

Councillor Frontline Visits Form

Name of Councillor	Sarah Bennett-Wake
Date of visit	14/07/2025
Team visited	Cared for Children Team

Quality of practice
<p>Strengths:</p> <p>All staff are dedicated and passionate about working with children and young people. They are not just safeguarding children but enhancing their lives in the best possible way. Staff shared case studies of how their work and persistence in finding the right care and multi-agency support leads to positive outcomes for individuals.</p> <p>It was clear that the child's voice is at the centre of practice, as well as a core belief that impact is evidenced by happy, healthy young people who thrive and achieve according to their needs.</p> <p>A new court team has reduced some of the workload for social workers and caseloads are at a maximum of 21. This was felt as a positive move by all the team.</p> <p>The consistency of recording the child's voice has improved as everyone is using the same template. This was easier for managers to measure consistency for audits, supervision meeting and visits. This meant that managers have better oversight of the children and young people in our care.</p> <p>Social workers now prepare for supervision meetings with relevant information, making the process more efficient.</p> <p>It was evident that social workers not only receive support from their managers but also from other team members sharing best practice and expertise.</p> <p>Managers are curious and are keen on the development of their staff, sharing best practice and praise.</p>

Improvements have been made to the number of visits reaching 90% with plan completion at 94%.

Areas for development:

Work with frontline staff to develop workable paperwork and systems, for example a social worker expressed that the long-term matching form/process is too long compared with other councils such as Stoke.

Specific time for training, social workers felt they did not have time to attend lunchtime sessions.

More family workers are needed to provide contact time with parents and children throughout the court process. Social workers are still picking up some of these visits (although one social worker has chosen to keep her remaining court cases for continuity).

More sharing local knowledge of safe places for families to meet children out of school hours. Social workers sometimes find it difficult to find suitable venues to meet out of office/school hours.

More suitable, local foster carers required to meet the needs of children and young people, especially groups of siblings and those with specific additional needs. Although social workers understood there is a decline in foster carers nationally, they questioned the quality of some foster carers.

Personal Assistants need to be matched with care leavers earlier to encourage better transition. Social workers stated young people were worried who would look after them through transitional periods. Again, social workers felt they were picking up this work.

It was acknowledged by all that the team were still on journey with pathway plans.

Case summaries could be improved so that everyone could pick up a case if necessary.

The team expressed that other agencies did not always appear to understand the nature of their role and the needs to be more joined up working.

It was also acknowledged by managers that there needs to be more consistency across the board with practice and plans.

Experience of working for Cheshire East Council

Strengths:

There are a number of managers and social workers who had worked at the council for more than 10 years and had made progression in their careers, stepping up into management roles or taking part in apprenticeships or higher education. Staff were actively encouraged to do this.

Peer and management support was a strength with all members of staff expressing they felt supported and could go to a variety of team members with technical or personal issues sharing best practice.

Monthly meetings outside the office were seen as a positive.

Everyone's focus was on the needs of children and young people and despite the pressures everyone enjoyed their work getting the best outcomes for children and young people.

Managers and a newly qualified social worker I spoke to were extremely positive and had a clear view of the improvement journey and what counts as best practice.

Areas for development:

Staff felt their working environment could be improved by working in pods, or teams. There isn't enough room on the 7th floor of Delamare House to accommodate the whole team at the same time.

Many staff prefer to work from home even though the whole team recognised the benefits of working together.

Not all monitors work, the room is too hot, with not enough fans and a water cooler. (It was a particularly hot day when I visited.)

Meeting rooms are used by other workers in the building resulting in a regular lack of private space for supervision or safeguarding conversations. Both managers and social workers highlighted this as an issue. All staff felt they should have their own small private meeting room for confidential conversations.

Out of area placements meant that social workers work 50+ hours per week, completing many tasks at home in their own time. This also impacted on the milage they could claim for visits. More quality local foster carers are required.

Turnover of senior management meant that systems had changed frequently. Sickness and maternity leave had also impacted on the team's sense of security.

There seemed to be resentment towards agency staff who are perceived to get more pay for the same work, although it has been highlighted that these are experienced social workers.

Some social workers complained their pay was not always correct.

Social workers could not attend lunchtime training sessions due to lack of time – most said they didn't get enough time for lunch.

Some staff felt the tone of Cheshire East was funding and data driven rather children.

Overall, I felt like the team had been through the mill with a lot of changes in senior management, Ofsted, and office location and they valued the opportunity to express their concerns. More work needs to be done ensuring frontline staff have a suitable place to work together as a team with reassurance and praise that they are making progress and that their work and commitment is valued.

Perhaps there could be more formal peer mentoring as a positive training opportunity.

Issues to be escalated to Head of Service

Please provide any areas where you require a response from the Head of Service

How do we assess the quality of new foster carers?

Do we record travel time to out of area placements/visits? Is this paid back?

Please send this completed form within one week of the visit to childrensdevelopmentandpartnerships@cheshireeast.gov.uk