

OPEN

## **Cared For Children and Care Leavers Committee**

**Date: 24 June 2025**

### **Cared for Children and Care Leavers Q4 scorecard 2024/25**

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**Report of: Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director of Children's Services**

**Report Reference No: CFC/01/25-26**

**Ward(s) Affected: All Wards**

**For Decision or Scrutiny: Scrutiny**

#### **Purpose of Report**

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

#### **Executive Summary**

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

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

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

## Background

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Consultation and Engagement**

- 5 Not applicable.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

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

## **Other Options Considered**

- 7 Not applicable.

## **Implications and Comments**

### *Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance*

- 8 There are no direct legal implications.

### *Section 151 Officer/Finance*

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

### *Human Resources*

- 10 There are no direct human resources implications.

### *Risk Management*

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

### *Impact on other Committees*

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

### *Policy*

- 13 There are no direct policy implications.

### *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

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

### *Other Implications*

- 15 There are no direct implications for rural communities.

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

#### *Consultation*

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

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