

Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting:	05 September 2023
Report Title:	Corporate Parenting Q1 score card 2023/24
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 1 of 2023-24 (1 April 2023 – 31 June 2023). The cared for children and care leavers committee is asked to note the performance for quarter 1 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 1 performance for children and families services for the relevant indicators for the reporting year of 2023-24

3. Recommendations

- 3.1.** The Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee is asked to:
- 3.2** note the performance of children's services for quarter 1.
- 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 1 of 2023-24 (1 April 2023 – 31 June 2023).
- 6.2. The following indicators have been highlighted for consideration

7. Briefing information

- 7.1 Cheshire East Council were responsible for 576 cared for children at the end of quarter 1. This is a decrease from 580 at the end of quarter 4. 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 70 per 10,000 and is above that of 60 for statistical neighbours.
- 7.2 Some of the increase in cared for children relates to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) becoming cared for. In Q4 we had 57 UASC in Cheshire East, in Q1 this decreased to 55. 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; in total during 2022/23 we discharged care orders for 20 children. This year we are continuing to make positive progress and the teams are working hard to ensure that where possible children have a plan of permanence where they do not remain Cared For unless this is absolutely necessary. We have several applications currently before the court so we are hopeful that this positive progress will continue. The progress we are making represents consistent progress and demonstrates a commitment to not intervening in children's lives when this is not necessary.

- 7.3** At the time of writing this report, the cared for service has 11 permanent social work vacancies out of an establishment of 24. These vacancies are filled with agency social workers. We are beginning to see applications from some agency staff to move to permanent positions within the authority. Locally and nationally social work recruitment is a challenge. In 2022, 5400 social workers left the profession, this is an increase of 9% from the previous year. Work is being undertaken with HR colleagues to consider how we retain our existing workforce and how we recruit experienced social workers. They are looking at neighbouring authorities to ensure that the Cheshire East offer is attractive and competitive. We are also increasing our workforce through additional 'grow your own' methods such as offering social work apprenticeships and student placements.
- 7.4** The timeliness of cared for children's reviews continues to be good, in Q4, this was at 73% and in Q1 this has improved to 83%. We know that most reviews were re-scheduled within a few days and were therefore only marginally out of timescale. 96% 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** Positively, Q1 data shows an increase in children placed with in-house foster carers (124 in Q1 compared to 122 in Q4). The number of children placed with connected carers remains relatively consistent. This means that children are living 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, however the number of children living in residential care is increasing. This is not because these children have been assessed as requiring residential care but because of the lack of available foster placements. In Q3, the number of children living in residential care was 43, in Q1 this has increased to 47. We remain committed to ensuring that children have the opportunity of living within a family wherever possible and continue to review children's placements to see if there are alternatives. 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 in the future. There are proposals to open 3 Cheshire East children's homes by the end of the year.

- 7.7** The Head of Service for Children's Provision which includes Fostering and Residential services chairs a weekly meeting- Triple S. This weekly panel provides scrutiny and oversight of children's placements, particularly those who are living in residential care.
- 7.8** The number of adoptions continues to slowly increase with 11 children adopted in 2022/23. So far this year we have 10 children adopted with another 19 children living in their adoption placements. This means that we are likely to significantly improve the number of children adopted this year compared to last year.
- 7.9** We continue to work hard to ensure that children have the benefits of placement stability. In Q1 this was at 71% which is a slight improvement from Q4 at 70%. 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 working to develop the service to improve stability for children. We have also developed a permanence tracker which is assisting in monitoring and driving forward children's plans.
- 7.10** Positively the number of children who live out of Borough is reducing. In Q1 this was at 248 compared to 257 in Q4. This number varies according to placement availability and matching but it is positive that more children are placed within Cheshire East.
- 7.11** 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.
- 7.12** The Q1 NEET data for our 19 to 21-year-old young people shows that 46% 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 yet 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. Within the Staying Close project there will also be a dedicated education worker, which will also greatly assist in terms of support our care leavers to access education and employment.

- 7.13** The NEET programme is underway and is being 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 funding from the DFE for Staying Close project will enable us to consider 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.
- 7.14** Q1 data shows that 79% of Cared For Children had a health assessment within the last 12 months. We have recently met with health colleagues to consider what we can do to ensure that this number improves and new systems with key points of contact have been agreed. We are hoping that the data now improves to demonstrate that Cared For children have an up-to-date health assessment.
- 7.15** Q1 data shows a decrease in children seeing a dentist from 70% in Q4 to 62% in Q1. We are working to try and look at how we capture this data as we believe these figures are not a true representation and hope to see further improvement in Q2. 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.
- 7.16** Q1 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 88% 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.
- 7.17** 69% of care leavers have up-to-date pathway plans and 77% 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 Q1
Background Papers:	None