drug & alcohol awareness	Cancelled due to low attendance	
Daytime Face 2 Face	Safer caring, recording skills, confidentiality & data protection	Cancelled by service	Cancelled by service
to Face	Blue Cross- Foster Children and Pets	13	10
Face to Face	Help to Reach my Teenager	20	11
Virtual	Tax and Finance	Cancelled due to low attendance	
Face to Face	De-escalation (2 day course) x2	16 20	4 13
Virtual	Gambling Bet You Can Help	9	8
Face to Face/Virtual	Contextual Safeguarding x2	19	13
Virtual	Post 16 Options and Transitions	12	12
Virtual	Mental Health and Wellbeing	16	12
Virtual	Food in Care	Course cancelled due to low attendance	
Virtual	Caring for Traumatised Babies and Toddlers	25	17
Virtual	Preparing for Exams	5	5

Virtual	Therapeutic Parenting (6-week course)	13	13
Daytime Virtual	Therapeutic parenting Module 1 – Attachment & training Module 2 – Blocking & miscuing Module 3 – The importance of emotional attunement Module 4 – All behaviour is communication Module 5 – Understanding attachment history Module 6 – Blocked care & safe care	20	15
Daytime Virtual	Mindfulness Session 1 – Introduction Session 2 – My breath, my body Session 3 – Finding your touch stone Session 4 – Mindful movement Session 5 – A psychology of life Session 6 – Attitude, mind the gap Session 7 – Finding insight Session 8 – Our whole journey to mindful life	Cancelled due to low attendance	
Total to date			312

Promoting Training and Increasing Participation

While we acknowledge that uptake and participation in training remains an area for improvement, we are confident that the introduction of the new Foster4 portal will enhance accessibility and engagement. To support this, we will implement a targeted communication strategy to promote the benefits of training, including how it supports carers in their roles and contributes to positive outcomes for children.

9. Fostering Family Events and Community Engagement

Throughout the year, we have continued to organise a wide range of events and activities for fostering families, with a particular focus on providing enriching experiences during school holidays. These activities have included Ninja sessions, Easter crafts, pottery painting, golf, kickboxing, rollerblading, science workshops, and visits to Flip Out, among others. Our events are thoughtfully designed to cater to different groups—ranging from activities exclusively for children and young people, to family fun days, and dedicated events for foster carers and their birth or adopted children.

One of the highlights of the year was our annual BBQ at Tatton Park, which remains a firm favourite among our fostering families. In addition to our own events, we have strengthened partnerships with local organisations to offer educational visits and experiences, all provided free of charge to our families.

We are also fortunate to receive generous donations from theme parks, with over £10,000 worth of complimentary tickets distributed throughout the year. These included tickets to Alton Towers, Cadbury World, and LEGOLAND Manchester, offering memorable days out for our carers and children.

We concluded the year with our much-anticipated Christmas celebration at Sandhole Oak Barn, kindly provided to us free of charge. This festive event brought together over 100 attendees and served as a heartfelt celebration of our foster carers. We recognised long-standing carers with awards and flowers, and were pleased to be joined by Councillor Bulman and Councillor Gillman in acknowledging the dedication and impact of our fostering community.

Support groups for foster carers:

Across the city (Crewe, Macclesfield, Alsager, Nantwich, Middlewich, Congleton, Breton) there are walk and talk support groups, these run on a monthly basis and include support groups for kinship carers, foster carers who care for teenagers, those who support unaccompanied asylum seeking children, parent and child foster carers, , foster carers who care for babies with neonatal abstinence syndrome and carers who care for children with disabilities, Each support group has a representative from the service and foster carers. Foster carer representatives play a key stakeholder role and are involved in a range of service developments. In addition, the service runs a monthly Stay and Play, and coffee and cake support group. The managers also run a monthly drop in across Cheshire East hubs “meet the manager” for foster carers, using this as an opportunity to raise any concerns they may have. In the next financial year, we will be adding a reflective ‘chit chat’ group for foster carers, and a crèche for under 5’s is provided.

10. Kinship Care and Special Guardianship

As of this year, Cheshire East has 85 approved kinship households providing care for 115 children. This represents an increase in the number of children supported through kinship arrangements compared to the previous year. Approximately 13% of our cared-for children are placed with kinship carers—a proportion that has grown and remains consistent with previous

years. Notably, 41 children were placed under Regulation 24 procedures, marking a 37% increase from the previous year.

This sustained and growing use of kinship care is a positive development. It enables children to remain within their extended families and communities, supporting their identity, cultural continuity, and emotional wellbeing. It also helps to alleviate some of the pressures caused by the ongoing national shortage of foster carers.

During the Regulation 24 temporary approval period, kinship placements can be fragile and often require tailored support. Our Kinship Assessment Team continues to provide this support, helping carers navigate the complexities of the assessment process and better meet the needs of the children in their care.

Children living with family and friends under Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) continue to receive support through our dedicated post-SGO service within Early Help. The Special Guardianship Team offers clear and structured support plans, and therapeutic services are available to both children and their carers.

11. The Mockingbird Family Model

This year the Fostering Service are pleased to share that we have increased our Mockingbird constellations from 2 to 3.

The Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) places an emphasis on building links between fostering families and the wider community. The emphasis is very much about strengthening families and protecting children and young people. The model is evidencing effective support for satellite carers and assisting with placement stability for children and young people.

In total 24 fostering households are being supported with a total of 82 children and young people (this is within 3 hubs). Of the 24 Fostering families involved in MFM - 18 of those families were reported to be under stress or at risk of breakdown (at some point in the year) without the support of the MFM Hub Carer. The Hub foster carer role is central to the establishment of a community network for up to 10 fostering families. Recruiting experienced foster carers has been key to the successful implementation of the model in Cheshire.

Our 3 hubs available to our foster carers this year have supported kinship families (including families who have obtained Special Guardianship Orders) and Mainstream Fostering Families (including some adoptive families). Our commitment to Mockingbird is strong and our development will be needs led – ensuring as a service that we have the right hub carers, the right liaison workers and full-service support. In constellation one, the MFM Hub Carers resigned, therefore we recruited a MFM Hub Carer



with the skills and experience to take over this role. In September 2024 our third constellation went live, and we successfully recruited the hub carers, which provided us with our first constellation in the north of the county.

There is a fidelity to the model, which is essential to uphold, however, the model is able to be used creatively to meet the needs of the overall service as these change. Our ambition is for hubs to further develop links to our residential homes aiming to assist young people stepping down from a residential home to a fostering arrangement. Part of this would include providing young people with quality time in a family/community setting until the right long-term family can be identified. We would also want to involve young people who are placed out of area where the plan is to return them to their Cheshire community.

Mockingbird Family Model staff continue to benefit from working in partnership with The Fostering Network who facilitate national and regional leadership and operational workshops for staff and carers involved in the Mockingbird Family Model. This is alongside national engagement activities for children and young people involved in Mockingbird. This past year 3 events have been held in Birmingham, both of which were well represented with hub carers and supervising social workers. In addition to this, in September 2024, we appointed a dedicated Team Manager for our growing Mockingbird offer, to ensure its future success and to prioritise its growth.

12. Complaints

In the last year the Fostering Service has received 3 complaints from foster carers.

Information about complaints between 1 April and 31 March of the reporting year

P1	Information about complaints made about the fostering agency or service (including foster carers)	How many complaints did you receive?	How many of these were not upheld?
	From:	Number	Number
P1.1	children/young people	0	0
P1.2	foster carers	3	2
P1.3	children and young people's social workers	0	0
P1.4	other professionals	0	0
P1.5	children and young people's parents	0	0
P1.6	others	0	0

All complaints were responded to within timescales and 2 of these were not upheld, this was accepted. 1 complaint was upheld and was an acknowledgement of staff sickness causing a delay.

13. Fostering Service Annual Report Summary

Over the past year, the Fostering Service has remained committed to expanding our offer and increasing the recruitment and retention of foster carers to meet the growing demand for placements. We are proud to have joined the Foster4 collaboration, which has strengthened our regional presence and enhanced our local offer. As a foster-friendly local authority (as of Dec 2024), we have continued to champion our carers, increasing our Mockingbird constellations from two to three, and hosting more events to celebrate and recognise the invaluable contributions of our foster carers, including long-service awards.

Organisationally, the service has seen positive developments, including changes within the assessment team and the addition of a new team manager role to support the Mockingbird programme. Leadership has remained stable, with the Head of Service and Service Manager continuing to drive forward our improvement agenda, whilst acknowledging changes at the team manager level causing some delays and impact.

Despite these achievements, the national sufficiency crisis has presented significant challenges. The urgent need for placements, including emergency and Regulation 24 arrangements, has placed considerable pressure on both our team and our carers. While we have made progress in converting mainstream carers, doubling the number from the previous year, we have not reduced our reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies to the extent we had hoped.

Fostering remains a cornerstone of our sufficiency strategy. We continue to raise awareness across the council of the critical role foster carers play in supporting some of our most vulnerable children, while also helping to manage financial pressures.

We commend the dedication and resilience of our social work teams in both the Fostering and Placement Services. Their unwavering commitment to finding the right placements and delivering the best possible experiences for children in our care is evident every day. Our foster carers, too, continue to go above and beyond, providing safe, nurturing homes in the most challenging of circumstances.

14. Fostering Service Action Plan 2025–2026

To address current challenges and build on recent progress, the Fostering Service will focus on the following strategic priorities:

1. Recruitment and Retention

- Launch a targeted recruitment campaign in partnership with Foster4 to attract a diverse range of new foster carers.
- Enhance carer support through regular engagement, training, and recognition events.

2. Service Expansion

- Seek to form a Kinship Mockingbird constellation to replicate the mainstream offer.

- Explore a salaried foster carer scheme, including specialist schemes for teenagers and children with complex needs stepping down from residential care.
- Set up a kinship task and finish group to expand our kinship offer

3. Workforce Development

- Recruit permanent staff to reduce reliance on agency workers, particularly within the assessment and kinship teams.
- Seek agreement to increase the establishment of the kinship team to support long-term sustainability.
- Provide ongoing training and development to ensure staff are equipped to meet regulatory and practice standards.

4. Strengthening Compliance and Quality

- Improve timeliness of assessments to ensure compliance with statutory timescales and regulations.
- Strengthen our relationship with the fostering panel through improved communication, preparation, and consistency in presenting cases.
- Monitor assessment quality and timeliness through regular audits and performance reviews.
- Promote the new Foster4 training portal to increase attendance and support development.

5. Reducing IFA Dependence

- Track and review IFA usage monthly, identifying opportunities to transition placements to in-house carers.

6. Foster Carer Offer and Support

- Work with the Local Authority to explore enhancements to the foster carer offer, such as:
 - - Free parking permits
 - - Larger household waste bins
 - - Access to local authority discounts and benefits
- Promote Cheshire East as a foster-friendly employer and community.

7. Cross-Council Collaboration

- Continue to raise awareness of fostering across all council departments.
- Promote a whole-council approach to supporting foster carers and recognising their vital role in the community.

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OPEN

Cared For Children and Care Leavers Committee**Date: 24 June 2025****Cared for Children and Care Leavers Q4 scorecard 2024/25****Report of: Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director of Children's Services****Report Reference No: CFC/01/25-26****Ward(s) Affected: All Wards****For Decision or Scrutiny: Scrutiny****Purpose of Report**

- 1 This report sets out the performance for the Cared for Children and Care Leavers service for quarter 4 of 2024/25 (1 January 2025 – 31 March 2025). The Cared for Children and Care Leavers committee is asked to note the performance for quarter 4 and to provide support and challenge in relation to performance in relation to Cared for Children and Care Leavers.

Executive Summary

- 2 This report provides an overview of quarter 4 performance for children and families services for the relevant indicators for the reporting year of 2024-25.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the performance of children's services for quarter 4.
2. Provide scrutiny in relation to performance in relation to Cared for Children and Care Leavers.

Background

- 3 This quarterly report provides the committee with an overview of performance across Cared for Children and Care Leaver's service. This report relates to quarter 4 of 2024-25 (1 January 2025 – 31 March 2025).
- 4 The following indicators have been highlighted for consideration:
 - 4.1 Cheshire East Council were responsible for 550 cared for children at the end of quarter 4. This is a decrease from 551 at the end of quarter 3. The cared for children population changes daily as children enter and leave care. Children cease to be cared for due to several reasons, these include turning 18, returning to their birth family, adoption, and special guardianship. The latest comparable data we have across the region shows that Cheshire East's rate of 67 per 10,000 is slightly below the national average of 70 per 10,000 and is above that of 60 for statistical neighbours.
 - 4.2 The number of children who are cared for are constantly monitored as well as ensuring plans for children are timely to achieve permanence at the earliest opportunity. In 2024/25 there have been a total of 222 young people entering care and 215 leaving care (100 left care in 2024/2025 due to turning 18). Children entering and leaving care is a fluctuating picture. There has been a focus on supporting children to leave care to live with family members via Special Guardianship Orders (SGO). In 2024/25 this represents 13% of all individuals that have left care which is now in line with the national picture and our statistical neighbours. This enables families to have the support they need without the formal intervention of social care.
 - 4.3 The timeliness of cared for children's reviews has improved since Q3, increasing from 73% to 82% in Q4. Between September 2024 and January 2025, there was instability of staffing numbers within the Safeguarding Service. The service is now at full establishment, and Independent Reviewing Officers are ensuring reviews that were stood down in Q4 are being completed. Positively, 96% of children were involved in their reviews, an increase from Q3. It is important that children and young people are involved in their plan, and participation is a key component of the improvements within the service.
 - 4.4 Q4 data shows that the number of children placed with in-house foster carers increased to 120 (Q3 116). However, the number of children placed with connected carers has reduced to 112 in Q4 (125 in Q3). This could be attributed to the increase in Special Guardianship Orders being granted. 13% of children during Q4 ceased to be looked after due to granting of Special Guardianship Order, an increase from Q3 which was 10%. This means that children are living with someone they have an

existing relationship with and permanency for these children has been secured.

- 4.5 The number of children living in residential care has increased to 47, from 45 in Q3. Whilst it is our ambition to have as few children placed in residential care as possible, there is now a strong focus on ensuring the needs of those children are met, and, that they are in residential care only for the amount of time that is right for them, where possible. Whilst this number has risen, we are confident this is the right home for the child and where it is not, we have clear plans to address this. We want to ensure children and young people have placement stability following any changes to their plan.
- 4.6 The number of adoptions has increased to 23 children already adopted since April 2024. In 2023/24 we had a total of 24 children adopted. We have a further 11 children living in their adoption placements including three children who are placed with fostering to adopt carers. Of the 23 children legally adopted in 2024/25, unfortunately the number of days from entering care to moving into placement with an adoptive family is skewed by a small number of children where there has been delay.

Q4 data shows that it took on average 609 days, compared to a national average of 376. This is a decrease from Q3 at an average of 614 days. We understand the reasons behind the delay involved for some of these children but have remained ambitious in terms of continuing to search for an adoptive family for them. Locally and nationally the timescales for placing children within their adoptive families is monitored to avoid unnecessary delay for children. For those children where delay was experienced, their individual circumstances are well understood, and we continue to scrutinise planning to ensure that children do not experience unnecessary delay.

- 4.7 A number of our most vulnerable Care Leaver's are supported under Staying Close as a result of funding from the DFE. Staying Close is a model which provides an enhanced support package for young people leaving care from children's homes and supported accommodation and is designed to be a comparable offer to the option to Stay Put, which supports young people in foster care to remain with their former foster carers until age 21. There are 54 young people living in Staying Put arrangements, an increase from Q3 at 45. These bespoke packages of support help young people to develop their confidence and skills for independent living, and for their emotional health and wellbeing.

Positively, the funding for Staying Close has been extended until March 2026. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill introduces a new provision in the Children Act 1989 to require each local authority to consider whether each former relevant child (up to age 25) requires

“staying close support” and where their welfare requires it, to offer that support.

- 4.8 Placement stability for cared for children has improved but further work is required to ensure that social workers are prioritising long term matching of children. Q4 data shows 69% of cared for children in care for at least 2.5yrs at the end of the period have been living in their current placement for at least 2 years. This is an increase from Q3 at 67% and an increase from 2023/24 at 66%. The development of a permanence tracker has assisted in monitoring and driving forward children’s plans and ensures that children exit care if possible. However, the number of children with 3 or more placements within a 12-month period has increased in Q4 to 63 (63 children in Q3). Sometimes, moves for children can be positive, such a move to an adoptive placement. Work continues to ensure a robust understanding of the narrative for each of these children, as often providers can struggle with increasing and complex needs that children and young people can experience.
- 4.9 The NEET data in Q4 for our 19 to 21-year-old young people who are not engaged in education, employment, or training has increased to 37% from Q3 at 34% of this cohort. The national average for 2023/24 was 38% with statistical neighbours being 37%. Our 2023/24 data was 47% NEET. There is a commitment to improving these figures and within the Staying Close project there are dedicated EET workers and an apprenticeship coordinator, which is positively assisting in terms of supporting our care leavers to access education and employment.
- 4.10 The number of young people who are accessing higher education has decreased from, 29 in Q3 to 26 in Q4. The number of care experienced adults who are in apprenticeships has slightly decreased in Q4 to 11 (13 in Q3). At the time of writing this report, there are thirteen 16-25 year olds in apprenticeships.
- 4.11 The number of children who had their annual health assessments within timescales within Q4 remains static at 89%. Some of the delay relates to children who are placed out of area and delays can occur due to reliance on other health authorities to undertake these assessments.
- 4.12 Positively 100% of Care Leavers had Health Passports by the time they left care. Progress in this area is being sustained.
- 4.13 Q4 data shows that 66% of cared for children saw a dentist within the last 12 months. This is a decrease from Q3 at 70%. Nationally, the average is 70% and our statistical neighbour average is 65%. To address this the IRO’s record the dates of dental checks within Cared For Reviews and these figures discussed with health colleagues to monitor this situation.

- 4.14 Q4 data shows that 96% of our care leavers (aged 19 to 21) are in appropriate accommodation, a 1% decrease from Q3. A small number of young people, unfortunately, are in prison which is never recorded as being appropriate.
- 4.15 The number of young people living in emergency accommodation varies on a day-to-day basis. At this current time there is 1 young person in emergency accommodation. Accommodation is a significant focus, with weekly accommodation meetings taking place with Housing. Young people who end up in hotels are usually our most vulnerable and complex young people. There are some great examples of therapeutic residential supports that take a trauma informed and child centred approach with young people, but some providers struggle with complex placements, which is a challenge across the nation. Young people can present with issues such as criminality and substance misuse. When a young person has accommodation stability, their complex needs can become less complex so our commissioning of providers who can support young people in individualised ways is critical. Work is ongoing in respect of widening the offer of accommodation options to young people aged 16 to 25. This work is part of the Improvement Plan and updates are provided to the Improvement and Impact Board monthly and to Children and Families Committee. Positively there has been an increase in provision with some of our commissioned providers and this has reduced the number of young people in emergency accommodation.
- 4.16 69% of care leavers aged 16-21years have up-to-date pathway plans, this is a decline from Q3 at 75%. This has subsequently improved and continues to be an area of scrutiny and development.
- 4.17 Care Leaver hubs have proved to be a critical element of support for children leaving care. There are 2 bases, one in Crewe and one in Macclesfield. During Q4, 34 Care Leavers accessed a Care Leaver Hub on 65 occasions. 38 Care Leavers accessed a Hub on 49 occasions during Q3. The Service has a dedicated Care Leaver Hub Lead to promote the Hubs and encourage attendance. Young people are attending the hubs for planned sessions such as cooking and education as well as using them as a base to drop into, which provides an important safety net. The longer-term plan is to have a bespoke hub at the Crewe Youth Zone. In response to what young people have told us about having support in the evening and weekends, we are developing our offer to ensure that there is an improved offer for young people.

Consultation and Engagement

- 5 Not applicable.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 6 One of the key areas of focus for the Cared for Children and Care Leavers committee is to review performance and scrutinise the effectiveness of services for cared for children and young people and care leavers.

Other Options Considered

- 7 Not applicable.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance

- 8 There are no direct legal implications.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 9 There are no direct financial implications or changes to the MTFS because of this briefing paper.

Human Resources

- 10 There are no direct human resources implications.

Risk Management

- 11 There are risks associated with some performance measures as set out above.

Impact on other Committees

- 12 Scorecard information in relation to cared for children and care leavers will also be reported to the children and families committee.

Policy

- 13 There are no direct policy implications.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 14 Members may want to use the information from the performance indicators to ensure that services are targeted at more vulnerable children and young people.

Other Implications

- 15 There are no direct implications for rural communities.

- 16 Performance reports enable members to identify areas of good performance and areas for improvement in relation to children and young people, including cared for children.
- 17 There are no direct implications for public health.
- 18 This report does not impact on climate change.

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
<i>Legal and Finance</i>			
Diane Green	Finance Manager – Children's Services	13/06/25	16/06/25
Jennie Summers	Acting Head of Legal	13/06/23	16/06/25
<i>Other Consultees:</i>			
<i>Executive Directors/Directors</i>			
Dawn Godfrey	Executive Director, Children's Services	16/01/25	16/06/25

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	<p>Tracy Stephen</p> <p>Director of Family and Children's Social Care</p> <p>tracy.stephen@cheshireeasr.gov.uk</p>
Appendices:	APPENDIX 1 Corporate parenting score care Q4
Background Papers:	Children's Services Improvement Plan

Mar 2025 - Cared for and Care Leavers Scorecard - This contains a rolling 4 quarters for comparison

Notes: The boxes that are grayed out are where national data is not applicable or data isn't available.

Notes: The column highlighted in blue reflects the most recent quarter being reported on

Notes: Rates from Q1 24/25 are calculated using the new 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. This enables the local authority to be compared on a like for like basis with different local authorities or groups of authorities.

Priority	Indicator	Indicator name	23/24 outturn	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25	24/25 outturn	Benchmark National (most recent available)	Benchmark Stat N'bour (most recent available)	Corporate Plan Aim	Acronym
General	G1	Number of cared for children	541	536	557	551	550				Fair	
	G2	Rate per 10,000 cared for children	69	63	68	68	67		70	60	Fair	
	G3	Number of care leavers (aged 16-21)		335	332	345	343				Fair	
Priority 1 - We will care for our Children and Young People as any good parent would	1.1	% cared for children reviews in timescales	94%	76%	72%	73%	82%				Fair	
	1.2	% of children and young people involved in their reviews	98%	94%	93%	92%	96%				Fair	
Priority 2 - Improved Education, Employment and Training outcomes	2.1	Number of 16-18 year old care leavers that are NEET		13	1	7	14				Fair	NEET - Not in Education, Employment or Training
	2.2	Number of care leavers accessing higher education (University)		23	25	29	26				Fair	
	2.3	Number of Cheshire East care leavers in apprenticeships (18+)		9	9	13	11				Fair	
	2.4	% 19-21 year care leavers that are NEET (as per national reporting)	47% NEET at birthday	38%	45%	34%	37%		38% NEET at birthday	37% NEET at birthday	Fair	NEET - Not in Education, Employment or Training.
em safe	3.1	Number of cared for children in external foster care		119	115	114	119				Fair	
	3.2	Number of cared for children in internal foster care		126	116	116	120				Fair	
	3.3	Number of children in care living with relatives and friends (inc reg 24)		116	130	125	112				Fair	Reg 24 -Regulation 24
	3.4	Number of children placed with parents		31	34	37	37				Fair	
	3.5	Number of children and young people in residential care		46	40	45	47				Fair	

Priority	Indicator	Indicator name	23/24 outturn	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25	24/25 outturn	Benchmark National (most recent available)	Benchmark Stat N'bour (most recent available)	Corporate Plan Aim	Acronym
Priority 3 - We will work to give all children and young people a forever home and keep them safe	3.6	Number of individuals with 3 or more placements (rolling 12mth figure)	66	65	75	61	63				Fair	
	3.7	% cared for children in care for at least 2.5yrs at the end of the period and living in their current placement for at least 2 years	66%	61%	63%	67%	69%		71%	72%	Fair	
	3.8	Number of cared for children placed over 20 miles from home address (Cheshire East and out of borough)		134	146	145	147				Fair	
	3.9	Number of children living out of borough		201	209	204	204				Fair	
	3.10	Number of cared for children who have been missing in the quarter		36	36	38	28				Fair	
	3.11	Number of children who have a long term matched placement		127	127	123	117				Fair	
	3.12	Number of placement moves in the quarter		72 (60 individuals)	120 (88 individuals)	107 (91 individuals)	91 (83 individuals)				Fair	
	3.13	% of currently cared for children who have had a C&F assessment in the last 12 mths		75%	72%	65%	61%				Fair	C&F - Children and Family
	3.14	% of Cared for Children in care for more than 1 mth who have had a review in the last 6 mths		90%	92%	94%	93%				Fair	
	3.15	% of children ceased to be looked after due to granting of special guardianship order (SGO) - year to date figure	12%	8%	6%	10%	13%		13%	12%	Fair	SGO - Special Guardianship Order
	3.16	% of children ceased to be looked after due to adoption - year to date figure	9%	11%	10%	11%	11%		10%	11%	Fair	
	3.17	Number of children with an adoption decision		36	38	39	46				Fair	
	3.18	Average number of days between entering care and moving in with adoptive family (A10 national indicator) - yearly figure		519	631	614	609		376		Fair	
	3.19	Average number of days between placement order and match with adoptive family (A2 national indicator) - yearly figure		167	244	236	281		185		Fair	
	4.1	Children looked after who had their annual health assessment (%)	91% (OC2 cohort)	83%	85%	89%	89%		89% (OC2 cohort)	86% (OC2 cohort)	Fair	
	4.2	Children looked after who had their teeth checked by a dentist in the last 12 months (%)	87% (OC2 cohort)	82%	74%	70%	66%		70% (OC2 cohort)	65% (OC2 cohort)	Fair	
	4.3	% of 4-16 in care for 3 months or more with a completed SDQ score in the last 12 mths	63% (OC2 cohort)	58%	68%	46%	52%		77% (OC2 cohort)	75% (OC2 cohort)	Fair	SDQ - Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. T

Priority	Indicator	Indicator name	23/24 outturn	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25	24/25 outturn	Benchmark National (most recent available)	Benchmark Stat N'bour (most recent available)	Corporate Plan Aim	Acronym
	4.4	% of young people with a SDQ score of 20 or above	26% (OC2 cohort)	30%	33%	31%	31%		37% (OC2 cohort)	40% (OC2 cohort)	Fair	SDQ - Strenghts and Difficulties Questionnaire.
	4.5	Number of care leavers with a health passport		34/34 100%	18/18 100%	24/24 100%	15/15 100%				Fair	
Priority 5 - We will prepare young people for Adulthood	5.1	% of care leavers aged 16-21 with an up to date pathway plan in the last 6 mths		88%	82%	75%	69%				Fair	
	5.2	% of pathway plan reviews completed in timescales in the quarter		92%	84%	68%	80%				Fair	
	5.3	% of pathway plan reviews completed in the quarter where Young persons view were not sent/ gained		7%	3%	10%	7%				Fair	
	5.4	% of former relevant care leaver aged 18-21 that we are in touch with		97%	94%	95%	97%				Fair	
	5.5	% of 16-17 years old currently cared for with a PA allocated			45%	30%	34%				Fair	PA - Personal Advisor
	5.6	% of 17-18 former relevant care leavers in suitable accommodation	95%	95%	93%	97%	96%		90% at yp birthday	88% at yp birthday	Fair	
	5.7	% of 19-21 former relevant care leavers in suitable accommodation	96%	92%	86%	97%	96%		88% at yp birthday	88% at yp birthday	Fair	
	5.8	Number of cared for children in secure/ remand placements			1	1	1				Fair	
	5.9	Number of former relevant care leavers aged 17-21 in custody			9	10	7				Fair	
	5.1	Number current UASC being cared for	38	38	34	32	28				Fair	UASC - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker
	5.11	Number current/ former UASC care leavers (aged 18- 24)		114	116	123	125				Fair	UASC - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker
	5.12	Number of individuals in staying put arrangement		42	43	45	54				Fair	

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