

March 2012 –December 2012



Care Leavers

"I hope to go to prison for Christmas for somewhere warm"

(former Cheshire East Care leaver)

Review

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1.0 Foreword



Councillor D Neilson – Chairman of the Task and Finish Group

- 1.1 Moving into adulthood and independence can be a daunting time for anyone. A number of social and economic changes in recent years have influenced the transitions that people make into independence with families having an increasing role in supporting children into adulthood by providing ongoing social, practical (financial) and emotional support. In contrast, care leavers are expected to make the transition from childhood to adult independence in one leap, assuming adult responsibilities at a much younger age than their peers. This is despite having to cope with a troubled upbringing and a myriad of disadvantages.
- 1.2 This presents the young person with a large amount of risk and for too long the gap between the outcomes of care leavers compared with their peers has been too wide. Whilst the risks are great, leaving care can also be seen as a time of great opportunity. *In loco parentis* the Council has the responsibility to ensure that the young people in its care are best equipped to take advantage of this opportunity and to do anything less would be a failure. It is clear after carrying out this review that the Council has made some important strides in improving outcomes for care leavers and it is hoped that the recommendations from this report will help the Council to continue to improve.
- 1.3 This report is the summary of discussions between Councillors with a genuine interest in the subject matter and I would like to thank Councillors Derek Bebbington, Brian Silvester, Gill Merry, Bill Livesley and Dennis Mahon for their time, diligence and hard work in shaping this report.
- 1.4 We commend this report to Cabinet.

2.0 Acknowledgements

- 2.1 The group Members would like to thank all the witnesses who gave evidence to the review. A full list of witnesses is given in the body of the report.
- 2.2 In particular, Members would like to thank the Children in Care Council for their invaluable contribution and the respective Council's at Ealing and Haringey for hosting site visits.
- 2.3 The scrutiny support was provided by Mark Grimshaw from Overview and Scrutiny. Many thanks to Mark for his help in putting together the evidence and formatting the report. The Group also thanks Denise French for finalising the review following Mark's departure from the Council.

Contents

Outline of Review	6
Methodology	6
Introduction	9
Journey to successful independence starts before leaving care	17
Is the Council structured and staffed adequately to deliver quality outcomes for care leavers?	20
Benefits	24
Employment, Education and Training	30
Housing	39
Reducing the Offending Rates of Cared for Children and Care Leavers	47
Conclusion	50
Recommendations	52
Bibliography	56
Appendix 1	57

3.0 Outline of Review

“To deliver the best for looked after children, the state must be a confident parent ...”¹

¹ ‘In Loco Parentis’ – Demos (2011)

3.1 Background

- 3.2 Following a previous Task and Finish Review which looked at Fostering in Cheshire East, a recommendation was made that –

“A Task and Finish Review be established to examine the 16 plus service for cared for children.”

As a result, the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee at a meeting on the 12 July 2011 agreed that a review which looked in more detail at how to improve the outcomes of some of the Borough’s most vulnerable young adults would be appropriate. Unfortunately due to resource issues, this review was deferred but recognising the importance of the work, the Committee resolved to reconvene the group in February 2012.

3.3 Membership

- 3.4 The Members of the Task and Finish Group were:

Councillor David Neilson (Chairman)
Councillor Brian Silvester
Councillor Dennis Mahon
Councillor Gill Merry
Councillor Derek Bebbington
Councillor Bill Livesley

3.5 Terms of Reference

- To examine the assessment, preparation and planning for leaving care
- To examine providing personal support for young people after leaving care (particularly in terms of housing)
- To examine the financial arrangements for care leavers
- To gain a comprehensive understanding of the current and historical outcomes for Cheshire East care leavers and the reasons underpinning these.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Witnesses:

Members met with the following people during the review:

- Julie Lewis – Principal Care for Children Manager
- James Treacy – 16+ Team Manager
- Liz Smith – Commissioning and Contracts Officer
- Jo Moss – Housing Options Team Leader

- Karen Bowdler – Senior Accountant
- Ben Whitter – Senior Organisational Development Officer
- Liz Rimmer – Benefits Manager
- Suzanne James – Operations Manager, Care4CE
- Sarah Webb – Resource Manager, Care4CE
- Trish Farrington – Operations Manager, Care4CE
- Phil Mellen – Head of the Virtual School
- Rt. Hon. Mr Edward Timpson MP
- Jacqui Evans – Head of Local Delivery/Independent Living Services
- Penelope Kay - Head of Cheshire Youth Offending Service
- Denise Stafford, Pathway Plan Coordinator
- Michelle McPherson, Independent Safeguarding Chair
- Nick Evans, Youth Engagement Manager – Cheshire Fire & Rescue
- David Lamb – Practice Consultant (16+ team)
- Leanne Hewer – Personal Advisor
- Andrew May – Personal Advisor
- Sandra Perry – Social Worker (16+ team)
- Debra Hall – Foster Carer
- Bryan Lowe – Foster Carer
- Children in Care Council

4.2 Timeline:

Date	Meeting / Site Visit
12 March 2012	Initial Scoping Meeting
16 April 2012	Background Information Session and finalising the Scoping Document <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Julie Lewis – Principal Care for Children Manager • James Treacy – 16+ Team Manager
3 May 2012	Further background information session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James Treacy – 16+ Team Manager
21 May 2012	Information on the 16+ budget and housing options for care leavers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James Treacy – 16+ Team Manager • Liz Smith – Commissioning and Contracts Officer • Jo Moss – Housing Options Team Leader • Karen Bowdler – Senior Accountant
18 June 2012	Information on employment outcomes, Welfare and the Shared Lives service. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ben Whitter – Senior Organisational Development Officer • Liz Rimmer – Benefits Manager • Suzanne James – Operations Manager, Care4CE
9 July 2012	Information on Re-ablement Services and educational outcomes for care leavers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sarah Webb – Resource Manager, Care4CE • Trish Farrington – Operations Manager, Care4CE • Phil Mellen – Head of the Virtual School

13 July 2012	Meeting with the Rt. Hon. Mr Edward Timpson MP
13 August 2012	Meeting with the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jacqui Evans – Head of Local Delivery/Independent Living Services • Penelope Kay - Head of Cheshire Youth Offending Service • Denise Stafford, Pathway Plan Coordinator • Michelle McPherson, Independent Safeguarding Chair • Nick Evans, Youth Engagement Manager – Cheshire Fire & Rescue • David Lamb – Practice Consultant (16+ team) • Leanne Hewer – Personal Advisor • Andrew May – Personal Advisor • Sandra Perry – Social Worker (16+ team) • Debra Hall – Foster Carer • Bryan Lowe – Foster Carer
27 September 2012	Meeting with the Children in Care Council
15 October 2012	Site visit to Ealing Council and Haringey Council
6 November 2012	Meeting to review draft
10 December 2012	Final review of draft
? January 2013	Submitted to Scrutiny Committee/PDG

5.0 Introduction

5.1 Children in the care of a local authority are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. The majority of children in care have suffered abuse or neglect and at any one time around 60,000 children are cared for in England. Unfortunately, this is a trend which continues to be on an upward curve with cases becoming ever more complex and resource intensive.

5.2 It is for these reasons that the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee has made Cared for Children a priority when commissioning task and finish reviews. This began with the review into Residential Placements and continued with an in-depth exploration into the fostering service. Part of this review touched upon care leavers; investigating whether the Council was doing all it could to help young people make a successful transition into adulthood. In the process of this review, the Group came across some disconcerting facts about care leavers in the UK²:

- Young care leavers show significantly lower academic achievement than their peers – just 11 per cent of children in care gain five GCSEs compared to the national average of over 60 per cent.
- Care leavers are more likely to be unemployed, to become homeless and to spend time in prison.
- One in seven young women leaving care are pregnant or already mothers.

5.3 The Group also spoke to the Children in Care Council and it became clear that for many young people, leaving care can be a daunting and confusing time. As these young people are the responsibility of the Council as ‘corporate parents’ the review recommended that a further Task Group be established. The aim of such a review would be to explore in more detail how best to help care leavers to make a successful and adjusted transition from care into independent living and wherever possible, financial independence; an outcome that any parent would want for their child.

5.4 Prior to starting the research process it was deemed vital that the Group fully understood the situation and context with regards to Care Leavers in Cheshire East. Indeed, it was felt important that the Group had a good understanding of the following issues:

- Defining a Care Leaver
- Policy and Legislative Framework for Care Leavers
- Number of Care Leavers in Cheshire East (and their outcomes?)
- How the team supporting Care Leavers is structured
- The budget that is available for supporting Care Leavers

² http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/our_projects/leaving_care.htm

5.5 Defining a Care Leaver

- 5.6 Whilst scoping the review a discussion was held within the Group with regards to the remit of the report. It was suggested that some children/young people not only left care because they had reached a certain age but for other reasons too – such as being adopted or returning home. Having considered this point, it was agreed to maintain a focus on care leavers as defined by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, in order to prevent the review from overreaching. With this in mind, ‘Care Leavers’ in respect of this report can be defined as follows:

A young person between the ages of 16-18 who is leaving the care system having spent at least three months (continuously or in aggregate since the age of 14) being looked after by the local authority. This includes disabled young people but excludes those disabled young people who live permanently with their parents and have regular respite within the care system away from home.

5.7 Policy and Legislative Framework

- 5.8 When embarking on this review, the Group was informed that Local Authorities have clear legal responsibilities towards the support of care leavers.
- 5.9 The Children Act 1989 provides the general legal framework for meeting the needs of children in care and young people leaving care. Since its implementation two further Acts have been introduced, which build on the duties laid out in the Children Act. These are the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Children and Young Person’s Act 2008, which have further extended the duties of local authorities to young people in care and care leavers.
- 5.10 The main purpose of the Children (Leaving Care) Act is to improve the life chances of children and young people leaving local authority care by:
- Delaying their discharge from care until they are prepared and ready to leave;
 - Improving the assessment, preparation and planning for leaving care;
 - Providing better personal support for children and young people after leaving care;
 - Improving the financial arrangements for care leavers.

This Act defines those young people entitled to receive care leaving support into three categories:

'Eligible'	Defined in paragraph 19B of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989, and regulation 40 of the Care Planning Regulations as a child who is: (a) looked after, (b) aged 16 or 17, and (c) has been looked after by a local authority for a period of 13 weeks, or periods amounting in total to 13 weeks, which began after he reached 14 and ended after he reached 16.
'Relevant'	Defined in section 23A(2) of the Children Act 1989 as a child who is: (a) not looked after, (b) aged 16 or 17, and (c) was, before he last ceased to be looked after, an eligible child.
'Former Relevant'	Defined in section 23C(1) of the Children Act 1989 as a young person who is: (a) aged 18 or above, and either (b) has been a relevant child and would be one if he were under 18, or (c) immediately before he ceased to be looked after at age 18, was an eligible child.

5.11 'Eligible', 'relevant' or 'former relevant' - however put, care leavers are simply those who have been in the care of the local authority for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 spanning their 16th birthday. The Council is expected to retain a level of responsibility for care leavers until the age of 21, or 25 if they are in full time education.

5.13 The Act gives duties to local authorities in terms of carrying out assessments before leaving care, preparing what is known as a 'pathway plan' by the time that young person is 16, ensuring financial support is in place, allocating a personal advisor and arranging accommodation:

5.14 The Pathway Plan

5.15 Around the age of 15 years, 9 months an assessment is carried out which leads to the preparation of a Pathway Plan which should be in place 3 months after the 16th birthday. At this time a 'personal advisor' is appointed to provide advice and counselling – acting as an advocate for the young person.

5.16 The plan is expected to focus on how the young person's need for support and assistance will be met until the age of 21 (or longer when the young person is in education or training). It should set out the manner in which the Council proposes to meet the needs of the care leaver and the date by which, and by whom, any action required to implement any aspect of the plan will be carried out.

5.17 The young person should be fully involved in the development of the Pathway Plan. It is their plan and they receive copies of the plan and the subsequent reviews. It is expected practice for the Pathway Plan to be

drafted and available for consideration by the statutory review meeting, chaired by the young person's Independent Safeguarding Chair (ICS), which must take place before making a decision to confirm that a young person is ready to leave care. Pathway Plans usually cover the following areas:

- Accommodation
- Practical Life / Independent Living Skills
- Education and training
- Employment
- Health
- Financial Support / Budgeting
- Specific Support needs
- Contingency planning for support if independent living breaks down

5.18 A Young Person's pathway plan must remain a 'live document', setting out the different services required to meet the full range of the child's needs. In order for each pathway plan to be effective it should be based on an up to date needs assessment, setting out the support that will be offered to achieve their aspirations.

5.19 Personal Advisors

5.20 Local authorities must appoint a personal advisor to each young person covered by the Act. This statutory requirement emphasises the importance of the role and reflects the belief that children and young people leaving care should be able to identify someone committed to their well-being and continuing development on a long-term basis. The Personal Advisor does not have to be social work qualified and should be independent of the responsible social worker. Key Functions:

- To provide advice (including practical advice) and support;
- To participate in the assessment and preparation of the Pathway Plan;
- To participate in the review of the Pathway Plan;
- To liaise with the responsible authority in the implementation of the Pathway Plan;
- To co-ordinate the provision of services and to take reasonable steps to ensure that the child or young person makes use of such services;
- To keep informed about the child or young person's progress and well-being;
- To keep written records of contact with the child or young person;
- To maintain regular contact with the young person

5.21 Financial Support and Claiming Benefits

5.22 The Act requires authorities to provide financial support. As 16/17 year old care leavers are not be able to claim benefits, the Council is their primary source of income. Financial support will include the cost of:

- Accommodation
- Income Maintenance
- Transport costs for education and training
- Clothing
- Childcare costs

5.23 The support is co-ordinated by the young person's social worker and Personal Advisor until the age of 18 when the Personal Advisor takes sole responsibility. One of the responsibilities of the Personal Advisor is to ensure that those who leave care at 18 and are entitled to claim benefits received their full entitlement. However the Council must assist with the expenses associated with education, employment and training.

5.24 Accommodation

5.25 The Act requires that 16/17 year old relevant children are provided with or maintained in suitable accommodation, and given support to sustain their tenancy.

5.26 There is no duty for social services to provide accommodation to a care leaver once they reach 18, unless the young person is in full time higher or residential further education. In which case social services must provide accommodation during vacations or pay the young person enough to secure such accommodation. This duty remains until the care leaver's 25th birthday.

5.27 **Numbers of Care Leavers and Outcomes**

5.28 In order to make any robust recommendations on care leavers' policy, the Group felt it was important to gain an understanding of the numbers of Care Leavers (16+) in Cheshire East:

Potentially Eligible	3
Eligible	60
Relevant	7
Former Relevant	135
Total	205

***At September 2012.**

(see paragraph 5.10 above for definitions)

5.29 The structure of the team supporting Care Leavers is structured as follows:

UNIT ONE, BASED IN THE HUB IN CREWE.

Staffing is ; one Practice Consultant, 37 hours; three social workers, two 37 hrs , one 30 hours.

Three Personal advisors; one 37 hours, two 30 hours.

One Unit Coordinator, 37 hours

UNIT TWO, BASED IN BRADSHAW HOUSE, CONGLETON.

Staffing is; one Practice Consultant, 37 hours; two social workers, 37 hours; six Personal Advisors, three 37 hours, one 15 hours, one 30 hours and one 18.5 hours. One Unit Coordinator, 30 hours.

5.30 The budget that is available for supporting Care Leavers

Analysis of the 2012/13 Budget
(those in post in parentheses)

16 Plus Team			
	FTE	Grade	£
Practice Consultants	2	11	
Social Workers	2.81(2.5)	9	
Social Workers	2(2.5)	8	
Care Leaving Personal Advisors	8(6.6)	7	
Unit Coordinators	2	4	
			555,547
Travel @ 200/FTE/month	15		34,560
Total Budget			590,107
16+ Allowances			393,600
16+ Placements			2,112,000
Total 2012/13 Budget			3,095,707

5.31 A Senior Accountant from the Children's Directorate attended one of the Group's meetings to provide some background information to the 16+ team budget. It was noted that at that point in time (21 May 2012) the service had already overspent on the £2,112,000 16+ placements budget by allocating

£2,450,775 for 2012/13 (overspend of £338,775). This overspend, it was explained, is illustrative of the pressure that the 16+ budget is under.

5.32 Summary

5.33 Following gathering this background information, the Group designed a wide-ranging and comprehensive research programme which attempted to cover all of the stakeholders relevant to improving outcomes for Care Leavers. After this process, the Group's findings fell naturally into the following main themes:

- **Journey to successful independence starts before leaving care**
- **Whether the 16+ service and the wider Council structured and staffed adequately to deliver quality outcomes for care leavers?**
- **Benefits**
- **Employment, Education and Training**
- **Housing**
- **Reducing offending**

5.34 At this point, it is important to make clear that in conducting the research, the Group found a number of instances of good practice. It is apparent that the guidance set out in the legislation is largely being adhered to and indeed, in some instances, Cheshire East is leading the way in good practice and innovation. However, as with all services, there is always room for improvement. One striking finding in this review was that there are a number of services across the Council not currently being utilised for the benefit of care leavers that could really make a difference in helping them to adjust to life outside of care. One of the outcomes that the Group hopes this report will produce is to join up services so that the Council is truly working to its maximum capacity as a corporate parent.

6.0 Journey to successful independence starts before leaving care

“It’s good when people stay through the system with you (having the same social worker or at least having contact with the same social worker throughout)”³
Care Leaver

³ ‘After care: Young People’s views on leaving care’ Reported by the Children’s Rights Director for England – Ofsted (2012)

- 6.1 Whilst the main focus of this review is on those young people who have left care or are getting ready to leave care and the services that support this process, it is clear that work to better prepare young people at an earlier stage would improve the transition to independent living. According to Emily Munro⁴, Assistant Director at the Centre for Child and Family Research at Loughborough University, poor outcomes for care leavers is not just a reflection of leaving care services but the experience of young people and the service whilst in care, whether in foster care or residential care.
- 6.2 One of the common themes to emerge from this review, and in particular following the evidence gathered from foster carers, is the view that the preparation for life after care needs to begin at an earlier stage. It appears that it is not unusual for the preparation process only to begin properly once the young person reaches 16 as they engage with the pathway plan process. As some of the Council's young people leave care at 16 (and most at 18), the Group feels that this leaves insufficient time to fully prepare a young person for adulthood.
- 6.3 This was in contrast to the situation in Ealing Council, which the Group heard about on a site visit held on 15 October 2012. They described how they began the conversation about leaving care with the young person at 15. This avoided beginning the process at 16 as this was deemed a difficult time with commitments to exams. It was also made clear to the young person that they would not be expected to fully leave care until they were 21 (or 24 if in education). They asserted that by extending the amount of time that the young person was in 'preparation' for leaving care, this had improved their outcomes for care leavers considerably.
- 6.4 Placement stability
- 6.5 Understanding what factors help a young person make a successful transition into adulthood once they have left care is a complex and multifaceted area. It is likely that it is a mix of the attributes and characteristics of the young person themselves; their family relationships; and the characteristics of their wider social environment. It is important to remember why young people come into care in the first place. Many of them will have experienced familial abuse and most if not all, to varying degrees, will have experienced some form of rejection, disruption and loss in their lives.
- 6.6 In this context, the most fundamental requirement from care for these young people will be for stability in their lives. Stability is the foundation stone. Young people who experience stable placements providing good quality care are more likely to succeed educationally, be in work, settle in and manage their accommodation after leaving care, feel better about themselves and

⁴ <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/ccfr/Publications/R2BCared4%20research%20report.pdf>

achieve satisfactory social integration in adulthood than young people who have experienced further movement and disruption during their time in care⁵

- 6.7 Whilst the issue of placement stability was not within the remit of this review, the Group would wish to reiterate the importance of this within Cared for Children policy.
- 6.8 The Group was made aware that occasionally young people change their social worker at 16. This is after the views of the young person, foster carer and Independent Reviewing officer are taken into consideration but the Group would strongly suggest that all attempts be made to delay this change until after the young person has finished their exams and that a smooth transition between social workers is aspired to. This would hopefully help the young person to retain stability at a challenging stage in their life.
- 6.9 Effective Pathway Planning
- 6.10 A pathway plan is a vital document for care leavers as it effectively acts as a roadmap for the young person's life after care. It is meant to capture the needs and aspirations of the young person and detail operational objectives so that care leavers can identify the steps that they need to take (and the help available) in order to achieve their goals.
- 6.11 This is an important process. Most young people in and leaving care do not have the benefit of parental support to guide them. For these young people, the local authority should be fulfilling the parental role, and providing for the young person as if it were the natural parent. Many young people leave care without the support to which they are entitled, unable to find suitable housing, education and employment. If pathway plans are as detailed as they should be, then the young person will, at the very least, be able to identify the steps that they need to take in order to achieve their goals. They will have named people to turn to, people who are able to help them to complete application forms, and are aware of the different support providers available and can arrange access to them. The difference to a young person between having no pathway plan or a bad pathway plan, to having a lawful, detailed plan, is enormous and, as was recently made apparent from the reported story of the death of care leaver, Andrea Adams, the lack of support and planning can lead to tragic consequences⁶.
- 6.12 The Group was pleased to discover that the Council has some robust processes in place for ensuring that lawful and detailed plans are implemented for the Borough's care leavers. After speaking to both the Pathway Plan Coordinator and the Independent Safeguarding Chair, the Group was informed that a new process had been implemented for the

⁵ Barn et al., 2005; Biehal et al., 1995; Dumaret et al., 1997; Jackson, 2002

⁶ The Guardian, Thursday 8 July 2010 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/jul/08/andrea-adams-care-leaver-death-inquest>

drafting of the Plan. Indeed, responsibility for writing the plan had moved to the Personal Advisor with the Pathway Plan Co-ordinator having a reviewing role.

- 6.13 It is also clear that Pathway Plan Co-ordinator and Independent Safeguarding Chair have an important role in ensuring that the Pathway Plans are of sufficient quality and that all young people who are entitled to a Plan have one. The Group was informed that there was currently 200 care leavers aged 16-25. Of these only 6 did not have a pathway plan and this was due to the fact that they had just entered the service past their 16th birthday.
- 6.14 Regular conversations are also held between the Pathway Plan Co-ordinator/Independent Safeguarding Chair with both Senior Management Team and the Personal Advisors. This enables a good flow of information throughout the service on how to make improvements to the Pathway Plan process.
- 6.15 Whilst it is clear that a lot of progress has been made around the Pathway Plan process, the Group has concluded that a number of improvements could be made. Firstly, it is the general consensus of the Group that the new format for the Pathway Plan did not go far enough to present the content in a 'user friendly' and logical way, making use of plain English. The Group understands that the service is somewhat limited in how it formats the plan due to legislative requirements but more work could be done to think about how the young person would like to use the document and to ensure that they were meaningful to them. Indeed, the Children in care Council expressed that they felt the Pathway Plans were written to meet the Council's own system rather than for them.
- 6.16 It is therefore important to ensure that young people are engaged in the Pathway Plan and the leaving care process in general. Whilst all staff involved with young people in care work to engage them in the leaving care process, it is suggested that the Council follow the example of Haringey Council and look to employ a participation officer (or extend an existing role) to pull this work together in a co-ordinated way.
- 6.17 After speaking to foster carers it is also clear that they feel detached from the Pathway Plan process. As foster carers often understand the characteristics, strengths and limitations of the young person better than any other professional it is felt that they should have an increased role in the writing of the plan.

7.0 Is the Council structured and staffed adequately to deliver quality outcomes for care leavers?

- 7.1 In the process of gathering evidence for this review, the Group visited two local authorities in London (Ealing and Haringey) after they had been identified by Edward Timpson MP as being good examples of producing quality outcomes for Care Leavers.
- 7.2 The most striking finding from both of these visits was how coherent each Council was in their approach to improving outcomes for Care Leavers. Using the example of Ealing, they had recognised a number of problems with their care leaver's service in the late 1990's and as a result they had undertaken a number of initiatives driven forward by strong political leadership. An articulation of this was the formation of a Corporate Parenting Committee, chaired by the Leader of the Council, which aimed to ensure that all elements of the Council took consideration of their corporate parenting responsibilities.
- 7.3 When asked what the main factor behind their success was, the officers at Ealing Council identified that having a central base from which a multi-disciplinary team operated from had been vitally important. This central base was known as the Horizons Centre, opened in 2007, which provides a site for both the young people (recreational room, education/study rooms and a trainer kitchen) and for a broad range of teams. This includes Youth Workers, the Semi Independent Outreach Team, Virtual School, Connexions Workers and the Looked after Children Nurse. They explained that the Horizons Centre had helped to engender good working relationships not only between the various teams but also with the young people. Everyone there appeared united behind the same ethos and working towards the same goal – producing quality outcomes for care leavers.
- 7.4 The Group would like to make a recommendation that the Council attempt to replicate the Ealing model. However, since Cheshire East is a largely rural borough without one central urban area, it would be challenging to replicate the Ealing model. As a result, it would be unrealistic to have a central base for the Council. Having said this, there are some important lessons that can be taken from the Ealing example:
- That strong political leadership is required to ensure that all areas of the Council are adhering to their Corporate Parenting responsibilities. In addition to the Cabinet Members role as lead corporate parent, it is suggested that a non-executive Councillor, with no Chairmanship duties, be appointed as a 'Cared for Children' champion to liaise with Cared for children and to provide independent challenge to the Council to drive through the corporate parenting agenda.

- That it is ensured that strong, tangible and demonstrable working relationships are in place for all teams involved in working to improve outcomes for Cared for Children.
- That opportunities be provided for Cared for Children/Care Leavers to engage directly and informally with officers so that positive relationships can be established. Ideally, small bases would be established in the North and in the South of the Borough which would have kitchen facilities and access to Personal Advisors/Youth Support staff/Careers advice. This has already occurred to some extent in Crewe with the formation of the hub which has successfully joined services together from the Youth Support Team, 16+ team and Forum Housing. Remote access to these teams could also be made available to young people by utilising Skype facilities.

- 7.5 Another key finding from our visits was the importance that they place on the relationship between the personal advisor and the young person. The care leavers from Haringey that presented to the Group noted how they often saw their personal advisor every week and how they were the one person that the young person went to first if they had any issues. Haringey Council also had a policy which stated that a Personal Advisor needed to visit the young person no less than at the minimum intervals (2 months).
- 7.6 This was in contrast to the evidence heard at the Children in Care Council. A number of the young people stated that they had had a poor experience with their Personal Advisor. This was mainly as a result of communication issues e.g. not answering queries or dealing with administration promptly and turning up to a flat without an appointment. When the young people were asked who had the most helpful person to them as they moved out of care, they identified the floating support workers from the housing associations.
- 7.7 The Group believes there are two issues behind this. Firstly, it is clear that Personal Advisors have high case loads (average 27) which are affecting their ability to provide sufficient attention to each young person. This high number is exacerbated by the fact that Personal Advisors have to travel considerable distances to meet with young people, not only throughout the Borough but also to external locations. As the role of Personal Advisor is of paramount importance in ensuring that quality outcomes for care leavers are achieved, the Group would strongly suggest that the Council explore recruiting more Personal Advisors. Creating hubs and utilising technology such as Skype as suggested above could also have the effect of reducing the travel time of Personal Advisors.
- 7.8 Secondly, it is important to ensure that personal advisors are provided with sufficient training so that there is a consistency of service across the team.
- 7.9 Whilst not in the remit of this review, it is important to note that strengthening the 'front door' for social care referrals would reduce the

number of children entering the care system and as a result this would reduce the pressure on the Personal Advisor case loads.

- 7.10 It was also brought to the Group's attention that there are a number of young people with disabilities leaving care that require the support of a Personal Advisor. This is an issue as Personal Advisors are not trained for such cases and therefore it is suggested that the Council recruit a specialist Personal Advisor who is qualified to work with disabled young people.

8.0 Benefits

“You don’t know
if you are even
receiving the
right benefit”.
Care leaver⁷

⁷ Morgan R., Lindsay, M. (2006) Young People’s Views on Leaving Care: What young people in, and formerly in, residential and foster care think about leaving care, A Children’s Rights Director Report, February 2006, p.13 and 27

- 8.1 Whilst it would be ideal if care leavers never had to access the benefits system, the reality is that most young people leaving care will have to engage with it at some point. Indeed, it is vital that care leavers have a good understanding of the system and their various entitlements so that they do not unnecessarily incur further disadvantages. It is also essential for the Council to ensure that care leavers fully maximise their income from benefits in order to reduce pressure on an already stretched 16+ team budget (see p. 14)
- 8.2 A small example of how the Council could save money is to follow the example of Haringey Council who have worked with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to enable care leavers to register for social housing at 17 ½ rather than at 18. This means that the young person's housing benefit has been processed and is ready to access when they reach 18. In Cheshire East, the Council continues to pay the young person a maintenance allowance until 4/5 weeks after their 18th birthday whilst the benefits application is processed. The young person is then able to claim the money back from the DWP but the Council is unable to claim any money back. It is therefore suggested that the Council ensure that consistency is achieved from the DWP with Cheshire East being allowed the same privileges. By adopting such a practice, the pressure on the Pathway Plan process will also be reduced.
- 8.3 It is important to state however, that whilst the Council must make young people aware of what they are entitled to and what is available to them, a dependency on benefits should not be created nor encouraged. What needs to be made clear is the idea that benefits are there to support the individual as they move through a transitional stage but this is a stage that they always should strive to move on from.
- 8.4 The Group interviewed the Council's Benefits Manager, with regards to welfare reform and the potential impact that this might have on care leavers.
- 8.5 *Care Leavers and Housing Benefit*
- 8.6 The Group was informed that formerly, under the Housing Benefit rules, single claimants under 25 were expected to live in shared accommodation (own bedroom, communal kitchen/bathroom e.g. bedsit) when renting in the private sector. Care Leavers were exempt from this until the age of 22 and could claim Housing Benefit up to the level of self-contained accommodation. There is no such restriction if renting in the social sector, although Housing Benefit could be restricted still if the person is over-accommodated or in expensive accommodation.

Definition of Single Room

The SRR reflects the cost of very basic accommodation. In making a determination the rent officer will consider if the tenant

- has exclusive use of one bedroom
- does not have the use of any other bedroom, and
- has shared use of
 - a living room
 - a bathroom and toilet
 - a kitchen, without the exclusive use of cooking facilities

Exempt from the shared accommodation

Young people under 22 years old and previously

- subject to a care order under Section 31(1)(a) of the Children Act 1989 made either after they were 16 years old, or before they were 16 years old and which remains in force once they reach age 16. Note: This exclusion does not apply to a young person who was subject to a supervision order under Section 31(1)(b)
- accommodated by an authority under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. The young person does not have to have been housed in LA owned or run property – they only need to have been provided with their accommodation by the LA under this section of the Children Act
- subject to a supervision requirement ended by a children’s hearing under Section 70 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 which was made in respect of them and which continues after reaching 16 years old. Note: This exemption does not apply where the sole condition for the need for compulsory measures of supervision was that the child had committed an offence or the supervision requirement meant that they had to reside with a parent or guardian, or with a friend or relative of their parent or guardian
- accommodated by an LA under Section 25 of the 1995 Act when they were 16 or 17 years old

8.7 From January 2012, the shared accommodation rate was extended to single claimants aged **under 35**. As care leavers are often placed in self-contained accommodation they now face a large reduction in their Housing Benefit from the ages of 22-35 rather than between the ages of 22-25.

8.8 The Group was also informed of the recent changes to housing benefit and in particular the levels of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) payable to the private Rented Sector. From April 2011 the level of LHA was reduced from the median levels in the area to the 30th percentile. Whilst some protection was provided to existing claimants, it had reduced the number of affordable properties from 5 in 10 to 3 in 10 thereby placing extra pressure on care leavers.

8.9 Due to fluctuations in the private rented market the impact varies on the area as illustrated below:

Example rates from April 2010 (£)

Weekly figures

BRMA	1 bed shared	1 bed self-contained
East Cheshire	78.94	97.81
West Cheshire	65.00	104.71
South Cheshire	55.69	90.00
South Manchester	63.50	103.56
Staffordshire North	54.60	80.55

Example rates from April 2012 (£)

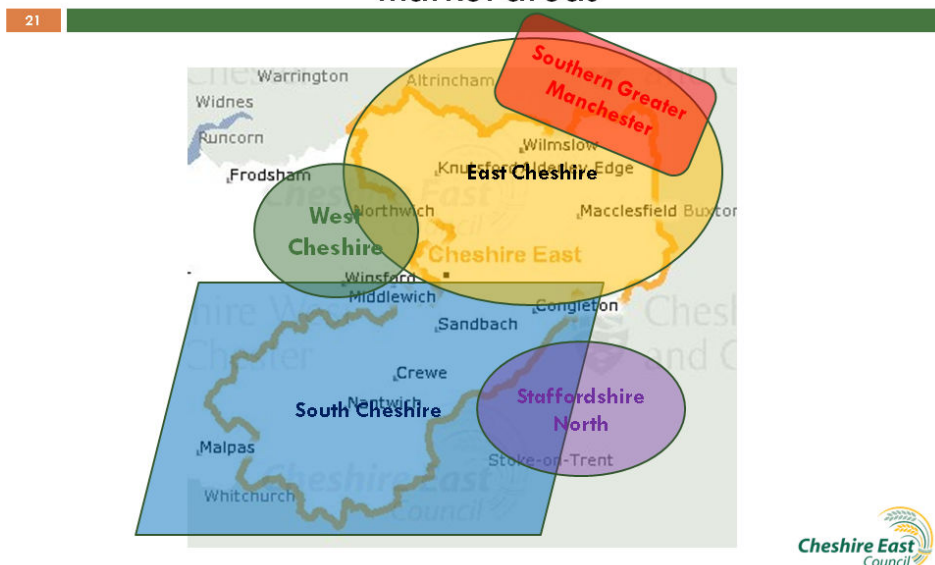
Weekly figures

BRMA	1 bed shared	1 bed self-contained
East Cheshire	80.77	102.69
West Cheshire	62.31	101.54
South Cheshire	52.00	80.77
South Manchester	59.08	98.08
Staffordshire North	47.06	78.46

*BRMA – Broad Rental Market Areas

Rough guide as to where each area is:

Local Housing Allowance – broad rental market areas



8.10 Universal Benefit changes

8.11 The Group was informed that a number of benefit streams (Income support, Job Seekers Allowance IB, Employment and Support Allowance IR, Tax credits and housing benefit) were being brought under one umbrella payment. This would be known as the Universal Credit.

8.12 The Universal Credit is due to be implemented in October 2013 for new out of work claims, with it being applied to new in work claimants from April 2014. It is expected that all people will be under the new benefit system by

2017. It was confirmed by the Benefits Manager that whilst no one would lose out in terms of the total amount of money received by getting a Universal Credit, it would provide less clarity on how much money should be spent on certain goods. For instance, by receiving benefits in one lump sum, there will be no direction on what proportion should be spent on housing rent or other goods. The Group feel that this could potentially create budgeting and debt management issues, particularly for care leavers who may have little to no experience of managing a budget.

- 8.13 The Group queried therefore whether there would be any exceptions to those receiving the universal credit. The Benefits Manager reported that whilst there is no current legislation for exemptions, Councils might be able to pay landlords directly for vulnerable people. Indeed, it was noted that this currently occurred under a Council safeguarding policy for those people who had been referred by a professional as being unable to manage their own budget. It was also added that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) were looking at setting up 'jam jar' accounts which would split up individual's budgets under a single account.

8.14 *Summary*

- 8.15 Benefits and welfare are tricky issues to navigate not only for Council staff but for the young people whose quality of life could depend on them. The forthcoming welfare reforms create further challenges but is vital that the Council gets it right in order to help young people leaving care to make a positive start to their adult life.
- 8.16 The Group firmly believes that benefits should be a means to independent living and not an end in itself.
- 8.17 The following are some suggestions that the Group believes would help care leavers to maximise their income from benefits and manage their budgets most effectively:

- **Guidance on entitlements for young people and workers**

Easy to read and accessible guidance explaining the benefits entitlements of care leavers and current employability schemes offered under New Deal and Flexible New Deal should be developed with the support of the DWP and distributed to care leavers, leaving care teams, benefit and Jobcentre plus offices. This would provide a reference point for care leavers, leaving care services and jobcentre plus workers and would address the confusion that currently exists within the system.

- **Specialist training for personal advisors on care leaver's entitlements and need**

As part of their extended role, personal advisers taking on the responsibility for dealing with care leavers should be trained on care leavers specific benefits entitlements and needs.

- **Employing a funding co-ordinator**

The individual appointed would have a strategic and practical lead in maximising income for children and adults coming through social care and health systems, including GPs and hospitals.

- **That the Council explore paying landlords directly for those care leavers who are deemed unable to manage their budget.**

During our visit to Haringey Council, the Group was informed that their Welfare Benefits Officer completed the application form for Housing and Council tax benefit with the individual rather than by doing it over the phone. This meant that the money went directly to the provider than to the young person.

- **That the Council encourage the Department for Work and Pensions to enable 'jam jar' accounts for Universal Credit payments in order to help facilitate budget management.**
- **That the Council work with the Department for Work and Pensions to enable claims forms to be issued and completed 4/5 weeks before the young person's 18th birthday.**
- **Budget Management training for cared for children.**

9.0 Employment, Education and Training

“I wouldn’t have even been able to think about staying on at college or going to university eventually. Being in care means that I get the support, encouragement and financial support”⁸

Care Leaver

⁸ ‘After care: Young People’s views on leaving care’ Reported by the Children’s Rights Director for England – Ofsted (2012)

- 9.1 Securing employment is an important step for any young person as they try to make the transition into adulthood. It not only helps to achieve financial independence but also provides self confidence and an all important sense of self worth. For young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), life chances are poorer than those of their peers. For example, young men who are NEET are three times more likely to suffer from depression than their peers⁹. Therefore, a successful transition to employment is an important element of overall well-being.
- 9.2 For young people leaving care, gaining employment could be seen as more crucial than it is for many of their peers. Care leavers are expected to make a leap into adulthood at much earlier stage than most other young people. The age that most people leave care is 16-18 whereas the average age that a young person leaves home is 24. For many young people outside of the care system, even when they have left home, they are still able to draw on support from their family throughout life. The family home usually remains open to them should they need to return. Most care leavers do not have this type of family support to fall back on.
- 9.3 Finding and maintaining a job can be difficult for many young people in care. Young people from care are much more likely than their peers to experience unemployment, both when first leaving school and throughout life. Government statistics for the year ending 31st March 2009 reveal that 37% of young people aged 19, who were formerly in care, are not in education, employment or training.
- 9.4 *Factors influencing the ability of Care Leavers to access and maintain employment and further education and training*
- 9.7 Lack of stability**
- 9.8 A lack of stability also impacts on care leavers' chances of securing or maintaining employment in other ways. Young people may not have a stable address or their living environment may be disruptive to their work life. On leaving care, many young people are placed in inappropriate accommodation, for example in hostels or in lodgings with vulnerable adults. Having to cope with so many facets of becoming independent at once and not always with a great deal of support can make it difficult for young people to gain and maintain work.

⁹ 'Against the odds: Re-engaging young people in education, employment or training' Local government, July 2010 - <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/AuditCommissionReports/NationalStudies/NEETsAgainsttheodds.pdf>

9.9 Lack of preparedness for work

- 9.10 The Group interviewed the Senior Organisational Development Officer, who manages the Council's Apprenticeship scheme (A-Team). The Group was informed that the Council had implemented a policy decision in December 2010 to ring fence 5 corporate apprenticeship placements for care leavers. A further placement was agreed for another young person as a result of conversations with a Head of Service who was mentoring a young person within the Council's care.
- 9.11 After some good initial progress with regard to adapting to the working environment things quickly changed for the cohort of apprentices and issues began to surface for apprentices and the Cared For apprenticeship programme as a whole. In summary, across the cohort there were issues around attitude, and in particular attendance, motivation and punctuality. As a result, none of the cohort completed the apprenticeship programme. To put this in some context, the A Team has a 100% successful completion rate.
- 9.12 After analysing the experiences with this initial cohort, the Senior Organisational Development Officer identified the general theme that the care leavers who had engaged with the Apprenticeship scheme had issues around attendance, punctuality and motivation. Very simply, the cohort had been unprepared for work and this had resulted in non-completion for all six of the care leavers. This is in contrast to the schemes usual 100% completion rate.

9.13 Low Aspirations

- 9.14 According to extensive research carried out by Professor Bob Broad¹⁰, Visiting Professor at the Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research, cared for children generally have low aspirations of what they will achieve in life, especially in the education sector.

Educational Attainment

- 9.6 Young people from care, as a group, have a much lower educational attainment than their peers. In 2009, 68% of looked after children achieved at least one GCSE, or equivalent qualification, compared with 99% of all children. Children in care have often experienced trauma and a lack of stability, both prior to care and whilst in care, this can lead to disruption in their education and has a visible affect on academic achievement. The resulting lack of qualifications then impacts on their chances of employment.

¹⁰http://www.tactcare.org.uk/data/files/resources/3/tact143_aspirations_bobbroad_research_summary_100709.pdf

9.15 Potential Solutions

9.16 Improving Educational Outcomes

9.17 The Group was pleased to discover that the Council is very much at the forefront of good practice for improving educational outcomes for cared for children and care leavers.

9.18 The Group spoke to the Head of the Virtual School, which had been taking a lead on improving educational outcomes for cared for children since it was established in September 2010. Working across the 0-19 age group, the Virtual School and its nine staff has achieved some considerable improvements since its inception. For instance, the Key Stage 2 results for cared for children are the best of any local authority nationally over the last two years. Additionally, the Borough has the second best attendance figures out of the 152 local authorities.

9.19 In terms of GCSE results, the statistics for the 2011 cohort of cared for children are as follows, the figures in brackets relate to those children who have been in care for more than a year which is the nationally accepted cohort:

- 95% (96%) took at least one GCSE (up from 70% in the previous year)
- 92% (96%) achieved at least one A-G grade
- 65% (69%) achieved 5 A* - G grades
- 36% (39%) achieved 5 A* - C grades
- 11% (19%) achieved 5 A* - C grades including English and Maths

This compares with the figures for non Cared for Children in Cheshire East in 2011:

- 96% of pupils were took a GCSE or equivalent examination
- 99% achieved at least one A*-G grade
- 97% achieved 5+ A* - G grades
- 83% achieved 5+ A* to C grades
- 64% achieved 5+ A* to C grades including English and maths

9.20 This meant that the Council was ranked 25th out of all local authorities in England.

9.21 As only 7% of cared for children go to university as compared to 40% of the general population, the Virtual School has forged strong links with local universities such as Manchester Metropolitan Cheshire in order to encourage young people in care to think about higher education. Part of this included communicating the availability of bursaries and other support available to cared for children.

9.22 The Virtual School has clearly been a huge success for the Cared for population of Cheshire East. This was reaffirmed when the Group interviewed foster carers who agreed that the Virtual School had been very useful in supporting them in communicating with and challenging schools. Having said this, there is always room for improvement and the Group feels that in particular steps could be taken to increase the number of care leavers going on to further and higher education.

9.23 It is likely that this will happen naturally as the success achieved with the earlier years filters through with each cohort but there are some immediate lessons that can be learned from Ealing Council. The Group visited Ealing Council after being alerted by Edward Timpson MP that they had 17% of Care Leavers at University (34 undergraduates and 7 pursuing Masters Degree programmes). The Group was interested to explore how Ealing had achieved such impressive outcomes – the key success factors were identified as follows:

- Mentoring Scheme – This is a scheme where older young people (some ex care leavers) who are in employment or higher education act as accredited and trained peer mentors for young people in care. These provide excellent role models to younger children and such an initiative was suggested by the Cheshire East Children in Care Council.
- Education Rooms – These are teaching spaces or self study areas from which ‘education study support’ sessions are facilitated with the teaching staff based in the Virtual School. Printing and Computer facilities are also available in these spaces.
- An allowance of £5,500 is paid to those care leavers in university (substantially higher than the recommended £2,000). The rationale for providing such a considerable sum is that it amounts to the same as a supported placement and it has a demonstrable effect on increasing applications.

9.24 In addition to these initiatives the Group believes the following suggestions would help the Virtual School to continue to go from strength to strength:

- **Extending the remit of the Virtual School from 19 to 25.**

The Group was informed that the Virtual School had improved the number of care leavers not in education, employment or training (NEETs) from 28% to 10%. Whilst this is an excellent achievement, it was also noted that the figures were less impressive once the young person was in their early 20's. Other Virtual Schools around the country have a remit up to the age of 25 which helps them to track and measure outcomes at 21/22/23 which gives a better indication of life trajectory.

- **That secondary schools be encouraged to retain a link with the young person once they enter further education.**

The Head of the Virtual School reported that the more informal nature of further education as compared to the structured environment found in secondary schools occasionally did not suit some care leavers. It is therefore suggested that secondary schools could be encouraged to maintain a link with the young person once they leave compulsory education and enter further education in order to continue some form of structured support.

- **That secondary schools and sites of further education be encouraged to apply for the Buttle UK Quality Mark.**

The Buttle UK Quality Mark is awarded to further and higher education providers who demonstrate their commitment to young people in and leaving care. The award provides a framework for validating the quality of support that the institution offers for this cohort and a basis for the assessment of their retention and progression strategies. Gaining the Buttle UK Quality Mark and displaying the logo is a clear way to demonstrate the institutions credentials to their partners, funders, inspectorates, and the wider community, but most importantly to the young people from care themselves.

The Group would encourage all of the further education sites in the Borough to apply for the Quality Mark. Additionally, whilst the Mark is currently only available for sites of further and higher education, when speaking to Mr. Edward Timpson MP he suggested that it would be useful for secondary schools to apply for it. If Cheshire East schools could work with the Buttle Trust in order to gain accreditation they would be the first secondary schools to achieve the quality mark – further underlining that Cheshire East is at the forefront of providing quality educational outcomes for cared for children and care leavers.

9.25 Better preparing Cared for Children for the demands of work

- 9.26 A number of witnesses that the Group interviewed including the Virtual Head, Social Workers, Personal Advisors and Organisational Development officers, made the same point that cared for children and as a corollary care leavers are poorly prepared for the demands of being in full time employment.
- 9.27 It is clear that better attempts need to be made to help a young person in care to start planning for the world of work prior to them reaching 16 or 18, at which age the preparation often resembles a rushed afterthought. Indeed, as the cohort that first engaged with the A Team scheme demonstrated, a full time yearly programme was too much too soon.

- 9.28 The Group is therefore much in favour of an incremental approach in which the young person is introduced to work and the potential options available to them through 'taster days'. Through this process, the young person will discover what excites or motivates them and this will help the Council to tailor increasingly intensive work experience placements as they move towards adulthood. To make this work, the Council needs to start using its influence in the local community to open doors for young people requiring work experience. Similarly the Council, as such a large and diverse employer, has the capability to cater for a wide range of tastes and abilities. A good start would be for the Council to adopt a policy in which there would be a work experience placement filled by a young person in care for every week of the year (excluding Christmas). To support this idea, it is suggested that the Council explore engaging with the Government's 'From Care2Work'¹¹ programme.
- 9.29 In addition to incrementally demanding work experience placements, the Group also feels that there would be a real benefit in utilising life skill development courses such as the Prince's Trust 12 week team course. This course involves team building activities, a residential week, a community project and a work placement, and it aims to raise self-esteem, build confidence and develop personal skills.
- 9.30 The programme is delivered from permanent bases in Crewe, Macclesfield and Congleton and the Fire authority, as the delivery partner, is fully funded by the Learning and Skills Council. The Youth Engagement Manager at Cheshire Fire & Rescue informed the Group that the programme had a 79-80% success rate in terms of getting young people into education, employment and training.
- 9.31 The Head of the Virtual School, also drew attention to the 'Chances' programme which the Council was part of alongside Stockport and Trafford Councils. This is a 16 week programme with the aim of developing self esteem, life skills and a positive attitude for young people in care. The Council is also a part of a North West bid to work with Lancashire Cricket Club to develop life skills through journalistic experience at sporting events.
- 9.32 The Group encountered an excellent programme ran in partnership between Haringey Council and Tottenham Hotspur Football Club. The 'E18hteen Project' provides support for 160 care leavers enabling them to access opportunities and a mentor to sustain engagement in education through sports, volunteering courses and activities. A young mentor who presented to the Group explained that the aim of the project was to 'gradually remove the

¹¹ Since its launch in 2009 From Care2Work has offered support to local authorities to help place employability on the corporate parenting agenda and enable local and national employer engagement.

scaffolding' from the individual so that they gained the confidence to move into independence.

- 9.33 The Group feels that these types of programmes are vital for helping young people to ready themselves for the world of work. The Head of the Virtual School explained that in his experience life in care often taught young people that good things didn't last and for them to expect rejection. He asserted that by building resilience and demonstrating that they can achieve something worthwhile when they put their mind to it, such initiatives will help them to take a positive attitude into the workplace. It is suggested that the Council in addition to existing partnerships attempt to build relationships with community organisations and businesses to provide opportunities for cared for children to develop.

9.34 Support needs to continue once the young person is in the workplace

- 9.35 The ultimate aim of providing work experience and development courses is to ensure that once the young person reaches 16 or 18 years old, they are ready to flourish in full time or part time employment. However, once the young person has gained employment – there is a danger that this could be seen as 'case closed' by the Council. Indeed, if anything can be learned from the initial care leaver A-Team cohort is that continued support inside and outside of the work place is vital for ensuring that employment is sustainable.

- 9.36 In terms of providing support outside of the work placement, The Group was interested to learn about the Council's 'Shared Lives' service. The Operations Manager from Care4CE, explained to the Group that Shared Lives is an adult placement scheme that provides three different types of support following referrals from other teams within the Council:

- **Intermediate support** – This is where a service user lives with a Shared Lives Carer/s as a member of their family for a sustained period of time. The Operations Manager made it clear that this is termed 'intermediate' support as it is not meant to be a permanent solution but rather a transition support stage to help guide individuals towards independence.
- **Respite Support** – This is where a service user stays with a Shared Lives Carer/s for a short period
- **Sessional Support** – This is where a service user is supported by a Shared Lives Carer either in their own home, the Approved Carer's home or out in the community. Sessions last for 3, 6 or 9 hours. Suzanne added that there are significant numbers of service users who receive sessional support. The placements are set up to achieve specific outcomes including improved health and emotional wellbeing, improved quality of life and to increase choice and control for service users etc.

- 9.37 The Group feels that there is a strong case to be made for referring care leavers who are on the Council's A Team scheme to the Shared Lives initiative. A business case for this proposal can be found in appendix 1 to this report.

9.38 Raising Aspiration

- 9.39 It is vital that cared for children have the confidence and belief that they can achieve whatever they put their mind to. It is significant to note that high aspirations aren't just about educational achievement, although important. It's about life achievements, seemingly small to some but significant to the young person. It's about having dreams and hopes about life and the self belief that they can be achieved.
- 9.40 The Group was impressed by Ealing Council and the way that they concentrate their approach on positive reinforcement. To this end, they hold Cared for Children Education awards and these provide recognition not only to high achievers but also to those young people who had made improvements. The Group was informed that the Council hold a similar event, called the 'CARE' Awards. This is held at Tatton Park and is attended by high numbers of young people as well as foster carers, local dignitaries and those who support young people.
- 9.41 Foster carers also have a central role in raising the aspirations of the young person in their care. The Head at the Virtual School noted that some foster carers were naturally better than others at challenging schools on their performance and the provisions they were making available for the young person. Additionally, some foster carers also have a better knowledge of the university system and routes into particular professions. It is important for the Council to ensure that there is a basic level of knowledge on these issues and therefore a comprehensive training programme is made available. Unfortunately it has proved difficult to ensure a high attendance of foster carers at the training events. It is therefore suggested that at least one of the education training sessions a year be made mandatory. It is also worth noting that a number of Cheshire East children are placed in agency foster placements. With this in mind, it is suggested that training events be made available for agency foster carers for a small charge.

10.0 Housing

“When you’re in care you don’t have to worry about bills and cooking or meals. All of a sudden when you leave it’s harder to manage and [it] stresses you out”¹²
Care Leaver

¹² ‘After care: Young People’s views on leaving care’ Reported by the Children’s Rights Director for England – Ofsted (2012)

- 10.1 Housing is an issue that affects us all. A home is not just bricks and mortar but a place where people relax, rejuvenate, entertain and gain a sense of belonging. Therefore issues relating to housing can be vital to the stability of people's everyday lives. A good home can have a positive impact on health, emotional well being, safety, security, educational attainment, childhood-adult aspirations and income-occupation.
- 10.2 It is well documented in the media how young people in the UK are struggling to enter the housing market as high rents make it difficult to save and a lack of available credit has reduced the chances of getting a mortgage. For most young people however, there is the opportunity to stay at home until their mid to late twenties and the family network is there to provide support when eventually the time to move out comes.
- 10.3 A group that does not have access to such support are Care Leavers who are expected to reach independence at a much earlier age and without the help of a family network. It is vital therefore, that the Council as corporate parent supports young people leaving care in order to access settled, secure and suitable accommodation. Indeed, gaining access to suitable accommodation was one of the main concerns expressed by the Children in Care Council when asked about their thoughts regarding moving into independence.

10.4 Housing Options for Care Leavers

The Council has a legal duty to provide 'suitable accommodation' for young people leaving care but the paths that care leavers take out of care can be varied due to differences in circumstances and preferences.

- 10.5 At the current time the Council provides the following options:
- 10.6 *For 16-17 Year olds*
- 10.7 Whilst it is strongly discouraged by the 16+ team, care leavers are able to legally leave care at 16. As they are unable to sign up for tenancy agreements until their 18th birthday, other options for accommodation must be found. The Council has a 16-17 year old housing protocol for when a young person presents as homeless or under the threat of homelessness¹³. The first step is to attempt to maintain the young person in their present accommodation if it is suitable. If the accommodation is deemed unsuitable or disagreeable to the young person then other options must be provided. This would include the use of independent social housing, supported lodging or hostels. Bed and Breakfasts are only used as a short term emergency measure.

¹³ As defined by part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) – 'a person is threatened with homelessness if they are to be without accommodation in 28 days.'

10.8 Social Housing

10.9 After a recent review of the allocations policy, additional priority for social housing has been awarded to care leavers. Cheshire Homechoice, the team that manages the housing register for social housing, works to a 5 level banding system (A – E) which is based on need and the length of time in the system. Those people with a direct threat of homelessness are placed in band A with care leavers automatically placed in band B. Care Leavers are able to express their interest in available social rented properties through Cheshire Homechoice.

10.10 Supported Lodging

10.11 Supported lodging schemes provide accommodation for a young person within a family home. The young person has their own room and shares the kitchen and bathroom facilities with the family or householder - or 'host'. Hosts can be families, couples or single people and they are paid a fee by the Council for their room (subsidised by 'Supporting People' money).

10.12 Supported lodgings schemes may also be called:

- **Nightstop Schemes** - offer young people a bed in a room of their own for one night at a time.

10.13 In terms of its suitability the provision is usually for younger young people who are not ready to live independently and require support to develop independent living skills. The model is not generally suitable for young people who have few boundaries to their behaviour or who want the freedom and anonymity of other settings.

10.14 A potential future model of housing for care leavers

10.15 As previously stated it is important for the Council to provide a range of suitable accommodation options for care leavers. Not one young person is the same and they all have different needs and preferences. One care leaver at 16 might be ready to live independently but another at 18 might still require considerable support and assistance.

10.16 The Group feels that no young person should feel forced to leave care if they do not feel ready and this sentiment is backed by Section 1.11 in the Leaving Care Regulations 2010. It was therefore concerning for the Group to hear accounts from foster carers that some young people had been made to move out of foster placements and into hostels with the explanation that it was a more cost effective solution. Whilst it is understood that this is likely to be an example of the exception rather than the rule, the Group does feel that there are a number of gaps in the current housing provision for care leavers.

- 10.17 Increasing the number of Supported Lodging Placement and Semi-Independent Provision*
- 10.18 The Group was informed by officers, foster carers and the Children in Care Council that the lack of alternative housing options beyond independent accommodation once a young person reaches 18 is a high priority issue. For the young people interviewed, this arbitrary cut off point creates a 'cliff edge'; a point from which all support appears to be removed. Care Leavers are then expected to either sink or swim in social housing with a minimal amount of support available.
- 10.19 This issue was partly resolved when the Council participated in the Government's 'Staying Put' pilot. This aimed to enable young people to build on and nurture their attachments to their foster carers, so that they could move to independence at their own pace and be supported to make the transition to adulthood in a more gradual way. It also aimed to provide the stability and support necessary for young people to achieve in education, training and employment. One of the foster carers who had participated in the Cheshire East pilot noted how it had removed the sense of an impending 'cliff edge' and therefore allowed the young person to move towards independence in their own time and at their own pace. She noted that it was unusual for the young person to stay until they were 21 and very often they moved into independent accommodation soon after their 18th birthday. What was important was the fact that a deadline had been removed.
- 10.20 To some extent the Council has continued with the principles of the 'Staying Put' pilot as the Head of Service makes decisions to allow a young person to stay in their placement post their 18th birthday whilst they complete any training or qualifications. This is done on an ad hoc basis and the removal of the 'official' pilot has somewhat left a policy vacuum. It is therefore suggested that it be made policy that a young person can remain in their foster placement to complete any training or qualification that they started prior to their 18th birthday.
- 10.21 The Group understands why the Council has been unable to continue with the 'Staying Put' pilot, in its original format – mainly due to the cost of maintaining placements in a challenging funding environment. The Council is also under pressure to provide more foster care placements and by keeping existing young people in placements, this only adds to the challenge.
- 10.22 With this in mind, it is suggested that a focus on providing more supported lodging places could provide a useful solution. There would be a cost implication to providing more places but this would be less than it would cost to extend existing foster placements. There would also be an issue, similar to that of the 'Staying Put' pilot, of potentially reducing the pool of foster carers but it is suggested that retired or retiring foster carers be targeted for recruitment.

- 10.23 It is also worth noting that an increased number of supported lodging placements would reduce the Council's dependency on using hostels for those care leavers aged 16-17. This is important as some hostels do not provide the requisite level of security for young vulnerable adults.
- 10.24 Whilst supported lodging placements are an excellent solution for those young people who want to maintain relatively extensive support, it may not be appropriate for those who are seeking a bit more independence. A good intermediary option is semi-independent accommodation. This has a number of incarnations articulated in varying ways across the country but the Group would endorse the following model:
- Small 3-4 bed units (staffed) with support available 24 hours a day. These could be provided by the Council or a tendering process could be undertaken to encourage independent providers of semi independent accommodation to locate within Cheshire East.
 - That the Council seek agreement with local social housing associations for a small number of single bed tenancies, identified to accommodate 16 -18 year old Cared For young people with floating support being provided by Residential Service care staff.
- 10.25 This provision would be used as a short term placement option to provide experience of independent living for young people who are considering a move on from foster care or residential settings. The Council should also look to explore how to facilitate the retention of meaningful relationships between care leavers and their former foster carers/supported lodging hosts. This is in recognition that the path to adulthood is rarely linear. Most if not all people stumble and fall as they try and negotiate their way to being independent and young people in care must feel as though they have the same safety net as their peers.
- 10.26 Some of the placements could be explicitly short term and temporary (weekend, week etc) and used as taster/training weeks for those young people nearing independence.
- 10.27 Along these lines, it is also worth noting that a number of the Council's care leavers attend universities around the country. The questions arises therefore as to where these young people go during the relatively extensive vacation periods. Nearly all universities allow cared for children to stay in university accommodation during vacation periods and whilst this is helpful it is not entirely satisfactory. Most, if not all of their peers, return home following the break of term and this is an option that should be made available to young people in care.
- 10.28 *Social Housing*
- 10.29 Whilst the Group was pleased to find out that care leavers are assigned to high priority band B when registering for social housing, it is felt that this does not go far enough. During the visit to Haringey Council, the Group was

informed that they have an agreement with local housing associations to prioritise 60 units per year for care leavers. This is despite the fact that Haringey Council has one of the highest demands for social housing in the country. When asked how this was achieved, the Group was informed that Haringey Council has a close working relationship with housing associations and the quota of housing for care leavers had been established in a joint protocol.

10.30 The Group was informed that the former Cheshire County Council used to have a similar joint protocol to prioritise housing to care leavers but this had been disbanded during Local Government Reorganisation and not re-established. The Group would call for the Council to open discussions with the three housing associations that operate in the Borough with the aim of re-establishing a joint protocol that prioritised a quota of social housing for care leavers.

10.31 The Group was also impressed by Haringey Council in the way that they provide compulsory tenancy workshops for those care leavers due to move into social housing. These workshops look at developing life skills, budgeting skills and provide information on good neighbour behaviour.

10.32 Support when leaving care and moving into new accommodation

10.33 Life skill training has been referenced above with respect to compulsory tenancy workshops for those young people already committed to moving into independent accommodation. Whilst this is important, this training should begin at an earlier stage. When interviewing the Children in Care Council, they made it clear that they felt unprepared to live independently in the sense that they had limited knowledge of how to cook, operate a washing machine and perform minor DIY tasks such as changing a light bulb. Whilst it is hoped that foster carers take a lead in preparing cared for children in these basic skills, it was clear from the conversation with the young people that their experiences varied greatly. It is suggested therefore that the Council take a more proactive role in providing life skill training. Both Ealing and Haringey Councils have training kitchens for their young people from which a number of domestic skills workshops were ran from. Whilst it would be difficult for the Council to replicate such a model, having no central base, a creative solution would be to work with schools around the Borough to provide classes after school.

10.34 It is also important to note that it is likely that the young person will be moving out of a busy home; either familial or residential and into accommodation where they are likely to be on their own. This will be a shock and consequently there is a significant risk of loneliness and possibly depression. It is therefore important that in addition to 'practical life skills', the Council helps young people to build the resilience and mental tools required to live on their own. The Council already has built good relationships between the 16+ team and the leisure team as free memberships to the

Council's sports facilities are available for care leavers. It is also suggested that the Council make attempts to facilitate social networks and take steps to ensure that housing placements are close to friends.

- 10.35 Moving out of care and into new accommodation can be a stressful time for a young person. What can help a move is ensuring that the correct luggage is in place to ensure that the move is made efficiently and with dignity. It was therefore a concern to hear from the Children in Care Council that some young people had been asked to move their items in black bin bags. After exploring this claim, the Group was reassured that the Council's policy was to ensure that the appropriate luggage was provided so that young people did not have to move their items in bin bags. In the particular case that was highlighted, bin bags had been used for a couple of items that would not fit anywhere else. However, the Group feels that there is a conflict between what is regularly reported at the Children in Care Council and what is reported by Children's Services Officers.
- 10.36 Young people that leave the care system are provided with a leaving care grant to help them set up a home. The amount of grant is based on the individual's need and this can be up to £2,250¹⁴. A number of comments were made by the Children in Care Council that there was a lack of flexibility in how the grant could be used. The example provided was that a particular kettle could not be purchased as it had been deemed a 'luxury item' by a Personal Advisor. Whilst the Group recognises that limits need to be placed on how the grant can be spent so that core items are covered, some flexibility should be retained and the young person's voice listened to.
- 10.37 As can be seen from this report, a large number of agencies and services are involved when a young person leaves care. This can be confusing and there is a risk that a young person becomes lost in a sea of bureaucracy and therefore does not engage with all the services that could help them. The Group suggests therefore that a comprehensive but vitally, easy to use information pack be developed which would provide information on what they are entitled to, how to complete administration (setting up direct debits etc) and contact details of various agencies who they can turn to for help/advice.
- 10.38 It is also suggested that the Council look to either appoint or second a housing officer for the 16+ team. This role would involve working to increase the number of supported lodging/semi-independent placements, building relationships with housing associations and facilitating workshops for care leavers.

¹⁴ This does compare favourably with other authorities although Haringey pay up to £5000 depending on income. However, The Care Leavers Foundation completed a survey and it was suggested that £2500 is the minimum for setting up home re essential furniture and equipment, although this obviously depends on local resources.

10.39 Summary

- 10.40 The Group realises that the suggestions in this section are extensive and ambitious. Whilst it might be difficult to implement all of these suggestions in the context of funding challenges facing the Council the Group would reassert the absolute importance of ensuring that safe and suitable accommodation is available for our Care Leavers. If the Council gets this right, the chances of getting good outcomes for care leavers will be dramatically improved.

11.0 Reducing the Offending Rates of Cared for Children and Care Leavers

“My behaviour towards others has improved and believing in myself to achieve what I set out to do”¹⁵

Care Leaver

¹⁵ ‘After care: Young People’s views on leaving care’ Reported by the Children’s Rights Director for England – Ofsted (2012)

- 11.1 Relatively few studies have addressed the relationship between care and criminalisation, and they are inconclusive about whether cared for children are at greater risk of criminalisation. However, respondents to a recent survey¹⁶ (carried out by The Adolescent and Children's Trust [TACT]), who have direct contact with these children, had a clear view that cared for children are at greater risk. 74% of respondents thought this was the case. This assertion is also backed up by the following table:

Table 1 - Offending by children who had been looked after continuously for at least twelve months by gender, England 31 March 2011

	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of Looked after Children aged 10-17 years	17,510	12,720	30,230
Number of Looked after Children convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand during the year	1,550	660	2,210
Percentage of Looked after Children convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand during the year	8.9	5.2	7.3
Percentage of all children aged 10-17 convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand during the year	3.7	1.1	2.4

Source – Department for Education. Outcomes for Children looked after by Local Authorities in England as at 31 March 2011

- 11.2 The respondents felt that the key factors putting cared for children at increased risk of criminalisation were:
- Mixing with offending peers
 - Poor management of challenging behaviour
 - Lack of stability of care placements.
- 11.3 Residential care was highlighted in both the literature and in the practitioner survey as the care setting which posed by far the greatest risk to young people in terms of criminalisation. Over four in five respondents felt that looked after children were more likely to be prosecuted than were children living at home.
- 11.4 Practitioners indicated that it was not uncommon for carers (and in some cases other residents) to report young people to the police for committing minor offences such as stealing, fighting and criminal damage.

¹⁶http://www.tactcare.org.uk/data/files/resources/4/care_experience_and_criminalisation_an_executive_summary_from_tact_090909.pdf

- 11.5 In terms of the situation in Cheshire East, the Group interviewed the Head of the Youth Offending Service (YOS). It was reported following Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) the Council had inherited some significant historical issues relating to the offending rates of children in care. These very much reflected the findings in the TACT survey and can be summarised as thus:
- There was a disproportionate amount of children in care who were offenders in comparison to the general population (25 out of 450)
 - Children were becoming offenders once they had moved into care.
 - Those children who were already offenders, continued to offend at the same rate once they had entered care.
 - The young people coming into the Borough were quite sophisticated in their criminality – e.g. making use of knives.
 - A high number of offences were due to a breach of order which were being unnecessarily reported by residential home staff due to a lack of training and support – thereby needlessly criminalising those young people in care.
- 11.6 On this latter point, the Head of the YOS explained that they had implemented a number of initiatives to prevent this from happening. Indeed, they were providing training to staff and foster carers around managing challenging behaviour and also providing mediation support from specially trained members of staff. This had prevented residential home staff and foster carers from inappropriately escalating an issue to the Police. Similarly the YOS had developed a protocol with the Police and separately with the Crown Prosecution Service to prevent the unnecessary escalation of a minor misdemeanour to a criminal offence.
- 11.7 As a result of these initiatives, since LGR the YOS has greatly reduced the number of children in care who offend to the extent that it was now commensurate with the general population. It asserted however that the YOS were aiming to reduce this figure to below that of the general population and this is the goal they were currently working towards.
- 11.8 In terms of improving the successful and crime free transition of children in care who have offended into adulthood, the Group was informed that this had been improved by developing partnership working. This was not only working with the Council's 16+ team but also with partners in the community. A particular example was given of working with the Youth development team of Macclesfield Town Football Club in order to build capacity and reduce the chance of continued offending or re-offending.
- 11.9 Summary**
- 11.10 The work of the YOS in reducing the offending rates of Cared for Children has been a real success story for the Council and it is making a vital contribution

to the Council's efforts to improving outcomes for Care Leavers. The Group wishes to applaud all those involved in the YOS and there is a great belief that the service will continue to go from strength to strength as it moves into a new era as a single Cheshire East YOS. This belief was recently reaffirmed by a letter received by John Drew, the Chairman of the Youth Justice Board which complimented the Council's YOS arrangements, noting the considerable improvements that had been made. What particularly impressed the Group was the use of partnership working and it is suggested that the Council could learn a number of lessons from this work.

12.0 Conclusion

12.1 In the course of this review, the Group has discovered a number of alarming facts about care leavers nationally¹⁷:

- The number of care leavers aged 19, not in education; training or employment has increased by 5% since 2009 and by 26% since 2006.
- A third (33%) of looked after children aged 19 are not in education, training or employment.
- 54% of young people in care felt that councils are doing poorly or very poorly at helping them prepare to get good jobs in the future.
- Only 12% of children in care achieve 5 A*-C GCSEs, including maths and English, compared to 53% of all children.

In relation to Cheshire East, the number of care leavers aged 19 not in education, training or employment is a declining figure. In Cheshire East in 2012, 6% of Cared for Children were not in education, training or employment. In 2012, 13% of Cheshire East Cared for Children received 5 A*- C GCSEs including English and Maths.

12.2 What these facts demonstrate is the enormous gulf between the achievements and outcomes of care leavers compared to their peers. This is quite simply not good enough and as a society we need to start to do more to ensure that young people in care have the same opportunities in life as everybody else. This is of course a moral argument but it has financial implications too. The think-tank DEMOS in their report 'In Loco Parentis' mapped the cost of care journeys to the age 30 for two young people, one with good qualifications and the other with no qualifications. The key finding from this process was that after combining both the costs of the care journey and the outcomes, the difference could be £133,330.89 per child from entering care to age 30. Given the current care population is nearly 61,000 children (approx 450 in Cheshire East) the contrast between the two creates a powerful argument to invest to save in both the short term and the long term¹⁸. The Group has recommended that targets are set so as to demonstrate the importance of education and training for its Cared for Children, both for the individual Cared for Child and to the Council itself.

12.3 This report set out to explore what the Council could do to improve outcomes for care leavers and to ensure that they make a successful transition into independent living. Overall, it is important to state that the Group has found that the leaving care service is a well performing area of work for the Council. For instance, it is clear that the Council is actually

¹⁷ <http://www.reedinpartnership.co.uk/media/68137/from%20care%20to%20independence.pdf>

¹⁸ http://www.demos.co.uk/files/In_Loco_Parentis_-_web.pdf?1277484312 (p.167)

leading the way nationally in improving educational attainment and offending rates for Cared for Children and as a corollary this has had a positive impact on the outcomes of care leavers.

- 12.4 Having said this, it is also clear that there is room for improvement in a number of areas. Important lessons can be learned from other leading authorities who, it could be argued, are a little further along in their journey than Cheshire East. In particular, the Council needs to pay greater attention to widening the housing options for care leavers and take further measures to ensure that care leavers are prepared for work and able to access further and higher education.
- 12.5 An important finding to note is that wherever success has been found, whether in Cheshire East or in other authorities, it has followed that there has been a culture of teams within a local authority working together and engaging with the resources in the local community. An example of this in Cheshire East has been the Virtual School and the YOS and in both Ealing and Haringey Councils they make best use of Council and community resources. The Council is a powerful organisation with a wide network of connections and resources that dwarfs that of any individual parent. Following this logic no child in care or young person leaving care should be disadvantaged with regards to the opportunities that are made available to them. To this end, the Group would call on the Council to start to maximise its potential as a 'corporate parent' to ensure that outstanding outcomes are achieved for the young people in its care.

13.0 Recommendations

13.1 Changes to the processes that support care leavers

- 13.1.2 That the Council make attempts to delay the changing of the young person's social worker until after their exams have been completed and that an 'overlap' period be initiated in order to maintain a smooth transition. (p.18 – para 6.8)
- 13.1.3 That the Council take steps to ensure that the Pathway Plan is an easy to use, easily understood and meaningful document for the young person. (p.19 – para 6.15)
- 13.1.4 That young people become more engaged in the leaving care process with more opportunities provided for them to engage with and question the processes that affect their lives. To support this, the Council should look to appoint a participation officer. (p.20 – para 6.16)
- 13.1.5 That foster carers be given a key role in the leaving care and pathway planning process. (p.20 – para 6.17)
- 13.1.6 That the Council ensure that the policy to provide adequate luggage to move a young person's belongings is being fully adhered to and continued until the age of 25. (p.45 – para 10.35)
- 13.1.7 That the Council ensure that the young person's voice is fully listened to in the spending of the 'leaving care grant'. (p.45 – para 10.36)
- 13.1.8 That a comprehensive but easy to use information pack be developed and given to every young person leaving care – to include; information on what they are entitled to, how to complete administration (setting up direct debits etc) and contact details of various agencies who they can turn to for help/advice. (p.45 – para 10.37)

13.2 Changes to how the support the Council provides to care leavers is structured

- 13.2.2 That alongside the Lead Member for Corporate Parenting, a non-Executive Councillor, with no Chairmanship duties, be appointed as a 'Cared for Children' champion to liaise with Cared for Children and to drive through the Corporate Parenting agenda and to monitor the outcomes of the Task Group reports on cared for children. (p.21 – para 7.4)
- 13.2.3 That opportunity be provided for Cared for Children/Care Leavers to engage directly and informally with officers so that positive relationships can be established. Ideally, small satellite bases be made available in the North (Macclesfield) and in the South (Crewe) of the Borough enabling access to kitchen facilities and to Personal Advisors/Youth Support staff/Careers advice. Consideration be given to increasing access to these teams through utilising Skype facilities (p.21 – para 7.4)
- 13.2.4 That the Council explore recruiting more Personal Advisors to bring down high case loads. (p.22 – para 7.7)

- 13.2.5 That the Council recruit a specialist Personal Advisor who is qualified to work with disabled young people. (p.22 – para 7.10)
- 13.2.6 That the Council explore the appointment of a funding co-ordinator to have a strategic and practical lead in maximising income for children and adults coming through social care and health systems, including GPs and hospitals. (p.28 – para 8.16)

13.3 Training and support

- 13.3.2 That the Council provide easy to read and accessible guidance explaining the benefits entitlements of care leavers and current employability schemes offered under New Deal and Flexible New Deal. That this be developed with the support of the DWP and distributed to care leavers, leaving care teams, benefit and Jobcentre plus offices. (p.28 – para 8.16)
- 13.3.3 That the Council provide budget management training for cared for children (p.29 – para 8.16)
- 13.3.4 That the Council explore initiating a mentoring scheme which would pair care leavers/young people with cared for children. (p.33 – para 9.23)
- 13.3.5 That the Council explore initiating a mentoring scheme for foster carers with other experienced foster carers. (p.38 – para 9.41)
- 13.3.6 That foster carers be strongly encouraged to attend one education based training event a year. (p.38 – para 9.41)
- 13.3.7 That training events be made available for agency foster carers for a small charge. (p.38 – para 9.41)
- 13.3.8 That the Council provide a range of tenancy workshops for those care leavers due to move into social housing – focusing on developing life skills, budgeting skills and information on good neighbour behaviour. (p.44 – para 10.31)
- 13.3.9 That the Council provide ‘practical’ life skill training for cared for children e.g. cooking, cleaning, minor DIY tasks prior to the pathway plan process. (p.44 – para 10.33)

13.4 Benefits

- 13.4.2 That the Council explore paying landlords directly for those care leavers who are deemed unable to manage their budget. (p.28 – para 8.16)
- 13.4.3 That the Council encourage the Department for Work and Pensions to enable ‘jam jar’ accounts for Universal Credit payments in order to help facilitate budget management. (p.29 – para 8.16)
- 13.4.4 That the Council work with the Department of Work and Pensions to enable young people to register for social housing at 17 years 6 months of age rather than at 18 to reduce pressure on the pathway planning process and double payment. (p.28 – para 8.16)

13.5 Housing

- 13.5.2 That the Council explore how to implement a policy so that a young person can remain in their foster placement to complete any training or qualification that they have started prior to their 18th birthday. (p.42 – para 10.20)
- 13.5.3 That the Council explore extending the number of supporting lodging placements that are available. (p.42 – para 10.22)
- 13.5.4 That the Council explore providing semi-independent accommodation options for care leavers based on the following two models (p.43 – para 10.24):
- Small 3-4 bed units (staffed) with support available 24 hours a day.
 - In agreement with social housing associations, a small number of single bed tenancies be provided to accommodate 16 -18 year old Cared For young people with floating support being provided by Residential Service care staff.
- 13.5.5 That the Council explore how foster carers and supported lodging hosts can retain meaningful relationships with a young person once they move into independent accommodation. (p.43 – para 10.25)
- 13.5.6 That the Council ensure that care leavers in university can return to a foster/supported lodging placement during the vacation period. (p.43 – para 10.27)
- 13.5.7 That the Council open discussions with the three housing associations that operate in the Borough with the aim of re-establishing a joint protocol to prioritise a quota of social housing for care leavers. (p.44 – para 10.30)
- 13.5.8 That the Council explore either appointing or seconding a housing officer to generate supported lodging/semi-independent placements, build relationships with housing associations and facilitate workshops for care leavers. (p.45 – para 10.38)
- 13.5.9 That the Council take steps to reduce the chance of loneliness for when a young person moves into independent accommodation e.g. ensuring that housing placements are close to friends when appropriate and that social networks are facilitated. (p.44 – para 10.34)

13.6 Education, Employment and Training

- 13.6.2 That the Council explore increasing the allowance that is paid to those care leavers who go to university to encourage increased applications. (p.33 – para 9.23)
- 13.6.3 That targets are set to demonstrate year on year improvements in education outcomes, training outcomes and attendance levels for Cheshire East Cared for Children (p.33 - para 9.24)
- 13.6.4 That targets are set to demonstrate a year on year decrease in the numbers of Cared for Children aged 19 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- 13.6.5 That the Council extend the remit of the Virtual School from 19 to 25. (p.33 – para 9.24)

- 13.6.6 That the Council encourage secondary schools to retain a link with a young person in care once they enter further education. (p.34 – para 9.24)
- 13.6.7 That the Council encourage secondary schools and sites of further education to apply for the Buttle UK Quality Mark. (p.34 – para 9.24)
- 13.6.8 That the Council initiate a programme of support to better prepare cared for children for the demands of work. That this include (p.34-35):
- An incremental approach to work experience – beginning with taster days and ending with increasingly tailored and intensive work experience placements. Working with the Government’s ‘From Care2Work’ programme to support this.
 - The Council adopting a policy in which a work experience placement would be available to a cared for child every week of the year.
 - The Council strongly encouraging cared for children to participate and complete life skill development courses with existing (Prince’s Trust) and newly developed partnerships.
- 13.6.9 That the Council initiate the business case for Care Leavers accessing Apprenticeships as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
- 13.6.8 That the Council ensure that Personal Advisors are provided with sufficient training so that there is a consistency of service across the team. That this include training on care leaver’s entitlements and need. (p.22 – para 7.8)

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Appendix 1: Business Case - Care Leavers accessing Apprenticeships with support from the Shared Lives Service.

1. Purpose

To respond to the challenges that young people within/leaving the Council’s care face in finding employment and with this in mind to request that funding be allocated to the 16+ Team in order to:

- 1) Offer Apprenticeship placements, both within the Council and with partner organisations to those young people who are deemed by the service to be ready to make the most of the opportunity.
- 2) Commission the Shared Lives Service to support young people within/leaving our care whilst they are in an A-Team/partner organisation apprenticeship placement.
- 3) Deliver a holistic Council approach to apprenticeships for young people within/leaving care, and align support/resources across services as required to enable successful completion of apprenticeships.

2. Background

Securing employment is an important step for any young person as they try to make the transition into adulthood. It not only helps to achieve financial independence but also provides self confidence and an all important sense of self worth. For young people within/leaving care, gaining employment could be seen as more crucial than it is for many of their peers. Young people within care are expected to make a leap into adulthood at a much earlier stage than most other young people with the average leaving care age being 16-18 as compared to the average age that a young person leaves home (24). Having said this, finding and maintaining a job can be difficult for many young people in care. Young people from care are much more likely than their peers to experience unemployment, both when first leaving school and throughout life. Government statistics for the year ending 31st March 2009 reveal that 37% of young people aged 19, who were formerly in care, are not in education, employment or training.

Recognising this issue, in 2010/11 the Council took a policy decision to ring-fence and recruit 5 young people from within the Council's care into A-Team Apprenticeships. After interview, the 5 successful candidates were then inducted into the A-Team scheme and began their placements between February and March 2011 in a range of Council services. A further placement was agreed for another young person as a result of conversations with a Head of Service who was mentoring a young person within the Council's care.

After some good initial progress with regard to adapting to the working environment things quickly changed for the cohort of apprentices and issues began to surface for apprentices and the cohort as a whole. In summary, across the cohort there were issues around attitude, and in particular attendance, motivation and punctuality. As a result, none of the cohort completed the apprenticeship programme. To put this in some context, the A Team has a 100% successful completion rate.

3. The Proposal

There were a number of aspects which influenced the unsuccessful completion of the A Team programme by the cohort. Indeed, on a wider level what is required is a new model of tackling the issues faced by the young people within our care in terms of their employment outcomes. This would draw together and align a number of Council services to establish a corporately led holistic approach to developing our young people into successful careers. The primary element which this paper touches upon is developing the support outside of the work placement – a key factor that has been identified as being absent for the initial cohort.

Following work carried out by a Scrutiny Task and Finish Review, an opportunity has been identified to re-establish a cohort of young people within/leaving our care to participate in A-Team or external apprenticeships but with added support from sessional carers as part of the Shared Lives Service. Sessional Support is where a service user is supported by a Shared Lives Carer either in their own home, the Carers home or out in the community. Sessions last for 3, 6, or 9 hours. These placements are set up to achieve specific outcomes included health and emotional wellbeing, improved quality of life and increasing choice and control for service users. This will also provide one point of contact for the A-Team and other employers to ensure excellent communication, take preventative action on any issues, and consistently aim to support young people to move forward, overcome challenges, and also receive timely feedback and recognition to reinforce positive behaviours, both in and outside the workplace.

This underpinning support would enable a more effective approach to motivation and sustaining a positive approach to work within the cohort, and greatly enhance the potential for successful completion and progression. The A-Team development experience would be made available to all young people within our care who become apprentices in Cheshire East organisations, not just the Council.

Workplace supervisors will also be trained further to support their apprentices working with the appropriate specialists such as the 16+ and Shared Lives teams.

In taking a more outcome focused position based on the whole ecology system of the young people who are embarking on apprenticeships, there may also be opportunity to further develop and explore aligning other Council services to play a part in this new approach such as Cheshire East Youth Support Service, and other relevant services within Children's and Families that could make a positive contribution.

Once agreed, the process of recruitment would work as follows:

- The 16+ team would evaluate the capabilities and the readiness for work of the young people in care. This would take into consideration factors such as the successful completion of the Prince's Trust 12 week programme, which is now open to all young people in care between 16 and 25 and participation in a work experience taster day.
- Those young people identified as being ready for work would then be interviewed by Organisational Development/Shared Lives to identify their preferences and development needs. Attempts would then be made to find an appropriate placement either within the Council or with a Council partner. Part of identifying an 'appropriate placement' would be determining whether the workplace supervisor is sufficiently trained and prepared to host a young person, and the level of commitment that the service can put into supporting the young person.
- Once the placement type is identified, a Social Care Assessor on the Shared Lives Team would match an appropriate sessional Shared Lives Carer to support the young person whilst they are in the placement. The extent of this support would depend on the individual's needs.
- A small budget would be required to recruit a sessional Shared Lives Carer if an appropriate match could not be found. It must be noted that this would be an unlikely occurrence.

4. The cost

A key finding from the initial cohort of young people within our care was that it was unhelpful to have a ring-fenced number of placements. A preferable situation would be to determine those who are ready for work and then find placements for them. The cost of the proposal as a whole would therefore be determined by the individuals and is unknowable at this stage. It has been suggested by the 16+ team manager that in the current cohort of young people in care there would be 3-6 young people who could benefit.

As apprenticeship recruitment has been frozen corporately, the funding of the placements would have to be taken from the 16+ team budget. For each placement this would be £5460.00 p.a. including on costs.

It has been determined that the support from the Shared Lives team would require 1 day a week from a Grade 7 Social Care Assessor (mid scale). This would cost:

Without on costs	£4,591.60
With on costs	£5,854.60

N.B. This would not include an allocation of Resource Manager time or any travel expenses, but for a 12 month pilot the Shared Lives Team would absorb these costs. The cost of the Shared Lives Sessional Carer is paid at minimum wage (£6.19ph) and they work in three hour sessions. The amount of hours required would be bespoke to each individual and therefore the total cost is unknown.

Worked example:

Yearly cost for:

5 placements – 2 young people receiving 3 hours per week and 3 receiving 6 hours per week:

Placements -	£27,300 (£5460 x 5)
Social care Assessor -	£5,854.60 (with on costs)
Sessional Support -	£6833.76 ([24 hours x £6.19] x 46 weeks)
	£39,988.36 per annum

Overview and Scrutiny Review

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