

# Corporate Parenting Committee

## Agenda

---

**Date:** Tuesday, 29th September, 2020  
**Time:** 4.00 pm  
**Venue:** Virtual

---

### How to Watch the Meeting

For anybody wishing to view the meeting live please click in the link below:

[Click here to view the meeting](#)

Or dial in via the telephone on 141 020 3321 5200 and enter Conference ID: 811 683 257# when prompted.

Please turn off your camera and microphone when entering the meeting and ensure they remain turned off throughout.

---

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 in the report.

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

1. **Apologies for Absence**
2. **Declarations of Interest**

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

3. **Minutes of Previous meeting** (Pages 3 - 6)

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2020.

---

**Contact:** Helen Davies  
**Tel:** 01270 685705  
**E-Mail:** [helen.davies@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:helen.davies@cheshireeast.gov.uk)

4. **Corporate Parenting Committee Update Report** (Pages 7 - 16)

To consider the above report.

5. **Quarter 1 Performance Review**

To receive a presentation on performance against Quarter One.

6. **Education Update**

To receive a verbal Education update.

7. **Vision and Identity for Children's Services** (Pages 17 - 22)

To receive a report on Vision and Identity for Children's Services.

8. **Member Frontline Visits Prospectus** (Pages 23 - 30)

To receive a report on Member Frontline Visits.

9. **Fostering Service Annual Report** (Pages 31 - 44)

To receive the Annual Report for the Fostering Service.

10. **Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report** (Pages 45 - 66)

To receive the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer.

11. **Update on Inspections during Covid-19** (Pages 67 - 74)

To receive a report on the Update of inspections during Covid-19.

**Membership:** Councillors R Bailey, J Barber, M Beanland, J Buckley, C Bulman, P Butterill, S Edgar, K Flavell (Chairman), S Holland, J Saunders (Vice-Chairman) and M Warren

**CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Committee**  
held on Tuesday, 14th July, 2020 as a Virtual Meeting

**PRESENT**

Councillor K Flavell (Chairman)  
Councillor J Saunders (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors R Bailey, M Beanland, J Buckley, C Bulman, P Butterill, S Edgar, S Holland and M Warren

**Apologies**

Councillors J Barber

**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies of absence were received from Councillor James Barber.

**2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED- That the minutes of the meeting held on the 21 January 2020 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

**4 CORPORATE PARENTING UPDATE REPORT**

Kerry Birtles, Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers, provided a summary and overview of the Corporate Parenting Update Report to the Committee.

The Committee heard how a virtual meeting of the Shadow Committee had been held with two cared for children recording from their own homes. The meeting was seen as an achievement particularly as the children had felt safe at home with carers in a way that hadn't been anticipated and the advantages of working this way had advantages that meant more virtual meetings would be held in the future.

The Committee heard the following key points::

- Every child having open to the service had been risk assessed where virtual contact was being maintained;
- 80-85% of young people were being seen in a face-to-face capacity unless there was a Covid-19 risk, solutions had included socially distanced walks in the park;
- Foster Carers had reported a reduction in the number of children that needed to move to another placement in an unplanned way. The day-to-

day pressures of school life being removed and the extra family time could have contributed to this; and

- Care Leavers had reported loneliness, social isolation and there were concerns that related to employment opportunities, this cohort of young people were not as well connected to their care families as other members of society were and were a current area of concern for the service.

The Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions and there was further discussion that established:

- The number of cared for children had risen from 530-547. This was due to the difficulties in the progression of children's plans for permanence during this period. Children could not be transitioned because of the lockdown restrictions;
- There had been significant delays for Children involved with care proceedings. It had been difficult to conduct complex cases in a virtual space and Courts had looked at hybrid solutions. There was an estimated delay of 6 months for children progressing through systems;
- There was a risk to children becoming cared for in an unplanned way as an emergency. Officers were expecting further incidents of hidden harm as a fallout from lockdown, this included an increase in drug/alcohol, mental health breakdown; and
- There had been a reduction in placement instability.

The Committee recognised the importance of the right response post-Covid-19, this should include appropriate accommodation, education, jobs and inclusive growth. Members had relationships with businesses across the borough that officers did not and from that perspective, the Committee could help advocate for care leavers in their role as corporate parents.

RESOLVED-

That officers be thanked for their continued good working practice during these unprecedented time and that the report be received and noted.

## 5 CHILDREN'S RIGHTS ANNUAL REPORT

Sue Preston, Service Manager at The Children's Society attended the meeting to present the Children's Rights Annual Report to the Committee.

The Committee heard that The Children's Society is now in it's seventh year of delivery and continues to have a good working relationship with Cheshire East Council.

Key headlines from the report included:

- From 2019, Ofsted recognised any young person classed as being in a private fostering arrangement receive advocacy support through the Children's Society;
- Advocacy referrals had increased this year and there had been more asylum seeking children;

- The Children's Commissioner completed a report in 2019 that concluded advocacy was strong, and a deeper dive was also reviewed on short-based advocacy which concluded as a positive piece of work;
- The Children's Society had a new Chief Executive Officer, Mark Russell; and
- Looking ahead, the next phase will be returning to work in a safe way.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received and noted.

**6 REVIEW OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE'S TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Lauren Conway, Improvement and Development Officer attended the meeting to address the Committee about the review of working that related to the Terms of Reference for this Committee.

The Committee were asked to endorse the change from:

"The Committee includes representative young people from the Children in Care Council to advise the Committee."

To:

"The Committee is informed by representative young people from the Children in Care Council to advise the Committee."

RESOLVED:

That the proposed changes be made to the Terms of Reference wording for this Committee.

The meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and concluded at 5.14 pm

Councillor K Flavell (Chairman)

This page is intentionally left blank



*Working for a brighter future together*

## **Corporate Parenting Committee**

---

**Date of Meeting:** 29 September 2020

**Report Title:** Corporate Parenting Update Report

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Kathryn Flavell, Portfolio Holder for Children and Families

**Senior Officer:** Mark Palethorpe, Executive Director of People

---

### **1. Report summary**

- 1.1. This report will advise the Corporate Parenting Committee of how the service are delivering the priorities for cared for children and care leavers which are clearly set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- 1.2. This is the second report to the Committee following the Covid-19 restrictions that were imposed in March 2020 and will provide further information about the impact of the national pandemic for cared for children and care leavers.

### **2. Recommendation/s**

- 2.1. Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to:
  - Note the contents of the report.
  - Provide support and challenge to the local authority's actions in respect of the report.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendation/s**

- 3.1. The Corporate Parenting Committee is an advisory group to the Cabinet and, as such, needs to be aware of any national or local issues that are likely to impact on cared for children and care leavers. The Corporate Parenting Committee needs to be able to scrutinise and challenge performance to improve outcomes for cared for children and young people.

#### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1. None; this is an update report.

#### **5. Background**

- 5.1. This report provides an update to the Corporate Parenting Committee since the last report which was presented on the 14<sup>th</sup> July 2020. The lived experiences for some of our cared for children and care leavers have continued to be affected by the impact of the Covid-19 in areas such as education and employment and planned transitions to more permanent homes.
- 5.2. The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 for Children's Social Care services has been in place since the 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020 and are intended to remain in place until the 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020. A review of the amendments is currently taking place and it is likely that the date will be extended for a small number of the regulations. The Government has said that, subject to consultation, it plans to extend the regulations for areas such as virtual visits, the frequency of Ofsted inspections, and medical reports required for adoption panel, by implementing a statutory instrument to be laid before Parliament 21 days before it comes into effect. This amendment has enabled local authorities to adapt traditional working practices in order to safeguard all involved from the risks of Covid-19 whilst continuing to undertake statutory social work.
- 5.3. As previously reported, in the early stages of the pandemic, virtual visits were undertaken to our cared for children and care leavers where this was assessed to be safe, however we very quickly returned to our statutory obligations. During this period all children and young people's needs were assessed individually, as were the risks to our frontline practitioners, in determining whether it was necessary to continue to undertake virtual visits. The current position in relation to our visiting frequency is that 80% of our visits are being done face to face with the remaining 20% occurring virtually for Covid-19 risk assessed specific issues.
- 5.4. Children and young people who are cared for by Cheshire East Council live in a variety of different homes with different types of carers depending on their assessed needs. As of the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2020: 118 children live with in-house foster carers and 50 of these children have been matched to live within these families until they are adults. 152 children live with external foster carers and 53 of these children are matched to live in these families until they reach adulthood. Where



children and young people are not permanently matched, the Court and the local authority are identifying long term plans for them or family finding for the most suitable long term homes. In addition there are 39 children who live in residential childrens homes and a further 7 children who live at residential schools. We also have 27 children who live in supported accommodation as they prepare for their transitions to adulthood. The remainder of our cared for children population live with their parents or a relative or family friend and are the subject of an interim care order or care order and the local authority shares parental responsibility to safeguard the needs of the children. Where a child continues to live within their family network they have a clear plan for the ending of social care involvement.

- 5.5. During the Covid-19 period we did experience a rise in the number of cared for children being cared for in residential childrens homes as a result of a lack of internal and external fostering provision however as a service we are clear that where children can be cared for within foster homes this should happen and so for each child where there is a plan to step back into foster care this will be achieved for them in a timescale that is right for them.

#### **Pledge 1 - Being a Good Corporate Parent**

- 5.6 Cheshire East Council committed to the pledges of the Corporate Parenting Strategy at full council on the 13<sup>th</sup> December 2018. It is the responsibility of all corporate parents across the council to consider the needs of our children and young people and advocate for how services can be designed, delivered and crucially influenced by what they need.
- 5.7 We must, particularly at this time, look to prioritise our cared for children and young people and care leavers where we know they are likely to have experienced the pandemic in a detrimental way. Some of these known areas are in relation to access to employment and training, mental health services and social isolation. Officers are focused on how we think creatively across the council to ensure that these young people are at the forefront of our minds to provide them with every opportunity to continue to be prioritised as we move into recovery from Covid-19.
- 5.8 Officers and members are keen to reestablish plans for frontline visits to take place across the service and the menu of options will be presented to members at committee on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020.

**Pledge 2 – We will improve education, employment and employment outcomes**

- 5.9 The educational and employment experiences of our cared for children and care leavers was significantly disrupted from March 2020 to the end of the school term in July 2020. Initially, in line with government guidance the local authority took the decision that it was in children's best interests to remain at home, however as the guidance around children safely returning to school emerged Cheshire East Council took the approach to prioritise the reintegration of cared for children back into school with a focus on transition groups. This resulted in many children returning to school and having a positive experience, crucially preparing them for a more permanent return to school in September 2020.
- 5.10 In preparation for the beginning of the academic year in September 2020, frontline teams and the virtual school worked closely with schools and educational settings to ensure that Personal Education Plans for children were targeted and focused on responding to the 'gaps in learning' that have been experienced by our cared for children. It will be necessary within the first half term for there to be a focus on supporting cared for children back into school, acknowledging their potential worries and anxieties and also seeking to continue to be ambitious corporate parents for them and for these ambitions to be actioned within up to date Personal Education Plans. In addition, enabling our cared for children to access any necessary transport to their educational setting has also been planned and individual plans have been put in place to ensure that transport to school does not act as a barrier to attendance.
- 5.11 The experiences of our care leavers are of equal significance where we observe a varied outcome; one care leaver achieved a First Class Honours Degree and another lost their employment because of redundancies within their place of work. In July, 54% of care leavers were in education, training or employment (EET). This is out of a population of 197 care leavers (18-24 year olds). This is a shift in direction where we are seeing care leavers lose employment opportunities and apprenticeships. However the service are already targeting our most vulnerable young adults with an autumn and winter NEET programme set up with young people enrolled, and through the Journey First Programme we will be able to target further care leavers who have struggled during this period and support them back into employment. It is however worthy to note that in addition to the 10 care leavers currently at university, a further 4 have places secured for September 2020. One young woman in particular has

shown resilience and commitment to Cheshire East residents in working in a local care home for elderly people and supporting them through this crisis. Fantastic achievements all round.

### **Pledge 3 - Achieving Permanence and Keeping Children Safe**

- 5.12 Achieving permanence for cared for children and care leavers is our service priority and we have a clear plan to ensure that the children who do require local authority care receive this in a timely way and that the care they receive is excellent. For children who no longer need to be in care, we are ensuring that their plans are progressed without delay so they can exit from care.
- 5.13 There are some children who have experienced delays in their care plans as a result of Covid-19 restrictions such as children transitioning to adoption or achieving adoption in the Court arena. It is positive to note that the barriers have now been resolved and children are now moving forward with achieving their plans of permanence with the first Adoption Order of the year being achieved in August 2020.

#### Bespoke Childrens' Homes

- 5.14 All four commissioned childrens homes in Cheshire East are open and Ofsted registered and are providing care to six Cheshire East children. Five of these children were previously cared for in external provision and were living outside the borough, and a return to their home community is a positive one. There is a clear trajectory for how we will support the homes to be fully occupied however this need to be done at the pace that is right for children. We have a variety of services linked to Bespoke such as Speech and Language Therapists, mental health services and the virtual school who are all supporting ambitious outcomes for the children in our care.

#### Adoption Counts

- 5.15 Cheshire East have been in regional arrangements with Adoption Counts since 2017 where success in the partnerships is evident in children achieving permanence via adoption and the timeliness of achieving these plans. Officers have been working in partnership with Adoption Counts and are seeking an 'in principal' decision to move to permanent arrangements within the year, subject to TUPE consultation and agreement of the Intergrated Service Agreement.

**Pledge 4 – We will Improve Health and Wellbeing Outcomes**

- 5.16 Our cared for children and young people and care leavers have not received a 'lesser' or reduced service as a result of Covid-19. Some the the assessment of their need has been undertaken virtually where appropriate and currently assessment clinics are now operating face to face once again. Initial Health Assessments completed by community paediatricians improved from 23% in Quarter 4 2019-20 to 67% in Quarter 1 2020-21. Review Health Assessments continued to be good at 85% in Quarter 1 from 80% in Quarter 4. The partnership are exploring how we can offer a varied service going forward as for some young people, having options about how we assess and meet their health needs has been of benefit to them.
- 5.17 The emotional wellbeing and mental health needs of our cared for children and care leavers has been an issue raised throughout the pandemic and is a current focus for our Lead Nurse for Cared for Children and Care Leavers, Shan McPharland. We seek to make the offer to children and young people much more visible to them as we continue in our recovery phase and challenge providers to ensure that cared for children and care leavers are prioritised in the delivery of their service.

**Pledge 5 – We will prepare young people for Adulthood**

- 5.18 It is notable that during the period from the beginning of April 2020 to date, the care leavers service have seen an increased need to support care leavers who are 21 and over (often described as returners) which is an increase of approximately 20%-40%. This equates to 23 individuals and 15 remain open to the service for ongoing support.
- 5.19 The education, employment, training experiences of care leavers have been described in elsewhere in this report however the accommodation needs of our care leavers also remain a priority. The Local Authority are currently in the process of recommissioning the 16+ supported accommodation offer which has been co-produced with care leavers.

**National or legislative changes**

- 5.20 The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulation 2020 were introduced to provide flexibility in the statutory obligations of local government relating to cared for children, adoption and fostering. They have been the subject of criticism due to concerns

that there has been a dilution of responsibility towards the most vulnerable children in our society, bringing in through the back door many of the provisions first proposed by the original draft of the Care Act 2014. This has included criticism from the Children's Commissioner. Nationally, Local Authorities have used the flexibilities sparingly and where this is in the best interests of children. There is no evidence to suggest a child has been harmed as a result of the flexibilities being used.

5.21 The approach in Cheshire East remains as it always has been, to promote best practice to achieve the best outcomes for the children and young people in our care. Set out below is the response to the changes and how we foresee them being used in Cheshire East, however the underpinning principles will be as follows:

- The initial assumption is that we will always seek to act within the current legislation as this underpins best practice.
- Where variation is required this will only be on the basis of a best interests decision for a child.
- A variation request that sets out the circumstances for the child, the variation being requested and impact for the child, and review point will be provided to the relevant senior manager for agreement.

5.22 A consultation has recently taken place regarding the amendments and it is expected that for a small number of regulations the agreed flexibility will be extended past the 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020.

## **6. Implications of the Recommendations**

### **6.1 Legal Implications**

6.1.1 There is a strong possibility that the referenced Regulations will be extended in part beyond 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020 subject to consultation but only for a small number of issues as highlighted above. For the sake of clarity, Parliamentary Under Secretary Vicky Ford indicated an intention that the continuing Regulations will be:

- The requirement for a medical report to become a foster carer or adopter from a GP.
- The provision for virtual visits but noting provisions regarding the frequency of visits are intended to lapse.
- The frequency of Ofsted inspections.

- 6.1.2 The majority of the Regulations will however expire as planned on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020. There is a need to ensure as outlined above that any choice to use this remaining flexibility is documented and that caution is used. The Local Authority's other obligations will therefore be required to be followed from 25<sup>th</sup> September.

## **6.2 Financial Implications**

- 6.2.1 There are no financial implications or changes needed to the MTFS as a result of the recommendations of this report.

## **6.3 Policy Implications**

- 6.3.1 Cheshire East is ambitious and committed to ensuring it is a great place to be young and every child has the best start in life. This is demonstrated through the Council's core priorities that people live well and for longer and have the life skills and education they need to thrive. These priorities are supported and driven through the Children and Young People's Plan and the Health and Wellbeing Strategic Plan. Our Corporate Parenting Strategy has a clear vision that our cared for children and care leavers are safe, happy, healthy and achieve their full potential.

## **6.4 Equality Implications**

- 6.4.1 Cared for children and care leavers can be a vulnerable group because of their experiences and so the impact of Covid-19 could mean further marginalisation.

## **6.5 Human Resources Implications**

- 6.5.1 HR and Public Health have been supportive of officers in ensuring that robust risk assessments are in place and available to staff in undertaking their duties.

## **6.6 Risk Management Implications**

- 6.6.1 Cared for children and care leavers are a vulnerable group that are at risk of a number of factors, including poor education and training, health, safeguarding and transition into adulthood; the Corporate Parenting Strategy prioritises these areas.

## **6.7 Rural Communities Implications**

6.7.1 There are no direct rural communities' implications of this report.

## **6.8 Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children**

6.8.1 The contents of this report have implications for cared for children and care leavers, who are some of Cheshire East's most vulnerable children.

## **6.9 Public Health Implications**

6.9.1 The impact of Covid-19 is well documented within this report.

## **6.10 Climate Change Implications**

6.10.1 There is a commitment to ensure that Cheshire East cared for children live as close to their home community as possible, wherever this is safe to do so. This will ensure that children can continue to feel connected to their families and local community. It also reduces the geographical footprint of children, families and staff as travel is reduced.

## **7. Ward Members Affected**

7.1 Although the number of Cheshire East cared for children and young people is relatively small, they are a vulnerable cohort, who live across Cheshire East and in other local authority areas.

## **8. Consultation & Engagement**

8.1 Our cared for children's group have been unable to meet as a group as a result of Covid-19 however the participation service intend on undertaking a children and young people survey in the coming months which may form part of our planning in relation to the shadow committee. Specifically we have coproduced the 16+ supported accommodation offer with our care experienced adults to ensure that the offer we commission is delivered in line with their needs and wishes.

## **9. Access to Information**

9.1 None.

**10. Contact Information**

10.1 Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

Name: Kerry Birtles

Job Title: Head of Cared for Children & Care Leavers

Email: [Kerry.Birtles@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:Kerry.Birtles@cheshireeast.gov.uk)





*Working for a brighter future together*

## **Corporate Parenting Committee**

---

**Date of Meeting:** 29 September 2020

**Report Title:** Vision for children and young people in Cheshire East

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Kathryn Flavell – Portfolio Holder for Children and Families

**Senior Officer:** Mark Palethorpe – Executive Director of People

---

### **1. Report Summary**

- 1.1 We have developed an overarching vision for what we want to achieve for children and young people in Cheshire East. This will be used to ensure all practitioners working with children and young people have a shared aim and are clear on the expectation that all work should be done **together** with children, young people and families.

### **2. Recommendations**

2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to:

- Endorse and adopt the vision for children and young people in Cheshire East
- Promote the vision widely
- Provide support and challenge to ensure these outcomes for children are achieved and decisions are made in children and young people's best interests.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1. The Corporate Parenting Committee has a key role in ensuring that, as a Council, we achieve strong outcomes for our cared for children, young people and care leavers.

- 3.2. We believe establishing a shared vision will help to support us to achieve strong outcomes for children and young people across the partnership.

#### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1 Not applicable.

#### **5. Background Information**

- 5.1 When Ofsted carried out their inspection in November 2019, inspectors felt that although the voice of the child was embedded within services and was a strength, and partnerships were mature and responsive, that practitioners would benefit from a clear overarching vision which set out what we wanted to achieve for children and young people.
- 5.2 A considerable amount of work has already taken place with our children, young people, families, communities and partnerships to establish our existing effective partnership plans and strategies, such as the Corporate Parenting Strategy, Children and Young People's Plan, Early Help Together Strategy, SEND Strategy, and Safeguarding Children's Partnership Business Plan. This work has informed the development of the vision, which pulls together the different elements of all of these plans into one place.
- 5.3 The vision is based on what children, young people, parents, carers and practitioners have told us is important to them. This will be used to ensure all practitioners working with children and young people are really ambitious for our children, and have a shared aim and are clear on the expectation that all work should be done **together** with children, young people and families.
- 5.4 Our vision is included within the Appendix. The content has been shared with children, young people, parents, carers and staff across the partnership, and their feedback has been incorporated into the final version.

#### **6. Implications of the Recommendations**

##### **6.1 Legal Implications**

- 6.1.1 There are no legal implications of this report.

##### **6.2 Finance Implications**

- 6.2.1 The design work on the promotional materials for the vision are being funded from the Troubled Families budget.

##### **6.3 Policy Implications**

- 6.3.1 There are no policy implications.

#### **6.4 Equality Implications**

6.4.1 Part of our vision is achieving respectful and inclusive communities.

#### **6.5 Human Resources Implications**

6.5.1 There are no additional human resource implications.

#### **6.6 Risk Management Implications**

6.6.1 Establishing a shared vision and the expectation that all work is carried out together with children, young people and families will help us to achieve better outcomes for children and young people.

#### **6.7 Rural Communities Implications**

6.7.1 There are no implications for rural communities.

#### **6.8 Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children**

6.8.1 Establishing a shared vision and the expectation that all work is carried out together with children, young people and families will help us to achieve better outcomes for children and young people.

#### **6.9 Public Health Implications**

6.9.1 The vision includes promoting healthy lifestyles and positive choices for children and young people.

#### **6.10 Climate Change Implications**

6.10.1 There are no climate change implications.

### **7 Ward Members Affected**

7.1 All ward members.

### **8 Consultation & Engagement**

8.1 Children and young people have been consulted and their views have informed the development of the vision.

## **9 Access to Information**

- 9.1 Further background information relating to this report can be obtained by contacting the officer below.

## **10 Contact Information**

- 10.1 Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

Name: Lauren Conway

Job Title: Interim Head of Service, Children's Development and Partnerships

Email: [lauren.conway@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:lauren.conway@cheshireeast.gov.uk)



## What we want to achieve

### Our Vision

Through working **together** we will make Cheshire East a great place to be young.

We will make our families and communities strong, welcoming and supportive, where differences are respected and celebrated

All our children and young people deserve to be happy, healthy and safe, and to enjoy a life which is filled with fun and opportunities to learn and develop.

We will be hugely ambitious for all our children and young people, supporting them to succeed and grow as individuals. Their interests will be at the heart of everything we do.

We will support children and young people to build on their strengths, develop resilience, and achieve to their full potential. We will celebrate their successes!

We will fully prepare our children for their transition into adulthood, so they have the skills to thrive now and in the future.



### We believe that...

- Children are best supported within their families and their communities.
- All children should enjoy the best education which prepares them to thrive in adulthood.
- Families and communities are strong and resilient, with the right help, by the right people, at the right time.



## Outcomes for children and young people

We will do all we can to ensure that:

1. Children and young people we care for are happy and given every opportunity to achieve their full potential.
2. Children and young people **feel and are safe**.
3. Children and young people are **happy** and experience **good mental health and wellbeing**.
4. Children and young people are **healthy and make positive choices**.
5. Children and young people leave school with the **best skills and qualifications** they can achieve and the life skills they need to thrive into adulthood.
6. Children, young people and young adults with **additional needs have better chances in life**.



## How we'll do this

### Working TOGETHER

We will work together with children, young people, parents, carers, services and communities, as equal partners towards a common goal:

- T**eamwork when designing, delivering and evaluating individual support and services
- O**pen minded ideas and discussions
- G**enuine communication for all parties involved
- E**qual partners help to shape and improve support for all
- T**rust each other to make the right decisions
- H**onest
- E**ngage and empower children, young people, adults and families
- R**espect for everyone's views and opinions



### Our focus

We will work to deliver

- Fairer and more resilient communities
- The best start in life for all children
- Enjoyable education that supports children achieve to their full potential
- The right support at the right time from the right people
- A stronger offer to improve social, emotional and mental health and wellbeing
- Excellence in social work and support
- Our ambition to be the best corporate parents
- Effective support for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities



## How we'll know if we've made a difference

- Children, young people and families will tell us we have made a difference.
- Children, young people and families will be supported at the earliest opportunity.
- We will get it right first time and we will help families to be resilient.
- Children and young people will live safely in their families and communities.
- Children will be cared for if they need to be and will have a permanent home as soon as possible.
- We will improve outcomes for pupils at risk of poor educational outcomes
- All young people, including our most vulnerable, will have choices in their education, employment and training.



### Our behaviours



We will work with children, young people and their families to understand what life is like for them, recognising their strengths and aspirations.



We will work together as one team, building strength within our relationships – we will make decisions jointly.



We will celebrate the achievements of the whole network and learn from the actions that we all take.

This page is intentionally left blank



*Working for a brighter future together*

## **Corporate Parenting Committee**

---

**Date of Meeting:** 29 September 2020

**Report Title:** Engagement options for members of the Committee

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Kathryn Flavell – Portfolio Holder for Children and Families

**Senior Officer:** Mark Palethorpe – Executive Director of People

---

### **1. Report Summary**

- 1.1. This report sets out the options for members of the Corporate Parenting Committee to engage with cared for children, care leavers, and the range of services and workstreams that support them.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. The Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to:
  - 2.1.1. Note the contents of the report.
  - 2.1.2. Complete the proforma in Appendix 1 to indicate their preferences for the options which are offered.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1. It is important for members to have an overview of the issues affecting cared for children, care leavers, and the services that support them. COVID-19 is having a significant impact on our children and young people, practitioners, and demand to frontline services, so it is particularly important that members are sighted on this and their changing needs as we move forward.
- 3.2. These engagement activities will enable members to effectively carry out their role as corporate parents.



#### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1. There is the option to continue to delay engagement activity until all activities can be carried out in person. However, we know our working practices will need to adjust to Covid-19 for a considerable period to come, and it is important that members are sighted on the key issues for children and young people during this unprecedented time.

#### **5. Background**

- 5.1. The Committee has previously considered different engagement options, but due to COVID-19 and the lockdown which took place from March 2020 arrangements were not able to be put into place. These options have now been revised to reflect current working arrangements.
- 5.2. Some options will be able to be carried out remotely and some will be offered face to face.
- 5.3. The options include:
- Participating in a workstream to help develop services in line with one of the pledges from the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
  - Visits to frontline teams and residential homes.
  - Attending decision making meetings for young people, such as the Ignition Panel, Adoption Panel and Fostering Panel.
  - Directly engaging with cared for children and young people alongside our participation service.
  - Being part of the Governing Body for the Virtual School.
- 5.4. It is proposed that a consistent person will be identified for each activity, and that members will feedback to the Committee on the successes and issues they have identified for cared for children and young people, and care leavers as a result of this activity.
- 5.5. The full range of options is detailed in the Appendix.

#### **6. Implications of the Recommendations**

##### **6.1. Legal Implications**

- 6.1.1. We advise that all members who are participating in the engagement activities also complete the member GDPR training.



- 6.1.2. Members are not required to undertake DBS checks to participate in these activities, as they will be accompanied by a member of staff, however, all members are encouraged to undertake DBS checks to enable them to effectively discharge other corporate parenting roles.

## **6.2. Finance Implications**

- 6.2.1. None.

## **6.3. Policy Implications**

- 6.3.1. As a result of these activities, elected members may raise issues that have policy implications. These would follow due process.

## **6.4. Equality Implications**

- 6.4.1. There are no equality implications.

## **6.5. Human Resources Implications**

- 6.5.1. These activities involve elected members engaging with cared for children, care leavers, and practitioners within different services. Previous feedback from practitioners from other work with elected members is that visits/engage with members and discussions about their work makes them feel valued.

## **6.6. Risk Management Implications**

- 6.6.1. Scrutiny and engagement from members will help to identify areas where services can improve and will help to prevent risks.

## **6.7. Rural Communities Implications**

- 6.7.1. There are no direct implications for rural communities.

## **6.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children**

- 6.8.1. These engagement activities will support the Committee to hear children and young people's views, understand the current issues cared for children and care leavers are facing, and ensure that we are effectively supporting children and young people as their corporate parent.

## **6.9. Public Health Implications**

- 6.9.1. Appropriate measures will be put in place to ensure children, young people, practitioners and members are protected from the risk of Covid-19 during these activities.

**6.10. Climate Change Implications**

6.10.1. Carrying out activities virtually will enable us to reduce our carbon footprint.

**7. Ward Members Affected**

7.1. There are no direct implications for individual wards.

**8. Consultation & Engagement**

8.1. Not applicable.

**9. Access to Information**

9.1. There is no additional information.

**10. Contact Information**

10.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

Name: Jacquie Sims

Job Title: Director of Children's Social Care

Email: [Jacquie.Sims@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:Jacquie.Sims@cheshireeast.gov.uk)

Appendix 1:

## Elected Member Options for Engagement around Corporate Parenting

Member Name:

Activity Area	Frequency	Detail	Preference (please rate 1-3 where 1 is your preference)
Workstream for Pledges 1 and 3 - Being a Good Corporate Parent and Achieving Permanency	Bi-monthly	<p>This workstream covers both Pledge 1 – Being A Good Corporate Parent and Pledge 3 - Achieving Permanence and Staying Safe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participation with children and young people, elected member and workforce development, developing the corporate parenting role, quality assurance and evaluation of the impact of the corporate parenting strategy</li><li>• developing direct tools, resources and practice guidance around permanence, stability and managing risk, embedding and challenging understanding of impact on placements and how to minimise disruption.</li></ul>	
Workstream 2 - Education and employment outcomes	Bi-monthly	<p>The purpose of the RAIC/SPEED group is to plan, implement and monitor co-ordinated actions to support the engagement, achievement and progression of cared for children and young people from age 5 -age 16+ and care leavers.</p>	

Workstream 4 - Improve health and wellbeing outcomes	Bi-monthly	This workstream aims to ensure that all cared for children and care leavers have equitable access to health services to enable them to achieve their optimum health potential and have the same opportunities as children who are not cared for. The group monitors progress of the actions identified to meet the health needs of cared for children and care leavers and identifies new opportunities to improve the services available. Opportunities for members of the Corporate Parenting Committee to gain a deeper understanding of the health needs of cared for children and care leavers, and the processes involved in meeting those needs could be achieved by virtually visiting the Specialist Cared for Children Nursing Team.	
Workstream 5 - Prepare young people for adulthood	Bi-monthly	This is a bi-monthly group where the actions of the Corporate Parenting Strategy are discussed, and we also look at how we can improve the preparation for adulthood for our cared for children and care leavers. The group consists of the Care Leavers Service, Fostering, The Children's Society, the Participation team and occasionally local accommodation providers. We look at new initiatives, how we can move the service forward and then feed back into the Corporate Parenting Operational Group.	
Frontline Visits to the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Service	Quarterly	<p>This includes opportunities to engage with the service, team meetings and (with consent of the young people), attend group activities such as the autumn programme supporting care leavers around young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and confidence and self-esteem training, and monthly care leavers' activities.</p> <p>The NEET programme is starting on 3<sup>rd</sup> November for 12 weeks, with the first sessions taking place on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> and Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> November. Further details will be available in due course.</p>	
Visits to Cheshire East Residential Homes	Every 2 months	Opportunity to engage with young people in the places they live, support the quality assurance role and also challenge and feedback to committee on challenges for young people in residential settings, local and community issues.	
Ignition Panel	Monthly	A monthly panel that meets to educate young people on their accommodation options. The panel empowers young people by giving them a choice to make their own decisions with the support of their Social Worker. The panels are usually held at the YMCA in Crewe, and lasts two hours, they are currently happening virtually on the second Wednesday of each month.	

Fostering Panel	Usually every 3 weeks	<p>The Fostering Panel makes recommendations for approval, changes to approval and deregistration of foster carers. It also makes recommendations relating to placement and long-term matching of cared for children and young people. It is expected that members have prepared well by reading the papers that are provided one week prior to Panel. This may take several hours as there are usually large numbers of papers to read. It is easier to take notes while reading so that the main issues can be identified at panel quickly. Panel members are expected to contribute to the discussion both prior and post attendance of applicants / foster carers presenting at Panel. These discussions include identification of strength and vulnerabilities of carers drawn from the paperwork, gaps in assessment and compliance with checklist, for example medicals and DBS checks. Panel members are expected to agree questions to ask Carers and who is asking which question. This provides a structure for the carers' attendance. Panel members are expected to contribute to the discussion on recommendations to be made to the Agency Decision Maker. All Panel members are appraised annually by the Chair and the service adviser. In addition, it is expected that Panel members attend the annual development session held with the Fostering Service.</p> <p>Panels start at 9am and usually last approx. 3 hours, they are currently being held virtually via Microsoft Teams. Dates of future panels are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monday 28th September</li> <li>• Friday 02nd October</li> <li>• Monday 19th October</li> <li>• Friday 23rd October</li> <li>• Monday 09th November</li> <li>• Friday 13th November</li> <li>• Monday 30th November</li> <li>• Friday 04th December</li> <li>• Monday 21st December</li> </ul>	
My Voice (Shadow Committee link –	Bi-monthly	Cheshire East's Children in Care Council meet with the chair of Corporate Parenting Committee and Head of Service to discuss the theme of the following Corporate Parenting Committee. All themes include the five main pledges of the Corporate	

C&F Portfolio Holder to attend)		Parenting Strategy.	
Governing Body for Virtual School	Once per term (3 per year)	The aim of the Governing Board of the Virtual School is to promote high aspirations for the educational progress, attainment, achievement and attendance of Cheshire East cared for children; working with key partners to close the attainment gap between cared for children and their peers and to ensure that their voice is heard and their full potential is reached. The Governing Body is currently being set up and the first meeting is hoped to take place in September.	
Tuition support	Ad hoc	To offer revision support and guidance to children through online/verbal feedback.	
Independent Visitor group meetings	Every 2 months	<p>Opportunity to visit our Independent Visitor group meetings, meet volunteers and find out from them how they are supporting children and young people, and also to offer any support in the recruitment of Independent Visitors.</p> <p>The next Volunteer meeting is on Thursday 17th September 6pm – 7:30 pm via Microsoft Teams and the next one is in November (date TBC).</p>	
Adoption Panel	Every 3 weeks	Opportunity to influence adoption decisions for children and understand frontline Social Work practice being an Adoption Panel member, these panels run every 3 weeks. There is a commitment with preparation for reading materials prior to panel and attendance at 3-weekly virtual panels.	

Please complete this form and return to [corporateparenting@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:corporateparenting@cheshireeast.gov.uk)



*Working for a brighter future together*

## **Corporate Parenting Committee**

---

**Date of Meeting:** 29 September 2020

**Report Title:** Fostering Service Annual Review Report

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Kathryn Flavell, Portfolio Holder for Children and Families

**Senior Officer:** Mark Palethorpe, Executive Director of People

---

### **1. Report Summary**

- 1.1. This report will update the Corporate Parenting Committee on the recruitment and support activity of the fostering service as well as the actions that we are taking in developing and improving the service for our staff, our foster carers and most importantly our cared for children. The first part of the report will focus on the recruitment and support activity over the past twelve months and the second part will focus on the improvement journey that we are undertaking.

### **2. Recommendation/s**

- 2.1. Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to:
- Note the contents of the report
  - Provide support and challenge to the development work and progress required to improve fostering services.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendation/s**

- 3.1. The Corporate Parenting Committee plays a key role in scrutinising and challenging performance to improve outcomes for cared for children and young people.

### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1 None; this is an update report.

## 5. Background

### **Recruitment and Support**

- 5.1 Over the last year, the Fostering Service has embarked upon a programme of renewal and improvement. The need to recruit foster carers remains our highest priority and has some additional urgency owing to the increase in demand for the service as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions. The current cohort of mainstream foster carers is largely made up of people over the age of 50; this means that there continues to be a need to bring in younger people and provide support and training to enable them to become the experienced and stable fostering population that every local authority needs.
- 5.2 In order to improve the mainstream recruitment position, we have reviewed some of the requirements we have had about the circumstances of foster carers, such as the need to have a car, the need to have one carer at home all day, and so on. This shift in our localised stipulations has resulted in an increase in enquiries and has enabled us to actively consider a wider group of individuals as prospective carers. In addition, we have also stepped up our in-house advertising efforts that will sit alongside the Foster 4 arrangements until we leave Foster 4 at the end of September. At that point we will have total responsibility for our own marketing and recruitment.
- 5.3 Since September 2019, the service has had 275 enquiries from people interested in becoming a mainstream foster carer. The service progresses each one of these enquiries, contacting the enquirer and having a general discussion about fostering and answering all the questions that they may have. Following this, if the person feels that they would like to explore this further, and where we consider that they are suitable, we then complete a formal Expression of Interest form with them. After this, an Initial Visit takes place (virtually at the present time) and where this is positive, a formal Application Form is sent to the person for them to complete. Once the Application form is returned, an assessing Social Worker is allocated to undertake the full fostering assessment, which is a process normally taking 16 weeks.
- 5.4 In the year to date since September 2019, we have received 57 Expressions of Interest, and we will receive more before the end of this reporting period. The figure of 57 is an improvement on previous years, which is attributable to having changed our stipulations in terms of base requirements for prospective carers and to having combined the Foster 4



recruitment arrangements with our own targeted Cheshire East advertising.

5.5 Over the past year (since September 2019) the approval of foster carers has been as follows

<b>Month</b>	<b>Mainstream Carers</b>	<b>Family and Friends Carers</b>
Sept 2019	0	0
October 2019	2	2
November 2019	0	0
December 2019	0	2
January 2020	0	4
February 2020	2	1
March 2020	2	4
April 2020	0	2
May 2020	2	0
June 2020	1	2
July 2020	2	5
August 2020	1 (projected)	
September 2020	5 (projected)	

5.6 The overall picture in terms of mainstream assessment and recruitment is a positive one. At the time of writing we currently have 11 mainstream fostering households in assessment, which is the best position we have been in for some time (it should be noted that these are the assessments that are projected for August and September panels, and a further 5 assessments that will be presented to panel during December 2020). It is also worth highlighting that over the past 12 months we have recruited 4 foster carers who were previously employed by Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA), the perception is often that foster carers leave to join IFA's, but this is clearly not the case. Those carers that have joined us describe the increased support and supervision as being their primary motivation for moving.

5.7 The flow of connected persons (family and friends foster carers) work into the service is very variable and generally at a high level. This arises because when children need to become cared for, the local authority must actively consider any extended family members who may be in a position to look after them and where this is going to be the permanence plan for the child, the person becomes the subject of a full fostering assessment.

5.8 In terms of people who have stopped fostering over the period, there have been 10 connected person households who have stopped fostering. This happens because sometimes the placement comes to an end, the young person may turn 18 and is therefore no longer a child, or more usually because the carer has sought and obtained a legal order (for example and Special Guardianship Order) which secures the child's permanence with them and ends the cared for episode, this is a very positive outcome for the child or young person. In some situations, the placement ends in an unplanned way and an alternative placement must be found for the child, which then means that the carer must resign as they are only approved to care for those particular children.

5.9 In respect of mainstream foster carers who no longer foster from September 2019 to September 2020 the reasons were:

<b>Reason for stopping fostering</b>	<b>Number of fostering households</b>
Allegation	1
Family Circumstances, including retirement	8
Health issues	1
Dispute with service	1
Placement disruption	1
De-registration	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>

5.10 For mainstream foster carers, there are sometimes tensions between the placed children and the birth children of the household, and this can contribute to the carers deciding to stop fostering. Clearly, the service works hard to resolve these issues and to make them manageable, we do specific work with birth children in order to help them to understand the issues that cared for children can have and to ease any tensions in the household. For other carers, the point at which they become grandparents can be pivotal, and for some people, they feel that their fostering responsibilities get in the way of the active role that they want to play in their grandchildren's lives. Again, the service actively works with carers in this situation, and explores alternatives in terms of their fostering in order to enable them to continue fostering, for example by becoming respite carers, sometimes this is successful and other times not.

5.11 From September 2019 there were 5 complaints about the Fostering Service. Two of these related to particular Supervising Social Workers and what was felt to be an over officious and oppressive approach to the foster carers. Two complaints related to financial matters which were

historical in nature and required a settlement, and the most recent one was a complaint from a cared for child in a placement, who found that the placement was not what he expected, and he wanted to move. The service generally responds to complaints within timescale and all these complaints have been dealt with at Stage 1 or are being dealt with at that stage.

### **Local Authority Designated Officer**

- 5.12 There have been 5 involvements with the Local Authority Designated Officer over the last year. Two of these related to simultaneous allegations about two carers in the same household, and the others were allegations about single carers. The service has undertaken some work recently to consider how these processes might be improved and matters resolved in a timely way. As a result of this, clear timescales will be set at the outset which will give the Fostering Service a timeframe to work to and will give foster carers some reassurance about how long things will take. Doing this work was an important element in terms of the feedback from foster carers about this area being problematic and difficult for them, and it will provide carers with some reassurance that their concerns are being heard, taken seriously and acted upon.

### **Service Improvements**

- 5.13 Corporate Parenting Committee members will be aware that in November 2019 Cheshire East Children's Services received our Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) inspection undertaken by Ofsted. One of the recommendations from the inspection was to 'Improve the quality and consistency and support of our foster carers'. The need to focus on the development of our fostering service was also evidenced through engagement and consultation with our foster carers and members of staff across the fostering and wider services since last summer.
- 5.14 There is no more important function for a local authority than exercising our corporate parenting responsibility to ensure our cared for children and care leavers are well cared for and achieve good outcomes during their childhood and as they transition into adulthood.
- 5.15 Ofsted's judgement found that overall, we 'required improvement to be good' and made the following statements as part of their inspection report; *'Sufficiency of in-house foster carers is a known service challenge. The number of approved fostering households has reduced and recent attempts to improve recruitment has not had the impact that the Local Authority had hoped for. The quality of foster carer assessment is good. The IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) for fostering is providing an*

*effective level of challenge to ensure that carers continue to meet the standards for fostering. Foster Cares reported that they have access to a range of good training which supports them in caring for the children in their care'. In addition, the inspection report said that 'A significant group of foster carers have raised concerns over a period of time and during the inspection about the support they receive from the Local Authority. Inspectors found that foster carers were not always well supported and that, in some cases, working relationships were at risk of breaking down'.*

- 5.16 Since then we have been working closely with our in-house foster carers and have made positive changes after listening to their views. We want to give our cared for children the very best opportunity to maintain their familial networks and live within their local communities.
- 5.17 We decided that we should commission an independent review of our fostering services. It is important to say that this did not solely focus on the work within the Fostering Service, but also included all aspects of the reach of fostering across the wider council and colleague network, including the work undertaken within our recruitment and marketing collaboration Foster 4.
- 5.18 The Independent Review of Fostering was undertaken by an expert in the field of Fostering and concluded that there was significant work needed to be undertaken across both the directorate and corporate levels to improve our approach and delivery of fostering services and support at Cheshire East Council.
- 5.19 Improvements must be made to the services that we deliver to children, young people, their families and foster carers to ensure that the outcomes for our cared for children and care leavers is improved. We must increase the number of in-house foster carers as this enables cared for children to remain closer to their familial environments, ensures that other networks (for example health provision and school) remains consistent. We must improve the experience of our existing foster carers and place the Local Authority on a sustainable financial footing concerning current and future placements costs. The acceptance of these recommendations will support the service to achieve this.
- 5.20 Our development journey since the Ofsted Inspection and independent fostering review has focussed on four specific areas, these are the:
- Strategic commissioning and corporate parenting functions for the service and for Cheshire East as a whole,
  - the recruitment and retention of foster carers,

- the Fostering Service structure and supervision
- and foster carers supervision and support.

### **Strategic Commissioning and Corporate Parenting**

- 5.21 Exercising duties as a corporate parent should be at the forefront of thinking for officers, managers and elected members. As such we must guard against the dangers of creating a culture which suggests that corporate parenting is the sole preserve of social care or those employed in Children and Families.
- 5.22 Corporate Parenting is a duty which stretches across the Council and beyond to partner agencies who have a key role to play in ensuring the welfare needs of the whole child can be met. The Council's elected members have made a commitment as corporate parents to our Cared for children and care leavers through the 'Pledges' that were signed up to in December 2018
- 5.23 We would very much like to see this commitment expanded through the Council committing to be a 'Foster Friendly' employer. This would see the Council providing additional incentives to all of the foster carers who are directly employed by Cheshire East Council, for example, providing paid time off for these carers to attend 'Cared for Reviews', training, etc.
- 5.24 The Fostering Network have developed the Foster Friendly Employer programme and we are currently engaged with them in informal discussions concerning how we could introduce this in Cheshire East.
- 5.25 The numbers of children being cared for nationally has been increasing in recent years. Cheshire East Council has also experienced rising numbers of cared for children at the same time, our numbers of in-house foster carers have decreased, this has led to an increasing reliance on the use of placements with Independent Fostering Agencies.
- 5.26 The combined effect of this for Cheshire East Council, and most specifically for our care for children and young people, is likely to be detrimental to the best outcome for some cared for children. The range of placements used often necessitates placement further away from the child's home which causes subsequent discontinuity in education, healthcare and family contact. Furthermore, the increase in external foster placements incurs additional expenditure, as many external foster placements are approximately twice the cost of in-house foster care.

- 5.27 It is therefore critical that Cheshire East Council increases its number of in-house foster carers as this offers the best outcome for the child or young person. This enables them to remain closer to their familial networks and provides for the most efficient use of our resources, both in terms of staffing and fiscal management.
- 5.28 We are developing our own marketing and recruitment capability in-house to maximise our local foster carers. This is separate from the Foster 4 collaboration, which we will be leaving in September 2020.

### **Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers**

- 5.29 We have already obtained a commitment from the Corporate Communications Team for a designated officer to work with us on our marketing, recruitment and communication. The officer identified had previously undertaken this role, prior to us joining Foster 4, and therefore has a wealth of knowledge and experience that is already proving to be invaluable.
- 5.30 We have already run two successful recruitment campaigns in the past few weeks via local radio and social media outlets and will continue to run campaigns alongside Foster 4 until September 2020.
- 5.31 We have streamlined the process for all new applicants that provides a swifter transition through to their approval, this has seen a reduction of the assessment process from 20 to 16 weeks.
- 5.32 Decisions on whether to proceed with an applicant are now made within 48 hours of the initial visit and the case is allocated for assessment at that point, with a date for Fostering Panel presentation set. Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the assessment process are being undertaken concurrently with checks, references and Skills to Foster training all forming component parts of assessment discussions.
- 5.33 The amended process for managing new prospective carers has required a cultural and managerial shift from current practice. In particular the practice of having to attend an Information Session and the Skills to Foster training prior to having an assessing social worker allocated has been discontinued.
- 5.34 We have recently approved 6 new Foster Carers using the new process with another 9 currently being assessed. This is the largest number of new Foster Carers and Foster Carers in assessment that we have seen in

the past couple of years and we hope that this is an indication of us 'turning the corner' in foster carers recruitment.

### **Fostering Service Structure and Supervision**

5.35 The current structure of the Fostering Service in Cheshire East is unusual and presents some dilemmas and conflicts. It is acknowledged and accepted that the service has been subject to a high degree of change in recent years, not least in having numerous changes of manager.

5.36 There is a need for a degree of specialism within the Fostering Service beyond that supported by the current structure; the current structure creates potential conflicts and clashes when determining the relative priority of work tasks. For example, a court-imposed deadline may create a priority for a family and friends' assessment over and above an assessment for a mainstream foster carer.

5.37 Proposals are being developed to implement a service redesign and restructure. With the impending withdrawal from Foster 4 there will be a requirement to undertake additional activities within the service. The structure of the new service will see the establishment of a **Mainstream Recruitment and Assessment Team**, a **Mainstream Support and Supervision Team** that will incorporate our Children with Disabilities Short Break Carers, a **Connected Persons/ Special Guardianship Assessment and Support Team**, our **Mockingbird Team**, and a specialist **Post 18 Team** working with Care Leavers who remain in supported living, shared lives or staying put arrangements.

5.38 The development of the Fostering Service is being monitored through monthly Fostering Development Meetings which are chaired by the Director for Children's Social Care. In addition, the performance of the service has been added to the quarterly performance monitoring focussed meetings that are held as part of the Social Care Leadership Team Meetings.

### **Foster Carers Supervision and Support**

5.39 Over the past few of months we have been working with a group of foster carers to develop a SharePoint site to enable them to directly access all the information and advice that they might need, for example; The Foster Carers' Handbook, policies and procedures (which are all being updated in co-production with another group of foster carers), training and events, support and resources (including payments, allowances and expense



claims), access to the Foster Carer Forum, our newsletter and other useful contacts.

- 5.40 As part of the Foster Carer Forums which have been reintroduced we have established several co-production groups with Foster Carers who expressed an interest to work on the development of services and support. This has included the Implementation Working Group for 'Mockingbird', working groups for policies and procedures, training and development, the newsletter and communications, and the fostering service steering group.
- 5.41 Cheshire East Council is one of very few Local Authorities who made a successful bid to the Department of Education to develop a Mockingbird programme. In excess of 60 Local Authorities applied to be part of the programme and we were one of the 5 successful applicants.
- 5.42 Cheshire East Council are working with the Department of Education and the Fostering Network to develop Mockingbird, which is an extended family model of delivering foster care through a central hub, which supports the role of several foster carers linked to the hub. We believe that this will strengthen support for those carers, and we hope will be an attractive incentive for part of our recruitment of new foster carers.
- 5.43 We will initially be developing two Mockingbird Hubs across Cheshire East; this will probably focus on the South and North localities. We have had a lead officer in place for some time and have been making significant progress in the development of the first Mockingbird Hub. We will be undertaking interviews for the 'Home Hub Carer' during the second week of September.
- 5.44 Our Mockingbird programme is linking with Bespoke, which is our new in-house residential and edge of care programme based within 4 new children's homes that are spread across the authority. The role of foster carers is crucial to support those children and young people currently living in residential care to return to family living, whether that be through returning to the care of their own parents or wider family or moving into foster care. We plan to recruit specialist foster carers to work directly with Bespoke.
- 5.45 A 12 month development plan is also in place, which is monitored through the Fostering Development Board, which meets monthly and is chaired by the Director of Childrens Social Care.



- 5.46 Cheshire East Council had not completed a fee increase for foster carers since 2015. A consultation exercise has just been completed with all of our current foster carers, who have overwhelmingly accepted the fee proposals that have been put forward and we have just implemented the fee increase. This act alone has done much to significantly improved the working relationship between us and our foster carers.
- 5.47 The service will be seeking feedback from foster carers via an annual questionnaire. In addition to this we have developed a fostering panel advice tracker, which amongst other things, contains details of the experience of foster carers through both the recruitment and assessment process and as part of the ongoing support offered to carers by the service and by children and young people's allocated social workers.
- 5.48 The service has also developed an information gathering process from the feedback received as part of the annual review for foster carers.
- 5.49 We are proud to support the Fostering Network's Foster Carer Charter which outlines the commitment we as a Council make to our Foster Carers and Children. It details the roles and responsibilities of the Corporate Parenting Board and the Fostering Service as well as the Foster Carers we support.
- 5.50 The Charter originated a number of years ago and has been updated to take account of developments within fostering and local government. Cheshire East is working hard to develop our Fostering Service and this Charter outlines some of our aspirations and goals for the next year to provide a service that everyone can be proud of.
- 5.51 In conjunction with our foster carers, Cheshire East will move forwards and provide children and young people with a positive experience of being cared for by our service and we are pleased to endorse the Charter.

## **6. Implications of the Recommendations**

### **6.1. Legal Implications**

- 6.1.1 Section 22G of the 1989 Children Act requires local authorities to take strategic action in respect of those children they look after and for whom it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation within their local authority area. In those circumstances, section 22G requires local authorities, so far as is reasonably practicable, to ensure that there is sufficient

accommodation for those children that meets their needs and is within their local authority area.

## **6.2 Finance Implications**

6.2.1 There are no direct financial implications of this report.

## **6.3 Policy Implications**

6.3.1 Our Corporate Parenting Strategy states that we are committed to ensuring that our cared for children live locally in a good, safe homes.

## **6.4 Equality Implications**

6.4.1 There are no specific equality implications contained with these recommendations.

## **6.5 Human Resources Implications**

6.5.1 Redesign and restructure of the Fostering Service will have human resource implications as current members of staff will move into the newly created teams. This will require staff consultation. There are no planned job losses within the restructure.

## **6.6 Risk Management Implications**

6.6.1 Regulatory Risks: The provision of sufficient and suitable foster placements is a key activity monitored by Ofsted during inspection, forming part of their judgement about services for cared for children.

6.6.2 Child Protection Risks: Failure to recruit or retain sufficient foster carers would be a child protection risk.

6.6.3 Reputational Risk: Recruitment of foster carers is a competitive market activity and has a high media profile.

6.6.4 Financial Risk: Cared for children placements is largely a demand led activity. A failure to recruit and retain sufficient in-house carers will result in overall increased expenditure on placements for cared for children with an overall higher unit cost. Independent

Agency Placements are high cost, and variations in the proportion of independent versus in-house placements can have significant and immediate impact on forecast spend.

## **6.7 Rural Communities Implications**

- 6.7.1 Foster carers, as well as our cared for children and care leavers, live within all our communities, including our rural communities.

## **6.8 Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children**

- 6.8.1 It is essential that we recruit and retain a sufficient number and quality of in-house foster carers within Cheshire East to ensure as many of our cared for children as possible can live in a good family environment. This will ensure that these children can remain within their local networks, their local schools and continue to receive support services within our boundaries enabling them to feel safe, offering stability so that they can flourish and achieve their potential.

## **6.9 Public Health Implications**

- 6.9.1 There are no direct policy implications relating to public health as a result of the recommendations within this report. However, increasing the life chances of our children and young people through fostering will improve the impact on the indices of health deprivation.

## **6.10 Climate Change Implications**

- 6.10.1 Recruiting in-house foster carers will reduce our reliance on external foster agency carers, who almost always live outside of Cheshire East. Having in-house carers living within Cheshire East will reduce travel for social workers, other professionals involved with the child or young person and their Foster Carer and will therefore reduce the associated carbon footprint. Changing the requirement for foster carers to have a vehicle also has the potential to reduce our carbon footprint.

## **7 Ward Members Affected**

- 7.1 Foster carers and cared for children and young people live in all wards and therefore all members will be affected. In addition, all members have

statutory responsibility as corporate parents for each one of our cared for children and young people.

## **8 Consultation & Engagement**

- 8.1 Consultation or engagement has taken place with our current cohort of foster carers and will continue to do so as part of our Fostering Service Development Plan.
- 8.2 We have engaged with the other Local Authorities within the Foster 4 Collaboration (Cheshire West and Chester, Warrington and Halton).
- 8.3 We will enter into a consultation exercise with the current members of staff employed within the Fostering Service concerning the proposed redesign and restructure.

## **9 Access to Information**

- 9.1 None.

## **10 Contact Information**

- 10.1 Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

Name:	Keith Martin
Job Title:	Head of Service for Children with Disabilities and Fostering
Email:	<a href="mailto:keith.martin@cheshireeast.gov.uk">keith.martin@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a>



**INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS  
(CARED FOR CHILDREN)**

**ANNUAL REPORT  
2019-2020**

**CONTENTS**

	<b>Section</b>	<b>Page</b>
1	Introduction	3
2	Statutory role and the legal context	3
3	The team	4
4	Overview	5-6
5	Review activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cared for reviews</li> <li>• Pathway plan reviews</li> <li>• Series of meetings</li> <li>• Participation</li> <li>• Attendance</li> <li>• Consultation</li> </ul>	7-11
6	Dispute Resolution and Practice Alerts	11-14
7	Impact	14-17
8	Progress against targets last year	17
9	Future plans	18

## 1. Introduction

This report is a reflective overview of activity and performance in Cheshire East in respect of our Cared for Children and Young People. It covers the period of April 2019-March 2020 and provides information about the performance and practice of the Independent Reviewing Officer Team in relation to the monitoring and review of care planning in Cheshire East. Additionally, it reports on the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) in relation to Quality Assurance through the Practice Alert and Dispute Resolution Policy.

## 2. Statutory role and legal context

The appointment by local authorities of an Independent Reviewing Officer is a statutory requirement. Their purpose is to ensure that the care plan for a cared for child fully reflects the child's needs and that each child's wishes and feelings are given full and due consideration and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's statutory responsibilities towards them.

The Children and Young Person's Act 2008, followed by revised care planning regulations and guidance which came into force in April 2011, strengthened the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer. The statutory duties of the IRO are to [section 25B (1) -1989 Act]:

- monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's case;
- participate in any review of the child's case
- ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case
- are given due consideration by the appropriate authority; and
- perform any other function which is prescribed in regulations.

As corporate parents each local authority, through their officers and Members, should act for the children they care for as a responsible and conscientious parent would act. There are two clear and separate aspects to the function of an Independent Reviewing Officer:

- Chairing the child's review; and
- Monitoring the child's case on an ongoing basis.

The Independent Reviewing Officer service in Cheshire East sits within the Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit. The service is managed independently of children's operational social work and is therefore offering a level of independence that enables the service to effectively challenge plans, arrangements and the practice of the local authority. The strategic lead for the service reports directly to the Director of Children's Social Care. Independent Reviewing Officers and their managers are not involved in preparing a child's care plan, management of the case, operational decision making and/or allocation of resources to cared for children.

The Independent Reviewing Officer Handbook sets out the statutory roles and duties as well as the strategic and managerial responsibilities of Local Authorities in establishing an *effective* Independent Reviewing Officer service.

The legislative framework regulating services of Independent Reviewing Officers (Children and Adoption Act 2002, Children and Young People Act 2008, IRO Handbook 2010 and Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010) imposes a specific set of statutory duties which all IROs

are expected to execute in order to improve outcomes for the children in public care, in particular it specifies that IROs should:

- be social work professionals with at least 5 years post qualifying front line practice and supervisory/ managerial experience
- ensure that children's views are heard, they are aware of their rights and entitlements and receive relevant services and support
- consult children before reviews to keep their views and input central to the whole review process (particularly during the review meeting)
- maintain over-view and promote meaningful consultation with parents, carers and others with significant involvement with the child and ensure they are involved, and their views have been considered in relation to the care planning and review
- monitor the local authority's management of the child's case at any time
- attend any significant meeting or other type of review for the child
- identify and challenge drift, delay and underperformance and make attempts to resolve them in a timely manner

### **3. The team**

The team of Cared for IROs in Cheshire East has increased in 2019 to reflect the increase in children cared for and is now made up of 10 IROs covering 9.5 posts and the Fostering IRO (FIRO) overseen by the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Cared for Manager. There are 8 female IROs and 3 males, 3 IROs are from the BAME community, one IRO is of mixed heritage and the remaining 7 are White British.

In relation to the children in care we serve this provides a diverse team, at the time of writing just over 85% of cared for children are white British with 15% from other ethnic backgrounds including mixed heritage backgrounds. Currently 52% of cared for children are male and 48% female and so in this respect the team are not representative of the population they serve, as the percentage of male IROs is lower but may reflect the gender balance of the workforce from which the team is drawn.

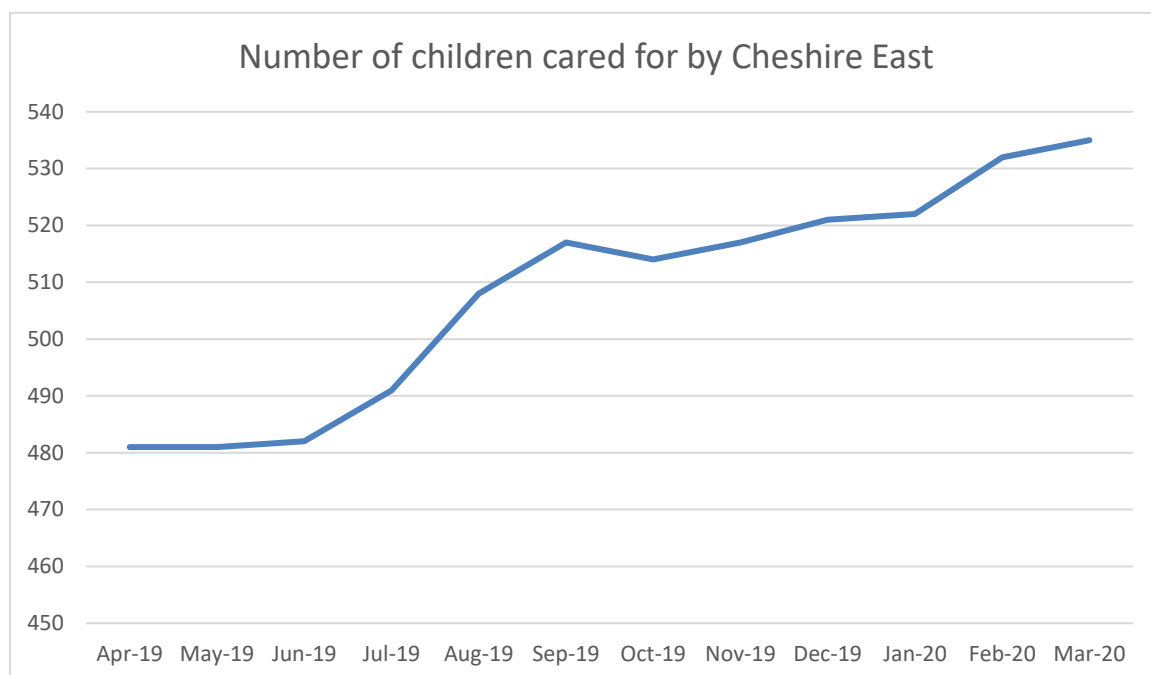
The team are settled and made up of 9 permanent members of staff including one member of the team who has been employed for over 7 years, 4 employed for over 3 years with 2 new members of the team who joined in August 2019 following an IRO leaving to pursue a different career and the additional post. It is also important to reconisre that during 2019/20 the manager to the service was also appointed, which represented an effective succession planning strategy.

At the end of the business year in March 2020, despite additional resource, caseloads of IROs were above the recommended level of 50-70 advised in the IRO Handbook and taking into account the geographical size of the authority and numbers placed outside the borough. Caseloads ranged at this time from 65-85 across the team.

Further measures have been agreed for 2020/21, to aid reduction of caseloads and increase IRO oversight by gradual reducing the number of over 19-year olds whose reviews will be chaired by an IRO as this is not a statutory function. Oversight will remain for those young people where it is felt the



impact of IRO scrutiny remains beneficial if that young adult agrees. The full realisation and benefit of this young person focused reduction will not be for 18 months under the current arrangements.



**This graph demonstrates the increase in the cared for population in the past year.**

#### **4. Executive Summary**

##### **What has gone well?**

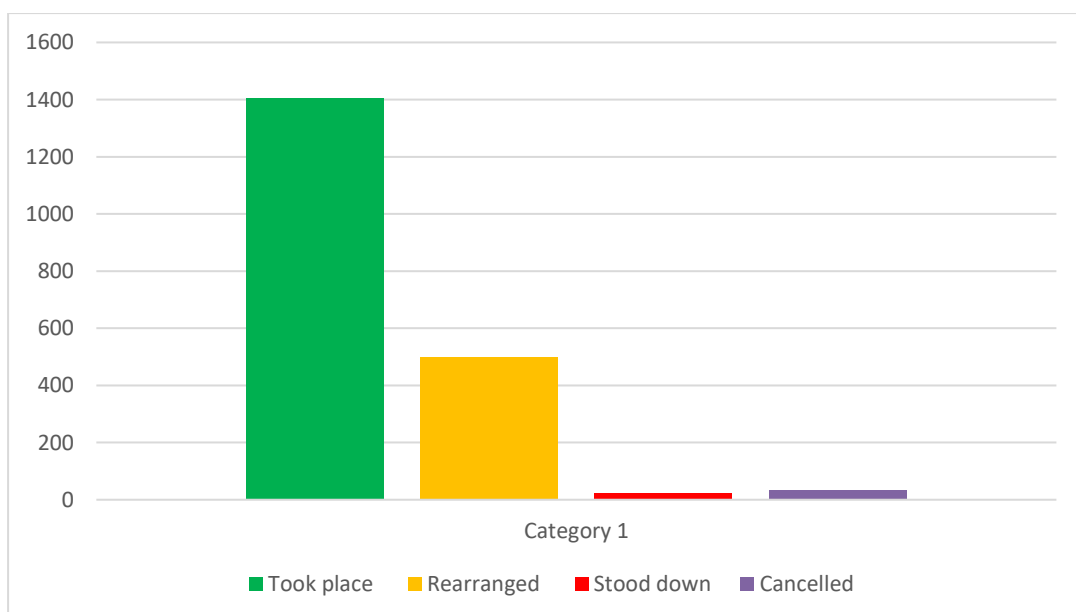
- We have chaired 1403 cared for reviews and 351 pathway plan reviews this year this an increase of 26% of cared for reviews from last year. This will reflect the increase of children into care but may also reflect more reviews taking place due to placement moves
- This year 98% of children over the age of 4 participated in their reviews
- Over the year an average of 62% of children over the age of 4 attended their review this is a slight 1% increase and remains a key area of focus for improvement
- On average 66 % of care leavers over the age of 18 attended their reviews each month - this is positive and an increase of 5% on last year. Engagement of our care leavers as adults is often more difficult as they often have their own commitments and so reviews must be held when they are available to attend.
- We have streamlined our administration processes following an internally led Lean Review to be more effective and to ensure GDPR compliance.
- We have been awarded the Investing in Children Award for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year running, we are the first service within Children's Social Care to achieve this award for a consecutive year

- We continue to base our review model around the principles of Signs of Safety providing child centred and interactive reviews for children
- We write a letter to each child following their review as a record of their meeting, these have been well received with positive feedback from children and young people

### What are we worried about?

- In total only 27 (1.5%) of reviews and pathway reviews were stood down, this is a reduction on last year which is good. In total 626 (35%) were rearranged whilst this is a reduction of 8% compared to last year this figure is still a little high. Reasons for rearrangements are due to a variety of factors, increased pressure on the IRO team due to higher caseloads, the long-term sickness of one member of the team, as well as a period of difficulty relating to social worker stability in one team in care planning. Often when a social worker leaves it is extremely difficult to go ahead with a planned review date in a child focused way.
- Reflected in the Practice alert report the greatest proportion of alerts continues to be raised for timeliness of care plans being completed ahead of the review by the social worker. This has improved slightly from last year but remains the single highest reason of practice concern and needs to be an area of improved performance for the social work teams
- Despite the introduction of Signs of Safety and increased numbers in Pre-Proceedings, the number of children coming into care in the past year has continued to rise. This has led to increased caseloads for both IROs and Social Workers
- Whilst child participation in their review remains at a high level of 98%, actual attendance at their review remains around 50-60% throughout the year. We have consulted with cared for children to better understand why this is, they give a variety of reasons for not attending including their dislike of meetings generally but we recognise we need to work across the service, and develop our practice model and approach to see if we can increase this figure

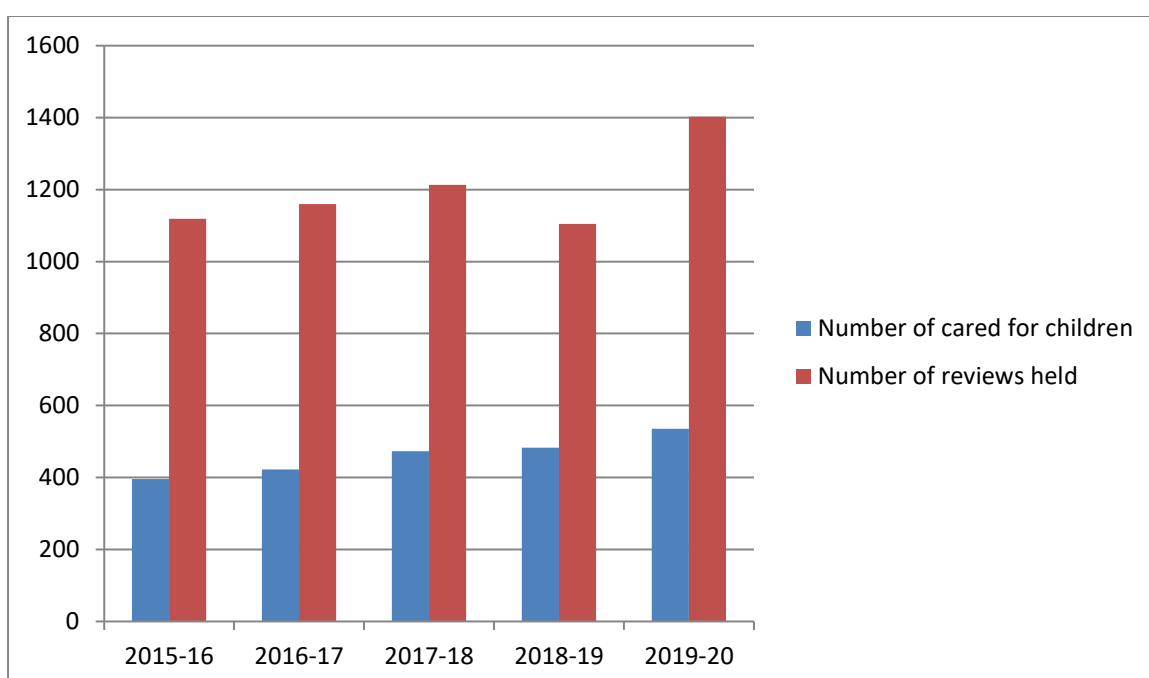
### 5. Review Activity and data 2019-2020



Cared for Reviews 2019-2020

- Of the total 1,754 review meetings planned to take place in this business year 35% had to be rearranged to a new date.
- Just over 2% of the total cared for and pathway plan reviews were stood down which is a low number and a decrease on last year where 4% were stood down
- Cancellations represent just 2% of activity and are rare as they relate to when a review has been arranged but the legal order changes, so a child is no longer cared for child. For example, a child returning home following a period of accommodation under Section 20 there is a very small increase on the 1.7% figure of last year.

#### Review activity comparison last 4 years



#### Review activity 2019-2020 – Cared for Children (under 18)

##### Reviews held in timescale

In the past business year 88 % of reviews have been held in timescales. This is slightly lower than the percentage achieved in the last business year 2018-19 but is in the context of a peak in children cared for by Cheshire East meaning increased caseloads and a much higher number of reviews held. When considering reviews held within 20 days following being stood down, which falls within statutory requirements, this percentage is increased to 90%.

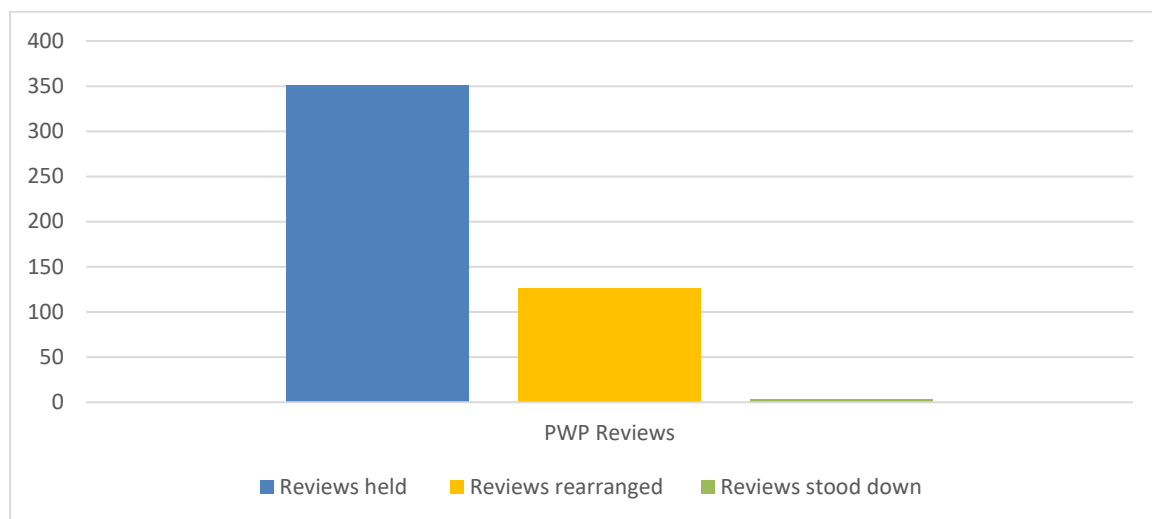
The reasons for reviews falling out of timescales are varied, these include:

- Foster carers going on holiday and forgetting a forthcoming review meaning it needs to be rearranged for their return.
- Unavailability of the social worker or the IRO due to absence caused by illness, reviews are not able to be covered by people who do not know the child.

- Insufficient time to rearrange a review within timescales due to the availability of the social worker or the IRO.
- Simple miscalculation of the days, where a review was rearranged or stood down the IRO has counted days from the date the review eventually took place rather than the original statutory date.

Many of the above are resolvable issue and possibly down to poor planning however they are also due to understandable difficulties caused by a high level of meetings, workload pressure on both IROs and the Social Work teams all leading to reduced ability to be flexible.

#### Pathway Plan Review activity (over 18's)



#### Pathway Plan Reviews 2019-2020

- There were 351 Pathway Plan meetings planned for this year and of those 36% were rearranged this is an increase of 6 per cent compared to last year
- Only a 1% were stood down
- Review meetings are not cancelled, and this figure reflects either a change in legal status or a young person turning 21 at which point our service no longer reviews their plan and a pre-planned meeting being taken out of the calendar for those reasons

#### Series of Meetings

The care planning regulations allow for reviews to be completed as a series of meetings where necessary. This might be to allow parents to take part in a separate meeting or due to parental conflict. At times it may be necessary to hold the review with the child and foster carer as one meeting and then meet parents separately. Other reasons for holding a series of meetings may be due to awaiting an expert report in those cases in proceedings where the review is held in timescales, but the report is due a few days after the statutory date. Holding the review as a series of meetings allows 20 working days to complete the review process.

**Figures for number and percentage of reviews held as series of meetings**

	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	
% of total reviews	10%	13%	15%	14%	7%	18%	11%	11%	5%	12%	15%	5%	18/19
	10%	6%	9%	9%	4%	20%	20%	9%	14%	14%	27%	17%	19/20

The percentage of reviews held as series of meetings has seen some increase particularly towards the end of the business year when we start to see the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. By March 2020 review meetings were being held virtually from the second week, when the technology to support this was crude, leading to an increasing number being held as a series of meetings to complete the review.

This is an area of work which will need some scrutiny and balance, as completing the review as a series of meetings is time taking. However, in some cases it may be more child centred if the child has indicated they want both parents involved but not at the same meeting or if for any reason it has not been possible to have all the people the child would want involved in their review in the same room. Within these figures there are also cases where a series of meetings has had to be held due to awaiting key pieces of work to be completed to ensure the review does not become overdue when a final care plan is due to be endorsed.

**Annual reviews**

A very small number of children in Cheshire East have annual reviews, where it has already been ascertained that SGO is not appropriate or possible. They are children who are all in long-term settled placements who have requested less visits and intervention to be able to function in their foster family as a "normal child". Regular risk assessments are carried every six months to indicate an annual review remains appropriate and should there be any concerns, any significant event or if the child enters transition planning with a Pathway Plan then reviews revert to six-monthly. Last year only 6 children had annual reviews with one returning to six monthly reviews this year as they now have a pathway plan and another returning to six monthly reviews due to changes in educational needs, we are confident that this is the right decision for these children.

**Participation in reviews**

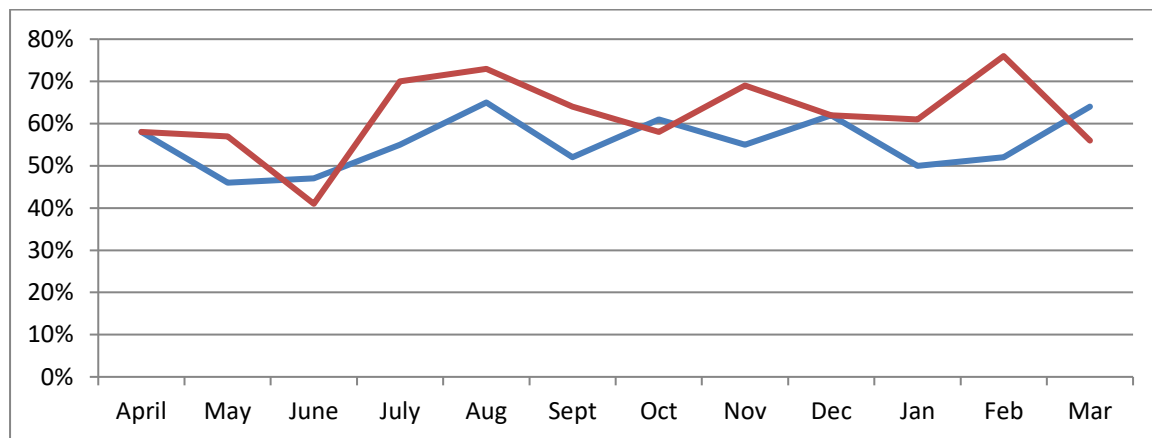
We continue to have a high rate of participation from children and young people's in their reviews consistently achieving between 97-100% throughout the year this is an area of continued improvement as in the last business year participation was an average of 92%.

Participation can be through completion of consultation documents, providing views via an advocate or their carers or attendance at the review meeting.

We remain concerned at the figure we are achieving for actual attendance at the review and have set ourselves a high target to improve this as currently, whilst it is an improving picture from previous years, we achieve between 56-72%. This practice improvement must also be a focus for improvement across all operational teams as well as the IROs.

We set ourselves a target of 75% to be achieved as part of our Team Plan for 2019-2020. We have in the past year achieved close to this figure and certainly it is an improving picture, but we have not

been able to sustain attendance consistently at this level. A working group in the team has sought feedback from children and young people and social workers this has recently been collated and will inform future planning to increase attendance



**Children's attendance at review % of all reviews**

Blue 2018-19

Red 2019-20

### Consultation

As part of the review process IROs are required to consult with the child or young person, their parents, their carers, as well as education and health or any significant agency involved in their care plan. Figures for return of consultation documents remain low and do not necessarily represent the true picture. For example, whilst foster carers may not always complete the consultation form, they attend the review and will report verbally instead.

We have focused on this area this year with a second working group gathering views and information as to how we can improve the consultation process. New forms have recently been designed and we have moved over to consultation via email especially in the latter end of the year due to Covid-19 and we have seen an increase in returns we are hoping next year's figures will indicate improvement

Children advise IROs they wish to be consulted face to face or on the telephone. For younger children their views are best collected by a visit which is recorded on their record, these figures are collected and represented in the consultation figure on page. During the latter part of the business year the Covid- 19 pandemic led to a the need to work virtually using technology, it was found that children over the age of 10 were very receptive to the way of working and we found increased engagement in their consultation with the IRO. We aim to take this forward in our Team Plan to ensure we continue to offer children and young people a variety of options to engage with their review.

Recorded Invites/Consultation Forms sent out					Black- 18/19
					Green -19/20
Y/P	Health	Education	Parents	Foster/Home	Other
680	536	641	695	679	447
655	492	589	652	530	356

Recorded Consultation Forms received					
Y/P	Health	Education	Parents	Foster/Home	Other
85 (13%)	164 (31%)	249 (38.8%)	87 (12.5%)	197(29%)	29 (6.4%)
70 ((10.6%)	153 ((31%)	160 (27%)	61 (9.3%)	145 (27%)	29 (8.1%)

## 6. Dispute Resolution and Practice Alerts

One of the key functions of the statutory role of the IRO is to seek resolution to any problem or disagreement arising out the care planning process. It is a core part of their role to scrutinise practice and challenge the Local Authority and hold them to account in relation to achieving good and timely outcomes for children. To do this, IROs must establish good working relationships with Social Workers and their managers in order to be able to affect a good dispute resolution process and with good support of this process by Senior Managers. Alongside this responsibility, IROs in Cheshire East also have a role in identifying good practice so learning from what works well for children and young people can also be understood and replicated.

The IRO Handbook, legislation and guidance around the planning for Cared for Children requires Local Authorities to ensure they have a good Formal Dispute Resolution in place. Whilst this may look different in each local authority all systems must have a 20-day maximum time limit to resolve any disagreement from the beginning of the process to its conclusion. In Cheshire East this commences with an Informal Practice Alert being raised by the IRO with resolution at this level within 5 working days with the Team Manager. If this is not achieved, then the IRO will escalate to a Formal alert allowing a further 10 days to reach resolution with a Senior Manager. If there were still no agreement after 15 days, then the IRO may escalate concern to CAFCASS.

What is going well?	What are we worried about?	Future focus
<p>Almost 60% of practice alerts have been resolved at informal level this is similar to the figure last year</p> <p>Compared to the same period in 2019 Good practice notifications have increased by just under 8% from last year now representing over 31% of all practice alerts. This is an improved picture of ensuring good practice is acknowledged.</p> <p>Good practice is being recognised more widely for a wider variety of categories. It is positive that in 4 cases it was considered there had been exemplary practice where the social worker went above and</p>	<p>There remain a high percentage of informal alerts, 53.2% for care plans or pathway plans not being prepared in a timely way for reviews. Whilst this has improved from last year's 61% it still means the child; young person and their parents has not had the opportunity to view or consider the plan of the review in 57 cases this year. It also leads to many reviews being rearranged or stood down which might give a message to children that their reviews are not important or given priority. This also suggests that that action taken from last year has not has significant impact this year.</p>	<p>The current increase in Good practice alerts should be maintained to recognise practice going above and beyond agreed standards the IRO team appreciate this is a fundamental way to improve practice and can aid retention in busy social work teams and link practice alerts to development and learning with a focus on where practice has had a positive impact on the child and their outcomes.</p> <p>We need to remain focused on improving the quality of care plans and pathway plans being completed in a timely way for the cared for review and consider what else can be to</p>

beyond practice expectations. There is also good reflection of social worker's advocating for children who are in our care.

Within the good practice alerts there is evidence of specific good pieces of work, assessments and plans being highlighted. These are examples of the alert system supporting practice and development.

There has been improvement in some plans being prepared for review which has to be given recognition whilst it may still not be where it needs to be

There has been a slight increase in the percentage of formal alerts from last year increasing to just under 12% of all alerts from last year's 10% figure.

There are 4 formal alerts that relate to cases at informal level being escalated due to no response or resolution at informal level.

There were 3 alerts raised due to concerns around safeguarding, one in relation to a Missing from Home meeting not taking place, one due to concern for a Strategy meeting being chaired by a social worker who had not received their registration and one due to a disclosure not being actioned as a Section 47

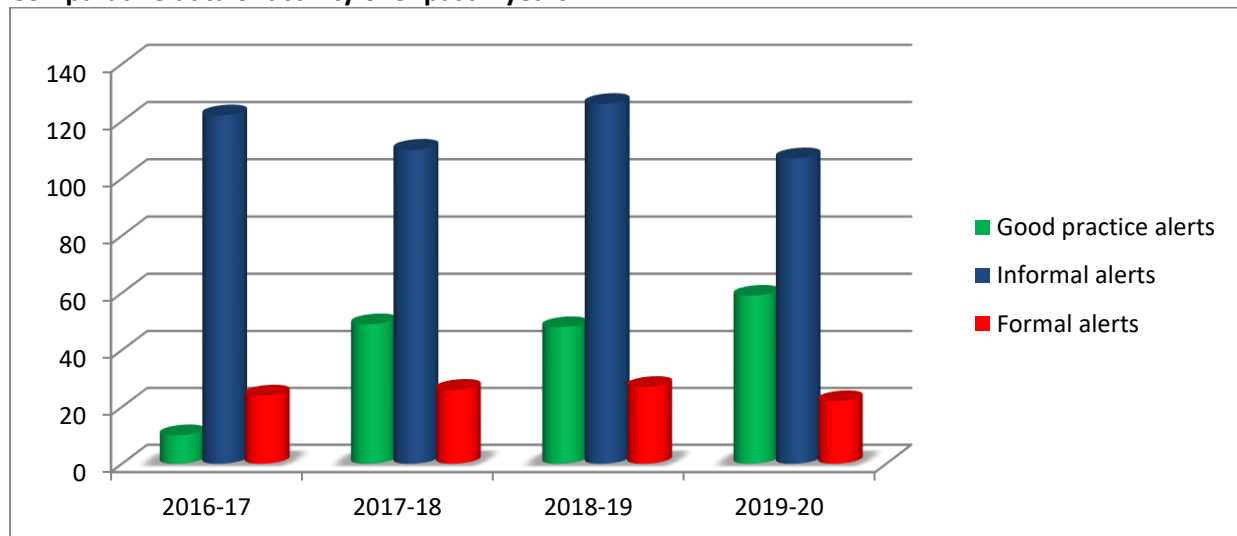
It was agreed alerts would be suspended halfway through March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic impacting on some areas of practice, a reduced framework was re-introduced in April 2020

improve social work practice in this area

The IRO team need to raise practice alerts more consistently when permanency is not achieved at the 2<sup>nd</sup> review this was an area agreed as a joint focus but is not reflected well in the data this year.

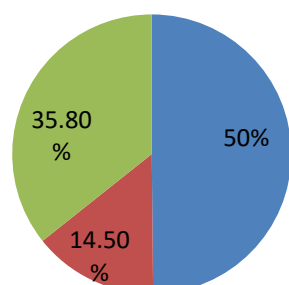
Some work and review is needed of the Practice Alert process to consider how to improve the impact and reception of practice alerts and whether the current language and framework used could be improved to align it more to practice improvement. It would be beneficial to align more practice alerts with the improvement plan actions accordingly as well as continuing to meet the guidance as outlined in the IRO Handbook.

**Comparative data of activity over past 4 years**



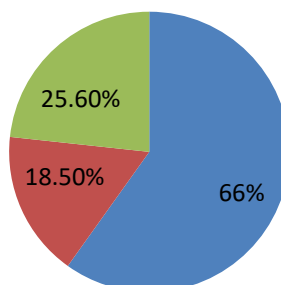


2019/20 Qrt 2



■ Informal alerts  
 ■ Formal alerts  
 ■ Good practice notification

2019/20 Qrt 4



■ Informal alerts  
 ■ Formal alerts  
 ■ Good practice notification

## THEMES

### Good practice alerts

Good practice alerts in the past year have increased and have centred around the efforts Social Workers and Personal Advisors have made to form good working relationships with the children or young people they work with, in some case exemplary practice has been identified. Examples have included a social worker who attended a young person's graduation on her day off because she knew the young person had no parent who would attend. As well an alert relating to a social worker who worked extremely hard to progress a working relationship with a parent to ensure safe socially distanced contact could be promoted during the Covid-19 crisis, this was not only in line with the child's wishes but supported placement stability and the safety of the young person as it meant the young person did not go missing as she had previously.

This year IROs have also taken the time to identify good pieces of work such as a good assessment, care plan, pathway plan or Life Story work and recognised this via the practice alert system to support development and learning of social workers and provide a benchmark of what good looks like. There is also recognition where social workers have really strived to advocate for the child and whilst most social workers would do this, the practice alerts recognise where above average efforts have been made or a difficult case where the social worker worked effortlessly to make progress in the child's plan.

### Informal alerts

53% of informal alerts relate to the care plan or pathway plan not being updated or completed in time for the review. This has been a feature over the last 3 years of reporting although with some improvement seen in the figures this year. It would seem timeliness and preparation for review continues to compete with other demands on the social worker's time and so no great improvement has been seen this year. This is of concern as all children and young people should have had their updated plan shared with them ahead of the review and in the case of Pathway Plans it should have been endorsed by the young person ahead of the meeting. If the IRO is not seeing a completed plan ahead of the review, then neither is the child. It remains the discretion of the IRO whether to go ahead with the review without a written plan and most reviews stood down are stood down for this reason.

Of the remaining 47% of alerts 25% of them relate to statutory visits not being in timescales, or no recorded statutory visits with rest of the themes relating to drift, inaccurate legal status or lack of regulation of the child's placement and the decisions from the previous review not implemented.

It is noted there are very few informal alerts raised in relation to permanency at 2<sup>nd</sup> review not being achieved despite this being an agreed theme, however IROs have identified this is often due to delays in court or due to complex assessments or through delay in parental engagement in PLO therefore not directly attributable to any deficits in care planning for the child.

### **Formal alerts**

Twenty-two formal alerts were raised this year, 27% were escalations from informal alerts with half of these reflecting a disagreement in the final care plan with the IRO being unable to endorse the final plan. Other formal alerts related to a sibling group of 3 where concern was raised for therapeutic input directed by court not yet started for children on a full care order impacting on their contact with their parent and essentially causing a delay in their plan progressing.

Those matters raised in the formal dispute resolution process are of course serious and others to note are concerns for the return of a child to his parent following a Section 47 where it was felt delay was resource led rather than child led again impact on the child is at the route of this alert as a young child out of parental care for longer than he needed to be. Concern for consent removed in relation to another child who was subject to Section 20 status as well as an alert in relation to another sibling group where the IRO did not consider the assessments presented supported the final care plan and was unable to endorse that plan. It is fair to say every one of these alerts resulted in action and resolution in the best interests of all children involved following the escalation and discussion with senior managers.

## **7. The impact of the role of the IRO in Cheshire East**

The Local Authority was inspected during this business year and Ofsted provided the following comments about the IRO service in Cheshire East:

***"Children are well supported to make meaningful contributions to their reviews; advocacy and the need for an independent visitor is considered in reviews. Reviews are child focused and well attended and they measure the progress of the children's plans. However, challenge by the IRO is not consistently effective. It does not always provide the level of critical evaluation required to progress children's cases with clarity and pace". Ofsted November 2019.***

We continue to strive as a team to improve our practice and in the light of Ofsted's comments are looking at how we can be more consistent and ensure we focus on the impact on the child regarding any issues where there has been drift and delay or where elements of the child's plan should be challenged to ensure better outcomes. We are also considering how and when practice alerts are used and how they are responded to as they are not currently having the impact on children's outcomes they need to.

We have introduced monthly peer auditing to aid consistency where we have a thematic approach with IRO's auditing each other's work with a follow up plenary session to fully discuss and agree improved practice standards. These audits focus on the impact for the child, evidence of SMART outcomes and IRO oversight and challenge.

The team also take part in audit activity including two thematic team audits a year. This year we have focused on planning for permanency at the four-month review, auditing in October last year and then again in March this year to highlight the barriers being found in practice in relation to achieving early

permeance. These reports have been presented to the Senior Leadership Team in order to inform and improve learning and practice development in this area.

In a busy year there have been a number of case examples where the challenge of the IRO has led to positive outcomes for children and young people including instances where care plans have been disputed and the IRO dispute resolution process has enabled discussion to take place and the opportunity to pause and reflect on the decisions being made.

The positioning of the IRO service outside the operational structure and so through their independence and experience the IRO is able to step back and take a broader view on occasions. It remains an important function of the IRO to challenge and hold social workers and their managers to account in respect of any practice that falls below acceptable standards leading to a negative impact on the child.

The IRO's role is always to ensure the child achieves the best outcomes and that the care plan is in line with their wishes and feelings and in their best interests. Hearing the voice of the child is therefore paramount to the review process.

Where a child wishes to challenge their care plan or indicates they are unhappy with aspects of their plan the IRO can direct a referral to the independent advocacy service (The Children's Society) to support the child or young person to challenge their plan and if required seek their own independent legal advice.

In many cases the Dispute Resolution process is seen to be effective in ensuring further dialogue between the social work teams and the IRO to reach an agreed resolution which meets the child's wishes and ensures the most positive outcomes.

Another important factor which can be seen in the examples below is the relationship that is formed between the child and the IRO who in many cases remains constant at times when social workers may have changed and in cases where the child or young person has fully understood the role of independence.

In the past year there have been a number of examples where IRO intervention has altered the outcome of the plans being made through professional challenge and discussion when needed. Through use of their experience, some professional curiosity leading to some pertinent questions and discussion held where plans have been adjusted or changed to promote better outcomes.

The intervention of the IRO is reflected on the child's record by recording of reviews, case records of consultations and discussions thus providing a clear footprint of the IRO.

An indication of the children where IRO challenge has had an impact are detailed in case examples below

#### **Example A**

A became a looked After Child on 23rd January 2020 following a head injury sustained in the home. Following medical reports, A was accommodated with family friends. A police investigation commenced, and a second medical opinion obtained as there was some conflicting information about how the injury occurred.

The IRO held an initial cared for review and considered and it was shared that following further examination and discussion with the police it was now considered the event was just an accident and

not an injury and a final medical report confirmed it was not a non-accidental injury, this was at the end of a week.

The IRO noted that A had not been returned home the following week despite a decision that he should endorsed at his review. The IRO challenged the social work team manager and it was indicated staffing issues had caused delay and they wished to seek confirmation via a legal planning meeting return home was the appropriate plan. The IRO challenged this was not in the best interest of A and not required based on evidence provided by both police and medics and furthermore work with the child had confirmed it was an accident. The IRO escalated the matter to the Service Manager via Formal Dispute Resolution as it seemed the legal status of Section 20 was no longer appropriate and expressed concern parents had not been updated about the situation and had therefore not had the opportunity to challenge why he remained out of their care. The Service Manager agreed return home would not be delayed and there was no need seek further legal advice based on the evidence available and A was returned home that day to his parent's care. As a young child the impact for A was that he remained out of his parent's care for a minimum amount of time whilst concerns were investigated whilst not losing sight of the rights of his parents and A due to the close oversight of his IRO.

#### **Example B**

B came into care four weeks before his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, as he was 'homeless and estranged from his family'. B had been living with his grandparents on an SGO grandmother had found it increasingly difficult to manage his behaviour.

When the IRO was allocated he noted that grandmother had been asking for B to be accommodated for a number of months and social care had actually made arrangements for him to move into a local hostel but had not brought him 'into care' when they did so. This is only permitted in the Statutory Guidance in certain circumstances. There was no recording on file that demonstrated that the Statutory Guidance (1) on such circumstances had been followed. Therefore, the date of his being made subject to section 20 Children Act 1989 and accommodated was challenged by the IRO. This date was important as to receive support and guidance after he turned 18, JL needed to have been subject to section 20 for 13 weeks, and as noted if the original date of accommodation he would only have had 4 weeks.

The matter was informally pursued by the IRO to Service Manager level and the matter was resolved with an agreement that he would be entitled to a full care leaver status. B now has the continued support of this status and a Personal Advisor.

#### **Example C**

C's situation is similar in some ways to B. He had lived at home with his siblings until November 2013 when he went to live with his Uncle alongside his brother whilst young siblings went into foster care. His uncle sought a Child Arrangement Order, but C was considered within the care proceedings of his siblings Special Guardianship Order was granted, the court indicated Cheshire East had responsibility for the original placement.

As C approached 18 his home situation was fragile, and he returned to Cheshire East to live with his Mum and then back to his Uncle. B eventually presented as homeless and was advised he should approach the authority where he lived for accommodation however this was declined. C approached

Cheshire East and was given emergency accommodation locally and referred into children's services as he was not yet 18. Whilst he was accommodated it was advised to C would not have full Care leaver status as he would have insufficient time in care (13 weeks) before he turned 18. The IRO felt due to his history and the identified duty of Cheshire East noted in the court papers that it would be remiss if the Local Authority did not extend support, especially when C's siblings continued to reside and live in the area and he was drawn back to the area for that reason.

The matter was escalated informally, and discussion took place with the relevant manager who agreed to discuss with his service manager that this support should be offered, this was agreed.

#### 8. Progress on targets from 2019-20

Target	RAG	Progress made
Increase attendance and participation of children at reviews	Green	Attendance has increased at cared for reviews and more so at Pathway plan reviews. Participation at reviews is very high at 98% and remains good
Increase return rate of consultation from parents and partner agencies	Red	This is an area where performance has dipped, there are many reasons why agencies, parents and carers do not return this paperwork. Current ways of working have identified electronic communication has had a better response we also hope to look at how the development of a "portal" to communicate with foster carers might be used to support the review process by both carers and children and young people
Lean review of Invitation process	Green	Completed successfully and has led to duplication of actions being removed, the use of Egress for invitation progress, the improved protection of data by use of Egress as well as actions for future development see below
To seek feedback about our service from children, young people, parents and partner agencies	Green	We have had a small working group collating information over the past year and this has included direct conversations, consultation with care planning team, and meetings with professionals. Feedback has been gathered which is to be used to shape changes to enhance the review process as well as to inform practice
To continue to work with the operational teams to improve stability and reduce placement disruption	Green	Monthly meetings are held with care planning and CP CIN managers which consider thematic issues to improve outcomes for children
To reduce the number of reviews rearranged and to ensure reviews for cared for children	Yellow	This figure remains similar to last year but audits and dip sampling have found a number of reasons by both IRO and SW as to why meetings are rearranged whilst

and care leavers are prioritised across the service

many of these are child centred decisions link meetings with the social work teams are being held to ensure planning for cared for reviews is prioritised

## 9. Future plans and development

<u>Priority team objective</u>	<u>Impact statement</u> (when you achieve this what will the impact be for C&YP and their families)	<u>Measures of success</u>	<u>Actions needed to achieve priority objective</u>
Relevant Children's Social Care Objective: <i>We will reflect, learn, and continuously improve our practice to provide an excellent service for children and young people</i>			
We will improve on our offer of how we consult with children offering them a variety of means to engage in reviews including the annual foster care reviews	Children's views will be evident in recording of reviews Two outcomes from each review will be provided by the child and will be followed up to ensure they are met at the subsequent review Peer reviews will take place to ensure consistency across the team using child participation as a theme	The child's voice will be evident in the review process in the outcomes from the review Letters to children will be personal and reflect the relationship built between IRO and child or young person Fostering reviews will not need to be stood down as children's views will be prioritised	Provision of options to the child ahead of the review Face to face meetings Microsoft Teams consultation What's app consultation Fostering Portal implementation for ease of access Revision of consultation templates for children wishing to provide views in writing Access to advocacy The FIRO will work with fostering improvement to ensure C4 children's views are obtained early for fostering reviews
Relevant children's social care objective: <i>We will safely and appropriately reduce the number of cared for children</i>			
We will review plans for children including consideration of those who	We will see an increase in children being able to return safely to their families where	Care numbers will reduce, and caseloads will reduce leading to	Good IRO oversight of children's plans Scrutiny of those children coming into care in regular audits to ensure it was the best decision

<p>could safely return to live with their families</p> <p>We will track those children awaiting discharge of care orders and raise formal disputes for those where resources are delaying their plan</p>	<p>care is no longer required</p> <p>Children will not remain in care and will achieve better outcomes by living in their families if safe to do so</p> <p>There will be a reduction in missing from home for those children who seek out their family and where it is assessed they can safely live with that family member if necessary, with support provided</p>	<p>better oversight by the IRO team</p>	<p>Clear C and F assessments available to ensure the IRO is fully informed of the family situation</p> <p>Clearly identified support plans to ensure any return home is sustainable and will provide permanency</p>
<p>Relevant Children's Social Care Objective:</p> <p><i>We will achieve a permanent, safe home for children, young people and care leavers as early as possible.</i></p>			
<p>Focus on achieving permanency at the 4-month review and evaluation of children's plan to ensure the plan is SMART</p> <p>Fostering Annual Reviews will be held on time and will be more robust following review of the process and update of the forms</p> <p>To ensure children are living safely in</p>	<p>Children will achieve early permanency with fewer placement moves</p> <p>All options will be considered early in planning including the option of Special Guardianship to a connected person where possible</p> <p>Outcomes for children will be good with early</p>	<p>More plans of permanency will be achieved by the four-month review</p> <p>IROs will identify any gaps in the C and F assessment at the first review</p> <p>IROs will identify family members to be considered at the first review</p>	<p>IRO s to ensure a mid-point review between the initial review and the 4-month review to ensure outcomes have been addressed</p> <p>The QA checklist completed on each new case will give opportunity to highlight any missing's information such as genogram to enable good preparation for the review</p> <p>IROs to raise practice alerts should a permanency plan not be achieved at the 4 months review due to practice below agreed standards</p> <p>FIRO to feed into fostering review</p> <p>FIRO supporting policy updates in fostering</p>



good fostering homes that meet their needs by carers who are skilled and trained and meet regulations	<p>identification of where they should safely live in order to have stability</p> <p>Children will feel safe and secure in their fostering settings</p> <p>There will be fewer placement breakdowns as reviews will highlight support needs or concerns</p>	Foster carers will feel supported and well trained and will be resilient providing safe stable placements	<p>FIRO supporting implementation of new Liquid Logic workflow and forms</p> <p>FIRO supporting improvement in participation of children in the fostering annual reviews</p>
<p>Relevant Social Care Objective:</p> <p><i>We will reflect, learn, and continuously improve our practice to provide an excellent service for children and young people</i></p>			
Strengthen QA role of IRO and FIRO to challenge SW and SSW practice that impacts on outcomes for children through use of QA forms, practice alerts and dispute resolution as well as audit activity	<p>Practice will improve across the service and there will be less delay in achieving children's plans</p> <p>Placement stability will increase</p>	<p>Children will have more timely outcomes and plans will be achieved without drift or delay</p> <p>Practice will improve and be consistent</p> <p>Foster reviews will be holistic involving all contributors including children and will support stable placements</p>	<p>Discussion with SW service TMs to agree practice standards going forward for Practice alerts and some shared goals</p> <p>Consistent use of both practice alerts and good practice alerts by IROs and FIRO</p> <p>Ensure use of dispute resolution when in disagreement with the plan to evidence IRO scrutiny and footprint</p> <p>Regular peer audit activity to improve consistency across the team</p> <p>Regular team audits to highlight themes and improve practice</p> <p>Monthly performance data</p> <p>Annual Practice Alert report</p>



**Senior Officer**  
**Mark Palethorpe**  
**Executive Director of People**  
**August 2020**

**In relation to the content of this report please contact:**

**Karen Chan**  
**Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager**  
[Karen.chan@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:Karen.chan@cheshireeast.gov.uk)

This page is intentionally left blank



*Working for a brighter future together*

## **Corporate Parenting Committee**

---

**Date of Meeting:** 29 September 2020

**Report Title:** Update on Interim Inspection Arrangements

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Kathryn Flavell – Portfolio Holder for Children and Families

**Senior Officer:** Mark Palethorpe – Executive Director of People

---

### **1. Report Summary**

- 1.1. This report sets out the interim arrangements for Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) following a pause in inspections due to Covid-19.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. The Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to:
  - 2.1.1. Note the contents of the report in preparation for an inspection.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1. It is important that members have an overview of inspection arrangements and the key areas that inspectors will scrutinise in order to support effective oversight and scrutiny of outcomes for our cared for children and care leavers in Cheshire East.
- 3.2. One of the areas inspectors will evaluate is the the impact of leaders on frontline practice and outcomes for children. The committee has a key role in contributing to this.

### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1. Not applicable.

## **5. Background**

- 5.1. All routine Ofsted inspections were suspended on 17 March 2020 as a result of Covid-19, although urgent inspections where specific concerns were raised were still carried out.
- 5.2. On 6 July, Ofsted announced their plans to recommence inspections, including their plans for ILACS inspections.
- 5.3. Ofsted published the guidance for the interim ILACS arrangements on 17 August.

## **6. Interim ILACS arrangements**

- 6.1 ILACS inspections recommenced on 15 September.
- 6.2 The way inspections will be carried out has changed as an interim arrangement following the pause in inspections and taking into account the additional pressures services are under as a result of Covid-19. This interim arrangement will remain in place until December 2020 and could be extended depending on the circumstances.
- 6.3 Usually, there are three types of inspections we could receive under the ILACS framework. Under the interim arrangements, there will only be one type of inspection.

### **What the ILACS inspection covers**

- 6.4 ILACS are inspections of children's services across the levels of need, and cover the partnership support provided to children, young people and families within the following areas:
  - Prevention and Early Help
  - Child in Need and Child Protection
  - Cared for services and Care Leavers
  - Education for vulnerable pupils
  - Support to vulnerable groups of children and young people, for example those going missing or who are at risk from exploitation.
- 6.5 Although ILACS are local authority inspections, the effectiveness of the support we provide to children and young people is dependant on the effectiveness of our partnership arrangements. Therefore, Inspectors will review how effectively we work together as a partnership to protect our children and young people.

- 6.6 Inspectors will also evaluate the impact of leaders within Cheshire East on frontline practice and outcomes for children.
- 6.7 Inspectors will consider how we have responded to, prioritised and met children and young people's changing needs throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. There will be a particular focus on the quality and impact of decision making for children and young people.
- 6.8 These interim inspections have a larger focus on education due to the implications to this as a result of the pandemic. The inspection will consider how we have worked together as a partnership to promote school attendance during this time, particularly for our most vulnerable pupils.
- 6.9 Inspectors will consider the last 6 months of practice in making their evaluations. The scope of the interim inspections is attached in the appendix for further information.

### **Inspection Activity**

- 6.10 The inspection team will usually consist of four Social Care Inspectors and one Schools Inspector.
- 6.11 Inspectors will use a mix of on-site and off-site activity to inform their evaluations. Some meetings will be held virtually. Inspectors who are meeting with practitioners virtually will ask practitioners to share their screens so they can view the child's record together as they would in a face to face meeting.
- 6.12 Interim inspections will take place over three weeks:

<b>Day</b>	<b>Inspection Activity</b>
<b>Week 1</b>	
Tuesday	The notification call will take place on a Tuesday morning. Inspectors will give us 10 working days' notice before they arrive on-site. There will be a detailed call with the Lead Inspector on the Tuesday afternoon to discuss the inspection arrangements.
Wednesday	Off-site activity
Thursday	Off-site activity
Friday	We provide Ofsted with performance data on our services, lists of the cases we hold, and a list of cases that have been audited in the last 6 months. Inspectors review this information and will select the

	cases they want to track in detail when they arrive on-site. This will inform the key areas they want to review.
<b>Week 2</b>	
Monday	We provide Ofsted with information on our services, and our evidence and reports on the quality of practice and outcomes for children.
Tuesday	Phone interviews will take place between Tuesday and Thursday between the Lead Inspector and key leaders within the Council, such as the Lead Member, Chief Executive of the Council and Director of Children's Services, and also key leaders within the partnership including the Clinical Commissioning Group, the Police, Cafcass, and the local family judiciary.
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	Off-site activity
<b>Week 3</b>	
Monday	Off-site activity
Tuesday	Inspectors are on-site and meet with practitioners.
Wednesday	Inspectors are on-site and meet with practitioners.
Thursday	Inspectors are on-site and meet with practitioners.

- 6.13 The inspection will focus on frontline practice and the difference this makes to children and families. Inspectors will spend almost all their time shadowing and speaking to workers and managers about casework when they are on-site. They will also sample and review children's case records, and will speak with children, young people, parents and carers.
- 6.14 Inspectors will look at the experiences of children and young people, and how we have made decisions in their best interests in the context of the pandemic. Inspectors are keen to look at examples of good practice as part of the inspection.

### Findings

- 6.15 At end of the inspection, a letter will be completed which outlines our strengths and our areas for development. This will be published on the Ofsted website. No judgements will be made on the quality of practice (e.g. outstanding, good).
- 6.16 Until the letter is published, we are not allowed to share the findings as these may change following moderation.

### Timing of the Inspection

- 6.17 We don't know when or if we will receive an interim inspection, however Ofsted have said that they are aiming to visit as many areas as they can.

## **7. Challenges**

- 7.1 As these are unprecedented circumstances, it will be more challenging to prepare for these inspections. There is no baseline for what good support should look like during lockdown and the pandemic. Learning from other authorities who receive these interim inspections will be key.

## **8. Implications of the Recommendations**

### **8.1. Legal Implications**

- 8.1.1. As part of the ILACS inspection, Inspectors will want to understand how any of the changes to regulation set out in [The Adoption and Children \(Coronavirus\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2020](#) have impacted on the experiences of children and families. This will include looking at management oversight.

### **8.2. Finance Implications**

- 8.2.1. There are no financial implications.

### **8.3. Policy Implications**

- 8.3.1. The findings from inspection may inform policy decisions.

### **8.4. Equality Implications**

- 8.4.1. There are no equality implications. Ofsted have said that where staff are working from home due to the risk from Covid-19 they will conduct meetings with these staff virtually.

### **8.5. Human Resources Implications**

- 8.5.1. Staff from the service areas above will be directly involved in the inspections.
- 8.5.2. A briefing on the interim arrangements for ILACS inspections has been sent to all Children and Families staff, and to senior leaders within the Safeguarding Children Partnership to circulate to their workforce.

### **8.6. Risk Management Implications**

- 8.6.1. The existing working arrangements will be taken into account when planning for inspection to ensure staff continue to be protected from the risk from Covid-19. Inspectors will be expected to comply with the existing controls within buildings.

- 8.6.2. There are reputational and financial risks of not providing good children's services. These risks are also included as risks for the Safeguarding Children's Partnership. The Council, as the lead agency, must continue to ensure that these risks are minimised by ensuring effective plans are in place to improve where areas for development are identified.

## **8.7. Rural Communities Implications**

- 8.7.1. There are no direct implications for rural communities.

## **8.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children**

- 8.8.1. The findings from inspection inform the development of our services so we can better meet the needs of our children and young people. Children and young people's views inform the inspectors' evaluations.

## **8.9. Public Health Implications**

- 8.9.1. Existing controls that are in place to reduce the risk of Covid-19, for example social distancing and one-way systems within buildings, and individual risk assessments, will continue to be observed during inspection to protect staff and inspectors.

## **8.10. Climate Change Implications**

- 8.10.1. Carrying out some aspects of inspections virtually will enable us to reduce our carbon footprint.

## **9. Ward Members Affected**

- 9.1. There are no direct implications for individual wards.

## **10. Consultation & Engagement**

- 10.1. We will continue to consult and engage with all our key stakeholders as we prepare for inspection.

## **11. Access to Information**

- 11.1. There is no additional information.

## **12. Contact Information**

- 12.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

Name: Jacquie Sims  
Job Title: Director of Children's Social Care  
Email: [Jacquie.Sims@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:Jacquie.Sims@cheshireeast.gov.uk)



Appendix

## **Scope of ILACS Inspections from September 2020**

These inspections will evaluate the quality and impact of key decision-making in the following practice areas:

- help and protection
- children in care and care leavers
- impact of leaders

### **Help and protection**

In the help and protection area, inspectors will evaluate:

- the effectiveness of the front door, with specific reference to any rise in and response to referrals, section 47 enquiries and strategy discussions
- the progress of children subject to child protection and child in need plans (those who have experienced abuse, neglect or exploitation)
- the progress of those recently stepped up or stepped down to early help and the exercise of thresholds

### **Children in care and care leavers**

In the children in care and care leavers area, inspectors will evaluate:

- edge of care/pre-proceedings, particularly those subject to a letter before proceedings (under the pre-proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline, local authorities are required to write to parents setting out what needs to change if they are to avoid family court proceedings).
- the focus on physical and mental health of children in care and care leavers, including how the local authority has maintained contact with the child/care leaver and how they have facilitated contact with families
- placement decisions, including the quality of matching, particularly when sufficiency is a challenge

### **Impact of leaders**

In the impact of leaders area, inspectors will evaluate:

- the quality assurance of practice and 'line of sight' to the quality and impact of practice with children and families
- management and workforce capacity, including responses to staff well-being
- the effectiveness of leaders in leading and contributing to multi-agency working that leads to effective social work practice

Inspectors will need to look at what has happened for children and families in the 6 months before the visit to understand children's experiences.

Our focus will be on child-centred practice that has been carefully risk assessed to result in the best possible decisions for children in the context of the pandemic locally.

Inspectors will want to understand how any of the changes to regulation set out in [The Adoption and Children \(Coronavirus\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2020](#) have impacted on the experiences of children and families. This will include looking at management oversight.

### **Role of the schools HMI**

A schools specialist will add value to our evaluation at a time when schools will have re-opened for all pupils, and will play a critical role in providing early help and identifying 'hidden harm'.

Schools HMI will evaluate:

- the educational progress of children in care
- children missing education
- electively home-schooled children
- how the local authority has promoted school attendance
- partnership working between schools and the local authority
- the effectiveness of the virtual school
- the experiences of care leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET)

To carry out their evaluation, schools HMI may speak with children and their foster carers, care leavers, the virtual school headteacher and relevant staff at a sample of schools. These conversations may be individual or in groups. They may happen through both phone and video calls.

This will not be an inspection of the schools in an area, but inspectors may comment on the effectiveness of schools' work and partnership with the local authority both during and post-lockdown. The schools HMI will triangulate their findings with the findings of the social care inspectors.