

Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting:	7 March 2023
Report Title:	Cared for and Care Leavers Q3 score card 2022/23
Report of:	Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director of Children's Services
Ward(s) Affected:	All Wards

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1.** This report sets out the performance for corporate parenting for quarter 3 of 2022-23 (1 October 2022 – 31 December 2022). The cared for children and care leavers committee is asked to note the performance for quarter 3 and to provide support and challenge in relation to performance in relation to cared for children and care leavers.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1** This report provides an overview of quarter 3 performance for children and families services for the relevant indicators for the reporting year of 2022-23

3. Recommendations

- 3.1.** The Cared for and Care Leavers Committee is asked to:
- 3.2** note the performance of children's services for quarter 3.
- 3.3** provide scrutiny in relation to performance in relation to cared for children and care leavers.

4. Reasons for Recommendations

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

5. Other Options Considered

- 5.1. Not applicable

6. Background

- 6.1. This quarterly report provides the committee with an overview of performance across cared for children and care leaver's service. This report relates to quarter 3 of 2022-23 (1 October 2022 – 31 December 2022).

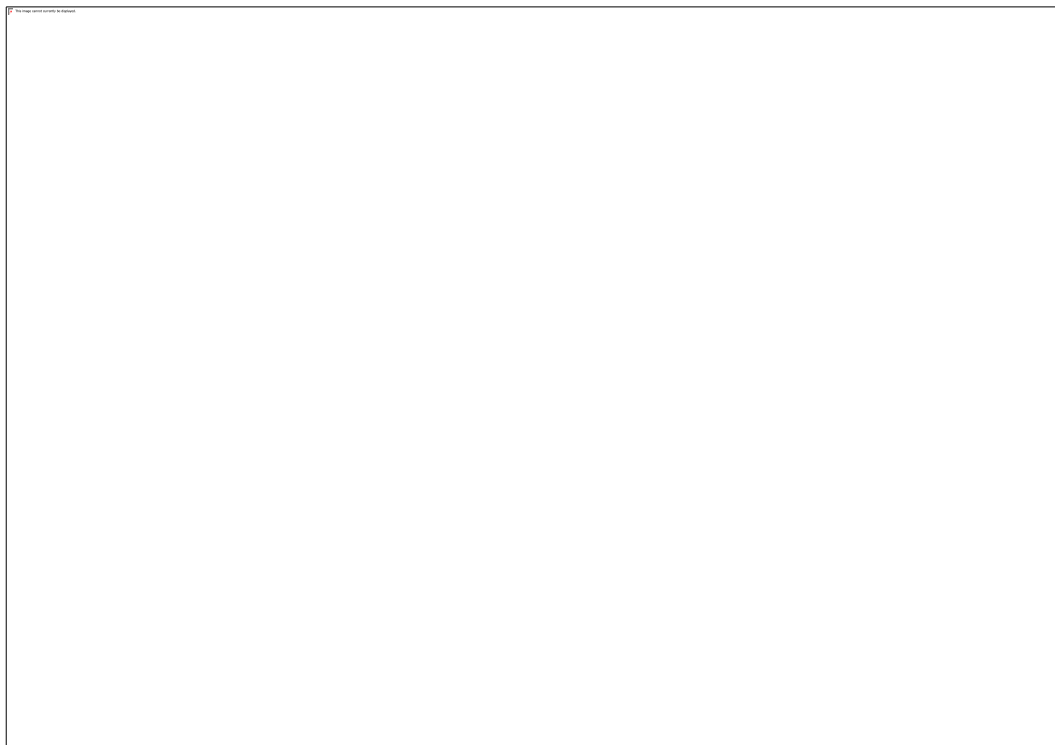
- 6.2. The following indicators have been highlighted for consideration

7. Briefing information

- 7.1 Cheshire East Council were responsible for 557 cared for children at the end of quarter 3. The cared for children population changes daily as children enter and leave care. Children cease to be cared for due to several reasons, these include turning 18, returning to their birth family, adoption, and special guardianship. The latest comparable data we have across the region shows that Cheshire East's rate is slightly above the national average of 67 per 10,000 and is above that of our statistical neighbours. Comparator data relates to 21/22 and so is not an up-to-date reflection of the national or statistical neighbour data.

- 7.2 Much of the increase in cared for children relates to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) becoming cared for. In Q2 we had 34 UASC in Cheshire East, in Q3 this rose to 56. We have seen an increase in young people who have been placed in hotels by the Home Office, who subsequently challenge their age and are then accommodated if they are assessed as being under 18. We know that regionally as a local authority, we are the 3rd highest in terms of our UASC numbers. We are constantly monitoring the numbers of cared for children and looking at ways to ensure that we are reviewing plans for children to achieve permanence at the earliest opportunity. Positively, the number of children where care orders have been discharged is increasing; so far this year (13 February 2023) we have discharged care orders for 17 children and there are several applications currently before the court so we are hopeful that this number will increase. Overall last year, we achieved 17 discharges of care orders and 7 the year before. The progress we are making represents a positive picture. We currently have 44 children placed with their parents on a care order, in Q1 we had 60 and in Q2 we had 54. This is consistent progress and demonstrates a commitment to not intervening in children's lives when this is not necessary.

- 7.3** The additional capacity through the commissioned managed service (7 social workers and a team manager) has also brought some short-term stability to the service. At the time of writing this report, the cared for service has 9.5 permanent social work vacancies out of an establishment of 24. This is an improving picture as within Q2 we had 12.5 permanent vacancies. Work is being undertaken with HR colleagues to consider how we retain our existing workforce and how we recruit experienced social workers. Below is a graph which shows how caseloads across the services are reducing. Within the cared for service, all vacancies are currently being covered by either the managed service or agency staff.



- 7.4** The timeliness of cared for children's reviews continues to be good, although this has dipped slightly to 82% in Q3, in Q2 this was at 93%. We know that most reviews were re-scheduled within a few days and were therefore only marginally out of timescale. There has been some sickness within the safeguarding service which has impacted upon timeliness, we have also seen an increase in our cared for children's numbers. Additionally, 92% of children were involved in their reviews. It is important that children and young people are involved in their plan, and we are always looking at how we can develop and improve their participation.
- 7.5** Q3 data shows a decrease in children placed with in-house foster carers (117 in Q3 compared to 130 in Q2). However, positively, the number of children placed with connected carers has increased from 99 in Q2 to 109

in Q3. This means that children are living with someone with someone they have an existing relationship with. There are plans in place to increase recruitment of foster carers, which will mean that we can place more of our children with Cheshire East foster carers. Generally, we want children to remain local and within Cheshire East where possible. For some children, they may live out of the area because they need a specialist placement, or they want to be close to birth family who have moved away. Arrangements for any child who lives at a distance are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure this remains appropriate.

- 7.6** We continue to work hard to reduce the number of children in residential care and this number does fluctuate due to the availability of foster placements and the needs of our children and young people. In Q2, the number of children living in residential care was 30, in Q3 this has increased to 36. We remain committed to ensuring that children have the opportunity of living within a family wherever possible. Currently we have 6% of our cared for children living in residential care, the national average is 10%. Currently, we have 3 children living in an unregistered placement. All 3 of these children are over 16. This is not our ambition for any of our children but is a result of pressures within the placement market. We are currently looking at how we can increase our in-house residential provision thus reducing the need to use unregistered provisions for our children and young people.
- 7.7** The number of adoptions continues to slowly increase with 11 children adopted so far this year and another 15 living in their adoption placements. Positively, we also have 3 children who are placed in foster to adopt placements. Of the 11 children legally adopted so far this year, unfortunately the number of days from entering care to moving into placement with an adoptive family is skewed by a small number of children where there has been delay. The time taken to achieve permanence is beneficial to the child however does impact negatively upon our figures. For example, one was 1,207 days, which will have impacted our average number of days for the 11 adoptions to date. Locally and nationally the timescales for placing children within their adoptive families is monitored to avoid unnecessary delay for children. Pre-pandemic Cheshire East were in a strong position in relation to timeliness, above the regional and national average. However, this has been significantly impacted because of the complexities involved in facilitating transitions and the impact of Covid-19. For those children where delay was experienced, their individual circumstances are well understood, and we continue to scrutinise planning to ensure that children do not experience unnecessary delay.
- 7.8** Placement stability for cared for children needs to improve. We know that due to a shortage of foster placements, some children experience several moves. A new head of service for Provider Services commenced

employment in January 2023 and is hoping to be in a position where she can develop the service to improve stability for children. We have also developed a permanence tracker which will assist in monitoring and driving forward children's plans.

- 7.9** The number of 16 to 18-year-old young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is low. We have a dedicated 16 plus advisor within the virtual school, and this reflects the proactive work to keep our young people in education or support them into employment and training.
- 7.10** The NEET data for our 19 to 21-year-old young people shows that 48% of this cohort are not engaged in education, employment, or training. The national average for 2020/21 was 38% with statistical neighbours being 37%. Comparative data for 22/23 is not available. However, in a recent meeting with Ofsted they confirmed that the national average for NEET exceeded 40%. We are looking closely at this data and the circumstances for these young adults which include pregnancy, parenting or illness, but are not exclusive to this. We know that our increasing population of UASC young people are not always able to access ESOL courses as many colleges are full. Our Virtual School are providing creative ways of ensuring that these young people are receiving an education whilst they await a college place. We have also developed a NEET challenge panel where we will consider what support we can provide to our young people on an individual basis.
- 7.11** The next NEET programme is currently being planned and it is anticipated that this will be well attended. This is a good way of engaging our young people and it is successful as a pathway to get young people involved in a range of activities and into education, employment, or training. The Virtual School are currently building a business case to seek funding to see if this course can be run on a continual basis rather than twice per year. This is in recognition that previous NEET programmes have seen real successes for our young people.
- 7.12** Most health assessments are being requested within 48 hours of children entering care (88% in Q3) this is an increase from 66% in Q2. 46% of newly cared for children have had their initial health assessment within 20 days in Q3. This has declined from 53% in Q2. We know that our increase of UASC cared for children has resulted in some delays because of additional complexities such as ensuring an interpreter is present. This data has been discussed with health colleagues to see what is causing delay so we can truly understand the full picture and manage this to ensure that the timeliness of health assessments for children improves. Positively 83% of

cared for children had a health assessment within the last 12 months, this is an improving picture.

7.13 Q3 data shows an increase in children seeing a dentist to 64% from 44% in Q2. We are working at how we capture this data as we believe these figures are not a true representation and hope to see further improvement in Q4. Where foster carers are struggling to find children a dentist, this issue is being escalated to health and a dentist will be identified. There is an identified pathway for escalation of such issues within Cheshire and Merseyside.

7.14 Q2 data shows that 97% of our care leavers are in appropriate accommodation. This is not 100% because we have a small number of young people who are in prison, and this is never recorded as being appropriate. This is currently less than five and as such the number is suppressed in line with DfE guidelines. Nationally the latest available data reported 95% of care leavers in suitable accommodation with 3% being in custody; the other main reasons for accommodation being classed as unsuitable is emergency accommodation or homelessness. We do not have any young people in emergency accommodation.

7.15 81% of care leavers have up-to-date pathway plans and 78% of care leavers had their plans reviewed within timescales. Pathway Plan reviews have now transferred to the safeguarding service to ensure that our care leavers have their pathway plans reviewed in a timelier way and to allow for external scrutiny. We have recently been working with Stockport and have engaged in some sector lead improvement work around our Care Leavers. This work has been beneficial, and we have implemented some ideas to ensure that our care leavers have the very best opportunities.

8. Consultation and Engagement

8.1. Not applicable.

9. Implications

10. Legal

10.1. There are no direct legal implications.

11. Finance

11.1 There are no direct financial implications or changes to the MTFs because of this briefing paper.

11.2 Policy

12.1 There are no direct policy implications.

12. Equality

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

13. Human Resources

14.1 There are no direct human resources implications.

14. Risk Management

15.1 There are risks associated with some performance measures, e.g. increases in demand and timeliness of services.

15. Rural Communities

16.1 There are no direct implications for rural communities.

16. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

17.1 Performance reports enable members to identify areas of good performance and areas for improvement in relation to children and young people, including cared for children.

17. Public Health

18.1 There are no direct implications for public health.

18. Climate Change

19.1 This report does not impact on climate change.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Annemarie Parker
Appendices:	Corporate Parenting Score Card Q3
Background Papers:	None