

Corporate Parenting Committee

Agenda

Date: Tuesday, 17th November, 2020
Time: 4.00 pm
Venue: Virtual

How to Watch the Meeting

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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 - 10)

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2020.

Contact: Helen Davies
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4. **Corporate Parenting Annual Report** (Pages 11 - 36)
To give consideration to the above report.
5. **Corporate Parenting Update Report 2019-20** (Pages 37 - 72)
To consider the above report and a presentation on performance.
6. **Virtual School Head Teacher's Annual Report** (Pages 73 - 122)
To consider the above report and an update on Education.
7. **Adoption Panel Chairs Report Oct 2019- March 2020** (Pages 123 - 130)
To consider the above report.
8. **Adoption Annual Report 2019-2020** (Pages 131 - 156)
To consider the above report.

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, 29th September, 2020 Virtually

PRESENT

Councillor J Saunders (Vice-Chairman) Councillors R Bailey, J Barber, J Buckley, C Bulman, P Butterill, S Edgar, S Holland and M Warren

ALSO PRESENT

Jacquie Sims- Director of Children's Social Care, Children in Need & Child Protection

Kerry Birtles- Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers

Laura Rogerson- Head of Service for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Virtual School Headteacher for Cared for Children

Keith Martin- Head of Service for Children with Disabilities and Fostering

Karen Chan- Independent Reviewing Officer

Lauren Conway- Interim Head of Service: Children's Service Development and Partnerships

Helen Davies- Democratic Services Officer

7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Michael Beanland.

The Chairman of this Committee, Councillor Kathryn Flavell, dialled into the meeting, however to enable smooth running and full connectivity the Vice-Chairman, Councillor Jos Saunders, chaired the entire meeting.

8 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

9 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED-

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 14 July 2020 be accepted as a correct and accurate record.

10 CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE UPDATE REPORT

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

The Committee heard that during the pandemic, 80% of Cared for Children were able to be seen face-to-face and in their homes. The remaining 20% showed a clear Covid-19 risk.

The most significant areas of impact had been children that needed care.

Laura Rogerson, Head of Service for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Virtual School Headteacher for Cared for Children, advised the Committee that during the pandemic, those who needed to attend school were able to attend, and were supported. Children's attendance with social worker was registered at 85% with 98% schools open and a 90% attendance rate, this is above national average and included those who could not attend because they had to isolate. (Isolation was classed as an authorised absence).

The Virtual School worked jointly with social care and extra funding had been invested.

Currently there was a specific focus on Personal Education Plans (PEPs) being completed and this was scheduled throughout this term.

All the young people that were due to go to college had secured their places. Five young people were recorded as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), this was a low number and they were being supporting with next steps. There had been no rise in children being able to access next steps 16+.

The Committee were advised that the reasons why young adults come back, can include connectivity with family, challenges with employment, and the feeling of isolation.

RESOLVED- That:

- Kerry and Laura be thanked for their update and attendance;
- The report be received and noted; and
- This Committee provide support and challenge to the local authority's actions in respect of the report.

11 QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Kerry Birtles, Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers advised the Committee that the performance had been covered in the previous item of business.

12 EDUCATION UPDATE

Laura Rogerson, Interim Head of Service SEND and Virtual School Headteacher for Cared for Children attended the meeting and gave a verbal update to the Committee.

The committee was told that 96.5% of schools across the borough have reopened which equated to 136. Five schools have partly reopened. There was a 90% attendance rate, and an 85% attendance rate for those

children who had a social worker. The Education Recovery Group met regularly and supported any challenges and gave regular guidance to schools.

There were regular meetings for parent/carer forums.

Virtual Personal Education Plans (PEPs) have continued, these had reduced during the pandemic but the focus was on those transitioning. This half term the focus was on PEPS, gaps in learning and identification of where extra support could be put into place.

There had been good results from students over summer, with all 16 year olds moving onto the courses they had opted for.

Out of 110 18-20-year old students, five had been recorded as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).

Two young people went to University. Six students could go to University next year if they opted to do that.

The Committee were invited to ask any questions, there was some discussion on:

- The National Tutoring Programme, the detail was in development and there was guidance going to schools this was an item that could be brought back to this Committee at the next meeting; and
- For students who could potentially be left out or were further behind with their education, tutors could be provided as tailored support where needed. Sometimes this was done via the school in-house and sometimes agency tutors were employed.

RESOLVED- That

- a) Laura be thanked for her attendance and update to this Committee;
- b) The update be received and noted;
- c) An update on the National Tutoring Programme be brought back to the next Committee meeting.

13 VISION AND IDENTITY FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Jacque Sims, Director of Children's Social Care, Children in Need & Child Protection attended the meeting and advised the Committee on this item.

The Committee were advised that it would be helpful if they, as Elected Members, could promote the vision as widely as possible to ensure the outcomes for Children were received.

The vision had been formed via the positive feedback from Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) gave

positive feedback on how the Council embedded the voice of the child within services and the responsive partnership working. The next step for children and families was an overarching vision to demonstrate ambition.

As the vision became more embedded, this would support Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Corporate Parenting Committee to improve outcomes for children and young people.

The Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions and there was some discussion that included:

- The need for performance measures behind the vision, to be outcome driven so performance could be measured;
- The ambition of the Executive Director for People to reduce the number of children who needed to be cared for;
- Cheshire had a higher number of cared for at home children than other parts of country, the ambition was to reduce numbers of those who could safely exit care. For those children who were in settled places, work was being done to explore secured special guardianship arrangements to assess if this was the right move for them and continue to assess exactly the right level of support. This would be an important piece of work for team over the next few weeks and a more detailed overview would be available for the next Committee meeting.

RESOLVED- That:

- a) Jacquie be thanked for her attendance and presentation;
- b) That the update be received and noted; and
- c) A detailed overview of the exploration of secured special guardianship arrangements for children in settled places to be brought to the next Committee meeting.

14 MEMBER FRONTLINE VISITS PROSPECTUS

Kerry Birtles, Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers thanked the Committee for their participation in expressing their preferences in relation to Member Frontline Visits.

RESOLVED-

That Jennifer Jenkins, Improvement and Development Officer will contact the Committee directly to advise of next steps.

15 FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

Keith Martin, Head of Service for Children with Disabilities and Fostering presented the Fostering Service Annual Report to the Committee to give an overview of the last 12-months.

The Committee heard that it had been a busy year for the service, and following the inspection by Ofsted there had been positives raised around the support and training to foster carers, however they found that Cheshire East had difficult engagement with foster carers, it is acknowledged this was during a time when Foster Carers did not have a voice within CEC. Since then, an external body had been employed to investigate this as an area of concern and Cheshire East had accepted their recommendations.

The current priority was the recruitment of foster carers. The establishment of a marketing and recruitment team were part of this priority with a heightened communications campaign to follow, linked to the vision: "Together for Fostering".

The Committee heard that from 275 enquiries there had been 54 expressions of interest. There were 112 Cared for Children within Cared for Foster Care and 57 family and friends placements- those family members were still subject to same foster requirements.

There had been some Issues around foster children cross boundary and moving school placements.

There was ongoing work to streamline work within the Fostering Service to enable more collective and strategic outcomes. Currently there were three teams within the fostering service, the goal was to expand within the current staffing structure and post 18 family living team.

The Committee were advised that the Fostering network, a close partner of the Council, have developed a Foster Friendly Employer programme. Currently if a Cheshire East member of staff who is also a Foster Carer needed to attend a Cared for Review or Training, there is no provision to enable them to attend in work time other than for them to use their own Annual Leave. The Foster Friendly Employer Programme aims to change that. Keith advised a paper was being drafted for the Council to consider.

There were no questions from the Committee.

The Chairman summarised that it was positive to see the 12-month review, there was clear ambition to increase the amount of foster carers for Cheshire East, and this Committee would be interested to measure the success on that as it is made.

RESOLVED- That:

- a) Keith Martin be thanked for his attendance and update to the Committee;
- b) the report be received and noted; and
- c) a paper be prepared for a future Committee date on the measure of success in recruitment of Foster Carers and Foster Friendly Employers.

Karen Chan, the Independent Reviewing Officer, attended the meeting and updated the Committee on the IRO Annual Report.

The key headlines from the report were:

- There had been two IRO's joining to the team last year to address the high case numbers, however Children in Care figures increased which led to an outturn position being similar to where it was before;
- 26% more reviews in 2020 than in 2019;
- 98% of children over 4 contributed in some way to their review;
- 62% attended the review despite creativity around thematic reviews from IROs to encourage more attendance. IRO's worked with a focus group to establish what the appeal of reviews would be for children;
- The department received an Investing in Children award for the second year running;
- 60% of all disputes have been resolved informally;
- Ofsted noted- Whilst the department does challenge it does not always have an impact in changing outcomes, IRO's were working to improve and change practice and standards;
- There were good examples of social workers going above and beyond in their role, with positive examples of best practice;
- There had been good Ofsted feedback, the child focus aspect was commended, but there was a need for more critical evaluation. IRO's had started peer reviews to address this; and
- Last years targets were met, apart from consultation for reviews- there was a low return rate, however there had been a better rate of consultation during the pandemic. There had been a variety of forms to consult with the IRO's- teenagers liked Microsoft Teams, where it was important to maintain socially distanced visits with children.

Going forward IRO's looked at children that had come into care, to scrutinise their plans and ensure the options were available to them and that had been fully explored. Reunification where it was right and appropriate whereas challenge if it was not right.

The Committee raised a couple of points around ensuring there was the capacity to meet the ambition within the team, and whether a series of meetings would be onerous to children.

Karen confirmed there had been recruitment of another IRO for six months to establish the trends in relation to the number of cases, and that the child could choose which part of the meeting they wanted to be in, and if parents were not able to be in meeting at same times, it would be stretched to a series of meetings. If that works best for the child that's what they do.

RESOLVED- That:

- a) Karen Chan be thanked for her attendance and presentation; and
- b) the Annual Report be received and noted.

17 UPDATE ON INSPECTIONS DURING COVID-19

Jacquie Sims, Director of Children's Social Care, Children in Need & Child Protection advised the Committee on this item.

The Committee heard that following suspension of Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) Inspections in March 2020, they had now been reinstated and would follow similar themes to the current inspection framework, but would be in context of the national pandemic.

Ordinarily the Council would have been subject to a focussed visit with a theme e.g. cared for children, or a targeted area inspections (JTAI) on an area of practice. However, between now and the end of March 2021, Ofsted would be conducting an 'assurance visit' instead. There would be ten days notice for the Council to prepare and that call is expected between now and March. Officers are putting together evidence in readiness for a visit.

There were no further questions from the Committee.

RESOLVED-

That the update be received and noted.

The meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and concluded at 5.32 pm

Councillor (none)

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Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2019-20

Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2019/2020

Foreword

As Corporate Parents we made pledges as a council in December 2018 to be truly ambitious in supporting and guiding our cared for children and young people and our care experienced adults to strive to reach their full potential. We committed to ensuring that our children and young people had permanent homes that met their individual needs locally so that they could stay connected to their families and communities. We pledged that they would have the very best educational experiences, be healthy, be safe and prepared for their onward journey to adulthood.

The Corporate Parenting Committee have continued to support, challenge and scrutinise the outcomes for our children and young people in line with the pledges that we made. This year we have focused specifically on achieving our vision to create more homes for children locally and I am able to say with confidence that we have been able to achieve this in the mobilisation of new residential children's homes where children have been able to return to the borough and connect once again with their communities.

Children and young people have continued to be at the heart of everything we do, and our Shadow Committee, My Voice, has met throughout the year to raise awareness of pertinent issues that we as a Council have within our gift to influence. As ever my thanks are given to our children and young people in their

efforts in bringing this perspective and challenge to the forefront.

We have been able to celebrate, with our children and young people, all their key achievements, at our annual Star Celebration Event which took place in November 2019. The event was a tremendous success which truly highlighted the wonderful things achieved by our children and young people.

Along with the support and challenge from the Committee, the service also received an ILACS Ofsted Inspection in November 2019. The inspection took place over three weeks and highlighted several areas of strengths as well as areas requiring further improvement. The findings from the inspection have informed our onward journey in improving outcomes for children and young people in Cheshire East.

I am pleased to present the Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2019-20. This report highlights the successes achieved in delivering positive outcomes for children and young people and more crucially, the next steps in our journey to success.

Cllr Kathryn Flavell - Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People



The Corporate Parenting Committee

We know that having the right values, beliefs and culture around prioritising and championing the needs of cared for children and young care experienced adults is essential to achieving excellent outcomes for children and young people. Our Corporate Parenting responsibility is a shared one that requires a high level of commitment from the leadership of the Council, as well as the support and ambition of all council employees and partners.

The Corporate Parenting Committee is comprised of eleven cross-party members with Council Officers in attendance to support agenda items, as required. The Committee is administered by Officers from Democratic Services.

The Committee has met on four occasions in 2019-20:

- 18th June 2019
- 17th September 2019
- 12th November 2019
- 21st January 2020

A meeting was planned for 17th March 2020 and papers were published but the meeting was cancelled due to the Covid-19 lockdown.

In preparation for the discussion and challenge at Committee, our Shadow Committee of young people meets in advance with the Chair of the Committee and the Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers to comment on the matters that are to be presented to Committee. They share their lived

experience of how services are designed and delivered and ultimately what it feels like to be a cared for child or care experienced adult in Cheshire East.

Officers and partners present information to the Committee. This can be themed in relation to key areas for children and young people, is responsive to changing times, or provides feedback from external scrutiny, so that members can scrutinise and challenge the service that is being delivered to ensure we are effectively meeting children and young people's needs.

The function of the Committee is to oversee the effective delivery of our Corporate Parenting responsibilities and the pledges that we made in December 2018. The Committee ensures that the statutory duties placed upon Cheshire East Council are met.

Officers support members in ensuring that they have the most up to date information available to them about local and national legislative changes and offer training annually to support this. Two training sessions were delivered in June and July 2019 by senior officers from Children's Social Care and Education.

The Corporate Parenting Committee has reviewed its Terms of Reference for 2019-20 which is attached at Appendix 1.



Corporate Parenting Strategy and Pledges

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018-20 sets out a number of pledges we are making to our cared for children and young people and those who are care experienced. These are based on what these children and young people have told us will make the most difference to their lives:

Pledge One

We will be a good corporate parent

Pledge Two

We will improve education, training and employment outcomes

Pledge Three

We will work to achieve permanence and keep children safe

Pledge Four

We will improve health and wellbeing outcomes

Pledge Five

We will prepare young people for adulthood

Each Committee meeting is focused on one of the Corporate Parenting Pledges from the Strategy 2018-20. Performance reporting and impact is scrutinised by the Committee, along with issues and risks.

Five Workstream Groups, aligned to the five pledge areas, are in place to ensure that this strategy is delivered effectively, and in January 2020 workstream one and three merged to strengthen the shared focus.



Corporate Parenting Strategy

Progress

Pledge One

We will be a good corporate parent
Staff and elected members will understand their roles and responsibilities and be ambitious corporate parents, who advocate and champion the needs of cared for children and care leavers in everything they do.
We will know ourselves and the needs of our children and young people well and design and deliver services that meet these needs.
Decisions about children and young people's lives, and the services that support them, will be made with them and for them . We will always value their views.

What the data tells us

- At the end of March 2020 there were 533 children and young people being cared for by Cheshire East. This is an increase of 49 children and young people from March 2019.
- This equates to 70 cared for children per 10,000 of the child population within Cheshire East, which is slightly higher than last year.

What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

- We have continued to monitor and scrutinise the progress and impact of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- We have received quarterly updates on our cared for children and care leavers through the Corporate Parenting Scorecard.
- We have had regular updates from the Participation Team. The Chair of the Committee and the Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers have attended 'My Voice' to develop a direct relationship with some of our cared for children and young people.
- The majority of elected members have undertaken corporate parenting training and completed 'Pen-Pictures'.
- On Sunday 24th November 2019 Cheshire East held the annual Star celebration event at Tatton Park. The theme of the event was princesses and pirates and many of our children, young people, family members and carers dressed up for the occasion. Officers and members supported with the day which was a huge success and celebrated the many achievements of our children and young people.
- We celebrated the Cared for Children and Care Leavers' Service achieving the Investing in Children Award.

TOGETHER: Co-production in Cheshire East

[TOGETHER](#) is our shared definition of co-production in Cheshire East, because TOGETHER is inclusive to all. Our co-production guide sets out how we will work together as equal partners to improve, develop and deliver services towards a common goal for all our children, young people, families and adults. Our guide has been co-produced together with children, young people, families and adults living in Cheshire East.

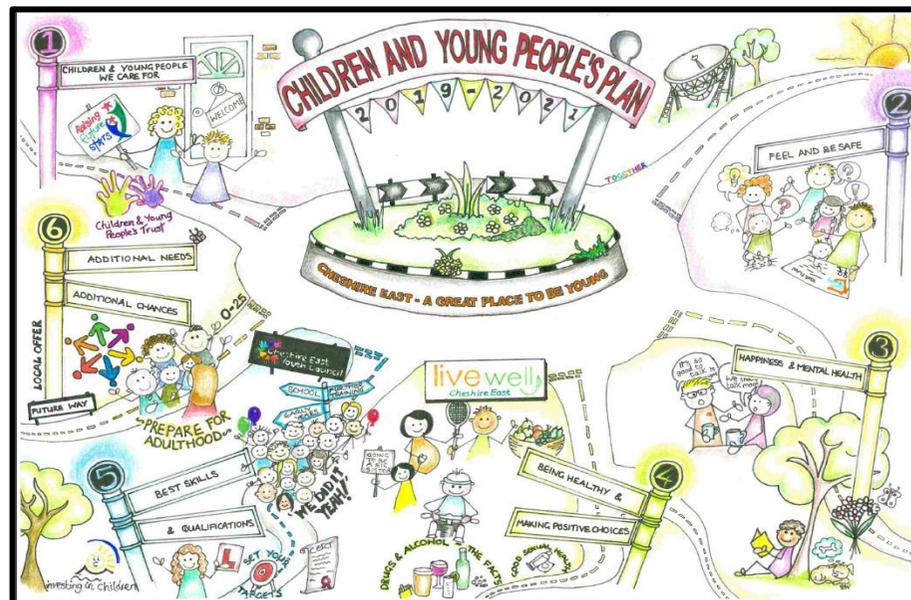
TACT: Language that Cares

A glossary of words and terms that aims to change the language of the care system has been published. [Language That Cares](#) is a collaborative effort led by adoption and fostering charity TACT (The Adolescent and Children's Trust) and the charity's children and care experienced young people, with contributions from 15 local authorities and organisations. Cheshire East signed up to this national initiative and the final document includes input from cared for children in Cheshire East and we continue to work on embedding this language in all areas of our work.

Children and Young People's Plan 2019-21

The Children and Young People's Plan, the overarching plan for children's services, was co-produced with children and

young people. Outcome 1 in the new plan is linked to the outcomes of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.



November Children's Rights Month

November Children's Rights Month offered cared for children and care leavers the opportunity to take over various roles such as an Engagement Officer in Cheshire Police and a Team Manager for Cared for Children. One of our care leavers completed a piece of work around the Care Leavers local offer and was supported to write a policy to support young people and professionals around transgender.

Engagement with Corporate Parenting

Officers provided members with a menu of activities to support in the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy. Elected members were asked to return their preferences of activities by the 6th January 2020 to be able to support functions such as attendance at Corporate Parenting sub-groups and participating in fostering panel. This was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and is a key part of 2020-21 action planning.

The latest version of the options for engagement for Members is included in Appendix 2.

Merging of Workstream Groups 1 and 3 - The new workstream will focus on the following areas:

- Training, support and direct work tools to be developed around **caring for teenagers** and balancing safe risk taking and independence skills.
- Embedding understanding of warning signs of **placement instability** to aid professionals in recognising signs of risk of placement instability, to prevent instability and for children and young people to be better prepared for changes in their home.
- Continuation of the use of trajectories with an aim of all **children placed at home** having a Signs of Safety trajectory and safety plan in place to aid discharge of the care order.

- **Mobility mapping** for all care leavers to ensure that they have clear support networks outside of the social worker and personal assistant that can remain with them into adulthood.
- Strengthening **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire** resources to triangulate views and to develop a holistic picture of emotional health.
- Development of **life story work** and use of **words and pictures** to help children and young people understand their journey through care and aims for success.
- **Corporate Parenting Induction Training** will be established with a rolling pattern of focussed thematic training through the remainder of the year.
- **Corporate Parenting Update Training** will be established for all other elected members.

What impact has it made?

Our Ofsted inspection found that “the voice of the child is a strength” in Cheshire East, and that the Corporate Parenting Committee provided “appropriate challenge to operational services where deficiencies are highlighted. This means that senior leaders are held accountable for the performances of services and the experiences of children.”

The appointment of a specific social worker to support placement stability has led to an increase in stability meetings. These meetings aim to either preserve the existing placement or effectively support transition to a new home. As a result, children and young people have received stronger support to transition to their next home. The next outcome we want to achieve is greater placement stability for children, with more children being able to remain within their current homes, as a result of these meetings.

Our children living at home have much clearer trajectories for their exit from care with the prospect of these children being discharged from care in 2020-21.

Next steps

- We will embed the TOGETHER principles, and our commitment to being active and ambitious corporate parents throughout all our work through the development and launch of a vision for all children and young people in Cheshire East. The Committee will provide scrutiny and challenge to ensure all our work is carried out TOGETHER with children and young people.
- Members of the Committee will be linked to the Corporate Parenting workstreams and will be engaged with service areas that support cared for and care experienced children and young people so they can hear children and young people's views and understand the current key issues for

our children, staff, and services, to enable effective support and scrutiny.

- We will find a different way to celebrate the achievements of our cared for and care experienced children and young people in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic restricting our ability to hold gatherings.
- The Committee will challenge and scrutinise the experience of children at risk of placement instability by examining the impact of the updated Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and additional tools and training for professionals and foster carers in line with refresher Corporate Parenting Training.



Pledge Two

We will improve education, employment and training outcomes
We will have high aspirations for every child and young person and will help them to achieve their ambitions , using opportunities in the ‘family business’ and our contacts so that they can be happy and successful in their education, training and employment.
Every child and young person will have an education plan that is targeted to enable them to reach their full potential .
We will strive to that ensure that every child and young person will have access to consistent, high quality, well matched, full time opportunities .

What the data tells us

- From September 2019 to February half term 2020, attendance had increased compared to last year with the average Primary attendance increasing from 90% to 93% and the average Secondary attendance increasing from 90% to 94%.
- 72% of cared for children are in ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ schools.
- Data from Q4 2019/20 shows that 9% of our care leavers are attending University.

- On average 86% of cared for children have had their Personal Education Plan completed each term.
- 100% of cared for children were accessing 2–4-year-old early education funding.
- In July 2019, the percentage of cared for pupils who gained Level 5 and above in Maths and English was 19%, which is the same as last year and slightly above the national average. 54% of the cohort gained 5+ GCSE qualifications between grades 9 and 1.

What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

- A number of year 10 and year 11 students attended an award event on 6th June 2019 to receive certificates commending them for the work that they had completed whilst on employment placements.
- We are proud of the A level results for our cared for young people last summer. These successes have been possible due to the hard work of the young people and the close working relationships between the Children’s Social Care teams and the Virtual School.
- The **Post 16 Education Subgroup** is focusing on achieving apprenticeships for cared for children and care leavers in and out of the council. This is a measurable target within our Corporate Parenting Strategy and local offer. Alongside this there is a drive to strengthen work experience opportunities within the council.

- The **School Age Children Subgroup** is also focusing on raising attainment for our cared for children and improving their outcomes. Cared for children can experience unplanned changes to their education when they come into care or during their time in care and therefore there is a greater challenge to ensure that they are supported above and beyond so that they achieve their potential.
- As Corporate Parents we continue to be ambitious around achieving the very best outcomes for children and young people in relation to their education, training and employment. At the end of 2019 the Care Leavers Service and the Virtual School ran a 12-week NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) programme whereby Care Leavers supported a homelessness project with a personal goal of re-engaging in education. From a total of 12 young people, nine successfully completed the course and have remained engaged in education.
- The Care Leavers Service will be strengthened further within the next 12 months by the resources allocated from the Journey First project. This will see additional keyworker capacity to work with our most vulnerable care leavers in being creative in re-engaging them in education, training and employment. The funding will be available over a three-year period which will offer consistency in relationships, a key driver for Care Leavers.
- A new Deputy Head has been appointed to support Virtual Head Laura Rogerson in the delivery of statutory functions to our cared for children and previously cared for children,

as Laura's role has developed and is now responsible for the SEND service.

What impact has it made?

- Cared for children are making educational progress and are supported well in schools. Most cared for children/care leavers have an effective PEP in place to ensure that they have clear SMART targets to support continued progress.
- In our inspection in November 2019, Ofsted found that "The virtual school provides strong leadership, which is leading to improving outcomes for most children. The virtual school's focus on the attendance of children in care has led to improvements in both primary and secondary. The virtual school has an accurate understanding of the work needed to ensure that children's outcomes at Key Stages 2 and 4 are improved."



Next steps

- The Ofsted inspection found that the quality of PEPs are variable, so we will continue to work alongside schools/ settings and social care to further improve the quality and consistency of PEPs for all children and young people.
- Support children and young people to return to education, employment and training from September 2020 following the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring any gaps in learning have been identified and effective interventions and support is in place.
- Continue to develop our support for post-16 to ensure that all have a clear post-16 pathway to reduce the number of care experienced young people who don't go on to education, employment or training.
- Implement the Journey First project, which will provide additional keyworker capacity to work with our most vulnerable Care Leavers in being creative in re-engaging them in education, training and employ

Pledge Three

We will work to achieve permanence and keep children safe

We will strive to ensure that every child and young person will have the **opportunity to live in a good, safe home locally**, either with their family or in another permanent home. All decisions will be made and reviewed with them without delay.

We will **respect those people who are important to our children and young people** and make sure that these safe relationships are sustained.

We will **keep children and young people safe**.



What the data tells us

- 88% for cared for children reviews took place within statutory timescales, with 98% of children participating in their reviews.
- 273 cared for children live with foster families, 39 live with family and friend carers, 58 live with their parents, 15 children are placed for adoption and 40 live within residential care.
- 107 children are living in permanently matched homes with their foster carers and a further 20 have remained in 'staying put' arrangements with their foster carers after they became 18.
- Of the children who ceased to be cared for during the past year, 15 became subject to Special Guardianship Orders, 17 children were adopted, 10 Child Arrangement Orders were made, 6 Supervision Orders and 5 Care Orders were discharged.

What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

- We considered the Annual Independent Review Officers Report and how the outcomes for our cared for children and care leavers are quality assured.
- We considered the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report and about the changes that have been introduced now the LSCB has moved to become the Children's Safeguarding Partnership.

Adoption

Cheshire East Council's adoption performance was praised by the Department for Education. In a letter marking the publication of 2015-18 adoption scorecards, the department recognised the strong performance on adoption 'timeliness' in Cheshire East. The adoption scorecard for Cheshire East shows that the Department for Education's threshold for both time taken to place children with their adoptive families, and for the average time to match an adoptive family for children, was met in 2015-18. A copy of the letter is attached at Appendix 3.

Fostering

Cheshire East Council commissioned an independent review of the fostering service which made recommendations about how an alternative delivery structure may assist with recruitment and retention of foster carers, a key objective within the post Ofsted Action Plan. A decision was reached to depart from our collaborative relationship with Foster4 and to engage on our own recruitment and assessment processes to recruit new foster carers to Cheshire East. The planning and trajectory for implementation began towards the end of the year with our exit from Foster4 planned for mid-2020.

Cheshire East submitted a bid to the Department for Education to secure funding for the development of a '**Mockingbird**' fostering initiative to work as part of 'Bespoke' homes for children project. Cheshire East Council were successful in this

bid and the implementation of the project was initiated in October 2019 with a trajectory for the first Mockingbird constellation planned to mobilize mid-2020.

Bespoke Children's Homes

We developed 'Bespoke' and mobilised our new Children's Homes. Bespoke is a hub-based model similar to the North Yorkshire 'No Wrong Door' model which has received national recognition. This will provide wrap around support to children and young people who are in care or on the edge of care.

Following a successful commissioning exercise, the mobilisation of four new residential children's homes are planned to be operational by May 2020 (subject to Ofsted registration) and these will house 12 places for Cheshire East children to reside in their home communities and receive the very best care to achieve their personal goals.

Placement Stability and Quality Assurance

The Cared for Children Team and the Safeguarding Unit facilitate monthly joint performance challenge sessions where this is retrospective analysis of unplanned placement changes. The information gathered from these sessions forms part of the feedback that shapes projects such as the recommissioning of the 16+ accommodation offer. Placement stability is one of the focus areas within the service, this focus was validated during the last Ofsted inspection as a positive area.

Family Time

The statutory requirement to support and facilitate family time between cared for children and those who are important to them was a priority this year and in planning for the sufficiency needs we ended our commissioned relationship with Core Assets and developed a full in house Family Time service within the Cared for Children's Resource Team.



What impact has it made?

Cheshire East Council have been able to support children back into their communities by having a very strong commissioned offer of residential homes in the borough. The review of the fostering service and successful bid to the DfE for innovation funding relating to Mockingbird will see greater opportunity for more Cheshire East children to remain living within their communities. We have also equipped our service to be able to deliver the statutory function of family time by resourcing a service appropriately.

Next Steps

- Continue to work with children and young people to review their changing needs throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, so services can respond and support appropriately.
- Complete the mobilisation of Bespoke and Mockingbird to full capacity.
- Establish our own in-house fostering recruitment service, launch a new recruitment campaign and drive performance in relation to recruitment and retention of Cheshire East Foster Carers.
- Continue to work with Foster Carers to develop our services and support to carers.
- Ensure family time is delivered safely in line with the restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, while working to

support children and young people to maintain the relationships that are important to them.

Pledge Four

We will improve health and wellbeing outcomes

We are committed to **understanding the health needs** of our children and young people **as early as possible** and to ensure they are **given the highest priority** in every service.

We will **equip** our children and young people to have **high aspirations for their own health**.

What the data tells us

- 86% of cared for children had an up to date health assessment
- 97% of immunisations were completed
- For children 5 and under 98% of developmental checks were completed
- 75% of dental checks were completed in timescales
- 58% of care leavers received a summary of their health at the time of their 18th birthday. Performance in this area was consistently high during the first 3 quarters of the year however during quarter 4 this work was suspended due to competing priorities relating to Covid-19. A commitment to

ensure all outstanding health summaries are completed by the end of the second quarter of 2020-21 has been made

What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

- We have considered the Annual Health Report for Cared for Children and Care Leavers.
- Following the **'Help me to be healthy' group**, the Cared for Children Specialist Nurses are now regularly attending service meetings to provide an update for social workers around the health processes for cared for children. This will include discussion around the requirements for making a request for an initial health assessment, the role of the nurse specialists, and how the health needs of cared for children are identified and met, with the intention of impacting on timeliness for requests for health assessments.
- The quality of information provided relating to each individual child when a request for an initial health assessment is made by the child/young person's social worker has significantly improved during this year. This enables the medical practitioner to conduct a more thorough assessment of health need with a greater understanding of the child's history and background.
- Accessing annual dental checks is a statutory requirement for all our children and young people and there have been occasions where it has been difficult to obtain appointments with dentists, in particular during Quarter 4 of

this year. The Dental Adviser for NHS England/Improvement has now been added to the escalation protocol, which has recently been reviewed by the group, in order to address any issues with access.

- Cared for children and care leavers have been added to the priority workstream for children living with mental health issues, which is a task and finish group within the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children Partnership.



Emotional wellness

The subgroup also focuses on how we understand the emotional well-being of our cared for children and care leavers. Pure Insights attended the meeting in November 2019 and highlighted the benefits observed from the support offered by their emotional well-being worker, ultimately avoiding escalation into services such as CAMHS.

What impact has it made?

In the context of rising numbers of cared for children, the overall performance in relation to the health outcomes for our cared for children and care leavers remains stable, however our ambition and focus remains for this to improve.

Next steps

Partnership working between health and children's social care needs to continue to be a priority in order to see improvements in the timeliness of requests for Initial Health Assessments and Review Health Assessments.

Our focus on health passports for care experienced adults has begun to impact of the way our young adults understand their health care journey, an area that we aspire to see greater improvements.



Pledge Five

We will prepare young people for adulthood

We will **support young people early with the skills needed** to prepare for their future through access to a range of good quality services.

We will be a **consistent guide** for our young people. We will **celebrate their successes** and **support them when things don't go well**.

We will **respect our care leavers as young adults** and adapt our relationships to their needs.

What the data tells us

- There were 274 care leavers eligible for services.
- 95% of Pathways Plans were completed within timescales.
- Pathway Plans are reviewed by an Independent Reviewing Officer, and by implementing a phased approach to reviews there has been success in a significant increase in participation of young people in their reviews, from 5% to 66% this year.
- 25% of 16 to 18-year-old care leavers are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Whilst there have been improvements in the number of NEET care leavers over the past 12 months due to the direct work being undertaken by the Personal Assistants, we know that this is an area that requires additional focus.

What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

Supporting our care experienced adults and celebrating success

We have had a care leaver give birth to her second child, she is a great mother to both children and is not receiving any intervention. She has been able to provide them with positive parenting experiences following clear support and intervention for her, and we are very proud to be corporate grandparents!

One young person is completing her final year in her Social Work Degree at university and will be completing her final placement with Cheshire East Child in Need/Child Protection Team. She will be a fantastic contributor to developing our family business. She continues to be a fantastic mother to her daughter balancing full time care and study.

A care leaver within the service has completed a work experience for a week in Italy working in a summer camp with children. She also volunteers every Saturday at a charity shop and is working really hard.

Recommissioning of 16+ accommodation

Cheshire East will begin to tender for the 16+ supported accommodation offer in Spring 2020. The commissioning and children's teams have already begun to write the specification with children and young people in order to ensure that their experiences inform the types, locations and support made

available from any future procured providers. The recommissioning has embraced the feedback from the Ofsted inspection in the need to tailor of deliver model when young adults are accessing emergency accommodation.

There has been a recent focus on care leavers experience of loneliness and how we can as corporate parents support our care leavers to be in touch with members of the community. Pure Insights, a commissioned provider, support many of our care leavers to be included in families and wider community events.

Committee have considered the Care Leavers Annual Report

Committee have considered that annual performance of our care leavers service in preparing care experienced young people for their transition to adulthood.

Review of the Local Offer for Care Leavers

The Care Leavers Service scheduled a review of the Local Offer for Care Leavers, in consultation with Care Leavers. The initial plans were to consult with the Ambassador for Care Leavers, Mark Riddell, however these plans were postponed because the gradual impact of Covid-19 in March 2020. This work is now scheduled for January 2021.

What impact has it made?

Care experienced adults in Cheshire East have been able to reconnect with the service when they were in need which is a clear demonstration of our corporate parenting approach. Their Pathway Plan review performance further demonstrates a commitment to ensuring that their needs are very clearly articulated, and action plans put in place to deliver co-produced plans for care leavers.

Next steps

- Recommission of the 16+ supported accommodation offer.
- Review the local offer to care leavers.
- Agree a whole Council approach to prioritise and support care experienced adults into employment, education and training. Implement the Journey First project, which will provide additional keyworker capacity to work with our most vulnerable Care Leavers in being creative in re-engaging them in education, training and employment.

Priorities for 2020-21

- **Update the Corporate Parenting Strategy.**
- **Coproduce a review of the local offer for care leavers.**
- **Fully mobilise Bespoke residential homes for children, and Mockingbird, to offer more local homes for Cheshire East cared for children and young people.**
- **Ensure that children are cared for with the right package of support and timely discharges from care, and that adoption and permanency planning is prioritised and achieved within children's timescales.**



TERMS OF REFERENCE

Cheshire East Corporate Parenting Committee

Functions

This is a cross party advisory committee appointed by the Cabinet.

It has 12 Members who are appointed on a politically proportionate basis and nominated by the political groups.

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

Purpose

The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Committee in its role as an advisory committee to the Cabinet is to ensure that the Council effectively discharges its role as Corporate Parent for all children and young people in care and care leavers from 0- 25 years of age and holds partners to account for the discharge of their responsibilities.

Terms of Reference

1. Act as advocates for cared for children and care leavers, ensuring that their needs are addressed through key plans, policies and strategies throughout the Council and its commissioned services.
2. Ensure key strategic plans and reports relating to children in care and care leavers including the Corporate Parenting Strategy, Sufficiency Statement and Children and Young People's Plan.
3. Oversee the implementation of Cheshire East's Corporate Parenting Strategy and action plan and monitor the quality and effectiveness of services to ensure they fulfil the council's responsibilities.
4. Monitor the quality of care delivered by Cheshire East's residential children's homes via the provision of reports including summary reports of Ofsted inspections.
5. Review the performance of the Council in relation to outcomes for children and young people in care via the scrutiny of both quarterly performance reports and annual reports, including the Health of Cared for Children and Care Leavers, the Virtual School, Fostering and the Independent Reviewing Service.

6. Establish an environment whereby Elected Members and young people work together to address the needs and aspirations of Cheshire East's children and young people in care and empower children and young people to participate in decision making with adults.
7. Oversee, with the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the implementation of best practice principles in all aspects of service delivery, with the aim of producing positive outcomes for children and young people in care.
8. Support the work of foster carers and adopters in making a difference to the care and support they provide to children and young people in care and those adopted.
9. Make sure that staff and partners commit to follow the pledges to cared for children and young people and care leavers set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

Governance

The Committee will:

- meet bi-monthly;
- report to the Council's Cabinet on at least an annual basis;
- report to the Council's Scrutiny Committee annually; and
- be informed by young people representatives from My Voice (Cheshire East's Children in Care Council); and
- review its terms of reference annually.

Administration

The Committee will be serviced by Democratic Services in line with other Council Committees.

Minutes and agendas will be distributed and published no later than 5 clear working days prior to the meeting.

The meetings will take place out of school hours to enable cared for children and young people to participate.

Engagement options for members of the Corporate Parenting Committee

Member Name:

Activity Area	Frequency	Detail	Preference (please rate 1-3 where 1 is your preference)
Workstreams 1 and 3 - Being a Good Corporate Parent and Permanency	Bi-monthly	This workstream covers both Pledge 1 – Being A Good Corporate Parent and Pledge 3 - Achieving Permanence and Staying Safe: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • developing direct tools, resources and practice guidance around permanence, stability and managing risk, embedding and challenging understandings of impact on placements and how to minimise disruption. 	
Workstream 2 - Education and employment outcomes	Bi-monthly	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.	

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 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	This includes opportunities to engage with the service, team meetings and (with consent of the young people) the Shadow Committee, attend group activities such as the autumn programme supporting care leavers around young people who are NEET and confidence and self-esteem training, and monthly Care Leavers' activities. The NEET programme is starting on 3 rd November for 12 weeks, with the first sessions taking place on Tuesday 3 rd and Thursday 5 th November. Further details will be available in due course.	
Visits to Cheshire East Residential Homes	Every 2 months	Opportunity to engage with young people in the places they live, support 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.	

<p>Fostering Panel</p>	<p>Usually every 3 weeks</p>	<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 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"> • Monday 28th September • Friday 2nd October • Monday 19th October • Friday 23rd October • Monday 09th November • Friday 13th November • Monday 30th November • Friday 04th December • Monday 21st December 	
<p>My Voice (Shadow Committee link</p>	<p>Bi-monthly</p>	<p>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</p>	

– C&F Portfolio Holder to attend)		Parenting Committee. All themes include the five main pledges of the Corporate 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	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. 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).	
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



Nadhim Zahawi MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
 tel: 0370 030 2268 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

Councillor Rachel Bailey
 Cheshire East Council
 Municipal Buildings
 Earle Street
 Crewe
 CW1 2BJ

25 March 2019

Dear Rachel,

As you may be aware, the 2015-18 Adoption Scorecards were published today and I would like to congratulate Cheshire East for your strong performance on adoption timelines.

Cheshire East has met the government's threshold for both the time taken to place children with their adoptive families, and for the average time between a local authority receiving a court authority to place a child and deciding on a match to an adoptive family for children adopted in 2015-18. Your performance has reduced unnecessary delays and has improved the outcomes for children in Cheshire East.

I am delighted with the work Cheshire East has done to ensure that children are found a permanent home without delay and I hope that you can continue to perform strongly in this area. Although the national average is steadily improving, there is still more that can be done and I hope that through your work with Adoption Counts RAA you are able to have an impact on other local authorities by sharing best practice and driving improvements throughout adoption.

I am copying this letter to: Councillor Jos Saunders, Children and Families Portfolio Holder; Kath O'Dwyer, Acting Chief Executive; Mark Palethorpe, Acting Executive Director of People, and Sue Westwood, Head of Service Adoption Counts.

Yours sincerely,

Nadhim Zahawi MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Working for a brighter future together

Key Decision N

Date First
Published: N/A

DECISION REPORT

Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting: 17 November 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 report will provide the third update to the Corporate Parenting Committee since the restrictions of Covid-19 came into force. Services for cared for children and care leavers embraced new ways of working in the initial stages of the pandemic; this report will outline any existing variations to our statutory service delivery and also highlight the progress in planning for children and young people now seven months into the pandemic.

2. Recommendation/s

- 2.1. Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to:
 - Note the contents of the report.
 - Provide support and challenge in respect of outcomes for children and young people as outlined in the report.
 - Provide support and challenge in relation to the key performance indicators as outlined in the presentation.

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 and care leavers.

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 29 September 2020. The lived experiences of our cared for children and care leavers have featured significant delays in planning for their future, particularly where children had plans to move on to more permanent homes such as adoption. The extent of these delays has been well-documented in previous reports to the Committee however it is pleasing to report that we are now moving forward and children's plans are progressing.
- 5.2. In response to the initial stages of pandemic, the government introduced the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 for Children' Social Care services. These regulations provided guidance for Local Authorities and Social Care providers in the alternative options for service delivery. These regulations were reviewed by Parliament on the 25 September 2020 and the majority of the variations to service delivery were removed. This ultimately means that frontline services have a statutory obligation to operate within a mainly business-as-usual model. There remains a small number of regulations in place to assist Social Care services in responsibly managing their statutory safeguarding responsibilities to children and young people whilst managing the risks of the virus to frontline workers. The remaining regulations include the possibility of undertaking virtual visits only if there is a specific Covid-related risk identified and variations to the processes in stage one and two for assessments of prospective adoptive parents and foster carers. These regulations were reviewed before the most recent tiered system to tackle the pandemic was enforced. It is therefore possible that a further review may take place in the future. The current regulations expire on the 31 March 2021.
- 5.3. The service has continued to comply with our statutory obligations towards children and young people. Between 79% and 86% of our visits to children

and young people were completed in line with statutory timescales (Quarter 2).

- 5.4. Individual risk assessments continue to be in place for all of our frontline workers and are updated in light of new information from Public Health and the government. There are a small number of frontline workers across the service where face-to-face working would place them at greater risk from Covid-19, and therefore their duties are varied and remain solely virtual. This has resulted in some young people experiencing changes in Social Worker and some additional capacity challenges, however there is no evidence at present that this is impacting on outcomes for children and young people.

6. Pledge 1 - Being a Good Corporate Parent

- 6.1. Cheshire East Council committed to the pledges of the Corporate Parenting Strategy at full council on the 13 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 the views of children and young people.
- 6.2. 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, education and training, mental health services and where they are experiencing social isolation. Officers and partners are focused on how we offer services creatively across the Council to ensure that these young people are prioritised as we move through the pandemic.
- 6.3. Elected members to the Corporate Parenting Committee have embraced the challenge of the Corporate Parenting role and volunteered to participate in a number of different forums and activities across the service. These observations and interactions will enable members to gain an understanding of frontline service delivery and collectively, with officers, continue to influence the way that Cheshire East Council prioritises our cared for children and young people and care leavers at this challenging time.
- 6.4. The service has historically celebrated the achievements of our cared for children and care leavers at the annual Star Celebration event. Unfortunately, we have been unable to hold this event this year due to Covid-19, however, in the true spirit of corporate parenting, we ran a competition for our young people across the service to design a logo to be printed onto a tote bag which would be sent to all children and young

people. Below are a sample of some of the entries we received, and I am pleased to say that we have sent all of our children and young people a tote bag with books and activities in recognition of how brave they have been this year. We will continue to celebrate the achievements of our children and young people and continue to think about creative ways to show them how important they are.



6.5. My Voice are an established group of cared for children who support the service and the Committee to understand the lived experience of children and young people in Cheshire East. Currently the support to My Voice is delivered via the Youth Service which is situated within Early Help and Prevention. We have taken the decision to move the resource into the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Teams, and from early November we will have a part-time Participation Lead working within the service. This is a fantastic opportunity to strengthen the voice of children and young people as we continue to drive improvements forward and we will see further developments in shaping services using the feedback that young people provide.

7. Pledge 2 – We Will Improve Education, Employment and Employment Outcomes

- 7.1. The challenges for our young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) have been well-documented in previous reports to Committee. The service has participated in a Council-wide NEET summit to give the best opportunity for care leavers to have a strategic priority as we move forward and tackle the unemployment challenges resulting from Covid-19. Within the Care Leavers service, we have a dedicated NEET Lead who has coordinated for the second year a NEET programme which will begin on the 2 November 2020. This will run as two groups of four young people to reintroduce them to the world of education, training and employment. Young people will choose a community initiative that not only re-establishes their aspiration for their own path to EET but also gives back to the community. Last year the programme focused on homelessness and had a significant social value impact for the young people attending the course and the broader community.
- 7.2. Cheshire East recommissioned a contract with Voice4Children in April 2020 with a focus on supporting care leavers into employment in a creative way. The project is in its initial implementation stage which will see a commissioned care leaver mentor work with a small cohort of care leavers to set up small entrepreneur businesses with the intention of creating sustainability in their future employment.

8. Pledge 3 - Achieving Permanence and Keeping Children Safe

- 8.1. Achieving permanence for cared for children and care leavers is one of our service priorities and we have a clear plan to ensure that the children who do require local authority care receive this in a timely way; that the care they receive is excellent; and, for children who no longer need to be in care, that their plans are progressed without delay. The service has reviewed how we strategically link our priorities to the operational delivery of services and from the 21 October 2020 we launched a new 'Resource and Accommodation Panel' where Heads of Service are setting expectations about the timeliness of plans and the resource allocation across the service.
- 8.2. Committee has been made aware of the significant delays as a result of Covid-19 for children with plans of adoption. I am pleased to share that we have seen some progress in this area and three children have now been legally adopted, with an additional 26 children placed with their adoptive families and awaiting final orders to be made. A further 22 children have a legal order in place to enable the local authority to actively family-find and place children for adoption.

- 8.3. It is also positive to report that, despite the delays in Court and the impact of the pandemic, the frontline service has continued to drive our priorities forward and three children have been discharged from care as they no longer require that level of safeguarding. Cheshire East Council are identified as an outlier in relation to the number of children living at home and subject to Care Orders, however, there is now clear evidence that the work that the service have been doing to make this cohort of children a priority is becoming evident and is fundamentally achieving positive outcomes for children and young people.

Bespoke Children's Homes

- 8.4. This year the service has opened four commissioned residential children's homes for cared for children, achieving a return to the borough for a number of children who have previously lived in externally commissioned children's homes. The outcomes for these children and young people are positive and their needs are being met.
- 8.5. Unfortunately, our home in Macclesfield experienced significant difficulties in staffing and infrastructure and made the decision that because of this they were unable to provide safe care to two Cheshire East children. Both of these young people transitioned to their next home and are described by their Social Workers as feeling safe, and they understand that the unplanned moves were a result of the staffing and not themselves. We have put a clear plan in place with the commissioned service to recruit the right staff with the right qualifications and skills to provide excellent care to our children and young people.

9. Pledge 4 – We Will Improve Health and Wellbeing Outcomes

- 9.1. The health needs of our cared for children continue to be positive and in the period between 1 April to the 30 September, 81% (relating to 65 children) of requests for a health assessment were made within timescales. 83% of our Cared for Children had an up-to-date health assessment where any health needs are identified within statutory timeframes and services put in place to respond to these needs. The Social Care service and the Health service continue to work in partnership to understand the complexities for children and young people in accessing health screening and assessment.
- 9.2. 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 Shan McParland, our Lead Nurse for Cared for Children and Care Leavers. 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 services.

10. Pledge 5 – We Will Prepare Young People for Adulthood

- 10.1. The service has worked closely with care leavers to coproduce a tender for the 16+ supported accommodation offer for cared for children aged 16-18 years old, including emergency accommodation. The tendering process has been successful, and we have identified two providers to deliver excellent support and accommodation services to our young people at a crucial part in their journey. The service is now in the mobilisation phase of the contract and has a very strong offer in place to support our young people.
- 10.2. The Care Leavers Service has in recent years experienced a higher demand as a result of changes in legislation to support care-experienced adults from 21-25 years old. A service redesign has taken place and resulted in an internal restructure and Service Manager Steve Nevitt being appointed as the leader of the service. Steve and the team intend to reignite the corporate parenting challenge in Cheshire East and have plans to continue to drive the service forward, tackling some of the known challenges for care leavers such as NEET, and also to review the Local Offer for Care Leavers in early 2021.

11. National or Legislative Changes

- 11.1. The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 were introduced to provide flexibility in the statutory obligations of local government relating to cared for children, adoption and fostering. These regulations were reviewed on the 25 September by government and significantly reduced the flexibilities initially introduced. However, the renewed regulations were delivered prior to the current tier system that is in place nationally and it is therefore possible that these regulations will be reviewed again in the future.

12. Implications of the Recommendations

12.1. Policy Implications

- 12.1.1. Cheshire East is ambitious and committed to ensuring that it is a great place to be young and that 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.

12.2. Legal Implications

12.2.1. The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) regulations 2020 were introduced to provide flexibility in the statutory obligations of local government relating to cared for children, adoption and fostering. These regulations were reviewed on the 25 September by government and significantly reduced the flexibilities initially introduced. However, the renewed regulations were delivered prior to the current tier system that is in place nationally and it is therefore possible that these regulations will be reviewed again in the future.

12.3. Financial Implications

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

12.4. Equality Implications

12.4.1. 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.

12.5. Human Resources Implications

12.5.1. 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.

12.6. Risk Management Implications

12.6.1. 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.

12.7. Rural Communities Implications

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

12.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children

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

12.9. Public Health Implications

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

12.10. Climate Change Implications

12.10.1. 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.

13. Ward Members Affected

13.1. 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.

14. Consultation & Engagement

14.1. My Voice, our Cared for Children Council, continue to meet virtually on a weekly basis. They provide their views on topics that affect their lives and have been a key stakeholder, sharing their views with the Committee system.

14.2. The local authority is currently undertaking an annual participation survey that will help the service to continue to understand the needs of our children and young people and align any newly identified needs to the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

15. Access to Information

15.1. None.

16. Contact Information

16.1. 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

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Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2019-20



Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2019/2020

Foreword

As Corporate Parents we made pledges as a council in December 2018 to be truly ambitious in supporting and guiding our cared for children and young people and our care experienced adults to strive to reach their full potential. We committed to ensuring that our children and young people had permanent homes that met their individual needs locally so that they could stay connected to their families and communities. We pledged that they would have the very best educational experiences, be healthy, be safe and prepared for their onward journey to adulthood.

The Corporate Parenting Committee have continued to support, challenge and scrutinise the outcomes for our children and young people in line with the pledges that we made. This year we have focused specifically on achieving our vision to create more homes for children locally and I am able to say with confidence that we have been able to achieve this in the mobilisation of new residential children's homes where children have been able to return to the borough and connect once again with their communities.

Children and young people have continued to be at the heart of everything we do, and our Shadow Committee, My Voice, has met throughout the year to raise awareness of pertinent issues that we as a Council have within our gift to influence. As ever my thanks are given to our children and young people in their

efforts in bringing this perspective and challenge to the forefront.

We have been able to celebrate, with our children and young people, all their key achievements, at our annual Star Celebration Event which took place in November 2019. The event was a tremendous success which truly highlighted the wonderful things achieved by our children and young people.

Along with the support and challenge from the Committee, the service also received an ILACS Ofsted Inspection in November 2019. The inspection took place over three weeks and highlighted several areas of strengths as well as areas requiring further improvement. The findings from the inspection have informed our onward journey in improving outcomes for children and young people in Cheshire East.

I am pleased to present the Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2019-20. This report highlights the successes achieved in delivering positive outcomes for children and young people and more crucially, the next steps in our journey to success.

Cllr Kathryn Flavell - Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People



The Corporate Parenting Committee

We know that having the right values, beliefs and culture around prioritising and championing the needs of cared for children and young care experienced adults is essential to achieving excellent outcomes for children and young people. Our Corporate Parenting responsibility is a shared one that requires a high level of commitment from the leadership of the Council, as well as the support and ambition of all council employees and partners.

The Corporate Parenting Committee is comprised of eleven cross-party members with Council Officers in attendance to support agenda items, as required. The Committee is administered by Officers from Democratic Services.

The Committee has met on four occasions in 2019-20:

- 18th June 2019
- 17th September 2019
- 12th November 2019
- 21st January 2020

A meeting was planned for 17th March 2020 and papers were published but the meeting was cancelled due to the Covid-19 lockdown.

In preparation for the discussion and challenge at Committee, our Shadow Committee of young people meets in advance with the Chair of the Committee and the Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers to comment on the matters that are to be presented to Committee. They share their lived

experience of how services are designed and delivered and ultimately what it feels like to be a cared for child or care experienced adult in Cheshire East.

Officers and partners present information to the Committee. This can be themed in relation to key areas for children and young people, is responsive to changing times, or provides feedback from external scrutiny, so that members can scrutinise and challenge the service that is being delivered to ensure we are effectively meeting children and young people's needs.

The function of the Committee is to oversee the effective delivery of our Corporate Parenting responsibilities and the pledges that we made in December 2018. The Committee ensures that the statutory duties placed upon Cheshire East Council are met.

Officers support members in ensuring that they have the most up to date information available to them about local and national legislative changes and offer training annually to support this. Two training sessions were delivered in June and July 2019 by senior officers from Children's Social Care and Education.

The Corporate Parenting Committee has reviewed its Terms of Reference for 2019-20 which is attached at Appendix 1.



Corporate Parenting Strategy and Pledges

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018-20 sets out a number of pledges we are making to our cared for children and young people and those who are care experienced. These are based on what these children and young people have told us will make the most difference to their lives:

Pledge One

We will be a good corporate parent

Pledge Two

We will improve education, training and employment outcomes

Pledge Three

We will work to achieve permanence and keep children safe

Pledge Four

We will improve health and wellbeing outcomes

Pledge Five

We will prepare young people for adulthood

Each Committee meeting is focused on one of the Corporate Parenting Pledges from the Strategy 2018-20. Performance reporting and impact is scrutinised by the Committee, along with issues and risks.

Five Workstream Groups, aligned to the five pledge areas, are in place to ensure that this strategy is delivered effectively, and in January 2020 workstream one and three merged to strengthen the shared focus.



Corporate Parenting Strategy

Progress

Pledge One

We will be a good corporate parent
Staff and elected members will understand their roles and responsibilities and be ambitious corporate parents, who advocate and champion the needs of cared for children and care leavers in everything they do.
We will know ourselves and the needs of our children and young people well and design and deliver services that meet these needs.
Decisions about children and young people's lives, and the services that support them, will be made with them and for them . We will always value their views.

What the data tells us

- At the end of March 2020 there were 533 children and young people being cared for by Cheshire East. This is an increase of 49 children and young people from March 2019.
- This equates to 70 cared for children per 10,000 of the child population within Cheshire East, which is slightly higher than last year.

What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

- We have continued to monitor and scrutinise the progress and impact of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- We have received quarterly updates on our cared for children and care leavers through the Corporate Parenting Scorecard.
- We have had regular updates from the Participation Team. The Chair of the Committee and the Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers have attended 'My Voice' to develop a direct relationship with some of our cared for children and young people.
- The majority of elected members have undertaken corporate parenting training and completed 'Pen-Pictures'.
- On Sunday 24th November 2019 Cheshire East held the annual Star celebration event at Tatton Park. The theme of the event was princesses and pirates and many of our children, young people, family members and carers dressed up for the occasion. Officers and members supported with the day which was a huge success and celebrated the many achievements of our children and young people.
- We celebrated the Cared for Children and Care Leavers' Service achieving the Investing in Children Award.

TOGETHER: Co-production in Cheshire East

[TOGETHER](#) is our shared definition of co-production in Cheshire East, because TOGETHER is inclusive to all. Our co-production guide sets out how we will work together as equal partners to improve, develop and deliver services towards a common goal for all our children, young people, families and adults. Our guide has been co-produced together with children, young people, families and adults living in Cheshire East.

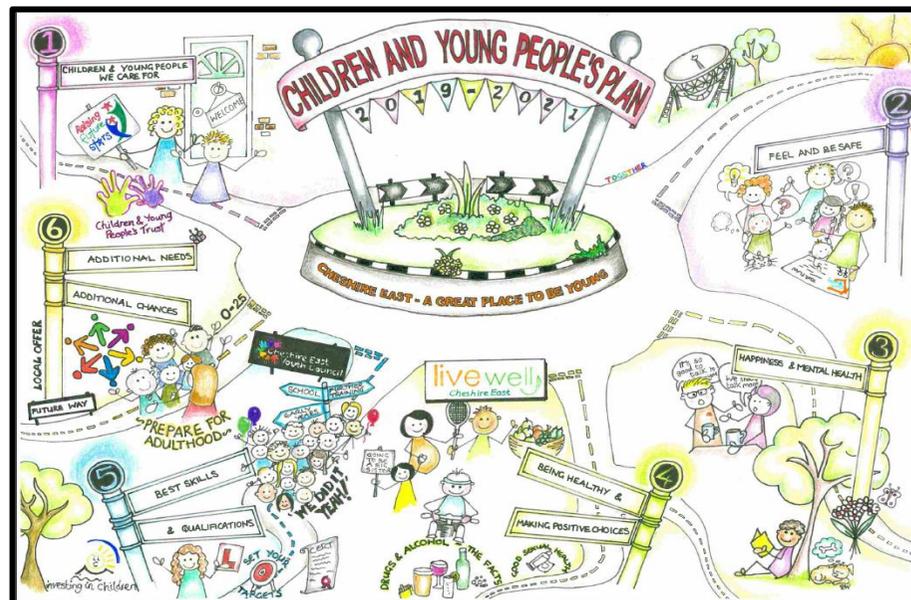
TACT: Language that Cares

A glossary of words and terms that aims to change the language of the care system has been published. [Language That Cares](#) is a collaborative effort led by adoption and fostering charity TACT (The Adolescent and Children's Trust) and the charity's children and care experienced young people, with contributions from 15 local authorities and organisations. Cheshire East signed up to this national initiative and the final document includes input from cared for children in Cheshire East and we continue to work on embedding this language in all areas of our work.

Children and Young People's Plan 2019-21

The Children and Young People's Plan, the overarching plan for children's services, was co-produced with children and

young people. Outcome 1 in the new plan is linked to the outcomes of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.



November Children's Rights Month

November Children's Rights Month offered cared for children and care leavers the opportunity to take over various roles such as an Engagement Officer in Cheshire Police and a Team Manager for Cared for Children. One of our care leavers completed a piece of work around the Care Leavers local offer and was supported to write a policy to support young people and professionals around transgender.

Engagement with Corporate Parenting

Officers provided members with a menu of activities to support in the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy. Elected members were asked to return their preferences of activities by the 6th January 2020 to be able to support functions such as attendance at Corporate Parenting sub-groups and participating in fostering panel. This was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and is a key part of 2020-21 action planning.

The latest version of the options for engagement for Members is included in Appendix 2.

Merging of Workstream Groups 1 and 3 - The new workstream will focus on the following areas:

- Training, support and direct work tools to be developed around **caring for teenagers** and balancing safe risk taking and independence skills.
- Embedding understanding of warning signs of **placement instability** to aid professionals in recognising signs of risk of placement instability, to prevent instability and for children and young people to be better prepared for changes in their home.
- Continuation of the use of trajectories with an aim of all **children placed at home** having a Signs of Safety trajectory and safety plan in place to aid discharge of the care order.

- **Mobility mapping** for all care leavers to ensure that they have clear support networks outside of the social worker and personal assistant that can remain with them into adulthood.
- Strengthening **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire** resources to triangulate views and to develop a holistic picture of emotional health.
- Development of **life story work** and use of **words and pictures** to help children and young people understand their journey through care and aims for success.
- **Corporate Parenting Induction Training** will be established with a rolling pattern of focussed thematic training through the remainder of the year.
- **Corporate Parenting Update Training** will be established for all other elected members.

What impact has it made?

Our Ofsted inspection found that “the voice of the child is a strength” in Cheshire East, and that the Corporate Parenting Committee provided “appropriate challenge to operational services where deficiencies are highlighted. This means that senior leaders are held accountable for the performances of services and the experiences of children.”

The appointment of a specific social worker to support placement stability has led to an increase in stability meetings. These meetings aim to either preserve the existing placement or effectively support transition to a new home. As a result, children and young people have received stronger support to transition to their next home. The next outcome we want to achieve is greater placement stability for children, with more children being able to remain within their current homes, as a result of these meetings.

Our children living at home have much clearer trajectories for their exit from care with the prospect of these children being discharged from care in 2020-21.

Next steps

- We will embed the TOGETHER principles, and our commitment to being active and ambitious corporate parents throughout all our work through the development and launch of a vision for all children and young people in Cheshire East. The Committee will provide scrutiny and challenge to ensure all our work is carried out TOGETHER with children and young people.
- Members of the Committee will be linked to the Corporate Parenting workstreams and will be engaged with service areas that support cared for and care experienced children and young people so they can hear children and young people's views and understand the current key issues for

our children, staff, and services, to enable effective support and scrutiny.

- We will find a different way to celebrate the achievements of our cared for and care experienced children and young people in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic restricting our ability to hold gatherings.
- The Committee will challenge and scrutinise the experience of children at risk of placement instability by examining the impact of the updated Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and additional tools and training for professionals and foster carers in line with refresher Corporate Parenting Training.



Pledge Two

We will improve education, employment and training outcomes

We will have **high aspirations** for every child and young person and will **help them to achieve their ambitions**, using opportunities in the ‘family business’ and our contacts so that they can be **happy and successful** in their education, training and employment.

Every child and young person will have an **education plan that is targeted to enable them to reach their full potential**.

We will strive to that ensure that every child and young person will have **access to consistent, high quality, well matched, full time opportunities**.

What the data tells us

- From September 2019 to February half term 2020, attendance had increased compared to last year with the average Primary attendance increasing from 90% to 93% and the average Secondary attendance increasing from 90% to 94%.
- 72% of cared for children are in ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ schools.
- Data from Q4 2019/20 shows that 9% of our care leavers are attending University.

- On average 86% of cared for children have had their Personal Education Plan completed each term.
- 100% of cared for children were accessing 2–4-year-old early education funding.
- In July 2019, the percentage of cared for pupils who gained Level 5 and above in Maths and English was 19%, which is the same as last year and slightly above the national average. 54% of the cohort gained 5+ GCSE qualifications between grades 9 and 1.

What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

- A number of year 10 and year 11 students attended an award event on 6th June 2019 to receive certificates commending them for the work that they had completed whilst on employment placements.
- We are proud of the A level results for our cared for young people last summer. These successes have been possible due to the hard work of the young people and the close working relationships between the Children’s Social Care teams and the Virtual School.
- The **Post 16 Education Subgroup** is focusing on achieving apprenticeships for cared for children and care leavers in and out of the council. This is a measurable target within our Corporate Parenting Strategy and local offer. Alongside this there is a drive to strengthen work experience opportunities within the council.

- The **School Age Children Subgroup** is also focusing on raising attainment for our cared for children and improving their outcomes. Cared for children can experience unplanned changes to their education when they come into care or during their time in care and therefore there is a greater challenge to ensure that they are supported above and beyond so that they achieve their potential.
- As Corporate Parents we continue to be ambitious around achieving the very best outcomes for children and young people in relation to their education, training and employment. At the end of 2019 the Care Leavers Service and the Virtual School ran a 12-week NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) programme whereby Care Leavers supported a homelessness project with a personal goal of re-engaging in education. From a total of 12 young people, nine successfully completed the course and have remained engaged in education.
- The Care Leavers Service will be strengthened further within the next 12 months by the resources allocated from the Journey First project. This will see additional keyworker capacity to work with our most vulnerable care leavers in being creative in re-engaging them in education, training and employment. The funding will be available over a three-year period which will offer consistency in relationships, a key driver for Care Leavers.
- A new Deputy Head has been appointed to support Virtual Head Laura Rogerson in the delivery of statutory functions to our cared for children and previously cared for children,

as Laura's role has developed and is now responsible for the SEND service.

What impact has it made?

- Cared for children are making educational progress and are supported well in schools. Most cared for children/care leavers have an effective PEP in place to ensure that they have clear SMART targets to support continued progress.
- In our inspection in November 2019, Ofsted found that "The virtual school provides strong leadership, which is leading to improving outcomes for most children. The virtual school's focus on the attendance of children in care has led to improvements in both primary and secondary. The virtual school has an accurate understanding of the work needed to ensure that children's outcomes at Key Stages 2 and 4 are improved."



Next steps

- The Ofsted inspection found that the quality of PEPs are variable, so we will continue to work alongside schools/ settings and social care to further improve the quality and consistency of PEPs for all children and young people.
- Support children and young people to return to education, employment and training from September 2020 following the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring any gaps in learning have been identified and effective interventions and support is in place.
- Continue to develop our support for post-16 to ensure that all have a clear post-16 pathway to reduce the number of care experienced young people who don't go on to education, employment or training.
- Implement the Journey First project, which will provide additional keyworker capacity to work with our most vulnerable Care Leavers in being creative in re-engaging them in education, training and employ

Pledge Three

We will work to achieve permanence and keep children safe

We will strive to ensure that every child and young person will have the **opportunity to live in a good, safe home locally**, either with their family or in another permanent home. All decisions will be made and reviewed with them without delay.

We will **respect those people who are important to our children and young people** and make sure that these safe relationships are sustained.

We will **keep children and young people safe**.



What the data tells us

- 88% for cared for children reviews took place within statutory timescales, with 98% of children participating in their reviews.
- 273 cared for children live with foster families, 39 live with family and friend carers, 58 live with their parents, 15 children are placed for adoption and 40 live within residential care.
- 107 children are living in permanently matched homes with their foster carers and a further 20 have remained in 'staying put' arrangements with their foster carers after they became 18.
- Of the children who ceased to be cared for during the past year, 15 became subject to Special Guardianship Orders, 17 children were adopted, 10 Child Arrangement Orders were made, 6 Supervision Orders and 5 Care Orders were discharged.

What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

- We considered the Annual Independent Review Officers Report and how the outcomes for our cared for children and care leavers are quality assured.
- We considered the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report and about the changes that have been introduced now the LSCB has moved to become the Children's Safeguarding Partnership.

Adoption

Cheshire East Council's adoption performance was praised by the Department for Education. In a letter marking the publication of 2015-18 adoption scorecards, the department recognised the strong performance on adoption 'timeliness' in Cheshire East. The adoption scorecard for Cheshire East shows that the Department for Education's threshold for both time taken to place children with their adoptive families, and for the average time to match an adoptive family for children, was met in 2015-18. A copy of the letter is attached at Appendix 3.

Fostering

Cheshire East Council commissioned an independent review of the fostering service which made recommendations about how an alternative delivery structure may assist with recruitment and retention of foster carers, a key objective within the post Ofsted Action Plan. A decision was reached to depart from our collaborative relationship with Foster4 and to engage on our own recruitment and assessment processes to recruit new foster carers to Cheshire East. The planning and trajectory for implementation began towards the end of the year with our exit from Foster4 planned for mid-2020.

Cheshire East submitted a bid to the Department for Education to secure funding for the development of a '**Mockingbird**' fostering initiative to work as part of 'Bespoke' homes for children project. Cheshire East Council were successful in this

bid and the implementation of the project was initiated in October 2019 with a trajectory for the first Mockingbird constellation planned to mobilize mid-2020.

Bespoke Children's Homes

We developed 'Bespoke' and mobilised our new Children's Homes. Bespoke is a hub-based model similar to the North Yorkshire 'No Wrong Door' model which has received national recognition. This will provide wrap around support to children and young people who are in care or on the edge of care.

Following a successful commissioning exercise, the mobilisation of four new residential children's homes are planned to be operational by May 2020 (subject to Ofsted registration) and these will house 12 places for Cheshire East children to reside in their home communities and receive the very best care to achieve their personal goals.

Placement Stability and Quality Assurance

The Cared for Children Team and the Safeguarding Unit facilitate monthly joint performance challenge sessions where this is retrospective analysis of unplanned placement changes. The information gathered from these sessions forms part of the feedback that shapes projects such as the recommissioning of the 16+ accommodation offer. Placement stability is one of the focus areas within the service, this focus was validated during the last Ofsted inspection as a positive area.

Family Time

The statutory requirement to support and facilitate family time between cared for children and those who are important to them was a priority this year and in planning for the sufficiency needs we ended our commissioned relationship with Core Assets and developed a full in house Family Time service within the Cared for Children's Resource Team.



What impact has it made?

Cheshire East Council have been able to support children back into their communities by having a very strong commissioned offer of residential homes in the borough. The review of the fostering service and successful bid to the DfE for innovation funding relating to Mockingbird will see greater opportunity for more Cheshire East children to remain living within their communities. We have also equipped our service to be able to deliver the statutory function of family time by resourcing a service appropriately.

Next Steps

- Continue to work with children and young people to review their changing needs throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, so services can respond and support appropriately.
- Complete the mobilisation of Bespoke and Mockingbird to full capacity.
- Establish our own in-house fostering recruitment service, launch a new recruitment campaign and drive performance in relation to recruitment and retention of Cheshire East Foster Carers.
- Continue to work with Foster Carers to develop our services and support to carers.
- Ensure family time is delivered safely in line with the restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, while working to

support children and young people to maintain the relationships that are important to them.

Pledge Four

We will improve health and wellbeing outcomes

We are committed to **understanding the health needs** of our children and young people **as early as possible** and to ensure they are **given the highest priority** in every service.

We will **equip** our children and young people to have **high aspirations for their own health**.

What the data tells us

- 86% of cared for children had an up to date health assessment
- 97% of immunisations were completed
- For children 5 and under 98% of developmental checks were completed
- 75% of dental checks were completed in timescales
- 58% of care leavers received a summary of their health at the time of their 18th birthday. Performance in this area was consistently high during the first 3 quarters of the year however during quarter 4 this work was suspended due to competing priorities relating to Covid-19. A commitment to

ensure all outstanding health summaries are completed by the end of the second quarter of 2020-21 has been made

What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

- We have considered the Annual Health Report for Cared for Children and Care Leavers.
- Following the **'Help me to be healthy' group**, the Cared for Children Specialist Nurses are now regularly attending service meetings to provide an update for social workers around the health processes for cared for children. This will include discussion around the requirements for making a request for an initial health assessment, the role of the nurse specialists, and how the health needs of cared for children are identified and met, with the intention of impacting on timeliness for requests for health assessments.
- The quality of information provided relating to each individual child when a request for an initial health assessment is made by the child/young person's social worker has significantly improved during this year. This enables the medical practitioner to conduct a more thorough assessment of health need with a greater understanding of the child's history and background.
- Accessing annual dental checks is a statutory requirement for all our children and young people and there have been occasions where it has been difficult to obtain appointments with dentists, in particular during Quarter 4 of

this year. The Dental Adviser for NHS England/Improvement has now been added to the escalation protocol, which has recently been reviewed by the group, in order to address any issues with access.

- Cared for children and care leavers have been added to the priority workstream for children living with mental health issues, which is a task and finish group within the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children Partnership.



Emotional wellness

The subgroup also focuses on how we understand the emotional well-being of our cared for children and care leavers. Pure Insights attended the meeting in November 2019 and highlighted the benefits observed from the support offered by their emotional well-being worker, ultimately avoiding escalation into services such as CAMHS.

What impact has it made?

In the context of rising numbers of cared for children, the overall performance in relation to the health outcomes for our cared for children and care leavers remains stable, however our ambition and focus remains for this to improve.

Next steps

Partnership working between health and children's social care needs to continue to be a priority in order to see improvements in the timeliness of requests for Initial Health Assessments and Review Health Assessments.

Our focus on health passports for care experienced adults has begun to impact of the way our young adults understand their health care journey, an area that we aspire to see greater improvements.



Pledge Five

We will prepare young people for adulthood

We will **support young people early with the skills needed** to prepare for their future through access to a range of good quality services.

We will be a **consistent guide** for our young people. We will **celebrate their successes** and **support them when things don't go well**.

We will **respect our care leavers as young adults** and adapt our relationships to their needs.

What the data tells us

- There were 274 care leavers eligible for services.
- 95% of Pathways Plans were completed within timescales.
- Pathway Plans are reviewed by an Independent Reviewing Officer, and by implementing a phased approach to reviews there has been success in a significant increase in participation of young people in their reviews, from 5% to 66% this year.
- 25% of 16 to 18-year-old care leavers are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Whilst there have been improvements in the number of NEET care leavers over the past 12 months due to the direct work being undertaken by the Personal Assistants, we know that this is an area that requires additional focus.

What have we done? (Committee and Officers)

Supporting our care experienced adults and celebrating success

We have had a care leaver give birth to her second child, she is a great mother to both children and is not receiving any intervention. She has been able to provide them with positive parenting experiences following clear support and intervention for her, and we are very proud to be corporate grandparents!

One young person is completing her final year in her Social Work Degree at university and will be completing her final placement with Cheshire East Child in Need/Child Protection Team. She will be a fantastic contributor to developing our family business. She continues to be a fantastic mother to her daughter balancing full time care and study.

A care leaver within the service has completed a work experience for a week in Italy working in a summer camp with children. She also volunteers every Saturday at a charity shop and is working really hard.

Recommissioning of 16+ accommodation

Cheshire East will begin to retender for the 16+ supported accommodation offer in Spring 2020. The commissioning and children's teams have already begun to write the specification with children and young people in order to ensure that their experiences inform the types, locations and support made

available from any future procured providers. The recommissioning has embraced the feedback from the Ofsted inspection in the need to tailor of deliver model when young adults are accessing emergency accommodation.

There has been a recent focus on care leavers experience of loneliness and how we can as corporate parents support our care leavers to be in touch with members of the community. Pure Insights, a commissioned provider, support many of our care leavers to be included in families and wider community events.

Committee have considered the Care Leavers Annual Report

Committee have considered that annual performance of our care leavers service in preparing care experienced young people for their transition to adulthood.

Review of the Local Offer for Care Leavers

The Care Leavers Service scheduled a review of the Local Offer for Care Leavers, in consultation with Care Leavers. The initial plans were to consult with the Ambassador for Care Leavers, Mark Riddell, however these plans were postponed because the gradual impact of Covid-19 in March 2020. This work is now scheduled for January 2021.

What impact has it made?

Care experienced adults in Cheshire East have been able to reconnect with the service when they were in need which is a clear demonstration of our corporate parenting approach. Their Pathway Plan review performance further demonstrates a commitment to ensuring that their needs are very clearly articulated, and action plans put in place to deliver co-produced plans for care leavers.

Next steps

- Recommission of the 16+ supported accommodation offer.
- Review the local offer to care leavers.
- Agree a whole Council approach to prioritise and support care experienced adults into employment, education and training. Implement the Journey First project, which will provide additional keyworker capacity to work with our most vulnerable Care Leavers in being creative in re-engaging them in education, training and employment.

Priorities for 2020-21

- **Update the Corporate Parenting Strategy.**
- **Coproduce a review of the local offer for care leavers.**
- **Fully mobilise Bespoke residential homes for children, and Mockingbird, to offer more local homes for Cheshire East cared for children and young people.**
- **Ensure that children are cared for with the right package of support and timely discharges from care, and that adoption and permanency planning is prioritised and achieved within children's timescales.**



TERMS OF REFERENCE

Cheshire East Corporate Parenting Committee

Functions

This is a cross party advisory committee appointed by the Cabinet.

It has 12 Members who are appointed on a politically proportionate basis and nominated by the political groups.

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

Purpose

The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Committee in its role as an advisory committee to the Cabinet is to ensure that the Council effectively discharges its role as Corporate Parent for all children and young people in care and care leavers from 0- 25 years of age and holds partners to account for the discharge of their responsibilities.

Terms of Reference

1. Act as advocates for cared for children and care leavers, ensuring that their needs are addressed through key plans, policies and strategies throughout the Council and its commissioned services.
2. Ensure key strategic plans and reports relating to children in care and care leavers including the Corporate Parenting Strategy, Sufficiency Statement and Children and Young People's Plan.
3. Oversee the implementation of Cheshire East's Corporate Parenting Strategy and action plan and monitor the quality and effectiveness of services to ensure they fulfil the council's responsibilities.
4. Monitor the quality of care delivered by Cheshire East's residential children's homes via the provision of reports including summary reports of Ofsted inspections.
5. Review the performance of the Council in relation to outcomes for children and young people in care via the scrutiny of both quarterly performance reports and annual reports, including the Health of Cared for Children and Care Leavers, the Virtual School, Fostering and the Independent Reviewing Service.

6. Establish an environment whereby Elected Members and young people work together to address the needs and aspirations of Cheshire East's children and young people in care and empower children and young people to participate in decision making with adults.
7. Oversee, with the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the implementation of best practice principles in all aspects of service delivery, with the aim of producing positive outcomes for children and young people in care.
8. Support the work of foster carers and adopters in making a difference to the care and support they provide to children and young people in care and those adopted.
9. Make sure that staff and partners commit to follow the pledges to cared for children and young people and care leavers set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

Governance

The Committee will:

- meet bi-monthly;
- report to the Council's Cabinet on at least an annual basis;
- report to the Council's Scrutiny Committee annually; and
- be informed by young people representatives from My Voice (Cheshire East's Children in Care Council); and
- review its terms of reference annually.

Administration

The Committee will be serviced by Democratic Services in line with other Council Committees.

Minutes and agendas will be distributed and published no later than 5 clear working days prior to the meeting.

The meetings will take place out of school hours to enable cared for children and young people to participate.

Engagement options for members of the Corporate Parenting Committee

Member Name:

Activity Area	Frequency	Detail	Preference (please rate 1-3 where 1 is your preference)
Workstreams 1 and 3 - Being a Good Corporate Parent and Permanency	Bi-monthly	This workstream covers both Pledge 1 – Being A Good Corporate Parent and Pledge 3 - Achieving Permanence and Staying Safe: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • developing direct tools, resources and practice guidance around permanence, stability and managing risk, embedding and challenging understandings of impact on placements and how to minimise disruption. 	
Workstream 2 - Education and employment outcomes	Bi-monthly	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.	

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 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	This includes opportunities to engage with the service, team meetings and (with consent of the young people) the Shadow Committee, attend group activities such as the autumn programme supporting care leavers around young people who are NEET and confidence and self-esteem training, and monthly Care Leavers' activities. The NEET programme is starting on 3 rd November for 12 weeks, with the first sessions taking place on Tuesday 3 rd and Thursday 5 th November. Further details will be available in due course.	
Visits to Cheshire East Residential Homes	Every 2 months	Opportunity to engage with young people in the places they live, support 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 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"> • Monday 28th September • Friday 2nd October • Monday 19th October • Friday 23rd October • Monday 09th November • Friday 13th November • Monday 30th November • Friday 04th December • Monday 21st December 	
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	

– C&F Portfolio Holder to attend)		Parenting Committee. All themes include the five main pledges of the Corporate 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	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. 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).	
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



Nadhim Zahawi MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
 tel: 0370 030 2268 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

Councillor Rachel Bailey
 Cheshire East Council
 Municipal Buildings
 Earle Street
 Crewe
 CW1 2BJ

25 March 2019

Dear Rachel,

As you may be aware, the 2015-18 Adoption Scorecards were published today and I would like to congratulate Cheshire East for your strong performance on adoption timelines.

Cheshire East has met the government's threshold for both the time taken to place children with their adoptive families, and for the average time between a local authority receiving a court authority to place a child and deciding on a match to an adoptive family for children adopted in 2015-18. Your performance has reduced unnecessary delays and has improved the outcomes for children in Cheshire East.

I am delighted with the work Cheshire East has done to ensure that children are found a permanent home without delay and I hope that you can continue to perform strongly in this area. Although the national average is steadily improving, there is still more that can be done and I hope that through your work with Adoption Counts RAA you are able to have an impact on other local authorities by sharing best practice and driving improvements throughout adoption.

I am copying this letter to: Councillor Jos Saunders, Children and Families Portfolio Holder; Kath O'Dwyer, Acting Chief Executive; Mark Palethorpe, Acting Executive Director of People, and Sue Westwood, Head of Service Adoption Counts.

Yours sincerely,

Nadhim Zahawi MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Virtual School for Cared for Children Head Teacher's Annual Report 2019/20



Laura Rogerson
Head Teacher
Virtual School for Cared for
Children

Cheshire East Council
September 2020



Introduction

The role of the Virtual School is clearly defined in *Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children statutory guidance for local authorities 2018*.

This report presents an overview of the operation and impact of the Virtual School during 2019-20. The Virtual School (VS) supports all children in care and relevant care leavers regardless of their length of time in care but the educational attainment data in the report relates to those who have been in continuous care from March 31st, 2019 to March 31st 2020. This is the cohort reported in national data which is supplied to external agencies such as Ofsted. National comparative data, where quoted, is that published in Nexus and the Statistical First Release of the Outcomes of looked after children

During 2019/20 the Virtual School has continued to support all cared for children and to continually review its operation to ensure it is meeting its statutory duties while providing effective support. This is delivered by an Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), primary, secondary and post 16 team. The Virtual School Headteacher (VSH) is currently also undertaking an Interim role as Head of Service for SEND (Statutory Assessment and Monitoring); therefore, we have appointed an Interim Deputy Head of Virtual School to support with the operational running alongside the VSH.

The overall number of children has continued to rise; this increase is an average that is experienced elsewhere. There are also a higher number of children with high level of Special Educational Needs (SEN), which means that the overall population is more complex as well as larger in number.

Cared for Children are making good progress overall. In order to continue to improve outcomes targeted support is needed to challenge some secondary/independent schools where Cared for Children have underperformed in previous years.

We have a dedicated advisor who also works part time for the Youth Justice Service this is supporting to ensure the mechanisms are in place to increase attendance at the end of orders.

The make-up, operation and funding of the Virtual School has been reviewed. There has been an increase in core staffing to include x2 specialist attendance officers to support increasing overall attendance of all Cared for Children and will continue to support reducing persistent absence during 2020/21 academic year. There have also been three new learning mentors employed to ensure that each locality has their own learning mentor to offer support to individual children as well as supporting schools; we have further developed our offer of support for post 16 by recruiting a dedicated Post 16 learning mentor with a specific focus on re-engagement back into Education, Employment and Training. Some core staffing is now funded through the Pupil Premium. The impact of these changes is currently being monitored.

All children have access to additional Pupil Premium funding to put in place actions and interventions which are additional to the normal school support and which will help them achieve targets. Funding is allocated through individual funding requests linked to children's' PEP targets, this has ensured accountability and allows the impact to be monitored through individual PEP meetings each term.

The Virtual School has a duty to work with Head Teachers to try and avoid excluding a Cared for Child and to make sure that they have the support in place to thrive and make progress. In the case of repeat exclusions, additional PEPs will be held to check that all necessary support is being given. There have not been any cases of a permanent exclusion in 2019/20.

The Virtual School has commissioned places at the Fermain Academy Alternative Provision in Macclesfield, and this has contributed to the reduction in repeat exclusions and total number of sessions lost for identified children. The use of good quality alternative provision (AP) has increased and has had good outcomes for children who have previously been unable to sustain or access full time mainstream school. The Virtual School are further supporting having champions within Fermain and Cornerstones (our primary assessment provision), we will be supporting to fund a Teaching Assistant (TA) within each provision who will have sole oversight of Cared for Children to offer 1-1 support, we will be offering regular CPD for staff.

The Virtual School works closely with other services within the local authority: Social Care, SEN, School Admissions, Medical Needs, Attendance and Youth Support. In some cases, this is through panels and working groups such as the 16+ NEET challenge panel or Resource and Accommodation panel, but is often through joint working and collaboration of individual staff. As a result of these collaborations processes and procedures have been revised to become more efficient. The Virtual School have delivered cross service training on how all services can support improving the educational outcomes of cared for children. Other services have delivered training sessions alongside the Virtual School at Designated Lead training days.

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Self-Evaluation

Area	Self Evaluation			Priorities for 20-21
Foundation Stage				Track and Monitor attainment and progress throughout academic year 20-21 to support to identify any gaps in learning due to Covid 19.
Key Stage 1				
Key Stage 2				
Key Stage 4				
Post-16				
Higher Education				*no grading on SEF due to no formal assessments taken place this academic year
Outcomes for cfc engaged with YOT				
SEN				
Admissions				
Attendance				
Exclusions				Still higher numbers in secondary
Leadership and Management				
Staff Training				To develop virtual training sessions further for wider staff and partners
Finance				
PEPs				To work within localities to further share good practise across schools to further improve quality of PEPs
Partnership Working				
Monitoring and Evaluation				
Participation by children and young people				Children/young people have continued to participate with virtual meetings with positive feedback
Safeguarding and promotion of wellbeing				

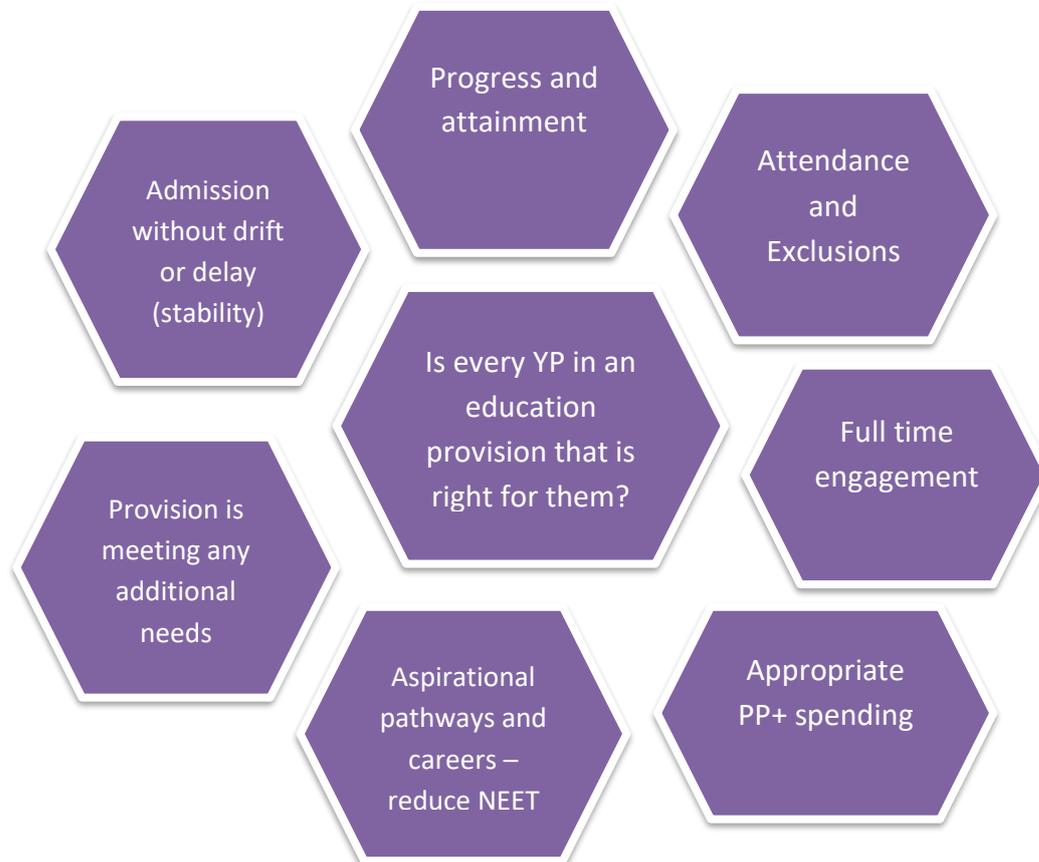
Green = Area doing well

Amber = further work needed

Red = High priority for action

Ensuring all children and young people in care are in an education provision that is right for them

Key focus areas



Remit and operation of the Virtual School in Cheshire East

Local authorities have a duty under the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child looked after by them. This includes a duty to promote the child's education achievement, wherever they live or are educated. The authority must therefore give particular attention to the educational implications of any decision about the welfare of those children. The local authority is required to appoint a Virtual School Headteacher (VSH) for the purpose of discharging the local authority's duty to promote the educational achievement of its looked after children, wherever they live or are educated.

The maxim of the Cheshire East Virtual School is to "Engage, Achieve and Progress". The Virtual School operates in such a way as to follow the Statutory Guidance to Local Authorities in the document "Promoting the education of looked after children" (DfE, Feb 2018). This requires the local authority to ensure that there are systems in place which promote good education provision for cared for children and to monitor that these are in place. In Cheshire East every young person in care has a

named Virtual School Advisor linked to their case who can provide support and challenge to schools, carers and social workers. This in turn helps to ensure that there is suitable education in place, champion the needs of the child and challenge and support education providers to ensure that they make suitable arrangements to allow the child to reach their full potential. This is carried out through termly PEP (Personal Education Plan) meetings with additional meetings and activities put into place for those with the highest level of need. The service is provided to all children in care up to the end of the school year in which they become 18; we have a dedicated post 16 advisor who works closely with our care leavers team to ensure the smooth transition and planning into adulthood.

During Ofsted's focused inspection of Children's Services visit to Cheshire East at the end of October 2019 inspectors stated:

- Children are well-supported with their education through the Virtual School Team
- When children's placements change, the head of the virtual school has proactively secured funding and appropriate education placements for children. This ensures that children, including those in placements out of the local area, have continuity of provision.

Partnership working

Partnership working is crucial to the effectiveness of the Virtual School and we recognise our role in part of a team with the child at the heart. The Virtual School is one part of the corporate parent body that works to look after children in care and we recognise that in order to be effective we need to have close working relationships with our partners. Teams within the council with whom the Virtual School works are:

- Social Care – social workers, care leavers, fostering and cared for support therapeutic teams attending all resource and accommodation panel meetings weekly to support sharing information on education when placements moves are being considered/sourced. Attending stability meetings with social workers and carers. Supporting the organisation of annual STAR awards to celebrate the successes of our children.
- Independent Reviewing Officers
- Special Education Needs and Disabilities Team
- Youth Justice Service, with an YJS advisor who works part-time within the virtual school team
- Youth Support Service – monthly meetings to support interventions to reduce NEET
- Early Years Team, with an advisor who works part-time within the virtual school team
- Educational Psychology Service, with a senior EP who works part-time within the virtual school team
- Corporate Parenting, with the Virtual School Headteacher attending all Corporate Parenting Committee meetings

As part of the Corporate Parenting Strategy (Priority 2) we have committed to the pledges below:

We will improve education, employment and training outcomes

We will have **high aspirations** for every child and young person and will **help them to achieve their ambitions**, using opportunities in the 'family business' and our contacts so that they can be **happy and successful** in their education, training and employment.

Every child and young person will have an **education plan that is targeted to enable them to reach their full potential**

We will strive to that ensure that every child and young person will have **access to consistent, high quality, well matched, full time opportunities.**

In order to achieve our targets we have a multiagency workstream group in place which consists of: A SPEED (Sixteen plus education and employment destinations) cross service working group which is well established as a forum for action planning for post-16 cared for and care leavers. This group uses the latest data to identify young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or likely to be so and what can be done to address this. Through good collaboration of managerial and operational staff much work has been done to continue to support reducing NEET and to ensure all young people have timely and effective actions and interventions in place to re-engage back into education. One of the key focuses of this year is to develop council apprenticeships and further increase our offer for post 16 young people.

A parallel group for school age children has now been established called RAIC, (Raising achievement in care). The aim of this group is to ensure that all parties share the responsibility for promoting aspirations and achievements and are active in their efforts. Areas to be addressed by this group have been identified as; improving attendance, minimising the time between school moves, reducing exclusions and development of PEPs content and quality.

The Virtual School also attends or arranges other regular meetings which result in improved support for children. These include:

- SEN tracking meetings to maintain momentum on cases with a VS SEN lead now in place within the team
- Children missing out on education to plan with joint services and ensure timely interventions and support is in place for any children not accessing full-time education
- Preparing for adulthood to ensure smooth transition to adult care

The Virtual School also works with the Independent Reviewing Officers and foster carers, providing training and support as needed. Through membership of Education, Headteacher and Virtual School Head groups the Virtual School is able to remain in touch with all current events relating to cared for children and also to make sure that other teams are aware of matters which influence their area.

The other team who are closely linked to Virtual School are Special Education and Disabilities Team (SEND). The Virtual School Headteacher is also part of the induction process for new social workers and IRO's.

Both social care and SEND supported training held at the end of last academic year (Nov 2019) for designated leads delivering workshops to over 90 school representatives, feedback was extremely positive from all attendees.

“Some of the best local authority training I have attended”

“Other services should adopt the cross-service training style”

The Virtual School also works with the Independent Reviewing Officers, foster carers and governors providing training and support as needed. Through membership of Education, Headteacher and Virtual School Head groups both regional and national the Virtual School is able to remain in touch with all current events relating to cared for children and also to make sure that other teams are aware of matters which influence their area. We have also now changed to locality working meaning that each area has changed to sit under an advisor rather than this being done by ages. This has helped massively in the development of relationship with schools and other professionals as it means that the team can really get to know their area on a better level to develop better working practices, as part of this the advisors are running termly locality get-togethers with designated teachers so they can share best practice and get to know each other better. Throughout COVID these have still been happening through Microsoft Teams online and they will continue to do so in September until there are less restrictions and they are able to meet face to face again.



I feel that the VS advisers I have involvement with have done everything they can to gain access to resources to support all young people. The pandemic hasn't stopped them from supporting YP and ensuring that they have everything they need, they have been supportive when I have needed help communicating with schools etc. and I couldn't be more grateful for the consistency across the board (Quote from Social Worker)

Training Provision

The statutory duties of the Virtual School include providing training on education issues relating to children in care and Head Teachers and Governing Bodies are required to appoint a Designated Teacher to champion the cause of cared for children and also to ensure that this teacher has access to training. Wider school training has proved harder this year due to the pandemic. In CE this is provided in a variety of ways

- a) Update/network meetings open to all schools and led by the Virtual school
- b) Bespoke training in individual schools which can be around a particular child or for all staff including attachment and trauma whole staff training
- c) Arranging outside speakers to provide 'expert' input.

The universal training programme offered by the Virtual School for Designated Leads in Schools

Date	Title	Objectives
November 2019	North & South Designated Teacher Network	SDQ workshop Market place – support and advice on using PP+ effectively Careers and post 16 PEPs – what makes an outstanding PEP
March 2020	Reginal Conference	Ofsted National updates (attended by all Virtual School team and a number of designated leads representative from our schools)
July 2020	Online Designated teacher locality sessions	Virtual locality sessions were held on teams for: Meet and greet Sharing important information - concerns and impact of Covid PEPs updates – focus on return to school

The network events held in November 2019 were attended by over 90 school representatives. This provided information and workshop sessions from a range of services. Feedback was positive with delegates stating that the sessions were useful and would help them to better support children in school.

During COVID the designated teachers training was held online in July 2020 and 42 designated teachers joined us online for training through Microsoft teams and more of these sessions have been arranged online for the Autumn term.

The Virtual School contributes to the Foster Carer training programme. Sessions have been planned on curriculum changes and attainment, preparing for tests/supporting learning at home, SEN and post-16 progression

COVID Update:

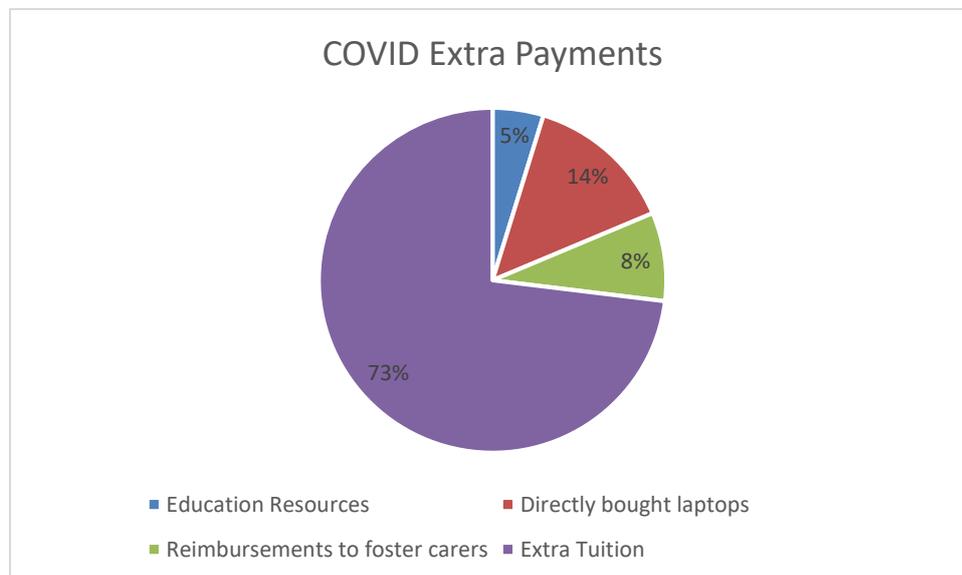
During this year the virtual school team have had to adapt to new ways of working due to the national pandemic. Throughout this period we have continued to develop new ways of working and we are continuing to deliver a good level of support to all of our children and schools.

Staffing:

- Bi-weekly team meetings have taken place online to deliver any updates and share best practice.
- New equipment has been supplied by the local authority to all staff members to ensure that we are still able to offer effective remote support; therefore, PEPs have been carried out via Microsoft teams.
- Where visits have been deemed essential/critical robust risk assessments and protocols are in place to ensure the safety of staff and children/families/carers and schools.
- Monthly advisor meetings are in place to ensure tracking and monitoring.

Pupil Premium Plus Funding:

Spend during March to July (COVID) equated to £25,300:



Due to delays in the government scheme we supported children/young people with the appropriate ICT equipment required to ensure remote learning could continue by supplying individual children and young people with laptops/iPads where needed.

PEPs:

During March – July during lockdown period we requested that there was a specific focus on transition year groups to ensure that clear plans were in place to support our children/young people who would be having school/placement changes. We developed a one-minute guide to support schools and social care to have clear process/procedures of how to undertake PEPs virtually at the start of the lockdown period.

The team were able to attend more PEPs than usual while completing them online as they don't have any travel time restricting them and they are able to coordinate their diaries to attend more, which has been of significant benefit. The feedback from all parties including social care has been positive and they agree that this could be a way we can be flexible with completing PEPs in the future, in particular for those living/educated out of borough.

Attendance:

During COVID our schools were on enforced closures for an average of 92 days, during this time 20% of our children were still attending school. The VSH worked closely alongside the Director of Education and other Heads of Service to support with the education recovery throughout this period. The Virtual School Headteacher and Advisors ensured communication throughout with schools, carers and social care and supported any children to access on site provision where this was deemed necessary by professionals.

Education recovery and support:

Throughout August the virtual school advisors, specialist attendance officers and learning mentors contacted children/carers and families to encourage them to return into school in September and ensure any support required was in place.

There will be a priority on completion of PEPs in the first term to ensure that all children have clear SMART targets to support with the return to school, gaps in learning and to identify where specific support is required. We will ensure that appropriate catch up arrangements have been put in place by schools/settings.

Virtual designated teacher training took place in July with leads from across each locality and out of borough schools, we received positive feedback for all schools that attended. We will be continuing to run virtual sessions during the first term:

October - December 2020:

- New designated lead training/network sessions
- North locality leads network session
- South locality leads network session
- Central Locality leads network session
- Out of Borough leads network session

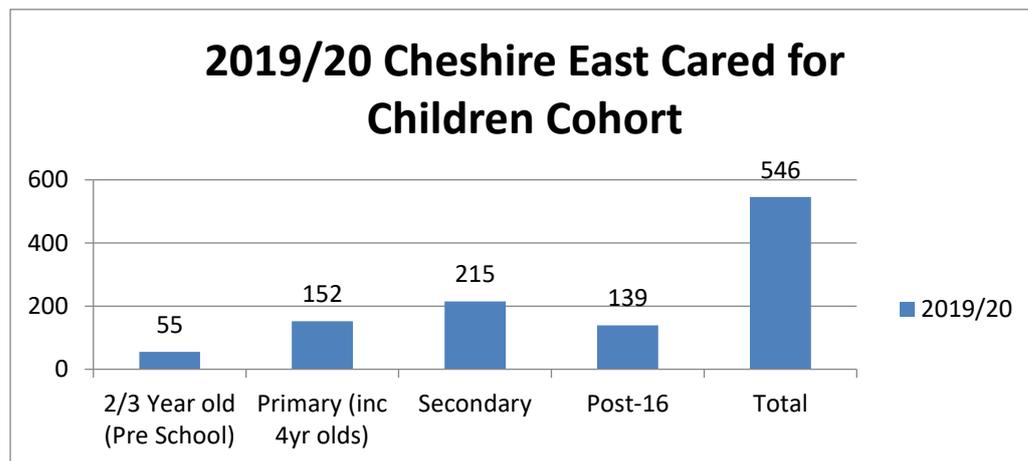
During these sessions will be gaining feedback from schools to identify training needs for this academic year.

Intervention	Impact
<p>Pupil Premium funding:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ICT equipment 2. Tutors 3. Carers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Supported to purchase ICT equipment where needed to ensure that all children/young people could access remote learning. 2. Funding in place for individual children to ensure where needed they had access to extra tuition. 3. Funding for carers to support continued access to education/activities whilst at home.
<p>Advisor/learning mentor support</p>	<p>Throughout the pandemic the virtual school advisors monitored and tracked each child/young person to ensure clear communication/support was in place. Advisors kept in communication with social care to support with access to on site school provision where this was deemed necessary.</p> <p>One Minute Guide was created to support how to complete virtual PEPs to ensure that schools and social care were consistent within the process.</p> <p>During the summer holidays advisors contacted all children/young people and carers to support with return to school and identify any areas of concern/support required.</p> <p>Learning mentors supported to work directly 1-1 with any children who were anxious regarding the return to school, in particular those from transition year groups and when moving to new schools.</p>
<p>Education Recovery</p>	<p>Virtual School Headteacher worked closely with the Director of Education and Heads of Service (Education and Social Care) with clear and robust planning for the education recovery throughout.</p>
<p>Training & Resources</p>	<p>Virtual training/network sessions took place for designated lead teachers within each locality: North, South, Central and Out of Authority. Sessions focused on sharing good practise and</p>

	<p>how to further support children/young people's return to school.</p> <p>Virtual School Headteacher created resource guides for carers/children and young people across all age groups (early years to post 16), these included advice and links to a wide variety of education, mental health and wellbeing resources.</p>
Post 16	<p>The Virtual School Post 16 tutor continued to run 1-1 virtual sessions for a cohort of young people who successfully gained a range of functional skills qualifications.</p> <p>Post 16 Learning mentor and Advisor have continued to support throughout the lockdown period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No Year 11 moving into post 16 has been unable to access the courses they identified. - Reduction in the number of young people 16-18 Not in Education, Employment and Training at the start of the academic year. - Successful planning and implementation of programme for Autumn term for post 16 young people identified as NEET.
Early Years support	<p>During lockdown early years advisor contacted all the carers of our 2-4-year-old children at least once each month providing advice, guidance and support on learning activities and useful websites. We made sure that all children transferring to school had school places and had a handover of cases. We supported 2-year olds to access a nursery place when eligible</p>

School Roll

At the end of the 2019/20 academic year there were 546 Cared for Children on Cheshire East Virtual School roll this was an increase from 496 recorded for the same time 18/19, of these 407 were of school age. Cheshire East Cared for Children from Reception to Year 11 attended 172 different schools in 31 different Local Authorities. 79% of our children attended Cheshire East schools.

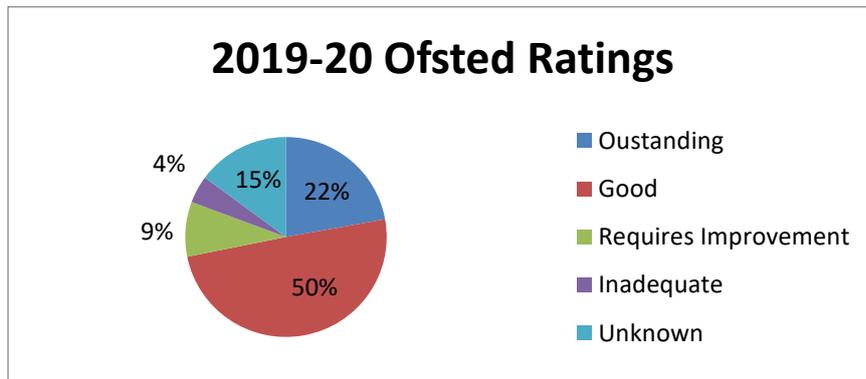


Ofsted Ratings

The statutory guidance states that schools judged by Ofsted to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding' should be prioritised for Cared for children. If any Cheshire East child is placed in a school rated below 'Good' then Virtual School Advisors will visit every school prior to any child being placed to ensure that pastoral and curriculum support is of a good standard. Advisors will attend PEPs and track progress each term throughout the year of all children in schools graded below Good, to ensure that children are making progress. Risk assessments are completed immediately when schools' grades are moved below Good following Ofsted inspection to ensure that the needs of the child are being met.

The chart below shows the proportion of pupils attending schools with identified Ofsted ratings:

* 15% (8 schools) Unknown due to conversion to academy or new schools so not had their first report yet.



Special Educational Needs

At the end of academic year 2019/20 there were 170 children with identified SEND needs; 35% within Reception to Year 11 cohort. Of these 96 had an EHCP, and 40 with either a School Support or a School Focus Plan. There were a further 30 Post-16 learners with EHCPs which equates to 22% of Post-16 cohort.

The Virtual School has an identified SEN lead advisor who meets with the cared for keyworker lead from the SEND team every 2 weeks. This is to review cases to ensure effective timelines and interventions are in place, plans are finalised, and advice received. The primary focus is to ensure timeliness within the Needs Assessment process, Annual reviews are aligned with PEPs and to ensure that moves between schools are timely and well planned. This is particularly important if school moves are out of county.

There is also a focus on children where Needs Assessments are being agreed to ensure that plans are formed within the statutory timeframe and children can access specialist support where needed. This has been in place since August 2018 and already consistency and collaborative working across teams has shown improvement. A tracking document is in place to store and monitor information which is reviewed and updated following each meeting. A checklist has been created to ensure that protocols and procedures are clear and in place for individual children. At present the VSH is also Interim Head of Service for SEND therefore chairs the SEND panel weekly and is working with the teams to ensure that the developments across the service continues to also support our cared for children as well as all SEND children within Cheshire East.

The Virtual School has continued to embed cross-service working within the SEND team to ensure that children are in the correct school and making progress as quickly as possible. Advisors are involved if an application for a Needs Assessment is made and are contacted by the SEND team to request any contextual data which may impact on the decision. If a child has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), their school are asked to review the EHCP at a PEP meeting so that the targets can be aligned; although these are not the same targets as actions are usually quite short/medium term and specific while the EHCP outcomes are more generalised or long term, we can ensure that they complement each other and support the holistic outcomes.

If a school or carer feel that needs are not being met, the Virtual School will work with school to ensure that due process is followed, and all necessary documents are submitted as required to the SEND keyworker. There can be a delay when finding a new school for a child with SEND, particularly if placed out of Cheshire East while consultations take place. Protocols and procedures are in place to ensure that all children have appropriate interim educational support whilst this process takes place.

For children/young people with SEN the following additional support mechanisms are in place:

- Virtual School to inform the SEND team of planned moves for cared for children at the earliest point
- Advisors to provide summary of history to be included in consultation documents
- Virtual School Head Teacher to support the consultation process at each stage ensuring this is sent and responded to in a timely manner to ensure there is no drift or delay
- Advisor/social care to provide names of possible schools for consultation as well as those identified by the SEND team
- Advisors/social care to support visits/observations and communication with potential schools
- Cared for Children not to be placed in school without agreement of Virtual School/social worker to ensure that the setting is correct and can fully meet the needs of each child
- A named SEN worker assigned to oversee cases of cared for children
- Guidelines for other councils produced to speed up process of finding schools for children living outside Cheshire East
- Liaison with SEND staff on how to record needs of children not attending or frequently changing schools
- Virtual School to put in place tuition/provision while awaiting a new school place to support ongoing learning and stability within placement
- Where required support is put in place during the Needs Assessment stage through the Virtual School to ensure that childrens needs are being met

Staffing and Organisation

The make-up and nature of the Virtual School Team is kept under review to ensure that the skills available match the needs of the cohort. During this academic year school age advisors have been working in localities to facilitate improving support to schools and develop working groups within locality areas to develop training and share best practice.

The team has evolved to provide more direct contact and support for children and young people so that the interventions can be more closely tailored to needs and monitored for individual impact. Through Pupil Premium Funding tuition is made available to young people to provide additional after school sessions to help prepare for exams and offer identified 1-1 intervention for targeted support. Three new Learning Mentors have been employed to work with children in schools with a specific focus on social, emotional wellbeing or high levels of anxiety or are at risk of exclusion and who require support in addition to that which the school can provide. The learning mentors can offer

targeted support within a range of specialist areas also supporting to empower and train school staff to support children.

The Virtual School Headteacher is working alongside the Head of Service for Education and pupil participation and senior Educational Psychologists to further develop the support, advice and guidance to schools around children with challenging or complex behaviours.

Monthly staff supervisions are in place for all staff to discuss their own wellbeing and workload and support with case supervision. In addition, there are regular team meetings, where the team can receive updates from Senior Managers and the performance/development of the team can be discussed. All staff are invited to identify training needs which will allow them to be more effective in their role or any specific area of interest. In addition to this the Virtual School Deputy Head teacher meets with advisors every 3 weeks to review attendance, attainment, exclusions and children causing concern to allow for swift intervention at all stages.

During 2019/20 all staff have been offered courses on attachment and signs of safety, all attended development days and all staff have been offered access to Mental Health First Aiders within the council to support their own emotional wellbeing. All staff have access to all council training including our learning lounge with a range of online courses such as GDPR to support their own professional development. All three of our learning mentors are completing their Emotional Literacy Support Assistant training/accreditation.

The VSH is a member of the North West Virtual School Head group and the National Association of VSH, (NAVSH) and through this network the Virtual School is able to keep abreast of current developments such as new guides for previously looked after, adopted and special guardianship children. This group are work together on a regional development plan.

The VSH has regular supervision with the Director of Education and Skills and completes a monthly scorecard to monitor progress. This gives a detailed breakdown of the performance of the Virtual School and key indicators are extracted to be included on the Corporate Parent Scorecard. The Virtual School Headteacher is a core member of the Corporate Parenting Committee who have oversight of scrutiny and governance of the scorecard data each quarter.

The team are a very highly motivated and committed group of professionals who always act in the best interests of the child. During 2019/20 there has been a very low level of absence amongst the team with no long-term sickness or stress. The Virtual School Headteacher uses the Council's behaviours toolkit effectively to support 'conversations' and team meetings/activities.



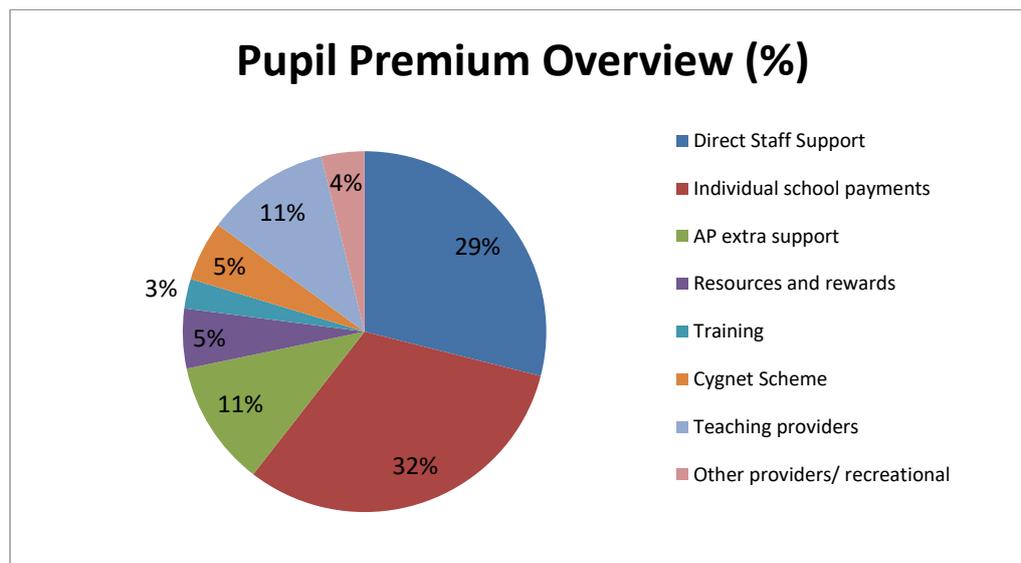
Virtual school are always contactable and on the ball. They are a fantastic source of support for our young people. (Quote from Social Worker)

I think VS are excellent. Very supportive and always give advice and good support to schools and myself. (Quote from Social worker)

Post 16 advisor is doing everything with my 16+'s from colleges to apprenticeships to support ensuring they do not become NEET (Quote from Social worker)

Funding

The Virtual School's main budget is the Pupil Premium Plus which is devolved to the Local Authority and is to be used as seen appropriate by the VSH as to best promote achievement and progress. The amount which is made available to the LA is £2300 per child in care as reported on the March return but the guidance makes clear that while it is expected that the majority of this is used for direct support of children, it does not need to be allocated equally as some children will need less than £2300 and some will need considerably more. The funding criteria also states that the Pupil Premium can be used to fund staff or central services such as training if they have a direct impact on improving the experience and outcomes for children.



The main use of Pupil Premium was to fund 1:1 or small group teaching, support to enhance social and emotional skills and purchase of specific resources. The remaining funds have been used to provide high cost support for children with particular needs. These include; attending high cost alternative provision for children without SEN who cannot manage mainstream school, providing a series of off-site support such as animal therapy or forest schools, having a weekly work placement to add variety and help prepare for the world or work or funding specialist support such as counselling. Significant funds were also allocated to schools and children to prepare for exams, access targeted support or to prepare for transition. In almost all cases this helped children to increase their skills and knowledge before the exams but always improved their preparation and confidence. In 2019/20 the total amount received was £851,000.

All school age children in care were allocated Pupil Premium (PP) once the PEP was returned to describe how this would be spent and, in some cases, funding was allocated to children outside this age range if the need was evident. For example, a nursery child with the need for additional speech and language support or a post-16 young person not in education who wished to take up a work placement to gain skills and confidence. Some school age children did not have a basic allocation if the school felt it had all the resources needed, such as an independent special school which already receives a high level of funding or if the Virtual school was arranging and funding provision such as tuition or off-site learning. In most cases funding is transferred to the school but in some cases, funding is used centrally, for example purchase of laptops and book parcels for young children to

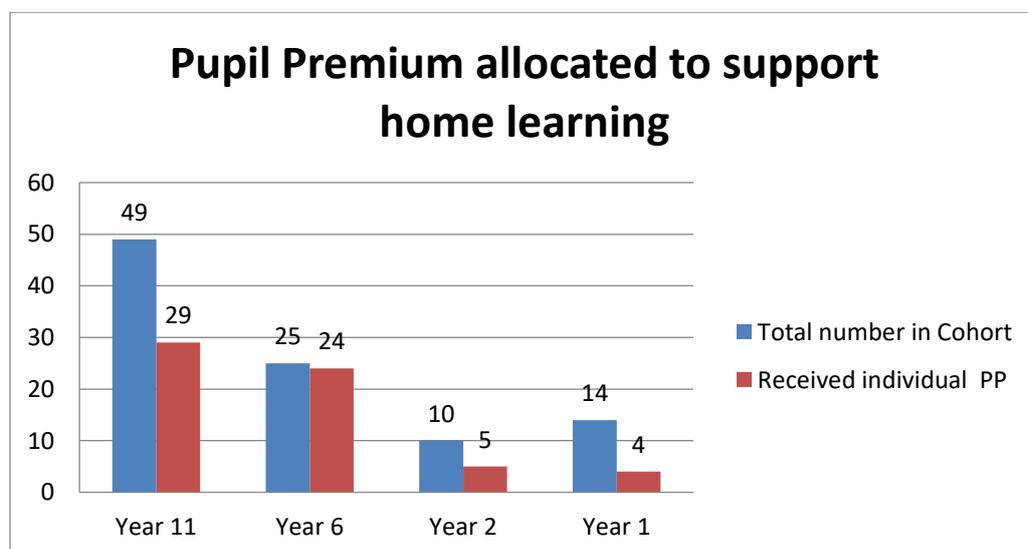
encourage love of reading and improving literacy. Although the funding formula is based on the number of school age children, requests for children in pre-school or post-16 are also considered. We have funded speech and language intervention within several of our pre-school nurseries following analysis of our attainment which clearly shown this was an area of need within our younger children.

The virtual school have also used pupil premium to fund Emotional Literacy Support Assistant training/accreditation for our three new learning mentors so that they can meet with our children and support them on a one to one or group basis with social, emotional and mental health needs. This is also being used to support schools to develop and enhance their offer and support to children with developing their skills within identified staff.

The Virtual School have also supported children to access recreational activities where they would not normally have access such as: Horse riding, Music lessons such as Flute, Piano and Guitar, singing lessons, Swimming therapy, Pony camp and Drama/Acting lessons.

The Virtual School also has an additional budget to fund the Cygnet programme for post 16 to support to reduce NEET figures. This year some of that was used to run an October NEET programme which consisted of activities for team building and life skills such as interview preparation and community projects.

In April 2017, a system was introduced which moved away from a standard allocation but asks schools to give a spending plan for each child. All requests are then considered by the advisor and the Virtual School Head Teacher and funding allocated accordingly. The average amount paid per child was almost £1980 and the most frequent support requests were for 1:1 session to focus on social and emotional support or tuition such as maths, English and science. Funding was also requested when children were at risk of exclusion and this was used to provide additional support or fund alternative provision/off site provision. Funding was made available to schools when a new child joined (following a placement move) so that they could implement an integration plan which involved having regular review and observations to identify any areas of need. In total, requests were received, and funding allocated for 223 children and 73 were given laptops.



Impact of Pupil Premium

Monitoring systems within the Virtual School mean that the impact of Pupil Premium can be observed, although it should be recognised that cared for children are subject to so many changes, such as placement moves or changes in contact arrangements that it is difficult to draw any absolute causal links. Following our last inspection and feedback received PEPs have been adapted and now include a section to review each target linked to funding specifically. Within every PEP schools are requested to review and show clear impact of funding allocated. This allows us to monitor interventions and support each term for individual children. This year we have had a significant number of children needing tuition due to home/remote learning and in some instances, placement moves during COVID.

Case study of a young person that has received pupil premium funding

Background:

Child B came into care in June 2018. School had identified some Special Educational Needs, ADHD and difficulty forming and maintaining relationships. This meant it made it difficult to build trust in adults/professionals. The first PEP identified that there were difficulties engaging in a mainstream curriculum in school. Attendance was poor, and there was a history of truanting or leaving school premises. Child B stated that they found written tasks difficult and lacked focus in lessons. Child B was given a full-time nurture curriculum and it was identified that they required a 1-1 Key Person to support them full time. Child B also responded well to praise and rewards of their own choosing, so a small Pupil Premium Plus budget was allocated for them to choose an appropriate reward for improved attendance in school and starting to reintegrate into some mainstream classes.

The introduction of the 1-1 Key Worker was immediately successful and this led to an improvement in attendance and engagement. Over time as Child B was able to share more about how they liked to learn, favourite subjects / activities and what they found difficult. This enabled a more bespoke and personalised curriculum to be developed, and new targets were set in her PEP including the reintegration into mainstream classes for core subjects and a vocational placement to the RSPCA (sourced through the virtual school) each week where they enjoyed participating in the care of injured or abandoned animals.

Targets also included therapeutic interventions to support them develop confidence, acquire life skills and maintain relationships with adults and other children. Child B was also allocated a learning mentor each week from the Virtual School who was ELSA trained to work on emotional well-being and they were given a laptop to support with written work.

A Needs Assessment was applied for which eventually led to an EHCP. This enabled the 1-1 support to remain with them in all lessons and over time the time spent in nurture group reduced significantly.

Key Concerns Identified in the Initial PEP meeting

- Reluctance to engage with the school (poor attendance, poor engagement in lessons, reluctance to complete homework, difficulty building relationships, truanting and leaving school premises).
- Possibility of an EHCP being required
- Impact of non-attendance on attainment, self-esteem
- Managing anxiety
- Difficulty building peer relationships
- Finding specific subjects / pieces of work difficult (writing, maths)

Type of Intervention:

- Educational psychologist assessment beginning leading to EHCP
- Nurture timetable
- 1-1 Key Person
- Allocation of personal laptop
- PP+ allocated for self-identified rewards for improved attendance and participation in mainstream lessons
- ELSA support sessions with a learning mentor funded by the Virtual School for emotional well-being.
- Therapeutic interventions for self-confidence and relationships
- Vocational work placement funded and sourced by the Virtual School
- Regular meetings and communication to review progress and unpick any barriers to learning.

Impact of Intervention:

- Excelled in the RSPCA placement showing the required maturity and responsibility to work independently on hedgehog care tasks, building relationship and trust with a wider range of professionals/adults.
- Attendance improved from 77.8% to 98%.
- Time in the nurture curriculum reduced from 100% to 20% (sometimes less)
- Built up a strong relationship with her Key Worker and other adults in school.
- Improvement in self-confidence.
- Attainment in all subjects has improved and they have been awarded a number of praise postcards and star of the day awards
- Completion of homework on time has improved significantly
- Enjoyment of school has improved
- Enjoyed choosing books and games as rewards for attendance
- Developed good friendships

Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

The PEP is the document which records the children's education provision, achievements and how the school or other provider will help to improve their outcomes. It is the joint responsibility of the local authority and school to ensure that there are PEPs in place and the Virtual School has the duty to monitor these and provide advice and support as necessary. The PEP should be reviewed each term at a meeting between school, carers, young people and social workers. The Virtual School attends all initial PEPs for children and young people between the ages of two and eighteen years old.

While the PEP document is mainly to support children of school age, Cheshire East also provides a similar service to children of pre-school age and those between 16-18 who are included in the Raising of the Participation Age cohort, (school years 12 and 13) although advice and support is available on request to children under 2 and young people in care or care leavers over 18.

The completion rate of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) was over 85% as was the percentage completed to a good or better standard this is due to the robust quality assurance process that is in place within the Virtual School team and training offered to schools through the Designated Lead teachers network events which allows staff in all schools to access practical working sessions to look at outstanding PEPs to allow self-evaluation and development of their own systems at the start of each year. However, the percentage was then impacted due to COVID where we had requested that children within the transition cohort must be prioritised.

We have continued to develop and embed the ePEP following feedback from schools to further enhance the quality and content, with almost all primary and secondary schools now effectively using the ePEP system. During this academic year we are further developing to introduce a new ePEP design for early years and post 16 providers.

Within Cheshire East the Virtual School takes an active role in the PEP process and the cases of all the children which means that prompt action can be taken when issues arise that require specialist education input.

Virtual Schools attend all initial PEP meetings and complete the first PEP which will provide a template and standard for future PEPs. This includes ensuring actions and targets are specific and measurable. These PEPs should be held within 20 working days and be available for the first cared for review meeting. The Virtual School also takes responsibility for ensuring that PEP is provided to the Social Worker in readiness for the initial review. PEPs are reviewed each term with the education provider taking a lead in these by reviewing the impact of the previous actions, update the PEP and return to the Virtual School. Support and training are available to assist schools, settings or colleges with the PEP process.

There is a robust Quality Assurance process in place within the Virtual School team where each case is reviewed to establish its support needs. Those with the highest support needs are rated as RED, in which case the advisor will attend all PEPs and probably have more frequent contact with the child, carer, school and Social Worker. Cases rated as AMBER have slightly less contact with the advisor whilst those rated as GREEN are monitored with attendance at one PEP per year. Virtual School are unable to attend all PEP meetings, therefore the criteria for Virtual School involvement is:

- New into care
- School or placement move
- Moved out of Borough
- Red rated cases
- Repeat exclusions
- Attendance below 90%
- Need for independent chair

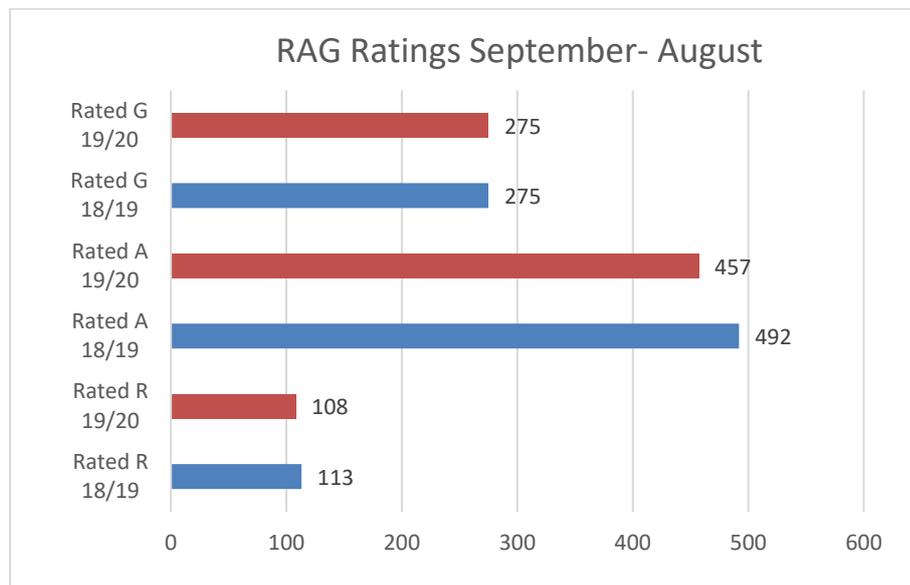
PEPs are deemed unsatisfactory if key information is not provided or if a previous PEP has been amended and it is unclear if information refers to the current or previous PEP. Most PEPs rated as satisfactory are given this grade because interventions are not specific or because the intended outcomes are not expressed in ways which can be evaluated. Where this is the case advisors support individual schools (designated leads) to develop the PEP to ensure that the quality is improved and targets are SMART. Exemplar PEPs are shared across localities during training sessions to share good practise.

Although the Virtual School Advisor does not attend all PEP meetings, they often do so for the more complex cases and in these situations can be a crucial and consistent link for the child. For example when a child is awaiting a new school or cannot attend school due to mental health issues the advisor will visit the child at home and make sure they have access to some tuition and learning and that this, where possible, includes a chance to include some social interaction.

The quality of the PEP is the joint responsibility of the local authority for cared for children and the school. Social workers, carers, VSHs, Designated Teachers and, as appropriate, other relevant professionals will need to work closely together. Social Workers have been asked to prioritise attendance at PEP meetings so that they gain essential information about their child. The Virtual School headteacher has attended and led workshop sessions during social workers development day to give clear guidance on PEP process and procedures. As well as updates on their attainment and progress this should include discussion of their attitude, emotional state, friendships etc. If a child has a statement or Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) then one of PEP meetings is run alongside the annual SEN review. This will ensure targets in the EHCP can be addressed through the PEP and that Social Workers and carers have the chance to review the impact of the SEN support for the child. The Virtual School Head has delivered training to all SEND workers to support sharing information of how all staff can improve the education of cared for children as a corporate parent.

There is a rigorous Quality Assurance (QA) process which has been developed jointly by the Virtual School and the Designated Teachers, this has ensured that the quality of PEPs remains high and continues to support schools to develop their own practise, this is reviewed each year to ensure the process is robust. All PEPs are quality assured by each advisor and each term there is a moderation process led by the Virtual School Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher to support further improving the quality of all PEPs and to share best practise. Each year following internal quality assurance sessions the virtual school have developed and shared a guide to schools on 'what's working well' 'even better if'. Below shows an outline of the RAG rating completed for the moderation of PEPs during 2018/19 and 2019/20 which shows the number of those rated as Red has slightly reduced and the

number rated as Green have sustained over time. We are continuing this year to work alongside all schools to share good practise and exemplar PEPs to ensure that the quality of PEPs improves.



OUTCOMES AND EVENTS	PEP RATING	Virtual School Support ACTION
Attendance below 80%	RED	Attend next PEP Consider calling emergency PEP Contact Headteacher re concerns Raise concerns with Social Worker Offer observation and planning
Episode of FTE since last PEP		
Planned or possible placement move		
Progress below expected for all subjects		
School move planned		
School rated as inadequate/special measures		
Attainment below age expected	AMBER	Call school to discuss case Request specific additional information Call school before next PEP to assess progress Contact DT to offer staff training Arrange to visit school to meet DT Set up monitoring plan for interventions
Attendance between 80% and 90%		
Attendance between 90% and 95%		
Attendance has fallen since last PEP		
Attends school outside Cheshire East		
Attends Special School (maintained or independent)		
DT is new to post		
Episode of FTE in past		
Has recently moved school		
In Y11 or Y6		
Lives in residential provision		
Previous PEP targets not achieved		
Progress below expected rate for 1 subjects		
School rated as RI		
Attainment equal to age expected	GREEN	Aim to attend 1 PEP per year Do not attend next PEP Offer advice and support if needed
Attainment above age expected		
Attendance above 95%		
Attends school inside Cheshire East		
DT is experienced		
In year other than 6 or 11		
Placement secure		
Previous PEP targets have been met		

ePEP

Following the successful implementation of our ePEP, we currently have 172 primary and secondary schools effectively using this system. We have further improved the content of the ePEP following feedback from our last inspection and from schools and have developed a signs of safety approach with more emphasis on SMART targets ensuring pupil premium is reviewed in detail for impact. We have now continued with the development of our ePEP to enable it to be used for Post 16 and we have now started rolling this out as a pilot. We are also continuing with the development to include

early years during next academic year to align and ensure consistency across all age ranges. This year we will be further developing to ensure that Preparing for Adulthood is included to support careers and aspirations for all children/young people.

School Admissions

The Virtual School are responsible for ensuring that every child has access to suitable education. Where possible and appropriate school moves will be avoided as it has been recognised that school can be a consistent and stabilising feature of a child's life. If a move is essential, then the following principles apply:

- Educational provision should mean a full-time place.
- Schools judged by Ofsted to be 'good' or 'outstanding' should be prioritised for cared or children in need of a new school.
- The choice of education setting should be based on what any good parent would want for their child. It should be based on evidence that the setting can meet the educational needs of the child and help them make the maximum progress.
- The child's wishes and feelings should be taken into account and the suitability of the education setting tested by arranging an informal visit with the child.

Children move schools for a number of reasons which include

- Change of foster placement which means that continuing at current school is unrealistic
- Carers move house which means that continuing at current school is unrealistic
- Change to live with adopters
- Change of school if proximity to social contacts/family are having a strong negative impact on the child's progress and learning
- Change when school can longer meet needs (SEN or non-SEN)

Cared for children are given the highest priority under school admission arrangements and the usual fair access protocols do not apply. The Virtual School works with Head teachers to make sure that any admission is made as swiftly as possible. Where schools are reluctant to offer places, the Virtual School will consider making appeals or directing schools to admit. In 2019-20 there were no appeals made and no directions needed. All children for whom a place in primary and secondary schools were requested were allocated a place swiftly. The Virtual School works with all schools who are admitting a child to offer support, with funding if needed to ensure a smooth integration. Where children are placed in schools rated below 'Good' a clear risk assessment process is in place to review the provision, advisors attend all PEP meetings throughout the academic year to ensure progress, attainment and support is reviewed termly.

Attendance

The Virtual School monitors attendance of all cared for children by commissioning an independent company, to contact schools to collect a record of attendance.

*Due to COVID this year we have broken our attendance down based showing September to February half term before the school closures commenced.

From September to February half term:

Attendance at this point had increased compared to last year with the average Primary attendance increasing from 90% to 93% and the average Secondary attendance increasing from 90% to 94%.

Attendance in Primary schools:

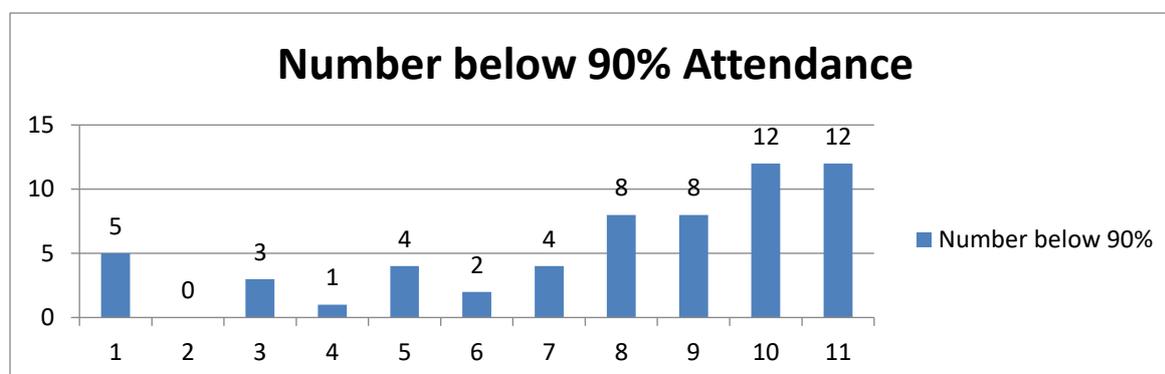
100% attendance	99% to 100%	98% to 99%	Below 90%
42 children	28	18	21
30%	20%	13%	15%

Attendance in secondary school :

100% attendance	99% to 100%	98% to 99%	Below 90%
49 children	21	28	44
24%	10%	14%	22%

Below 90% Special	Below 90% Primary	Below 90% Secondary
10 Children	21 children	44 children

There were 75 children whose attendance fell below 90% and would be considered as persistently absent. This equates to 22% of the Reception- Year 11 cohort which is a decrease from 27% recorded during the same period in 2018/19.



This year we have employed two specialist attendance officers who have been tracking and monitoring attendance to ensure effective support is in place:

- Working closely with key staff in schools to identify and resolve attendance problems.
- Working in conjunction with other Virtual School Colleagues.
- Meeting parents/carers and pupils at school or home.
- Jointly working alongside social care to ensure updates are given.
- Supporting to ensure access to education for pupils who are excluded is in place.
- Be involved in alternative education plans and development of bespoke packages alongside schools where this is deemed it is needed.
- Attend reintegration meetings following fixed term exclusions to support with next steps and effective planning to help reduce further repeat exclusions.
- Developed communication with Supervising Social Workers so that carers can be encouraged and supported to help improve attendance.
- Robust tracking and monitoring to ensure that direct intervention is quickly put in place for when attendance falls below 95%.

Case study of a young person that has received support to increase Attendance

Background:

Child C is in Year 11 at a mainstream Cheshire East School and has significantly poor attendance and engagement in school.

Key Concerns Identified

- Attendance has fallen to 85.3%
- Non-engagement in school/key lessons
- Internal truancy

Type of Intervention:

- Referred to Virtual School attendance support officer
- Attendance officer met with school to review attendance reports to review any patterns or trends
- Attendance officer met with school, carer and child individually to discuss any concerns and listen to child's voice
- Attendance officer led joint meeting with carer, school and young person to identify key strategies of support including identification of key worker in school to meet and greet and have access to safe space, 1-1 sessions with a tutor in a small room for identified classes

Impact of Intervention:

- Reduction of internal truancy
- Increased attendance from 85.3% to 99%
- Developed trust and relationship with key professionals in school and access to safe space and support when needed
- Access to 1-1 tutoring in a small space, supported to feel successful in key areas of timetable

Exclusions

The Virtual School has a duty to work with Head Teachers to try and avoid excluding a cared for child and to make sure that they have the support in place to thrive and make progress. During 2019/20 the Virtual School has been quick in its response to exclusion or threat of exclusions so that a joint plan for the child can be implemented which identifies any key triggers and also instances when the

inappropriate behaviour does not occur and these strengths can be built on. If an exclusion was unavoidable then there were similar meeting held afterwards to try and avoid any further instances. Schools or carers are asked to inform the Virtual School whenever an exclusion takes place. In the case of repeat exclusions, additional PEPs will be held to check that all necessary support is being given.

The Virtual School has commissioned places at the Fermain Alternativie Provision in Macclesfield and this has contributed to the reduction in repeat exclusions and total number of session lost with identified KS4 children. The Fermain staff have been trained in how to support children with insecure attachment and pupil premium funding has been used to help provide a mentor/key worker to support our children as a cared for champion.

There have been no cases of permanent exclusion in acadmic year 2019/20 with 9 individual fixed term exclusions recorded (for 4 individual children) of primary age. There still seems to be a higher number of fixed term exclusions at secondary school which is that of the national picture, although fixed term term exclusions overall have decreased compared to the same time last year. The data shows that there were 84 individual exclusions recorded (for 31 children) at secondary age. The Virtual School Headtacher is working alongside the Northwest Virtual Head group to design a regional guide to support reducing exclusions and offer advice and guidance to schools.

	Proportion of pupils subject to fixed term exclusion	Average Number of days lost per pupil
2016/17	13%	4 days
2017/18	10%	4 days
2018/19	12%	5 days
2019/20	9%	4.5 days

Participation of young people

The Virtual School recognises that young people are at the heart of all its work and that to be effective in helping young people to succeed in education, their wishes and feelings must be listened to.

All young people are invited to contribute to their PEPs, either by attending the meeting or by sharing their thoughts on the 'My Voice' form which can be presented at the meeting on their behalf. Specific intervention and plans are influenced by this input in a variety of ways such as:

- Deciding what subjects to have tutoring in and when/where this takes place
- Agreeing targets for improvement in attendance or behaviour
- Identifying any particular issues/concerns in school
- Deciding whether additional adult support, eg mentor is required.

The voice of young people is included in staff appointments and children have participated on interview panels this year. They were involved in planning the questions and identifying the desirable

qualities and had an equal say with other panel members when the decisions were made. The 'My Voice' document has been developed this year following a working group session led by the Virtual School Head Teacher with a number of cared for children and careleavers who supported redesigning this document in line with Signs of Safety. The feedback from children and schools of the new format has been positive.

The participation team attend all corporate parenting workstream meetings to ensure that information around education is shared and communicated effectively.

Where children are not attaining and are struggling in school the VS advisor works 1-1 to gain understanding from the child of what support can be put in place. The Virtual School has dedicated learning mentors who work 1-1 with children, they work closely with schools to empower and train staff to continue support children/young people.

Comments from an advisor getting their young person's views across during COVID:

Young people that joined teams for PEP meetings with foster carers, were able to speak about the work they were doing at home and how they were using teams to contact teachers and ask questions regarding work that was set. Foster carers also spoke about how they were supporting with learning. Schools also sent postcards home or messages home to say how well they had done with online work that was set. Young people were also able to speak about how they were feeling or if they had any concerns. (VS Advisors)

With a couple of year 11's they were able to discuss how they felt regarding not doing exams, a lot were disappointed as felt they had worked hard. One was due to stay on at school so discussed a project she was asked to do and she was able to discuss how she was feeling about going into sixth form. Another young person then had some support from the learning mentor to help support with transition from school to college. (VS Advisors)

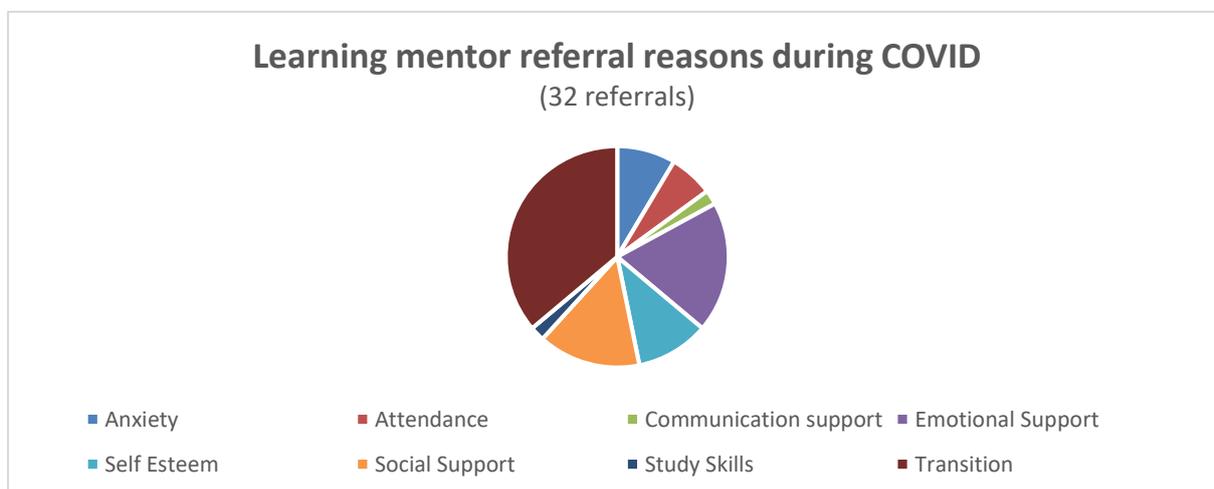
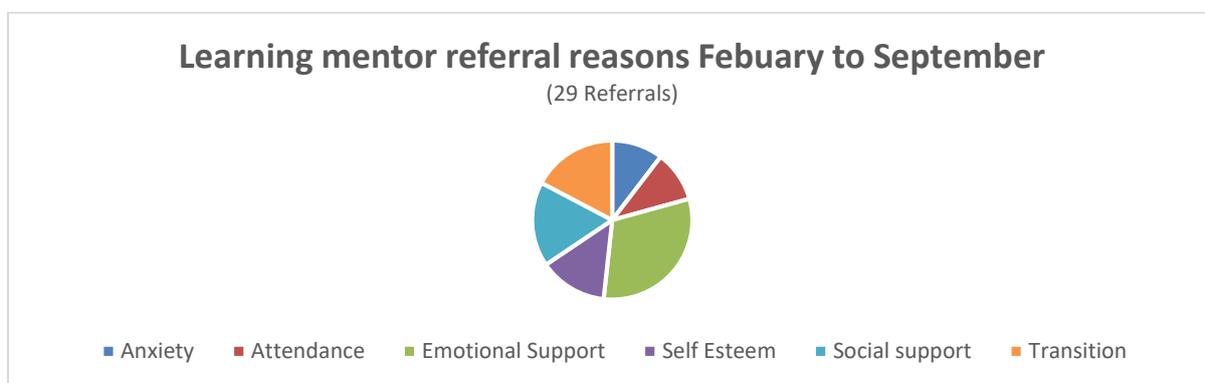
During lockdown I also engaged with some young people who had the EHCP reviewed. For one young person we discussed his views for the plan and another young person joined in the teams meeting to amend his plan ready for post 16 provision
(VS advisors)

I have worked closely with the VS to ensure children and young people have been able to access educational support during the pandemic.

One member of staff has been on hand to advocate for a young person due to a deterioration in their mental health which reduces their ability to concentrate whilst managing their anxieties due to their Grandmother's ill health. Unfortunately, this young person's Grandmother passed. VS staff have supported me in advocating for this young person to ensure he can continue at college. She also provided the assistant of the tutor to support this young person to catch up on outstanding work. (Quote from Social Worker)

Learning Mentor

Virtual School now has three full time learning mentors who were newly appointed March 2020 and we are in the process of recruiting one more. The main aim is to work with school aged children to support social, emotional mental health and transition, when children have had a placement or school change or where children have high levels of anxiety. The learning mentors work alongside Designated Teachers and other agencies to support cared for children to overcome barriers to learning. This year we have one of our learning mentors specifically for supporting post 16 young people with a specific focus on increasing support for our NEET young people.



Our Learning mentor follows different programmes of study depending on the needs of the child and consults with professionals and carers prior to planning this. This multi-faceted approach aims to upskill the schools and carers enabling them to provide a consistent approach which can be maintained once the direct work with the Learning Mentor (LM) ceases. The focus of work with young people has included:

- Joined up work for Y6-Y7 transition
- Support in reintegrating back into mainstream provision
- 1:1 support around anxiety
- How to manage challenging social interactions and friendships
- Support around emotional regulation and the exploration of feelings
- Understanding feelings, social and friendship skills

This year we have also employed our first Post 16 learning mentor who has specific oversight of our NEET young people to support in reengaging them back into Education, Employment and Training.

Case Study from the learning mentors support during COVID

Background:

- Child A became a cared for child in April 2020
- Experienced considerable disruption in their education having been on roll at numerous different schools.
- In year 6 Child A had moved placement and to a new school.

Type of Intervention:

- VS Education Adviser identification of school place for conclusion of year 6 in line with government guidance for 'wider opening of schools'
- Successful identification of alternative school where Child A could attend as a 'guest' whilst living in foster care
- Referral to Learning Mentor to support transition liaison with carers and school in order to attend sessions in school
- Joint working with partners to ensure effective completion of initial PEP
- Effective communication between the VS Adviser and foster carer
- Identification of school place for year 7 Sept 2020

How is PP being spent

Appointment of Learning Mentor within the VS team to support direct work with identified children.

Impact of Intervention:

Child A had previous fixed term exclusions and had uncertain education provision though the work of the VS mentor they were able to access education under government guidelines for 'Year 6 wider opening of schools' during Covid school closures.

Post 16 Learning Mentor Case Study

Background:

Child came into care in the Spring of 2020 as an unaccompanied asylum seeker, was unable to speak English and educational background was unclear.

Key Concerns:

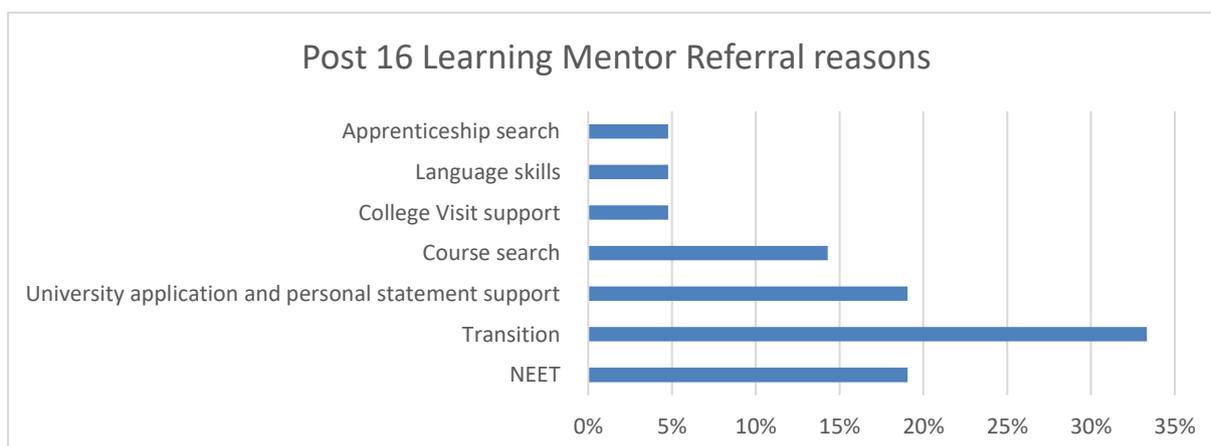
- Language barrier
- Accessing education
- Self-esteem and anxiety
- Dependence on foster carers
- Impact of police involvement
- Building relationships
- Cultural differences

Type of Intervention:

- 1:1 weekly catch up sessions with VS post 16 mentor
- Language support sessions using ESOL learning materials over the summer to prepare for college
- Application support to the ESOL course at College
- Support in applying for an educational bursary
- Post 16 mentor arranged and supported college visitation morning to increase familiarity, meet and greet with tutors

Impact of Intervention:

- Built a trusting relationship
- Gradually increased his English vocabulary to support him in accessing simple English language skills at college
- Attended the visitation morning at college which made transition into education smoother
- Support with enrolment at college and is now attending full time.
- Receives a bursary to fund learning materials and lunches at college
- Developed close friendships with other children and young people living in his foster placement
- Plays for a local football team



Post 16 Tutor

1:1 tuition is offered to 16-18 years old. Most of the young people taking part are currently NEET and/or have no formal qualifications. If there is a need and there is a capacity within the caseload, 1:1 tuition is also offered to under-16 and over-18 years old. The purpose of 1:1 tuition is to gain

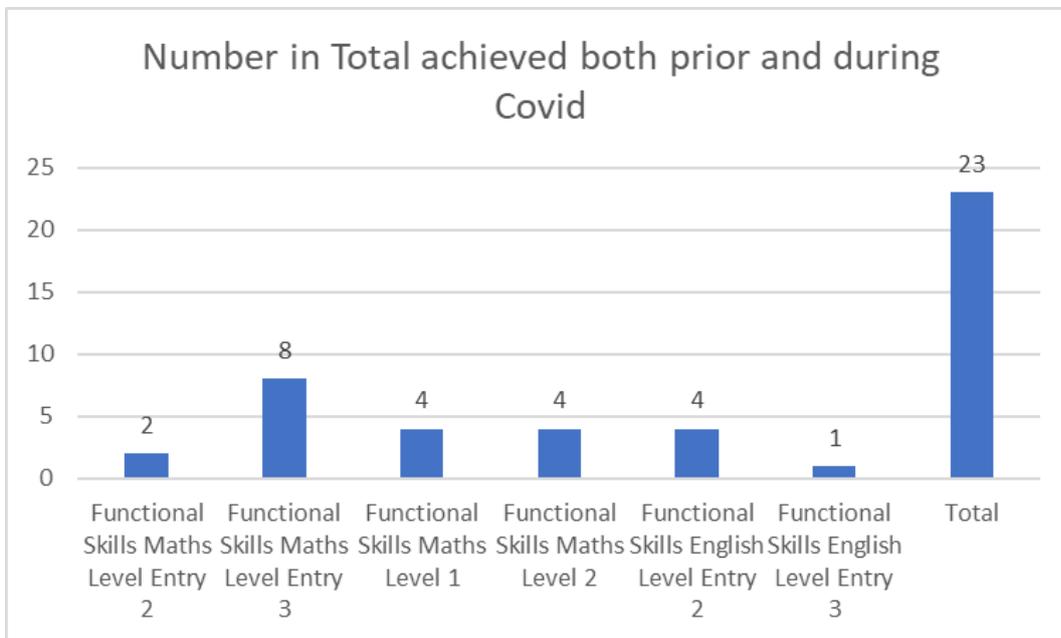
qualifications, improve confidence, to engage in other positive activities and progress to Education, Employment and Training.

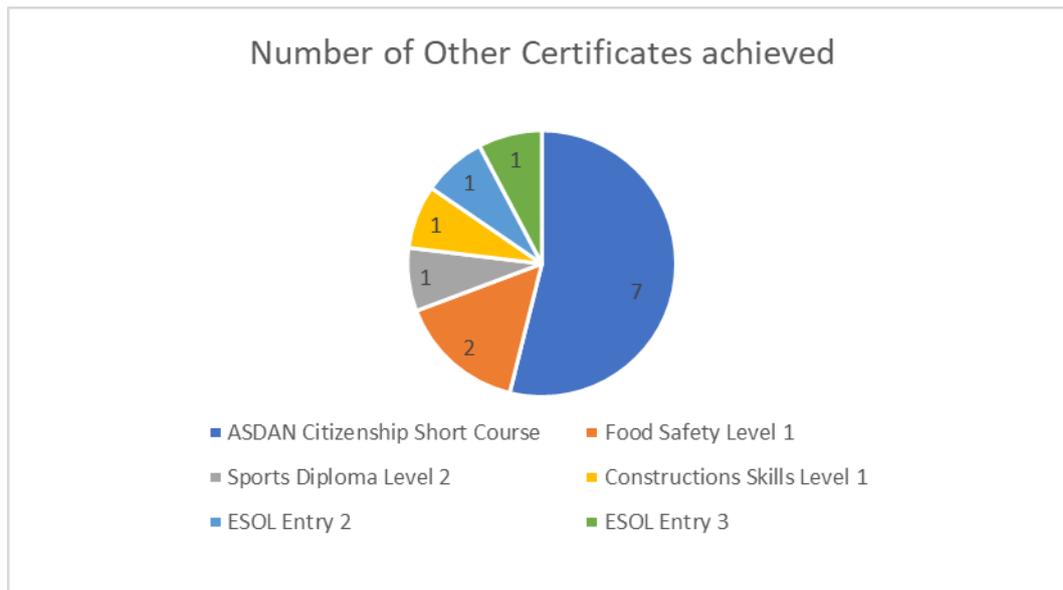
1:1 Tuition Offer:

Functional Skills Maths and English. Every student gets access to an online learning resource (bksb). Students take an Initial Assessment test to determine current level. Then an Individual Learning Plan is created and the students to follow, using learning resources provided.

During the last academic year, 100% of the students who attempted, have passed their Functional Skills Exams and gained qualifications. We were also able to continue sitting the exams during COVID due to them being completed on a 1:1 basis.

Exams passed/Qualifications achieved:





English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) - Teaching ESOL to UASC Young People, who are currently awaiting to enrol to an ESOL course. Students are working at their individual pace and create a portfolio of activities covered in 16 topics of ESOL Activities. Main aim is to introduce English to non-speakers (Pre-Entry Level) and to boost their language skills at Levels Entry 1 and Entry 2.

The Post 16 tutor offered 1:1 intervention for several ESOL learners, 3 of the young people have continued at college, 1 has secured full time employment due to success of support and completion of qualifications.

Post 16 Tutor Case Study

Background:

Child C is a former relevant care leaver who has arrived in UK in 2018 (15 years old UASC). English is not their first language but they speak good English.

Key Concerns during last academic year

- No engagement via Teams during COVID-19
- No work submitted since the lockdown (since Friday 20th March 2020)
- Will not pass the course if the outstanding work is not completed
- Due to leave the area therefore was not engaged in finishing the work to complete the Level 2 course.

Type of Intervention:

- Post 16 tutor liaised with designated staff member at college to get contacts to teachers
- Post 16 tutor contacted teachers to find out what work needs to be completed
- Post 16 tutor arranged to visit college during COVID-19 restrictions, in order to access resources needed to complete the work
- Post 16 tutor monitoring daily to ensure attendance and access as needed, visits if required to support engagement
- 1:1 sessions were extended if needed with post 16 VS tutor, to make sure that the piece of work is completed and submitted to the teacher.
- Constant communication between VS and College to support with updates as needed
- VS involved in information relating to final assessment (Teacher Assessments)

Impact of Intervention:

- Young person has passed Sports Diploma Level 2 course
- Enrolled at college to continue studies

Early Years

Early Years children cared for children have been supported by three members of the Early Years team during the year Sept 19-20. Foster carers and parents were signposted at PEPs to the facilities and activities being run by the Children Centres and through the Parenting Journey. Due to COVID 19 and lockdown the majority of our 71 2-4 year old cared for early years children only had two PEPs completed this year. However, during lockdown, we contacted all the carers of our 2-4 year old children at least once each month providing advice, guidance and support on learning activities and useful websites. We made sure that all children transferring to school had school places and had a handover of cases. We supported 2 year olds to access a nursery place when eligible.

We were also busy putting together an Early Years ePEP (electronic PEP) which we trialled in the summer term 2020 and have implemented from September 2020. However, this will need updating next year in light of the information below.

There has been no formal assessment at end of Reception this year due to the impact of the Pandemic. It is also worth noting that the new Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) coming into effect in September 2021 was released with updated Development Matters (child development) guidance for settings to use. We have 36 schools in CE that have agreed to pilot the new curriculum guidance and Development Matters, including 19 maintained nurseries. The new curriculum comes with a change in assessment criteria which will come into effect in July 2022.

Feedback from a foster carer

Hi this is just a little note to say thank you for your support, over organising funding for... to attend the Holiday Club in lieu of her being unable to take up the Pre-school entitlement in January. The difference it has made is very obvious.

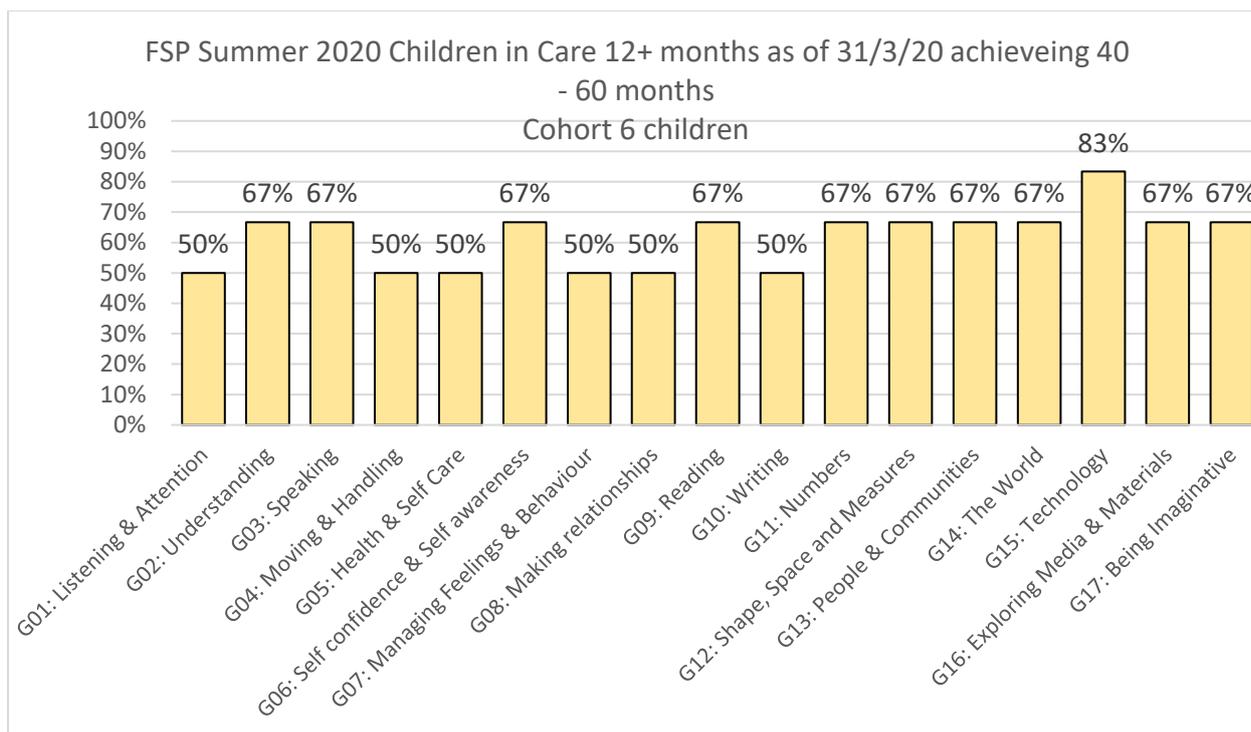
She has both enjoyed and benefited from this time. We can see how much it has helped her interaction with other children and her self-reliance. Mixing with others after such a long time of isolation has been of enormous value. It has also given us some time away from the constant and extremely lively attentions of our little 'Pocket Rocket'. Thank you again

There were 10 children in total as of July 2020 with 6 in the eligible cohort (in care for 12 months as of 31st March)

*All data is based on Teacher Assessment as no formal baseline assessment were undertaken due to Covid 19, DFE guidance is that no school is required to submit data July 2020.

Based on In care 12+ months	On track to achieve GLD?	On track to achieve GLD?
Yes	2	33%
No	3	50%
Not provided	0	0%
NOR	1	17%
Total	6	100%

Data in the graph below shows that although only 2 children have been recorded as on track to achieve GLD higher percentages were recorded of children achieving 40- 60 months.



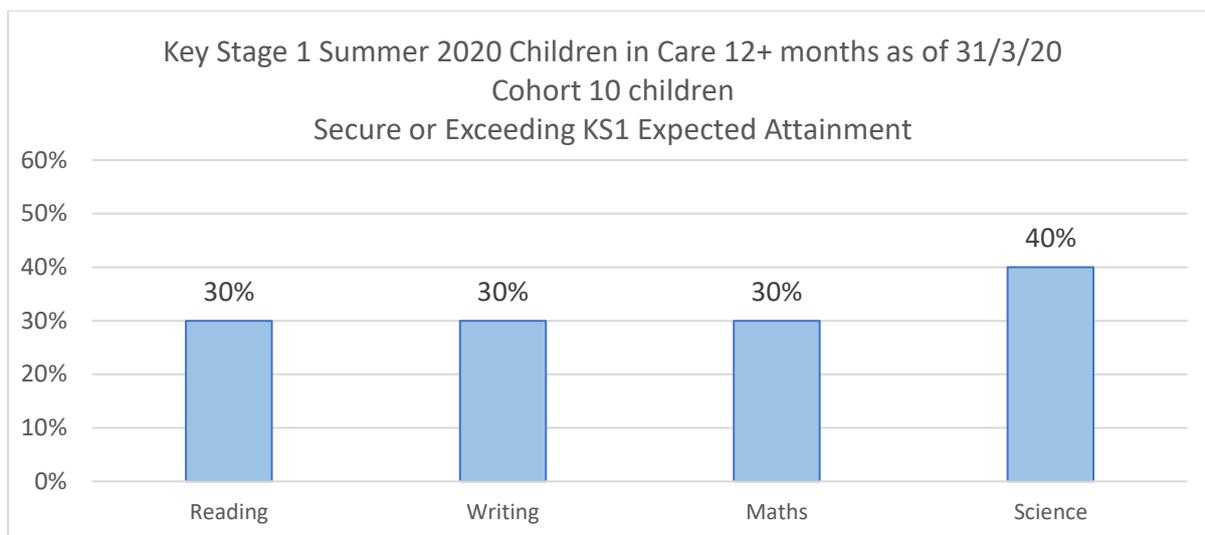
Attainment at Key Stage 1

As at July 2020 there were 13 cared for children in total, with 10 within the eligible cohort (in care for 12 months as of 21st March).

*All data is based on Teacher Assessment as no formal SATs were undertaken due to Covid 19, DFE guidance is that no school is required to submit data July 2020.

Number of children	Reading attainment	Reading Progress	Writing attainment	Writing Progress	Maths attainment	Maths Progress	Science attainment	Science Progress
Emerging	2		3		2		2	
Developing	5		4		5		4	
Secure	3		3		3		4	
Exceeding	0		0		0		0	
Progress - Age Expected		5		4		6		6
Progress - Below Age Exp.		5		6		4		4
Total	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10

Percentage (based on whole cohort)	Reading attainment	Reading Progress	Writing attainment	Writing Progress	Maths attainment	Maths Progress	Science attainment	Science Progress
Emerging	20%		30%		20%		20%	
Developing	50%		40%		50%		40%	
Secure	30%		30%		30%		40%	
Exceeding	0%		0%		0%		0%	
Secure + Exceeding	30%		30%		30%		40%	
Progress - Age Expected		38%		31%		46%		46%

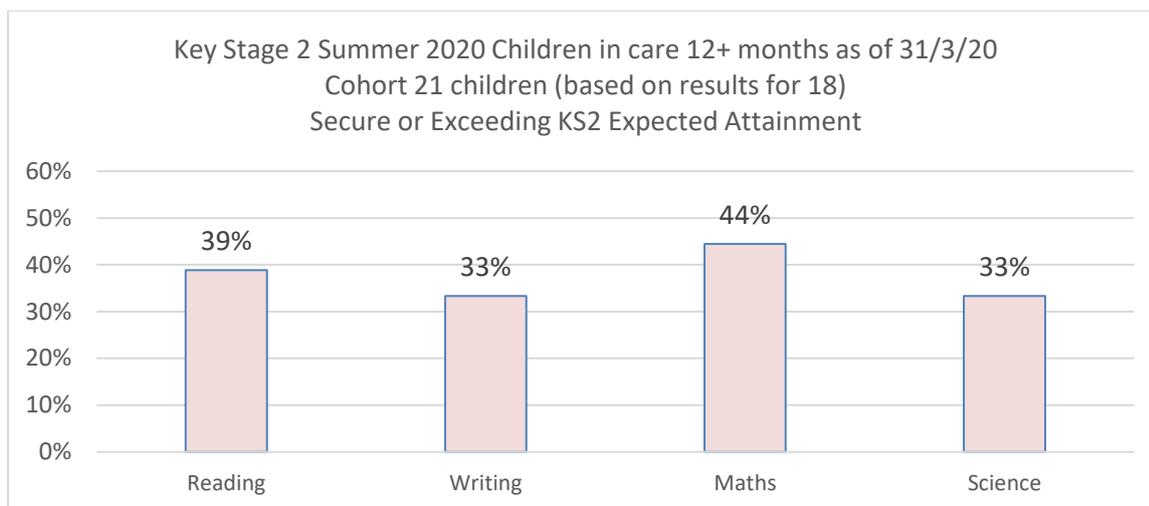


Attainment at Key Stage 2

As at July 2020 there were 27 Cared for Children with 21 within the eligible cohort (data for 18 children were submitted)

*All data is based on Teacher Assessment as no formal SATs were undertaken due to Covid 19, DFE guidance is that no school is required to submit data July 2020.

Number of children	Reading attainment	Reading Progress	Writing attainment	Writing Progress	Maths attainment	Maths Progress	Science attainment	Science Progress
Emerging	7		7		6		6	
Developing	4		5		4		6	
Secure	5		5		6		6	
Exceeding	2		1		2		0	
Progress - Age Expected		11		11		12		11
Progress - Below Age Exp.		7		7		6		7
Total	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
Percentage (based on returned cohort)	Reading attainment	Reading Progress	Writing attainment	Writing Progress	Maths attainment	Maths Progress	Science attainment	Science Progress
Emerging	39%		39%		33%		33%	
Developing	22%		28%		22%		33%	
Secure	28%		28%		33%		33%	
Exceeding	11%		6%		11%		0%	
Secure + Exceeding	39%		33%		44%		33%	
Progress - Age Expected		61%		61%		67%		61%



*Phonics collection is taking place next term and results will be available in January (report will be updated following this)

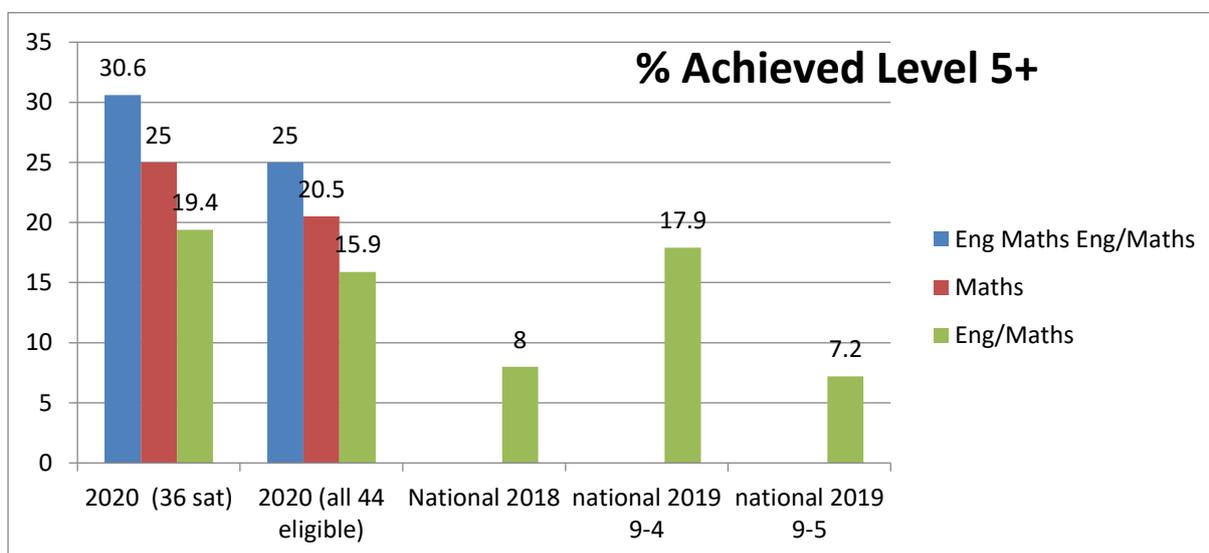
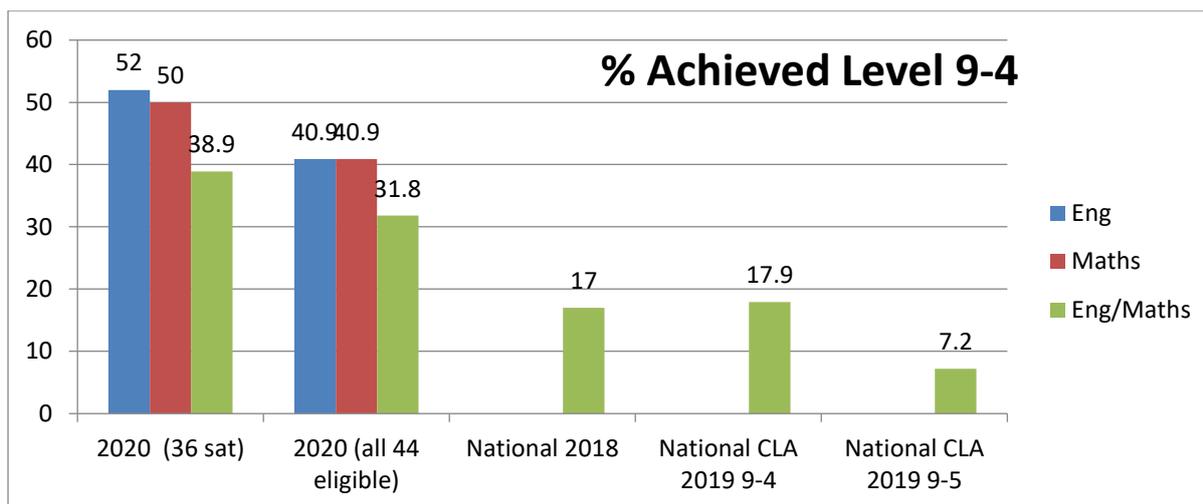
Attainment at Key Stage 4

*All data is based on Teacher Assessment as no formal GCSEs were undertaken due to Covid 19, DFE guidance is that no school is required to submit data July 2020.

At the end of the academic year July 2020 there were 51 children in total that are Cheshire East Cared for Children. Of the 51 there were 44 in the eligible cohort (Cared for - at least 12 months March 19-March 20). Of the 44 eligible 36 were entered for GCSEs, (the other 8 children gained a range of other functional skills qualifications, most attended specialist schools for children with complex needs).

- 6 gained 9-6 in Maths
- 4 gained 9-6 in English
- 1 gained grade 8 & 9 in English and Maths
- 29 received grades for at least 5 GCSEs
- 13 received grades for at least 8 GCSEs

*Although data below includes that of this year and national, as per DFE/OFQUAL guidance this year's data should not be published or compared to previous years/national data.



Post-16 Education, Employment and Training

Year 12:

At the end of the academic year 2019/2020, there were **53** students in total. Of this, **10** were NEET (19%), 4 of the NEET young people have been supported through summer and have a positive destination for the start of the new academic year. The other 6 young people are not currently engaging with services on offer and have other needs to address before EET can be achieved. Students are engaging in a range of post 16 pathways including college courses ranging from entry level to level 3, apprenticeships and re-engagement programmes.

8 students have completed the first year of their level 3 course and are progressing to the 2nd year in September.

Year 13:

At the end of the academic year 2019/2020, there were **65** students in total. Of this **21** were NEET (32%).

Students have engaged in a range of post 16 pathways, including college courses ranging from bespoke and pre- entry level to level 3, apprenticeships and re-engagement programmes.

2 students completed and passed level 3 qualifications. Both have secured places at university.

Year 14:

16 students have continued with their learning this year. 14 of these young people have either gained employment or progressed to the next level of learning. 2 students from this cohort do not yet have a positive EET destination for Sept. (88% moving into a positive EET destination)

Service objectives 2019/20

Strategic priority	Summary	Lead	Achieved/Some Progress/ Not achieved
<p>Implement changes resulting from the Social Care Bill which includes Virtual School Head teacher to have responsibilities for previously looked after children as well as looked after and to promote mental health and attachment awareness in schools</p>	<p>Evaluate models and make changes to staffing structure and use of funding to support improving outcomes of children. We have introduced learning mentors across the team to support individual children.</p> <p>Continue to increase support to schools through training and locality sessions</p> <p>Continue to work alongside adoption counts to develop information and guidance for Previously Cared for and adopted children. We have an advisor with specific oversight for advice and guidance for PLAC children and has developed web pages and resources.</p> <p>We have worked alongside regional VSchools to ensure collaborative working is in place and sharing good practise</p>	LR	Achieved
<p>Implement a self-assessment tool for use with and by schools to improve their practice and support for cared for children</p>	<p>Adapted a self-assessment tool for schools following DLT to support audit of current protocols and practise</p>	LR	Some progress

	<p>Checklist created to support new DLT with roles and responsibilities in line with DFE guidance</p> <p>Created a cared for children profile for use in schools.</p> <p>Although some progress due to Covid some elements were put on hold and will continue to be a focus and review next academic year</p>		
<p>Virtual head teacher to review impact and effectiveness of current arrangements to ensure support and interventions are targeted and lead to improved outcomes.</p> <p>Review the impact of a SEN lead within the Virtual School team</p>	<p>Clear and robust tracking documents to review attendance of all children.</p> <p>Clear and robust tracking documents to review attainment of all children.</p> <p>Clear procedures to support improving SEN and aligning EHCP reviews and PEPs with a SEN lead within the VS team in place.</p> <p>Clear procedures to support building Signs of Safety into practise and procedures.</p> <p>Virtual School are working closely across service areas to support clear impact for children. Advisors have been identified as leads within specific areas to support across services: SEND, Bespoke, Mockingbird, PFA</p>	<p>LR</p>	<p>Achieved</p>

<p>Development of ePEP (Electronic Personal Education Plan) for Early Years and Post 16</p>	<p>ePEP and PEP documents have been redesigned to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Signs of Safety format -Review of PP funding to ensure schools are measuring impact each term - My voice was adapted with working group of cared for children and care leavers to change format for scaling system <p>Nearly all primary and secondary schools are now effectively using ePEPs, due to success the ePEP has been developed for EY and Post 16 and is being piloted during this year.</p>	LR/CL	Achieved
<p>Implement a revised quality assurance process for PEP arrangement to increase the number of good/outstanding</p>	<p>Clear and robust QA process for advisors is in place.</p> <p>Clear and robust moderation process is in place.</p> <p>Training delivered to Designated lead teachers to support 'what makes an outstanding PEP'</p> <p>Virtual locality sessions have continued throughout this academic year with both CE and schools Out of Authority.</p>	LR/CL	Achieved

<p>Improve attendance to ensure reduction in Persistent Absence figures in particular within Special Schools</p>	<p>Clear and robust tracking documents in place to allow for regular monitoring and reviewing of individual Children’s attendance.</p> <p>Worked closely with Director of Education and HOS (education) throughout Covid on the education recovery of schools to ensure that there was smooth reopening in September.</p> <p>Joint working with other services to ensure that access to education either remote or on site was in place as needed.</p> <p>Clear communication and procedures in place throughout the pandemic to ensure PEPs continued. Effective communication procedures in place to support return to school.</p>	<p>LR/CL</p>	<p>Achieved</p>
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24. Development Priorities for 2020-21

In addition to the specific actions included in the various sections of the report the Virtual School has identified the following priority areas and key actions to be addressed this year.

Strategic Priorities for 2020-2021:

1. Implement a Governing Body to ensure governance and scrutiny to include core members from across key partners and stakeholders.
2. Work with council leaders to ensure development of apprenticeship opportunities for our Cared for Children/care leavers.
3. Development of a pupil council voice to ensure our children/young people are fully involved with key developments across the service.
4. Work alongside council members as part of the corporate parenting strategy to develop access to front line services (members to support: Governing Body, Priority 2 Workstream, Direct work with children and young people to improve access to education).

Operational priorities:

Continue to provide support and interventions for schools and children to improve outcomes (narrow the gap and lost learning) and attendance, evaluating the impact of the intervention and use of Pupil Premium. In relation to the return to schools following impact from Covid 19.

Monitor requests and impact of Pupil Premium and develop a system to ensure schools are made accountable for impact.

Introduce a governing body within the virtual school to scrutinise all areas of the service.

Increase targeted support and interventions for pupils in Y6, 11 and Post-16.

Embed locality model working to support children and schools.

Improve outcomes for all years and support with impact from Covid 19 and gaps in learning.

Improve Literacy and Communication of Early Years and Primary aged children.

Identify and implement changes resulting from the Social Care Act 2017 which includes Virtual School Head Teacher to have responsibilities for previously looked after children as well as looked after and to promote mental health and attachment awareness in schools

Continue to review the impact of staffing changes and use of funding to support improving outcomes of children.

Adapt training to increase support to schools to offer full staff CPD to increase Attachment and Trauma awareness.

Continue to work alongside adoption counts to develop information and guidance for Previously Cared for and adopted children.

Continue to work alongside regional VS partners to share good practise

Continue to develop online webpages and resources to further support advice and guidance.

Monitor the impact of commissioned and front-line services through engagement, progress and outcomes

Work with procurement and commissioning to develop monitoring process for commissioned services.

Increase direct supervision of commissioned service and clarify expectations to be achieved.

Review and monitor the impact of commissioned service to ensure quality and value for money.

Continue to work with alternative provisions to ensure outcomes of children accessing alternative provision is further improved.

Work alongside social care to ensure education involvement with Bespoke and Mockingbird

Implement the self- assessment tool for use with and by schools to improve their practice and support for cared for children

Identify schools where progress is below expected and use self-evaluation to plan for improvement.

Share best practice where pupils achieve above expectations.

Improve completion rate and quality of PEPS and develop to extend to Early Years and Post 16

Review and roll out pilot for ePEP for early years and post 16 providers.

Continue to improve completion rate of PEPs (termly).

Continue to improve number of PEPs graded as 'Good'/'Outstanding', sharing best practise within locality network sessions

Develop PEP to ensure PFA is a clear focus

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Adoption Counts Adoption Panel**Adoption Panel Chairs 6 monthly report in respect of Cheshire East****(October 2019 – March 2020)****1. Introduction**

The second half of the year has been a busy one for Panel. As one of the newer chairs to Adoption Counts, I have been impressed by the overall efficiency and quality of work submitted to panel. It is evident that panel members are committed to their role and are knowledgeable and skilled in their understanding of the lifelong implications of adoption.

During this period two long standing Panel Chairs have resigned due to emerging commitments, and two new chairs have been appointed

Panel Chairs meet regularly with the Regional Director, Operational Manager and the Panel advisor to review the operation of the panel, to consider practise improvements and work closely together to support consistency of practice in all aspects of panel performance.

In between these meetings, there is very good communication between senior management and the chairs, with any queries or issues dealt with promptly and efficiently.

The panel advisor provides a very valuable conduit between the panel and the wider areas of Service. As she does not have any managerial responsibility for the cases presented, she is in a strong position to support the panel's quality assurance function and is able to raise concerns before matters are presented to panel. Having a dedicated panel advisor supports consistency across the RAA and the local authorities. When the dedicated panel advisor is not available, the role is covered by the Adoption Team Managers.

Prior to panel, the advisor works closely with the Panel Chairs to ensure that cases are in good enough order to present and to ensure that the item is regulatory complaint. It is extremely rare for there to be major concerns. This is reflection of the robustness of the pre panel quality assurance by managers and the standards the agency sets.

Administrative support to panel is highly efficient, with papers sent well in advance. The quality of draft minutes is good and are sent to chairs in a timely manner, again supporting swift decision making by Agency Decision Makers for the benefit of children and adopters.

2. Overview of panels

Before the move to virtual panels (26.03.2020) - meetings were held every two weeks on Fridays at Unity House in Salford; every three weeks on Thursdays at Etrop Court in Wythenshawe; every six weeks on Wednesdays at Etrop Court (these were moved from a Friday at the start of the year to allow p/t workers to attend more panels and to support the administrative side); every six weeks on Tuesdays, predominantly at Cledford House in Middlewich, occasionally at Etrop Court.

The frequency of panels supports the timeliness of approvals and matches. The timetabling of panel items is based on need, and therefore panel will be convened even if there is only one item to be presented.

3. Panel membership

At the end of the reporting period on 31 March there were 52 active panel members. The make-up is as follows- 3 panel chairs (one having resigned in Dec 2019 and another in Feb 20. Two new chairs were appointed and started their posts in Oct 19 and Jan 20), 21 Social worker representatives (1 is on maternity leave and another on long term sick leave), 19 Independent Members (including one vice-chair), four Medical Advisors, two Elected Member, and 3 Local Authority representatives.

The 19 Social Workers are made up of representatives of both Adoption Counts and the Local Authorities: 9 representing Adoption Counts; 2 for Cheshire East; 4 for Manchester; 5 for Salford and 1 for Stockport. The 3 Local Authority representatives are from Stockport and have a health or children and families background.

During the period October to March, resignations were received from 5 Social Workers although one returned as an independent member having moved to another agency and 2 chairs. There has been a change to one elected member following the elections. We continue to seek a diverse panel membership to reflect our population and demographics and during the reporting period have recruited four additional independent members as well as ten new Social Workers. Some further applications are yet to be processed given a delay following the current situation with Covid-19.

Adoption Counts panels strive to have panel members from varied backgrounds, life and personal experiences and whilst we have several adopters on panels and adults who were adopted, it is recognised that it would be hugely beneficial to have a birth parent who has had a child adopted.

The Agency also recognises that the panel membership should be more diverse and is actively seeking to attract a more diverse membership.

Panel member appraisal

The vast majority of appraisals were carried out during the reporting period. The themes and issues have been collated by the Agency Adviser and have been used to inform the Chairs' appraisals and further development of panels.

The way in which appraisals are held has been changed to an electronic system, with a third of Panel members invited in for a face to face discussion. All Panel members have been given the option to attend their appraisal in person. This has been done to ease the pressure on the Panel Advisor and Panel Chairs as the previous appraisal process became very lengthy and protracted given the

number of panel members and their varied availability for an additional meeting outside of panel times.

Annual panel training

Adoption Counts continues to run two Panel Development Days per calendar year. The last one took place on the 20th Nov 2020. The areas that were discussed were an update on the agency, ground rules, panel members views, the voice of the adopted adult, The voice of the child, contact, CPR tools and purpose of CPRs, feedback from a learning review, what makes a good PAR, Checks and ex-partner references, panel feedback and a joint staff and panel member session was held. There was considerable feedback from the day which was overwhelmingly positive regarding the training and the content delivered. Feedback regarding practice issues has been carefully considered and has informed the continued development of how panel is run and managed. A further panel development day was planned during the next review period (26th of April 2020) although this is to be postponed due to the current situation with Covid-19.

4. Panel Business

Cases considered by panels (October 2019 – March 2020)

Panel Business							
	No. of panels	No. of items considered	Matches	Approvals	SHOBPA	De-reg	Adopter review
Panels held at Manchester spoke	13	49	26	20	2	0	1
Panels held at Salford spoke	12	38	15	21	1	0	1
Panels held at Cheshire East spoke	4	9	5	4	0	0	0
Panels held remotely via video conference	2	7	3	3	1	0	0
Panels held at Stockport spoke	Panels are no longer held at Stockport spoke due to difficulties around securing an appropriate venue. Panels that would have been held in Stockport are now held at the Manchester spoke.						
Total	31	103	49*	48	4	0	2

*54 children matched – 44 single children and 5 sibling groups of 2

Out of the 49 matches for 54 children, 10 were fostering for adoption – which is 20% of the total matches and 19% of the children.

5. Panel scrutiny – timescales

Matches			Approvals		
A1 met	25	46%	Stage 1 met	7**	17.5 %
A1 not met	29	54%	Stage 1 not met	33**	82.5%
A2 met	23*	45%	Stage 2 met	19	40%
A2 not met	28*	55%	Stage 2 not met	29	60%

* Three children (two from Salford and one from Cheshire East) were relinquished, hence no Placement Orders were granted so no A2 figures are available.

** Out of 48 approvals, 8 were fast tracked so did not go through Stage 1

Agency specific data matches					
Agency	Total children matched	A1 met	A1 not met	A2 met	A2 not met
Cheshire East	15	3 (20%)	12 (80%)	2** (14%)	12** (86%)

** One child was relinquished, hence no A2 figure is available.

Comments

There is wide variation in the above figures across local authorities, however a number of factors impact timelines of placement such as age on entry into care, sibling group, complexity of need, etc.

Each local authority will be analysing their own cohort of children via the national scorecards and comparisons with both regional and statistical neighbours, and using tracking data, with narrative provided by Adoption Counts.

6. Panel scrutiny – Quality of reports at the final audit

RAA data of quality of reports. All agencies					
Matches, 54 CPRs			Approvals, 48 PARs (4 unknown gradings) *		
Outstanding	3	6%	Outstanding	1	2%
Good	50	93%	Good	42	88%
In need of improvement	1	2%	In need of improvement	1	2%
Inadequate	0	0%	Inadequate	0	0%

Information considered as Cheshire East specific data - out of 15 children matched				
Agency	Outstanding	Good	In need of improvement	Inadequate
Cheshire East	0 and 0%	15 and 100%	0 and 0%	0 and 0%

** Data has been collected from 54 CPRs and 48 PARs. We are missing grading's from 4 PARs as there was no recorded feedback provided on these. This inconsistency has reduced from the previous reporting period and is being further addressed to ensure all data is tracked for future reports.*

All percentages have been carried to the nearest decimal.

Work to improve the quality and consistency of the reports within Adoption Counts and the 5 partner Local Authorities remains ongoing. For Prospective Adopters Reports - In the reporting period, 2% were outstanding, 88% good and 2% being in need of improvement to be good. There was data missing from 4 PARs at the final audit although their first audits graded them as least as being good (trying to obtain) – the omission of these 4 gradings is due to a change in the usual Agency Advisor where cover is needed and the number of missing data has significantly reduced from the last reporting period.

There have been no inadequate PARs. These figures show that PARs remain fairly consistent in terms of being of good quality from the previous reporting period where 77% were graded as good and 8% were graded as outstanding. Whilst there are less reports graded as outstanding, many good reports had outstanding features.

Adoption Counts continues to take on a mentoring role for the 5 partner Local Authorities to guide and support workers with their understanding of the purpose of the report and desired practice in completing these with further training having been delivered. There has been an improvement from the last reporting period whereby 60% of the CPRs were graded as good and 27% as being in need of improvement to be good. For this period there has been an improvement with 6% being outstanding, 93% as good and 2% as being in need of improvement to be good.

The new quality assurance process is now underway and so CPRs are audited by the relevant Adoption Counts Team Manager prior to SHOBPA consideration and then again by either the Team Manager, Family Finder or Senior Practitioner before matching panel. This is to ensure that CPRs are graded as being 'Good' as a minimum and that the final report is submitted to panel rather than reports still requiring amendments.

There have been a small number of CPRs still requiring some additional work following submission as identified by the Panel Advisor and/or Chair. The bulk of these cases have had the suggested amendments completed in a timely manner allowing the case to be heard as per the schedule. Even these CPRs have told and explained the child's journey but needed additional work to enable them to be appropriate for the adopters and adoptee to have as lifetime documents.

As per the previous Chairs report, clear CPR guidance has been completed and ongoing training has been provided to Family Finders via their regular development days as they are taking a lead role in mentoring Social Workers. Drop-in clinics are being offered to Social Workers and further training sessions are being planned. Information regarding the new audit process and panel expectations has been distributed amongst the five partner Local Authorities for dissemination amongst the staff and Team Managers. Guidance on the panel gradings has been developed and has been shared with panel members/Family Finders at the most recent Panel Development Day to help support panel members understanding of what 'good' looks like and what more might need to be done to achieve a grading of 'outstanding'.

7. Attendee feedback

Both the Social workers and adopters are asked the following questions; -

- 1) Before attending panel were you clear about panel's function?
- 2) Were you given sufficient notice about the date and time of panel?
- 3) Were panels members introduced to you?
- 4) Did panel members treat you with courtesy and respect?
- 5) Did panel members seem familiar with your case?
- 6) Were panel member's questions relevant to the issues they were considering?
- 7) Were you given the opportunity to clarify points raised?
- 8) Were the recommendations made by the Panel Chair clear?
- 9) Attendees were asked to grade their overall experience from 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent)
- 10) Add any further comments you would wish to make.

Feedback from evaluations

Evaluation is gathered through both an online form and paper forms. The forms are given to applicants on the day of the panel. Just under a third of adopters completed feedback forms, interestingly only 9 social workers completed feedback for the agency in relation to their experience of panel. The agency encourages all to complete feedback forms as this is part of its continuous learning culture. The panel advisor is working with the teams to encourage more participative feedback.

Adopter feedback

34 feedback forms were received from adopters during this period. The comments were overwhelmingly positive. 29 attendees rated their overall experience as excellent with 4 attendees rating their experience as a 4, and one at three. This attendee felt uncomfortable about the tone of a question asked but responded positively to other feedback questions.

Overall every question was responded to with a yes. Comments ranged from:

"My social worker explained everything in detail about the panel "

"I was nervous going in. I went in and all the panel members made me feel very comfortable and it was nice to see smiling faces"

"It was clear that they had reviewed our case files and made relevant notes about our experiences"

"We were made to feel very welcome by the panel chair, the overall experience was positive. "

Grading of overall experience

Overall, the feedback is overwhelmingly positive and demonstrates the work that is done by social workers to ensure that adopters understand the role of panel and what to expect. It is evident that panel conducts itself in a professional manner, is aware of how nerve wracking it is for applicants and approved adopters at the matching stage and does its best to make people feel relaxed.

Social worker feedback

Social work feedback has been more difficult for the agency to obtain. An analysis of the feedback shows a variety of experience. Two thirds of the three responses are very positive, with an overall experience of 5. Two felt they had a more negative experience. Interestingly one social worker felt that the chair had spent too much time speaking with the applicants before panel as she had already done this. This in contrast to other feedback. Both of the more negative observations were that the questions from panel should have been directed at them rather than the applicants.

“Felt some of the question could have been directed at me “

This is in contrast to other feedback which was “the questions put to the professional and the applicants were very relevant and obviously well thought out “

It is important for panel members to learn from negative as well as positive feedback. The panel advisor is efficient in bringing to panels attention particular feedback that is relevant to improve our functioning.

I am confident that the agency continues to seek and encourage both social workers and adopters to feedback to the agency their experience of panel.

Analysis

As one of the newer chairs, my experience of the agency and the Panel has been overwhelmingly positive. The feedback and the quantitative analysis supports my observations. The administration of panel is efficient, the quality of paperwork and verbal presentation is on the whole good with some outstanding features. The agency is closely collaborating with its partner local authorities to both drive up standards and to gain greater consistency.

In relation to timescales, there does appear to be a wider variation across local authorities, and it may be helpful for panel for the agency and the local authority to share their individual deep dive analysis on their particular cohort of children. Fostering to adopt remains a priority for the agency and this evident from the PARS, that is on the agenda right from the beginning

In reference to timescales for approval, stage 1 remains a challenge as the complexities in sourcing references in a timely way, often leads to delays in Stage 1.

There is a very evident learning culture in the agency ranging from senior managements willingness to respond to issues raised by chairs, to the range of training opportunities open to adopters. From observations at panel and from feedback, adopters are well prepared for the task ahead of them and are confident that the agency will support them going forward.

The agency recognises that panel needs to widen and diversify its membership, and it would be right and proper that panel members are given further training to enhance their understanding of anti-discriminatory practice in adoption work

8. Conclusion

At the time of writing this report, panels were moving towards a virtual world, due to the impact of Covid 19. This is a very different experience for both panel members and adopters. The way that the agency responded in the first few weeks gives me confidence that going forward into recovery, it will keep children as the focus of their service delivery. Panel has responded to the challenges thus far, but it's hard to predict what the impact will be on Children services over the next few months and whether the pandemic will adversely affect recruitment going forward.

9. Recommendations

1. That the agency continues to improve timeliness in relation to approval timescales.
2. It would be helpful for panel to have an increased understanding of the variation in timescales for children.
3. That the agency seeks to recruit a greater diversity of panel members.
4. That the agency consider offering additional training to panel members in relation to anti discriminatory in adoption work.
5. That the agency works with panel to elicit more feedback from social workers and to use this to improve panel performance.

Anne Tully

Independent Panel Chair

June 30th

Cheshire East Council

Adoption Service – Annual Report

01.04.19 – 31.3.20

1. Introduction and Purpose of the Report

This report fulfils the obligations in Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002 to report to the “executive side” of the local authority. This has guided the structure and information set out in the report below.

It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 31st March 2020. Plans for children are dynamic and develop every day and the picture will have changed at the point this is read.

2. Working with Cheshire East Council

Since going live, Adoption Counts has had responsibility to discharge Cheshire East’s responsibilities as an Adoption Agency. The working relationship between the LA and the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) has been fundamental to the success so far of the partnership working and has been embedded at all levels. The Director of Children’s Social Care sits as a member of the Adoption Counts Board. The Head of Service with a link to adoption is invited to attend the quarterly operations group meetings. These provide an important opportunity for operational issues to be raised and shared with equivalent managers from the other partner LAs and with the senior managers in the RAA. There is a shared ownership of the agenda and a range of issues are discussed with very positive communication and outcomes as a result. The group has identified the need for input from the RAA to ensure that staff in the LAs maintain their knowledge and benefit from updates to practice and research. For example:

- The fostering team manager has been an active member of the moving to adoption transitions steering group. This is concentrating on standardising practice using recent research from the University of East Anglia about the transition from a foster placement to an adoptive home.
- Colleagues from Cheshire East have attended a conference exploring practice developments adoption transitions.

The Operations Manager linked to Cheshire East is in regular contact with the Head of Service linked to adoption to discuss performance over the period and any issues or themes that may be arising. This is very much a two-way dialogue, with Cheshire East ensuring that the RAA is fulfilling its responsibilities as well as the RAA being able to offer feedback to the LA about any emerging themes or issues in care planning or working together.

The Head of Service for cared for children and care leavers and the Service Manager for cared for children and care leavers attend the monthly Adoption Counts tracking meetings and are active participants. The tracking meetings are an opportunity for scrutiny and performance management following the whole cohort of Cheshire East children where there is or may be a plan of adoption including:

- Children now adopted to ensure that life story books and later life letters are received
- Children placed for adoption but not yet adopted to track the progress of placements and the timeliness of adoption order applications

- Children where a family has been identified to ensure that there is no avoidable delay in the shortlisting and matching process and throughout the planning of introductions and placement
- Children subject to a Placement Order where a family has not yet been identified. This cohort is rigorously discussed to ensure that the family finding strategy is being carried out effectively and is the forum for escalation of agreements regarding family finding within the RAA, other LAs or in the voluntary sector.
- Children in care proceedings where there may be a plan of adoption as their final care plan. These children are tracked closely both in the LA and the RAA to ensure that there is timely progression of the plan from Agency Decision that they Should Be Placed for Adoption, through profiling and the identification of a family.
- Children under the Public Law Outline where there may be a plan of adoption should care proceedings be initiated.
- Children requiring legal revocation of placement orders and “Should be placed for adoption” rescinds.

There is no doubt that the efficacy of these meetings is improved when care planning representatives from the local authority (LA) attends as this ensures a robust joint approach.

The team manager in the RAA linked to Cheshire East also attends the monthly tracking meetings and she, alongside the three dedicated Family Finders, regular work in Cheshire East office bases alongside the social work teams, attend legal gateway meetings and final care planning meetings to provide advice and a view where required. Links between Cheshire East and the RAA seem to be embedded well.

3. Performance

3.1 Children made Subject to Should be Placed for Adoption (SHOBPA) decisions

Number of children made subject to SHOBPA decisions per month							
Cheshire East	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	
	1	1	1	5	1	3	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
	2	3	0	1	2	3	23

3.2 Children subject to Placement Orders

Number of children made subject to Placement Orders per month							
Cheshire East	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	
	3	2	1	0	1	5	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
	2	5	1	1	1	3	25

Out of the 25 Placement Orders granted within the period:

Ten children have subsequently been placed for adoption with two of the children adopted by their foster carers.

Six children have been linked with prospective adopters, five of these children are within the A2 threshold.

There are nine children for whom a Placement Order has been granted within the last six months but are yet to be placed. Within this cohort there are:

two sets of siblings – a sibling group of three and a sibling group of four who are placed in foster care together – the care plan is to place separately with adopters in two sibling pairs.

Family finding is currently on hold for the sibling group of three who all have complex needs and are currently accessing therapeutic support in preparation for permanence. A link has been identified for one of the sibling pairs.

Family finding is also on hold for a two year old little boy – a link had been identified but birth parents have applied to the court to contest the Placement Order application.

Family finding continues for the remaining three children. In relation to identifying ‘patterns’ two of the children are older and a sibling group and the remaining child has a diagnosis of foetal alcohol syndrome.

3.3 The Numbers of Children who had a Change of Plan in the Period

There have been three children who have had a change of plan:

Two children were returned to the care of their parents following further assessments in proceedings.

The remaining child was an older child who had experienced significant neglect alongside a number of moves. Extensive family finding took place for a 14-month period, unfortunately, an adoptive family was not identified. The plan for this child therefore changed to one of long term fostering.

3.4 Number of Children Placed for Adoption during year.

Number of children placed for adoption per month							
Cheshire East	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	
	1	1	2	1	2	1	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
	2	2	3	1	2	1	19

74% of the children placed for adoption were placed with prospective adopters approved by Adoption counts.

For sixteen of the children placed for adoption during this period, it has taken longer than the A2 measure of 121 days to achieve permanence.

Four of the children were older sibling pairs. Each sibling pair had complex emotional and health needs, their A2 measures were 377 and 181 respectively.

One child had complex health needs and a genetic deletion, his A2 measure was 265 days.

One child had significant development delay, his A2 measure was 197.

An interagency placement was required for two of the children due to identified geographical risks, their A2 measures were 227 and 133 respectively.

Three of the children were older with complex health needs and disabilities, family finding searches were completed, the children were then adopted by their foster carers. Their A2 measures were 338, 711 and 456 respectively.

Further medical information was required in respect of genetic issues for one child, her A2 measure was 349.

A 5 year old little girl who needed careful preparation and support in readiness for a move to an adoptive family. Her A2 measure was 164.

A child who was placed just 7 days outside the A2 threshold as further medical information was required before proceeding to match.

A 4 year old little girl with complex health needs. She needed to be placed separately to her sibling, the family finding search took longer as she had experienced significant neglect, had complex needs and her birth family applied for leave to contest her Placement Order. Her A2 measure was 587.

A 3 year old little boy with significant health needs and a serious skin condition. His A2 measure was 834.

In terms of identifying 'patterns' for these children, the majority had complex health and / or care needs, several children were also older or part of a sibling pair. Whilst it has taken longer to achieve permanence for the children identified above, it has been important to ensure families are identified who possess the right skill sets and experiences to meet the needs of the children. Adoption Counts and Cheshire East continue to work together from an early stage in care planning to ensure adoption plans for children who may wait longer i.e. sibling groups and older children, are achievable and the right plans for those individual children.

3.5 Number of children adopted

Number of children made subject to Adoption Orders per month							
Cheshire East	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	
	1	2	2	2	0	3	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
	2	0	1	0	0	3	16

For this cohort, the average number of days for A1 is 486 days, which is 60 days above the threshold of 426 days but within the overall average for England. From the 16 children adopted, 9 were within the A1 threshold. For the remaining 7 children outside of the threshold:

A six year old little girl with a measure of 627 days, had complex health needs and a disability. Family finding therefore took longer to ensure prospective adopters were identified who could meet her individual needs.

One child was placed on a fostering for adoption plan – the care proceedings were protracted due to the request for independent / additional assessments. His measure was 641 days.

A four year old little boy with a measure of 654 days, had complex health and developmental needs. Family finding therefore took longer and an inter-agency placement was required.

A two year old little boy with a measure of 446 days, had complex health and developmental needs. Family finding therefore took longer and an inter-agency placement was required.

Two of the children were older with complex health needs and disabilities, family finding searches were completed, the children were then adopted by their foster carers. Their A1 measures were, 744 and 846 respectively.

A three year old little girl had protracted care proceedings due to a connected persons and independent assessments. Her measure was 755 days.

For A2, the average number of days for this cohort is 231 days which is 110 days over the threshold of 121 days. From the 16 children adopted, three were adopted within the A2 measure and a further five within 4 – 6 months. For the remaining 8 children it has taken over six months to find a permanent family. Whilst it has taken longer to place the majority of children with an adoption plan during this period, many of the children have had extremely complex health or developmental needs, are aged 4 years or over and / or part of a sibling group and therefore are children who are likely to wait longer in achieving permanence through adoption. It is positive outcome for these children that whilst it has taken longer, permanence has been achieved within the right families.

The children outside of the threshold are as described above with A2 measures of 140, 144, 135, 176, 315, 207, 240, 383, 265, 456, 711, 227, 127.

3.6 Early Permanency

Two children were placed in early permanence placements during this period. The children were placed with carers temporarily approved by Cheshire East's Agency Decision Maker as foster carers under regulation 25A of the care planning regulations on 12/11/2019 and 02/12/2019.

4. Quality of Reports

Child permanence reports are audited as routine at point of should be placed for adoption (SHOBPA) decision and are re-audited prior to submission to the adoption matching panel.

Fifteen audits have been completed. Of those:

Eight were graded as good and seven as in need of improvement at point of SHOBPA.

All were graded as good at point of matching panel.

The available statistics evidence there have been improvements in the quality of paperwork between SHOBPA and matching panel during this period as seven CPR's have moved from requiring improvement to good. This highlights there is a robust and supportive auditing process in place. Adoption Counts will continue to support practitioners and managers in

implementing the advice they are given to ensure all CPRs reach a standard of ‘good’ by matching panel.

5. Adoption Support

Adoption Support remains integral to our delivery for adopted children, new adoptive families, birth families and adopted adults, recognizing the lifelong journey. We remain committed to supporting families in the early transition stages of a placement and when an adoption order is made. Thereafter we recognize that new challenges may emerge requiring varying levels of tailored support to ensure successful outcomes for children. We have based our service delivery on a graduated approach, with our Adoption Psychology Service forming the foundation of our delivery.

5.1 Centre of Excellence for Adoption Support

The Adoption Psychology Team is an assessment, consultation and therapeutic CAMHS and Educational Psychology partnership service for Adopted Children, their parents, carers and workers. It is a partnership between Manchester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, One Education and Adoption Counts. The service is multidisciplinary including clinical psychology, therapeutic social work, child psychiatry and educational psychology. The information in this report relates to the CAMHS component of the service. The service is partly co-located with Children’s Social Care which enables a co-ordinated approach to the mental health and emotional wellbeing and develops the skills of the social work teams through consultation, training and joint working. It is consultation and referral-based and offers timely and flexible appointments with some choice of venue. The service sits alongside other services that support the child’s home, care planning, relationships, health, education and hobbies. The iThrive model shows how the Adoption Psychology and Adoption Counts Adoption Support Service fit together

i-THRIVE Model of Care - Adoption Support



5.2 AP Service outcomes

1. Adopted children have good mental health
2. Adopted children have healthy relationships
3. Adopted children have stable placements
4. Adopted children and their parents have a positive experience of care and support

5.3 Service Aims

- Children who have a Placement Order and an adoption plan are offered, where necessary, assessment and intervention to support decision making and make recommendations to inform their placement needs.
- Adopted children and families have access to assessment and interventions to improve their relationships, emotional and behavioural regulation and engagement with learning.
- Children and families placed in their adoptive placement can access group-based approaches as part of an early intervention package to enable families to have a good start on their adoption journey.
- Children who have been placed in their adoptive placement are able to access specialist assessment and intervention up to age 12.
- Adoption social workers, family finders and children's social workers can access Specialist Consultation for adopted children up to the age of 18 for advice and signposting.
- Prospective adopters and adoptive parents are offered training, consultation and evidence-based interventions to enhance their understanding and management of the psychological needs of children who have experienced abuse and neglect.
- Adoption Social Workers are offered training and consultation to enhance their understanding, assessment skills and knowledge of attachment, mental health difficulties and interventions

Whilst this service provides an annual report on the overall outcomes of delivering its service aims they have continued to support families early in their adoption journey. New adopters have the option of attending a Foundations for Attachment Therapeutic parenting group and a Theraplay group.

Following the successful pilot of the Theraplay group in the summer of 2019 it has been rolled out as a programme available to new adopters, with family finders and recruitment and assessment workers identifying the families to attend within the first 6 -12 months of placement.

The programme was adapted from Theraplay®, which is a therapeutic approach which focuses on attachment strengthening activities designed to promote pro-social skills, self-regulation, trust and a positive sense of self.

The intervention focuses on enhancing attachment based parenting techniques through engaging in playful, fun games and activities. The group provides parents with an opportunity to play with their pre-school child in a structured and supportive environment, with other adoptive children and their families. Each week families are introduced to different games and activities that are based on the four dimensions of Theraplay: structure; nurture; engagement; and challenge. Each week ideas and information are shared about activities and parenting strategies that could be tried at home.

The group is led by Dr Sarah McIntosh, Senior Educational Psychologist (One Education) and facilitated by Joanne Lomas, Therapeutic Social Worker (Adoption Counts). The outcomes of attending the group were evaluated and highlighted the following;

- Increased parental confidence in relating to their child and in parenting them.
- Children displaying increased enjoyment and emotional progression
- Extended family members joined the course to establish a competent support network
- Early identification of additional support
- Additional early support implemented post group

The Foundations for Attachment programme is delivered jointly by Dr Kate Bonser Clinical Psychologist and Katy Peacock, therapeutic SW.

It is an introductory, interactive 6 session learning and support programme designed by Kim Golding. The course recognises the challenges in parenting children who have relationship difficulties, displaying resistant or challenging behaviours. It provides guidance on how to: nurture attachment relationships, build emotional connections, regulate stress and support behaviour through 'connection with correction'.

This then enables families to receive early therapeutic support to ground the family securely in recognising their child's emotional needs and how to meet them. Investing in adoption support at this early stage is intended to maximise the outcomes for the children.

5.4 Multi Agency Resource Panel

The **Multi Agency Resource Panel**, continues to consider complex cases that require Adoption Support Fund (ASF) match funding from the Local Authority. This has enabled more consistent and transparent decision making across the region. The panel consists of representative from CAMHS, Virtual Schools, Social Care and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) which enables professional challenge and support to make the best use of resources in our agency.

In this period the panel have considered 7 requests for match funding. The panel have scrutinised the requests and challenged some of the length and frequency of the therapeutic plans.

Authority	Decision
Manchester	3 recommended
Stockport	1 recommended
Trafford	1 recommended
Cheshire East	2 recommended
Salford	0

5.5 Adoption Support Fund Applications

We have continued to access the ASF to provide additional therapy for adoptive families using the Adoption Counts portal, this has enabled families to receive specialist support that we would not have been able to provide in house or access from other universal services.

There have been 187 applications to the ASF, in this period totalling £669,904.61, three group applications – the remaining applications are broken down below.

Local Authority	Number of applications	Amount of funding agreed
Stockport	28	£96,535.99
Manchester	42	£181,574.29
Trafford	26	£99,254.50
Salford	25	£53,800.05
Cheshire East	63	£212,326.75
group applications	3	£26,413.03

There is now confirmation from the Government that the ASF will continue for a further year until April 2021.

5.6 Referrals / Enquiries for Adoption Support

We are currently working with **571 open** cases (excluding Letterbox) an increase from the first 6 months of the year.

We have a further **412** cases awaiting allocation, **197 children for** Adoption Support, **180** adults for Access to records. The remaining 35 are general enquiries, for advice & signposting. All of the Adoptive families have received initial advice and guidance and a surgery appointment where required, but are awaiting a named SW for longer term support. Whilst waiting, families are linked to a First Response SW as a point of contact, so do still receive a service from Adoption Support.

Our service to Adopted Adults is not as responsive, and the waiting time for an office visit to progress with access to records is considerably longer.

The table below indicates gives the data for each Local Authority in terms of those open / allocated cases and those awaiting an allocated SW (excluding allocated birth families 30)

The numbers for other Local Authorities included in the data, relates to other local authorities who have placed children in our RAA and are transferring over, or for the adopted adults, the records are held with one of the LAs in our RAA, rather than the person residing in our RAA.

Local Authority ALLOCATED	Adopted Adult April–Sept 2019	Oct- March 2020	Adoptive Family April- Sept 2019	Oct- march 2020	Total April- Sept	Oct- March 2020
STOCKPORT	19	17	74	75	93	92
MANCHESTER	31	29	69	87	100	113
SALFORD	11	12	48	45	59	57
CHESHIRE EAST	8	12	115	110	123	122
TRAFFORD	12	9	83	86	95	95
Other LAs	23	33	20	26	43	59
	104	112	409	429	513	541

Local Authority WAITING	Adopted Adult April–Sept 2019	Oct- March 2020	Adoptive Family April- Sept 2019	Oct- march 2020	Total April- Sept	Oct- March 2020
STOCKPORT	13	36	29	34	42	70
MANCHESTER	30	75	23	45	53	120
SALFORD	7	15	17	14	24	29
CHESHIRE EAST	21	41	50	46	71	87
TRAFFORD	11	13	23	25	34	38
Other LAs	48	0	18	33	66	33
	130	180	160	197	290	377

During the period October 2019 – March 2020 we received **219** new referrals into the Adoption Support Service, This is a reduction on the first half of the year, as calls are being redirected appropriately by business support at the initial stage of the enquiry.

The number of requests are defined below;

(Please note; this does not include the Letterbox service, which is recorded separately.)

April- Sept 2019 Local Authority	Adopted Adult	Adoptive Family	Birth Family	Advice & Signposting	
STOCKPORT	7	30	2	5	44
MANCHESTER	15	29	1	5	50
SALFORD	5	26	0	1	32
CHESHIRE EAST	8	34	0	1	43
TRAFFORD	4	19	0	3	26
UNDEFINED	5	4	1	5	14
OTHER LA	30	15	0	4	49
	74	157	4	24	259

Oct- March 2020 Local Authority	Adopted Adult	Adoptive Family	Birth Family	Advice & Signposting	
STOCKPORT	10	21	0	3	34
MANCHESTER	18	32	1	3	54
SALFORD	9	16	0	1	26
CHESHIRE EAST	19	42	0	5	66
TRAFFORD	2	21	0	1	24
UNDEFINED	0	2	0	1	3
OTHER LA	0	8	2	6	16
	58	143	3	19	219

The first response model remains in place, to encourage better screening of calls and redirecting to universal services where appropriate. If a call is clearly adoption specific then advice, support and counselling can be offered via telephone and may be all that is required.

If it becomes clear from discussion that there is a need to gather more detailed information then the family will be invited into a surgery appointment to conduct an Adoption Support Assessment of need.

Of the referrals into the service for both Adoptive families 100% of adoptive families requiring an assessment / interview have been offered a surgery appointment within a 4-6-week timeframe.

We have not been able to meet the demand for ATR cases as readily and our service standards for this aspect of adoption support are below what we would want to deliver. We are developing a more systemic approach with a better use of business support to progress ATR cases more speedily.

The **Adoption Support team staffing establishment** is as follows -

- 2.2 FTE team managers (4 staff)
- 9.1 FTE Adoption Support Social Workers of which 7.3 FTE Social Work roles are filled (13 permanent staff ,1 agency worker - vacancies of 1.8 fte)
- 2.5 FTE First response SW role (3 staff). This includes an additional 0.5 post which has been seconded into Adoption support from the R & A team temporarily from February 2020.
- 2 FTE Therapeutic SW roles (2 staff)
- 0.8 FTE Senior Letterbox SW
- 2.8 FTE Letterbox Family Support Workers (4 staff , one vacancy for 0.8 post))

We are currently recruiting to fill vacant posts.

5.7 Letterbox Service

The FSW letterbox workers continue to be supervised by the same senior practitioner as a discreet team of workers within Adoption Support. This allows Adoption Counts to support birth families and adopters to provide the best they can for the child to promote their identity. We are currently operating over 1,500 letterbox agreements which means over 3,000 exchanges in a year. We have additional administrative support to facilitate this more smoothly.

The Family Support Workers also undertake short pieces of work to assist families with adoption related issues, reducing the pressures of SW allocations.

As a Service, Adoption Counts is keen to develop best practice for our children and families. As such we are embedding new ways of supporting continued relationships with birth families and promoting children's identities.

Birth families

First Family delivered through PAC-UK are our current provider of support to birth families following a decision for their child to be adopted.

The clear and easy referral process is increasing the number of families who access the service. PAC-UK will provide annual figures as part of the contract.

5.8 Group work

Adoption Counts continues to recognise the importance of supporting adopters through the use of group work, to enable families to access professional guidance whilst building support networks with other adopters. We have continued to hold coffee drop-ins for informal support in the South & North spoke. These have been well attended and families enjoy being with other adopters in a group that accepts their child for who they are.

We have continued to deliver open access topic-based workshops, to enable adopters to access monthly support with clear advice and guidance to enable them in their therapeutic parenting role. These are delivered jointly with the Adoption Psychology team and alternate between the North and South spoke to maximise attendance across our Region. The workshops delivered have been -

- Life Story book and Later Life Letters
- Therapeutic Parenting
- Managing Transitions (education)
- Adopter Voice
- Theraplay

The feedback is very positive and always attracts families from across the Region,

'I learned great ideas about empathy and stepping back.....Not managing children, nurturing instead'

'Experts willing to share and impart knowledge.....Really personable and approachable'

'Enjoyed Table work/discussions "How to talk about abuse".....Understanding reasons why we need to tell the life story and the importance it holds'

We have also continued to hold successful **Family Fun days-**

- Zed Arts activity day
- Heaton park Walk
- Buille Hill family fun day
- Tatton Park farm trip

These are always well attended and appreciated by families as an opportunity to meet families in the same situation, who offer understanding and acceptance. This is also a really valuable way of families meeting staff in a relaxed and engaging environment. We find that families are coming from across our region to attend and that location does not prevent a barrier for attending these events.

We have also continued to support 16 families to attend the Child on Parent Violence / Non-Violent Resistance programme commissioned through PAC-UK.

Towards the end of this period we were all impacted on by the Covid 19 lockdown. We have been responsive and reactive in setting up additional support for adopters that will be reported in further detail in the next report.

6. Recruitment of Adopters

6.1 Approvals

There have been 50 families approved as adopters during the last six months of the year 2019-2020. This is an increase of 11 from the same period in 2018/19 and makes the total for the year 110, compared with 85 the previous year. This is a great achievement for the service in terms of available families for the children in need of permanence through adoption.

At the end of the period (31st March 2020), there were 25 families in Stage One, 11 in between Stage One and Stage Two, and 41 in Stage Two; a total of 77 families in the assessment process. This is a similar number to the previous six months, which is positive as there was a good start to the year. Whilst there will inevitably be a percentage of these families who leave the process, this is an encouraging position to be in, at the start of 2020/21.

Enquiry numbers remained stable with 437 received over the six months, in comparison with 447 in the same time period last year. Very low numbers of enquiries were received in the last two weeks of this period, due to the Covid-19 lockdown, but this has picked up again in the start of 2020/21 and so is not thought likely to have a significant impact on numbers for the next period.

Numbers of initial visits were also very similar to the same period last year, but again some visits were delayed slightly whilst plans were put in place during the lockdown. We are expecting to therefore see an increase in initial visits during the first month of 2020/21.

It is difficult to compare the number of families attending the preparation groups as the March 2020 group was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, there were still 48 families who attended over the five months, in comparison to 52 for the same six months of the previous year.

Our performance should still be viewed in the context of an ongoing national shortage of adopters. It suggests that the strategies implemented through our Recruitment and Marketing plan are effective though of course we are not complacent and continue to strive to increase our numbers further, to raise the profile of our agency and continue to aim to achieve adopter sufficiency for our children across our five local authorities, with a surplus to generate income and offset the cost of inter-agency placements for our children who need them. Monthly Adopter Sufficiency meeting continue with the Head of Service, the Operations Manager with thematic lead for recruitment and assessment, the Recruitment and Enquiries Manager and the Marketing Officer meeting to plan and review our progress. The conversion rate from enquiry to approval remains constant at 11% which would suggest that we continue to receive enquiries from the right kinds of people who are in a position to offer a family to our children as opposed to an increase in unsuitable enquirers.

6.2 Referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

No referrals were made to the IRM during this period.

6.3 Partner/step-parent adoption enquiries

Our Recruitment Team received 34 partner/step-parent adoption enquiries during this period compared with 57 in the same period in 2018/19. This number is the total from across all five of our local authorities.

LA	Number	Percentage
Cheshire East	4	12%
Manchester	12	35%
Salford	8	24%
Stockport	7	21%
Trafford	2	5%
Not known/out of area	1	3%
Total	34	100%

Twenty enquiries resulted in an office meeting taking place with a social worker, for information gathering and advice, in comparison with seventeen during the previous six months.

LA	Number	Percentage
Cheshire East	3	15%
Manchester	6	30%
Salford	5	25%
Stockport	4	20%
Trafford	2	10%
Total	20	100%

Six applications were received during this period, in comparison with fifteen during the previous six months.

LA	Number	Percentage
Cheshire East	2	33.3%
Manchester	2	33.3%
Salford	0	0%
Stockport	2	33.3%
Trafford	0	0%
Total	6	100%

7. Marketing Report

Adopters Required and Strategy 2019-2020

Full information is available in the Recruitment and Marketing Strategy. In summary;

Our aims and objectives are to;

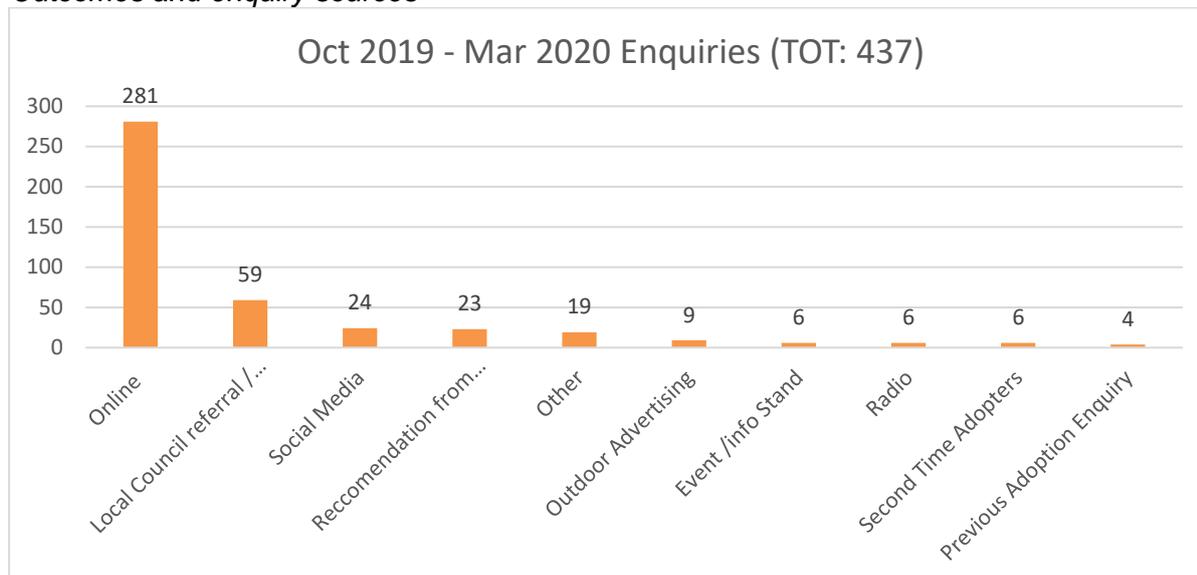
- increase the number of adopters approved by the agency against a national picture of falling recruitment figures and difficulties in attracting adopters to come forward.
- improve our conversion rate from enquiry to approval from the current 11% to 13% as evidence that our marketing messages are identifying the right people to come forward.

Although we do have babies available for adoption, we still need to target people who are willing to adopt children who are wait longer to be placed. We want to target **people who are willing to adopt children aged 2+, children of a BAME background, sibling groups, and children with complex needs**. Therefore, primary target audiences are as follows:

- People aged 25 – 55
- LGBT+ or heterosexual
- Married or in civil partnerships or co-habiting couples
- Single people
- People of a BAME background
- People who have experienced fertility difficulties
- Altruistic people who want to help children and society
- People that have experience in the social care sector and especially medical care sector (NHS employee pool), to improve the chances of placing children with complex needs

We will have four main campaigns throughout the year with consistent key messages;

- The value of adopting older children, sibling groups, BME children and children with complex needs
- Myth busting, i.e. *you CAN adopt if you rent, are single, gay, have birth children etc.*
- Adoption Counts provides timely and improved matching without unnecessary delay for children
- Full preparation, training and an excellent package of post adoption support and ongoing training is provided by Adoption Counts
- Introduce Adoption Counts always as “*your local adoption agency*” and focus on the regional aspect

Outcomes and enquiry sources

Source	Enquiries
Online	281
Local Council referral / website	59
Social Media	24
Recommendation from friend / relative	23
Other	19
Outdoor Advertising	9
Event /info Stand	6
Radio	6
Second Time Adopters	6
Previous Adoption Enquiry	4

We continue to see that Google AdWords and online organic searches are the highest sources of enquiries.

Google AdWords and Website Improvements: Last year we undertook a review of our website and Google Adwords set up with external agency Creative Concern, which led to some layout changes – this was in order to optimise our expenditure and our presence online. As Google searches that link to adoptioncounts.org.uk remain the top source of enquiries, we want to make sure we are doing everything that we can to capture website visitors by improvising usability (especially on mobile devices). We have also increased our Google Adwords expenditure from £50 to £60 a day, which has seen enquiries improve – a review of this is due in the summer to evaluate whether to maintain the cost.

Social media is also proving to be still a very powerful tool for brand awareness. We have increased followers numbers on both Twitter and Facebook, which are now well over the 1,000 mark on both platforms. Twitter shows a higher engagement from followers on conversations and stories, while the majority of actual adopter enquiries come through Facebook. We are

currently one of the most active RAA’s online. Our followers’ numbers keep increasing monthly, and we have seen a reflection of this in the number of enquiries generated via online medium.

Social media enables our agency to get exposure, traffic and gain market insights. Since the start of the Covid-19 lockdown period, we have increased our social media advertising budget, which has resulted in a steady number of enquiries.

In the year, we will continue to look at **online family finding via social media** presence with the creation of specific children-targeted adverts. This is a cost effective method in attracting adopters for children that have been waiting longer.

At this very moment in time, we are also using social media people from a BAME background who would be interested in adopting a child/children. We are currently exploring different avenues to spread the word and reach all different parts of the community, to ensure we are able to recruit more BAME adopters. So far in 2020 we have trialled leaflet drop in high BAME density areas and focused our social media advertising on spreading the appeal – targeting people who have expressed particular interest in BAME issues and related information.

A national recruitment campaign was set up during this period, to be delivered by regional adoption agencies, voluntary adoption agencies and other key stakeholders. The aim was to raise awareness of adoption and bust myths around who is eligible to adopt; ultimately to increase the number of possible parents registering their interest in adoption. Additionally, the campaign aims to target potential parents from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds as these children, as we know, traditionally wait longer to be matched with a new adoptive family, as well as older children, sibling groups, and those with complex health needs or disabilities.

Following extensive discussions with the National Adoption Recruitment Steering Group, the launch date was set for 26th March 2020. Unfortunately, a few days before the launch date, a decision was made to postpone the campaign due to the quickly evolving situation around Covid-19 and an expected notice of lockdown. The campaign will still take place in the future, hopefully in the next six-month period.

7. Compliments, comments and complaints

Description
Complimenting a letterbox worker on her positivity and empathy whilst working on a case where the birth parents had not been informed of an adoption due to their address not being known
Compliment from birth parent regarding FSW Support
Complimentary comments about Adoption Counts team manager for giving such clear information about the adoption process at a meeting.
Complimentary comments passed on from a child’s social worker and her manager about a family finder and her contribution regarding a child being placed in America
Complimentary comments received from adopters about an adoption support social worker and how she has really understood the situation the parents are in, in relation to support their daughter and her challenging behaviours.

Description	S1 Outcome	S2 Request Date
Complaint from parent that a photo taken of their family has been seen of the Facebook page of the birth mother. The photo has been cropped showing only the child. Mother states that the photo was requested for court only and they have never given permission to share. Despite raising this previously, no one has been able to provide answers.	Not upheld	
Complaint about a lack of support from Adoption Counts. Mum lives in the Isle of Man with her twins, she and her husband split up and he hit one of the children whilst in his care. This has intensified the issues.	Partially Upheld	
Complaint from an adopter about a lack of support she has received from the service in relation to her daughter. Now resolved and the adopter has written to express her satisfaction with the current service.	Upheld	
Complaint from potential adopters about the way a SW handled their Stage 1 process. Reports she has been unfriendly, unhelpful and has lied and been unsupportive.	Partially Upheld	
Adopters have progressed a complaint via Cheshire East directly but they are not happy with response. It appears there are elements which relate to Adoption Counts which they wish to progress.	Partially Upheld	02/03/2020

8. Practice Developments in Adoption Counts

Family Finding

Over the past twelve months development days have continued to take place on a quarterly basis for Family Finders. The days are well attended and prompt lots of discussion. A training workshop was provided at one development day by Coventry University to deliver research findings on Muslim children in the care system and a joint development day has also been held with recruitment and assessment workers. Areas explored include:

CPR audits – what does good look like

supporting colleagues in the local authorities regarding adoption planning

Completing matching paperwork and adoption support plans

performance data

From our discussions we have formed several working groups to consider practice issues. One of the working groups has developed a profiling template which has been well received and is now used across the service when profiling our children. This ensures profiles are of the highest quality alongside consistency of practice in terms of format, the information provided and incorporates contributions either from the child (depending on age and understanding) or from those who know the child best.

Another working group has met to consider race and ethnicity practice issues. This group will be discussing provision of training for Adoption Counts staff, adopters and panel members on issues of race, identity and culture alongside collecting figures and identifying national trends, research evidence and government guidelines re: BAME children, adopters and placements.

A transitions working group has been set up-linking with fostering leads in each LA to look at new research from The University of East Anglia. Transition planning is critical for placement success and yet often follows a very traditional script rather than a child centred needs led approach. In February we worked with the University of East Anglia to facilitate a very successful conference on moving to adoption. This looked at the challenges for all parties involved in the transition from foster carers to an adoptive family and considered:

- the key questions that arise for professionals supporting children through the process
- address the needs of each involved party before, during and after the move draw on theory, research, recent practice developments and existing good practice
- changes in social work practice to an individualised approach with a clear focus on the needs of the child

It was great to see so many colleagues join us, and the conference received very positive feedback. We have begun to share the research and learning back in our partner authorities and over the forthcoming months will continue to look at the next steps in changing transitions practice.

Two example templates and guidance have been produced and circulated - a CPR template and matching minutes meetings forms. The CPR template has been received very positively in terms of providing assistance in writing an accurate, comprehensive, informative and up-to-date picture of the child and their circumstances. The matching minutes form has assisted in standardising practice regarding the information provided to panel when considering matches.

The format of monthly matching / strategic matching meetings has changed, a monthly strategic matching is now held whereby all family finders, recruitment and assessment workers and team managers attend. This is chaired by an operations manager, all children are discussed who are subject to a Placement Order and are currently waiting for a link / match or children subject to a SHOBPA where Placement Order is anticipated within the month. The aim of this meeting is to prioritise our children waiting in terms of need and ensure all our children who are on placement orders or likely to wait longer have equal visibility / priority across our service. Families are identified and asked to consider children in terms of priority, this approach has been successful in reducing delay for children likely to wait longer whilst maximising our adopter resources.

Our Adoption Picnics continue to take place on a quarterly basis. During this period they have been attended by 76 children and 85 adopters. These have continued to be a highly successful matching method with 20 children successfully matched as a result in 16 placements.

At the end of March the COVID-19 pandemic began in the UK and as lockdown began came a busy period of adaptation as we had to think about the delivery of our family finding and transitions in a new virtual way. We were aware that Covid-19 measures could have significant consequences for our children who had been matched with prospective adopters and where introductions were being planned. We have therefore as a priority developed processes to look creatively at all cases where introductions have been delayed, and those where matches are being planned, to ensure that as far as possible we can progress permanence plans. Further details will follow in future reports.

Recruitment and Assessment

Development Days

We have continued to meet on a quarterly basis and recently had a successful day during which we discussed a range of issues including the results from the staff survey, performance data, the use of social media in assessments and obesity in applicants and its impact on adoption. The day was well attended and there was lots of discussion and useful contributions. Our next day planned for April will be part shared with the Family Finders to enable us to cascade learning and discuss common issues.

Training for Adopters:

Our new preparation programme has now been run several times and is becoming well embedded. Three of our workers put themselves forward to lead on the preparation group – Emily, Teresa and Bine – and so there is greater consistency in delivery. A very useful and comprehensive manual has been developed as part of this work which is shared with applicant's at the end of each day electronically and contains further reading on the topics covered as well as other useful resources that they can refer back to as they progress.

Sessions for *Family, Friends and Support Network* members have now moved to being delivered on a Saturday to enable more people to attend as numbers were very low in the sessions during the working week. We have been overwhelmed by the positive response to the new dates and are currently exploring how we can offer more sessions.

COVID-19

At the very end of this period, the COVID-19 pandemic began in the UK leading us to cancel the March preparation groups for the safety of attendees and then with lockdown at the end of the month came a busy period of adaptation as we had to think about delivery of all of our provision and training for adopters in a new virtual way. The first provision to be tackled was information evenings to ensure we remained compliant with the requirement to offer detailed information to enquirers within 10 working days of their enquiry. The work of the team was quite simply outstanding and we were able to get the session up and running via SharePoint very quickly and were able to offer the sessions weekly rather than fortnightly. There has been a great deal of learning from these forced adjustments and transition in service provision and a number of benefits and improvements to the delivery of our service to families which we will continue as the lockdown eases. More information on this and other developments will be shared in the next six monthly report.

Adoption Support

Adopter Hub

Adoption Counts has invested in peer support for adopters through the Adopter Hub. This is delivered by PACT and offers adopters access to -

- Peer support from other adopters via a live web chat, email and an adopter forum
- A programme of webinars on topics ranging from severe behaviour to emotional resilience.
- ELearning to top up adopters knowledge on attachment and how to support their children.
- Wide range of resources on topics such as education, online safety, mental health and development needs.
- Resources for schools

We have widened access to the hub to all adopters on our mailing list and are gradually increasing membership.

Adopter Champions

Champions are a group of volunteer adoptive parents from across the Adoption Count region who were recruited as part of a joint initiative between Adoption UK and Adoption Counts. The recruitment of Champions came about as a result of Adoption Counts' commitment to Ensure the voices of adopters are heard. Adopter Voice, an initiative set up by Adoption UK, the national charity for adopters, was the perfect fit to fulfil this objective.

The Champions are members of the Adopter Advisory Board (AAB) and they meet four to six times a year.

Champions seek feedback from adoptive families on a range of issues including education and emotional wellbeing and report back to the Adoption Counts leadership team.

Feedback is sought via the private Facebook page called AdopterVoiceCounts and at social/networking events; Champions also sit on the national adopter advisory board.

The group have organised 4 Family Rambles which have proved highly successful as many of our family's value being able to walk and talk freely about issues important to them.

They have also compiled a report on School Transitions which has been taken forward by the Virtual School teams in some areas.

Adoption Panels

Information about panel will be covered in full in the Chairs reports.

Panels continue to run at least weekly across three venues (Salford, Manchester and Middlewich), with two panels in a week every 6 weeks. Panel business continues to be high; we have held 31 panels during this period hearing 103 items of business; that is 49 matches

of 54 children and 48 adopter approvals plus two adopter reviews. No families have been de-registered during this time.

Following the government's announcement of lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic on the evening of 23rd March 2020, we had to very quickly make arrangements for panels to be held virtually to ensure that there was no delay for our children or families. The first virtual panel met on 26.03.2020 which was an incredible achievement for the Panel adviser and Panel leader who facilitated this transition with creativity, practicality and a will to make it work. We have continued to improve and tweak the panel processes as will be updated in the next report.

9. Partnership Working

With Our partner LAs

Quarterly Operations Managers Meetings continue to provide an important opportunity for operational issues to be raised and shared. There is joint ownership of the agenda and attendees are proactive in raising relevant issues focusing on any ongoing issues but also at ongoing service development. Many issues are now resolved at a local level between team managers or operations managers enabling more strategic focus in the meetings themselves. Other meetings take place between the RAA and the LAs as and when needed in order to ensure a quick resolution.

Managers from local authorities are attending Adoption Counts tracking meetings where possible, with the exception of Manchester. There is no doubt that the efficacy of these meetings is improved when a care planning representative from the LA attends as this ensures a robust joint approach.

Adoption Counts staff audit process for Child Permanence Reports is now taking place in all of the LAs – both at SHOBPA and then again at match. In this way we are able to report to the LA on improvements and highlight where we need to target training and development. Details are incorporated into six monthly and end of year reports for each LA. .

Adoption Counts is working to implement the UEA model of transitions to adoption and our LA fostering and social work team representatives were invited to a conference we held in January launching the research.

Partnerships with other RAA's

A national leadership forum usually meets face to face six weekly, facilitated by Mark Owers, sharing useful learning and shaping development at a national and local level, as evidenced by work on the new national recruitment campaign. At the start of the Covid lock down these meetings commenced weekly on a virtual basis, offering a forum for shared discussion and problem solving, along with colleagues from DFE and Deloitte's Management Consultants. There have been a number of working groups established as a result –to focus on assessment, matching, transitions and adoption support .These groups have developed some best practise standards for implementation during various stages of lockdown, ensuring consistency and quality assurance at a time of great challenge in terms of service delivery. We have been able to use input of leading researchers from the university of East Anglia and it has been helpful to have the direct input of the DFE. The regional manager was directly involved in this piece of work.

The Regional Adoption Manger meets regularly with 3 others local RAA leads who are currently exploring opportunities for further pan–regional development. We have for example worked together on the provision of independent support to birth parents and inter-country adoption.

With the Voluntary sector

We continue to work on the FLAG project with Adoption Matters and Caritas Care – a family finding tool to assist workers in identifying appropriate family finding strategies for children.

The provision of independent support to birth parents commenced in November 2019 – delivered by Pac UK-Family action. A launch took place and each La was invited to be represented. The contract delivery is regularly reviewed and the organisation have been evidencing an increased uptake in provision compare to that of our previous provider.

Intercountry adoption –Yorkshire Adoption Agency have been commissioned to undertake this piece of work on behalf of all 5 local authorities. This agreement will initially run until 31st March 2020. All subsequent years would then run from 1st April to 31st March.

The Concurrency project is commissioned from Caritas Care /Adoption Matters. Alternative funding arrangements for these placements were agreed at the last board meeting as Adoption Counts inter-agency budget cannot sustain funding. We have made no placements in this period, although 1 referral was made but could not be provided for in terms of an appropriate cultural and ethnic match. We believe that the increased use of Fostering for Adoption placements within Adoption Counts is the main reason for this dip in referrals although all LAs are encouraged to consider concurrency wherever relevant.

We routinely share profiles of those children where permission has been given for an inter-agency placement with voluntary sector partners.

With our adopters

Adoption Counts hold strategic matching meetings where all children and adopters are considered, in order to make best use of the skills and abilities our adopters have, and to ensure that all our children are considered. Following this meeting, recruitment workers will share profiles with their adopters, using their professional assessment skills and knowledge to identify the most appropriate potential links. Shortlisting identifies from these links which matches will be put forward.

The matching process within the Adoption Counts Family Finding policy requires full information about the child to be shared with adopters after short listing has taken place. Adopters will meet the key professionals for the child as well as their foster carers and have the option of meeting the placing agency’s medical advisor. Life Appreciation Days are held wherever possible to promote best practice in sharing the full history of the child with adoptive parents. There is also an opportunity to meet the child through ‘Mini meets’ where this is appropriate.

Adoption Counts is working to implement the UEA model of transitions to adoption and our Adopter voice champions were invited to a conference we held in January launching the research.

Adoption picnics are held 4 times per year, giving adopters the opportunity to interact with some of our children, and to date these have been very successful.

Adopter led family finding is undertaken via Link Maker and activity days although the majority of our adopters are matched with children from AC partner local authorities very quickly post approval.

Once the match has been agreed, adopters are fully involved in the planning for introductions. All adopters are encouraged to meet with birth parents, with the exception of very rare instances where risk is too high, and in those cases alternative methods of communication can be considered.

11. How do we involve staff and adopters in the development of our agency?

Within Adoption Counts we endeavour to build a culture which encourages transparency and routine staff consultation.

Staff have regular team meetings, development days and whole service days where feedback is sought. Management decisions are explained and reviewed taking feedback into account. Staff are given the opportunity to be involved in, and to initiate service developments, such as the group looking at transitions from foster care and more recently the UEA research and new 3 stage model of transition planning. Staff are enabled to attend national conferences and to bring the learning back into the organisation.

Adoption Counts contracts with Adoption UK to lead the Adopter voice programme, bringing independence to our consultation with adopters. The Adopter Advisory Board is the conduit for engagement between Adoption Counts and adopters. The RAA manager meets regularly with the Adopter champions and attends their board meetings ensuring that the work of the agency and the advisory board have common aims.

Adopter champions have been recruited through Adoption UK, to engage with adopters, discuss topics, collate a report with recommendations and this would be shared with us via the board meetings. Adoption Counts senior staff attend the board meetings.

The Adopter Voice Champions are building on their engagement activities, growing the Facebook group, and developing a relationship with the communications officer in AC and seeking views on topics tasked by the RAA.

One of the greatest successes of the board is the growth of the engagement walks hosted by one of the Champions and supported by the others. These events are in different areas of the region as it is an easy way for peers to form connections and share feedback. The means of feedback is gathered by closed face book groups, email and more informal chats.

An important aspect of engagement with the AAB is that as it is independent of Adoption Counts, subsequently feedback is honest, anonymous and increases trust and confidence in adopters that leaders are listening. Social Media plays a significant part as an engagement tool and it has been agreed that a social media champion will be recruited to support the aspirations of the Adoption Counts AAB to be more interactive and encourage posting/comments/topical discussions.

The AAB have committed to their work and their established networks feed in, where appropriate to topics where we have asked for feedback. Champions brought feedback to the AAB for discussion and agreed recommendations which were included in the reports written and submitted by the Chair of the AAB.

These topics were

1. Mental Health
2. Peer to Peer Support
3. Adoption Counts website
4. Preparation Groups

Their input has resulted in a number of positive changes to the programme.

The chair of the AAB has taken up the role of representing Adopter Voice at the RAA management board. Adoption Counts has tangible outputs from the service commissioned to understand the lived experience of our adoptive families and where possible we endeavour to act on the recommendations proposed by the AAB.

In addition –the Chair for the Adoption Counts AAB sits on the Adopter Reference Group at the DFE, representing our adopters at national level.

12. Accountability

The RAA has clear governance procedures in place. A quarterly Management board attended by our local authority DCS's receives reports on performance, service developments, budgetary issues and any decision making areas which requires authorisation at board level. The board has strategic responsibility for overseeing the work of the agency in relation to the following key areas.

- Sufficiency of adopters
- Timeliness for children
- Adoption support
- Management oversight of quality and performance
- Partnership working
- Use of resources
- Professional development

In addition, a monthly budget forecast, including the inter-agency position, is circulated to all partner LAs to ensure they remain fully up to date.

Name Nicola Booth

Role Operations Manager

Date 30.6.20