



Cheshire East

TOGETHER for Children and Young People

Together we will make Cheshire East a great place to be young



Cheshire East
Council

Cheshire East Council – Sufficiency Strategy 2025 Update August 2025

Over the past year, Cheshire East Council (CEC) has made careful and deliberate progress in implementing our 2024–2027 Sufficiency Strategy, with a clear focus on increasing local placement choice, improving stability, and delivering earlier, more sustainable interventions for children and families.

Progress Made

We have taken a proactive and strategic approach to addressing sufficiency challenges, particularly those affecting placement stability and access to the right provision at the right time. Among our most significant achievements this year:

- **Joining Foster4**

CEC joined the Foster4 collaborative, working closely with eight North West local authorities. This strategic move has given us access to a wider pool of potential carers, increased marketing reach, and enabled us to align our fostering offer with regional best practice. Early indications show an uplift in enquiries, and we're now focused on conversion and retention.

- **Two in-house children's homes opened**

We now operate two CEC-run residential homes. These two homes offer high-quality, stable care and have already reduced our reliance on out-of-borough placements for some of our most vulnerable children. The homes were commissioned in response to specific local need and provide therapeutic support alongside day-to-day care. Flude House is rated by Ofsted as Good in all areas and is at full occupancy, this home opened in May 2024. Cherry Tree House was registered in early June 2025 and has one child living there, with a further child planned to move in at the end of August, its first graded inspection visit is due around Christmas.

- **Expanded supported accommodation for 16–25**

Recognising the unique needs of care leavers and our increasing population of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), we have expanded our supported accommodation offer, including properties with tailored wraparound support. These services are vital in preparing young people for independence and preventing homelessness. We have contracted 10 new beds, 4 are emergency beds, 6 for our UASC children, with a further option of 1 emergency bed should we need this. It is also important to mention our new panel the 'Good Homes for All project' which was established to improve the support available to our Care Experienced Young People when they are ready to move into Independent living.

Since the inception of the Project Group we have:

- **Assigned two Designated Cheshire Homechoice Officers to work with Care Experienced Young People Leavers to ensure they understand the process and provide them with support to access social housing. The officers are the link between Housing and the new Children's Housing PA.**

- Developed a draft pathway, which outlines the start of the journey to independent living and the support which can be accessed through this journey, which both Housing and Childrens will follow.
- Undertook a workshop with Registered Housing Providers to work to develop a Housing Charter which outlines both Cheshire Easts and Registered Housing Providers commitments to support our Care Experienced Young People as they access social housing.
- Put in place additional support when moving into or living in independent living including:
 - Access to the Council's Handyperson services to assist with small jobs, putting up shelving, curtains, decorating.
 - Agreed the use of CEC staff volunteering days to support Care Leavers with moving and decorating.
 - Extending the Lifestyle benefits provided by Vivup to Care Leavers when they are ready to move into their homes and this will continue until they are 25
- Edge-of-care framework

Our framework of early support and edge-of-care providers has supported 46 families (approximately 90 young people) in the last year. The support has enabled families to remain together within their homes and in the community they were raised. Many of the young people have required specialised support for Children with Disabilities, which is an area within which we require more providers.

Examples include: supporting young people who have been open to Police and probation services with positive behaviour support and engagement in education, working with families who require support with routines, attending medical and care planning meetings and behaviour management.

As part of our children's transformation programme – Right Child Right Home – we are scoping an in house edge of care service, which will complement the work being done within the Families First implementation. This will offer a range of services tailored to different age needs such as adolescence and pre-school.

- Introduction of a Court Team

To ensure timely permanence planning, we launched a dedicated Court Team. The teams purpose is to streamline our legal casework and improved timescales for achieving permanence — particularly Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) and Adoption. There are signs of improved timeliness but there remains a significant capacity issue and need to stabilise the team to ensure progress is made more quickly.

- Adoption Counts partnership growth

Our partnership with Adoption Counts continues to go from strength to strength. Increased collaboration has led to improved family finding, more matches, and faster transitions for children in need of permanence (7 adoptions made 2024-2025), including supporting Foster for Adoption carers, of which 5 out of the 7 adoptions made in April 2024-March 2025 were carers supported as FFA carers, compared with only 2 the previous year.



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- Commissioning redesign in progress

We are establishing a Children's Commissioning function within the Directorate which will be responsible for all commissioning activity including placements commissioning. This will include quality assurance functions and provider relationship management. This is a direct response to market pressures and reflects our aim to be a more intelligent, proactive commissioner.

Areas for Continued Focus in 2025

Despite real progress, we acknowledge that several sufficiency priorities still require significant work. These include:

- Expanding our kinship care offer

We must strengthen our kinship support pathway, from early assessment and training to long-term support. This is a key pillar in reducing reliance on external placements and ensuring relational continuity for children. In order to achieve this we must support Family Group Conferencing (FGC) and Family Network meetings at the earliest opportunity.

- Growing our in-house foster carer base

While Foster4 has helped improve reach, we must convert this into more local households offering long-term, short-term, and specialist fostering, reducing our dependency on IFA provision.

- Reviewing residential capacity

We are reviewing our need for further residential growth particularly for solo placements and children with complex emotional and behavioural needs. This is in tandem with our review of specialist edge of care support so that our strategy is to prevent more children from entering our care and to successfully remain within their home communities where safe to do so. This may include the use of more shared care options or short breaks.

- Collaboration with regional markets

Through the Appropriate Places of Care (APoC) regional group, we're working to address cost inflation and inconsistent availability across the North West. We are supporting a proposed fixed uplift agreement with private providers to stabilise the market and improve forward planning.

- Post-18 accommodation strategy

We are strengthening partnerships with housing providers and adult services to develop a more coherent and affordable post-18 accommodation pathway. The aim is to ensure no young person leaves care without a clear and safe housing plan, which is the forefront of the 'Good Homes for All' agenda.



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The Way Forward

Our strategy is underpinned by a commitment to early help, permanence, and place-based care. We know that the closer our provision is to home, the better outcomes are for children. With dedicated investment and clear governance through our Improvement Board, we are confident in the next steps:

- Embedding a quality-assurance culture in commissioning to drive improvement and accountability across our provider base.
- Expanding our regional work to jointly plan capacity, increase leverage with providers, and prevent cost escalation.
- Embedding the plan for our Families First launch in March 2026, which will include a restructure of how our services operate to support children remaining with their families where possible.
- Further consideration of our post 18 offer, including options to work with local projects is needed.
- Continued growth of our in house foster offer through Foster4, as well as a full review of our Kinship offer.
- Review further in-house residential provision in line with edge of care development

We remain committed to delivering a responsive, ethical and financially sustainable placement strategy that reflects the individual needs of our children and young people, and we welcome continued collaboration and oversight from partners in delivering on that mission.