



**Corporate Parenting
Committee**

**Annual Report
2016-17**

Foreword

It has been a pleasure working alongside both member and officer colleagues to coordinate Corporate Parenting arrangements in Cheshire East for the 2016-17 year; the first year of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

The first year of the committee has seen enhanced member involvement in their roles as corporate parents through the committee where we have covered a number of key elements which impact on the daily lives of our Cared for Children and Care Leavers.

Throughout the course of the year, the committee has covered;

- An overview of Corporate Parenting in Cheshire East
- An overview of the Cheshire East Corporate Parenting Strategy
- The role, purpose and outcomes of the Virtual School
- The Health and Wellbeing of Children in Care
- The Fostering Panel Annual Report
- The Adoption Panel Annual Report
- Five Priority Areas from Children and Young People
- The provision and outcomes for Care Leavers
- The wider Children and Families Improvement Plan

Most importantly, amongst all of the above key themes and topics, the voice of the child and outcomes for children has been at the centre of the committee's discussions and I hope that this is something which continues in years to come.

Working with our partners is key to our success to ensure a holistically improved service and outcomes for our Cared for Children and Care Leavers. I am grateful too for the contributions which they have made during the course of the last 12 months and look forward to continuing to share accountability and performance together.

I am resolute, that although improvements continue to be identified, we are never to be complacent in our work in this important area and will always commit to striving for the best possible outcomes for our Cared for Children and Care Leavers.

I hope that this report suitably outlines the ever-improving work which Cheshire East Council continues to deliver for Cared for Children and Care Leavers. It has been heartening to see the genuine care and concern for our children from officers and members alike and I truly believe that with this ethos, we are well-positioned to continue improving our performance and in turn our OFSTED outcomes in this critical area.



Cllr George Hayes

Chair of the Corporate
Parenting Committee

Context

Corporate Parenting is commonly used to describe the collective responsibility of the council, its members and partner organisations to provide the best possible care for children and young people who are “looked after” – those who are in the care of the local authority. In Cheshire East, children and young people have requested that their preference is to be known as “Cared for” or “Care Leavers” as opposed to “Looked After Children” – therefore this terminology will be used consistently throughout this report.

The most effective examples of Corporate Parenting take an authority-wide approach whereby all Council members and employees have an active commitment to ensuring the best possible outcomes for Cared for Children and Care Leavers.

Statutory responsibilities relating to Local Authorities duties in relation to Corporate Parenting were first outlined in the Children Act 1989. This outlines that Councillors should have a lead role in ensuring that their Council acts as an effective corporate parent for every child in care, actively supporting standards of care and seeking high quality outcomes that every good parent would want for their child. This extends to ensuring that children are not just cared for in terms of their essential needs, but cared about and nurtured as individuals to grow into successful and independent adulthood.

The ongoing commitment of being an excellent parent extends to all partner agencies providing services used by Cared for Children and Care Leavers.

Corporate Parenting in Cheshire East

Since May 2016, Corporate Parenting has been coordinated by the Corporate Parenting Committee, which works as an advisory committee to the Cabinet of Cheshire East Council. The committee is made up of cross-party representation. The purpose of the committee is to ensure that the Council effectively discharges its role as Corporate Parent for all children and young people in care and care leavers from age 0-25 years old, as well as holding partners to account for the discharge of their responsibilities in this area.

The Corporate Parenting Committee undertakes its duties within the realm of the following Terms of Reference;

1. Act as advocates for cared for children and care leavers, ensuring that their needs are addressed through key plans, policies and strategies throughout the Council and its commissioned services.
2. Ensure key strategic plans and reports relating to children in care and care leavers including the Children’s Improvement Plan, Corporate Parenting Strategy and Sufficiency Statement.

3. Oversee the implementation of Cheshire East's Corporate Parenting Strategy and action plan and monitor the quality and effectiveness of services to ensure they fulfil the council's responsibilities.
4. Monitor the quality of care delivered by Cheshire East's residential children's homes via the provision of regular reports including summary reports of Regulation 44 visits and Ofsted inspections.
5. Review the performance of the Council in relation to outcomes for children and young people in care via the scrutiny of both quarterly performance reports and the annual reports of the Cared for Children Service, the Independent Reviewing Service and the Virtual School.
6. Establish an environment whereby Elected Members and young people work together to address the needs and aspirations of Cheshire East's children and young people in care and empower children and young people to participate in decision making with adults.
7. Oversee, with the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the implementation of best practice principles in all aspects of service delivery, with the aim of producing positive outcomes for children and young people in care.
8. Support the work of foster carers and adopters in making a difference to the care and support they provide to children and young people in care and those adopted.
9. Make sure that staff and partners follow Cheshire East's pledge for cared for children and young people and the care leaver's charter.
10. Receive and scrutinise the Independent Review Officers' Annual Report

In addition to the Corporate Parenting Committee, the Council also has a Corporate Parenting Operational Group (CPOG). This group is officer led with membership drawn from across agencies. CPOG provides an officer led mechanism for identifying key issues for the corporate parenting committee whilst also ensuring that actions highlighted by the committee are effectively followed up.

Governance

The role of the Corporate Parenting Committee is to oversee the corporate parenting function of Cheshire East Council and its partners. It works to ensure that the Director of Children's Services and Cabinet Member for Children and Families meet their statutory responsibilities for providing professional and political leadership respectively to all children within the Borough, particularly those from identified vulnerable groups. The work undertaken by the Committee is also scrutinised in part by the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Cheshire East Health and Wellbeing Board, which is the accountable body for the Cheshire East Improvement Plan in Children's Services.

Frequency of Meetings and Attendance

The Corporate Parenting Committee meets six times throughout the municipal year. During the 16/17 Municipal Year, these meetings have been in June, September, November, January, March and May. Meetings have been held at 5.00pm in order to try and accommodate including the input from Children and Young People who are in care or are care leavers.

On the whole attendance at meetings has been strong with many of the elected members serving on the committee also holding roles in other areas of the Children and Families Directorate including Children and Families Scrutiny Committee, The Fostering Panel, The Adoption Panel and responsibilities as school governors in a variety of schools across the Borough.

Cheshire East Profile¹

The following is key data relating to cared for children and care leavers:

- At the end of March 2017 there were 422 children and young people being cared for by the local authority. This is an increase of 36 (9%) from March 2016. This equates to 56 children for every 10,000 in the general population of Cheshire East, which is substantially lower than the England and North West averages, and in line with last year's statistical neighbour group average. Over the last 3 years Cheshire East has sat in the mid range of its statistical neighbour group in terms of the rate of cared for children.
- 145 individuals left care in 2016-17, compared to 141 in 2015-16.
- Cheshire East supported 11 unaccompanied asylum seekers children (UASC) with placements in 2016-17, including those supported through the national strategy.
- The gender profile of children and young people in care is split 51% male and 49% female. 41% of the children and young people in care are between the ages of 11 and 15. More females than males are aged 16+ are in care, whereas more males than females are aged 11-15.
- The average age of children and young people entering care has been age 8 for the past 3 years.
- A total of 181 children and young people have entered care in 2016-17, which is up from 166 in 2015-16.
- As at the end of March 2017, 84% of all children and young people in care live in a family situation. Every effort is made to support children and young people within Cheshire East provision and currently 82% of Cheshire East fostering provision (excluding respite) is occupied.

¹ Note that some figures may not correspond with published national data due to reporting arrangements, eg, rounding up and down.

- There has been a very small increase in the number of children and young people in residential care - up from 36 last year to 38 at year end.
- As at 31st March 2017 the ethnic profile of cared for children is predominantly white British (88%), with the biggest other ethnicities of white other and other mixed background. This is a very similar picture to last year when 87% of the cohort were white British.
- 26 children and young people were adopted over 2016-17, which is a 44% increase from the 18 children and young people adopted in 2015-16.

Progress within the 2016/17 Municipal Year

Given that the committee was only constituted in May 2016 as an advisory committee to the Council's Cabinet, this report will outline initially how progress has been made towards each of the terms of reference. Thereafter, the report will become thematic, looking at the key areas which have been scrutinised by the committee this year and how we seek to continue our work in the next municipal year.

Act as advocates for cared for children and care leavers, ensuring that their needs are addressed through key plans, policies and strategies throughout the Council and its commissioned services.

The committee has;

- Revisited a number of key strategic and plans which directly impact on our Cared for Children and Care Leavers, ensuring that they are fit for purpose and being delivered well

The committee's continued work will focus on;

- Holding commissioned partners (The Children's Society & Voice for Children) to account for the outcomes of their commissioned work in relation to advocacy and engagement in initiatives such as the Cared for Children's Council
- Ensuring that the Voice of the Child plays a more active role in the committee's work, so that we can quality assure how policies, plans and strategies are being implemented and the impact this has to the everyday lives of our Cared for Children and Young People

Ensure key strategic plans and reports relating to children in care and care leavers including the Children's Improvement Plan, Corporate Parenting Strategy and Sufficiency Statement.

The committee has;

- Been consulted on the revised Children's Improvement Plan.
- Received updates on the Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Received the Annual Sufficiency Statement

The committee's continued work will focus on;

- Ensuring that the newly revised Children's Improvement Plan is delivered both effectively and efficiently, meeting key targets and deadlines to improve practice and performance
- Being part of the process of updating our Corporate Parenting Strategy which is due to be refreshed in the forthcoming Municipal Year
- Ensuring that there continues to be sufficient and suitable accommodation for our Cared for Children and Care Leaver population

Oversee the implementation of Cheshire East's Corporate Parenting Strategy and action plan and monitor the quality and effectiveness of services to ensure they fulfil the council's responsibilities.

The committee has;

- Considered the current Corporate Parenting Strategy in detail
- Considered the Quarterly Performance Reports to ensure that the strategy is being successfully implemented

The committee's continued work will focus on;

- Updating the Corporate Parenting Strategy which is due to be refreshed in the forthcoming Municipal Year
- Rigorously monitoring and quality assuring relevant elements of the Quarterly Performance Reports to ensure that the Council and its partners are fulfilling their responsibilities effectively and efficiently

Monitor the quality of care delivered by Cheshire East's residential children's homes via the provision of regular reports including summary reports of Regulation 44 visits and Ofsted inspections.

The committee has;

- Received and scrutinised the OFSTED inspection report relating to Claremont, a children's home currently run by Cheshire East Council
- Received and scrutinised reports relating to Regulation 44 Visits

The committee's continued work will focus on;

- Ensuring that "Good" OFSTED outcomes are sustained across children's homes
- Overseeing the move from "in-house" provision to this moving to a commissioned arrangement
- Getting better consistency for member involvement in Regulation 44 Visits

Review the performance of the Council in relation to outcomes for children and young people in care via the scrutiny of both quarterly performance reports and the annual reports of the Cared for Children Service, the Independent Reviewing Service and the Virtual School.

The committee has;

- Rigorously reviewed the outcomes for children and young people in care by scrutinising quarterly performance reports, the Annual Report for Cared for Children, The Annual Report for the Independent Reviewing Service and the Virtual School

The committee's continued work will focus on;

- Holding the Council and associated partners to continued account where identified performance is not at a satisfactory standard
- Ensuring that the Annual Reports for both Cared for Children and the Independent Reviewing Service continue to reflect a true picture of service provision in Cheshire East
- Ensuring that the Virtual School continues to hold all schools across the Borough to account for the performance of Cared for Children and Care Leavers
- Ensuring that the Virtual School promotes the best possible outcomes and opportunities for Cared for Children and Care Leavers across the Borough

Establish an environment whereby Elected Members and young people work together to address the needs and aspirations of Cheshire East's children and young people in care and empower children and young people to participate in decision making with adults.

The committee has;

- Held meetings at times which are appropriate to enable young people to attend
- Promoted the attendance of children and young people in care at their meetings
- Some members have met children and young people in care at one of their meetings in their own surroundings and environment
- A group of young people have attended one meeting of the committee, made valuable contributions and asked insightful questions regarding elements of provision

The committee's continued work will focus on;

- Ensuring that the Voice of the Child continues to be at the heart of it's work and decision making processes
- Enabling young people to access more opportunities to engage with the committee both through formal meetings and other informal opportunities.
- Ensuring that commissioned partners provide suitable opportunities for children and young people to contribute to the work of the committee
- Ensuring that all members of the committee have the opportunity to meet and engage with children and young people to directly quality assure how provision is perceived by service users.

Oversee, with the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the implementation of best practice principles in all aspects of service delivery, with the aim of producing positive outcomes for children and young people in care.

The committee has;

- Provided a relentless focus on achieving the highest possible standards across the Council and it's partners

- Promoted the best possible outcomes for cared for children and care leavers throughout the various themes covered within the year

The committee's continued work will focus on;

- Ensuring a better interface with the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee to avoid any duplication in work and to share findings of work undertaken by each respective committee
- Continue to provide a relentless pursuit of excellence across all areas of work undertaken by the Council and its partners

Support the work of foster carers and adopters in making a difference to the care and support they provide to children and young people in care and those adopted.

The committee has;

- Scrutinised the cared for children sufficiency strategy to ensure the effective recruitment of foster carers and adopters.
- Received and scrutinised the Annual Reports of the fostering and adoption Panels.
- Received and scrutinised the move in to regional adoption arrangements (Adoption Counts)

The committee's continued work will focus on;

- Ensuring there is oversight of the progress made by Adoption Counts following its launch in July 2017.
- Ensuring there is oversight of the development and growth of the Fostering Service.

Make sure that staff and partners follow Cheshire East's pledge for cared for children and young people and the care leaver's charter.

The committee has;

- Continued to deliver the commitments identified in the pledge for Cared for Children and Care Leavers and the Care Leavers Charter
- Dedicated deep-focus areas of its meetings to ensure that key elements of the pledge are given specific time to be discussed, in order to quality assure and improve outcomes.

The committee's continued work will focus on;

- Ensuring that the Cared for Children and Care Leaver's Pledges and Charters remain up to date and relevant in the view of all stakeholders
- Ensuring that all staff and elected members have a clear oversight of the Pledge Commitments outlined in the Cared for Children and Care Leaver's Pledges

Receive and scrutinise the Independent Review Officers' Annual Report

The committee has;

- Received and scrutinised the Independent Review Officers' Annual Report

The committee's continued work will focus on;

- Ensuring that the work of the Independent Review Officers' service remains appropriate and receive the next annual report for this service

Thematic Focuses for the 2016/17 Municipal Year

As mentioned earlier, there have been a number of key themes and documents which the committee has scrutinised in particular depth. This section of the report outlines these areas; identifying key strengths and areas for development, which will also inform the committee's continued work programme in the forthcoming municipal year.

Education and the Virtual School

Health and Wellbeing of Children in Care

The Health of Cared for Children and Young People Annual Report 2015-16

The Fostering Panel Annual Report

The Adoption Panel Annual Report

Sufficiency Statement 2016/17

Claremont Residential Home Report

Regulation 44 Independent Inspections of Children's Homes Annual Report 2015 – 2016

Provision and Outcomes for Care Leavers

Children's Social Care Service Improvement Plan

Corporate Parenting Strategy Progress in 2016-17

Progress against the Corporate Parenting Strategy priorities for 2016-17 is set out at Appendix 1.

Corporate Parenting Strategy Priorities 2016-17 – Annual Progress

Involve Me

- Children and young people are at the heart of decision making in relation to all aspects of their lives and are supported to make their views and wishes heard.
- There are a range of opportunities for children and young people to influence and shape service planning and delivery.
- All staff have the knowledge and skills to engage with children and young people and encourage, promote and support their active participation.

The Children's Society currently delivers the Children's Rights and Participation Service on behalf of Cheshire East. This includes facilitating the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum. During 2016-17 these important forums for our cared for children and care leavers have been established on a more regular basis and work has taken place in increase membership and engagement.

Work has continued in 2016-17 to put children and young people at the heart of decision making. This includes the establishment of a 'Shadow Corporate Parenting Committee', made up from children and young people from the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum. The Chair and Deputy Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee have met with the Shadow Committee to discuss issues relevant to them.

Staff from the Children's Society have worked closer with Cheshire East staff during this year to build better relationships. This includes working regularly from the Cheshire East office base, input to team meetings and links with social workers, Personal Assistants (PAs) and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs).

The Participation Network continues to operate on a bi-monthly basis to support 'champions' from within services to undertake training, share good practice and develop tools for promoting participation of children and young people.

For the third year running Cheshire East celebrated November Children's Right's Month (NCRM). NCRM is where everyone working with children and young people in Cheshire East can celebrate and raise awareness of children's rights in a variety of different ways. This year, young people came up with the idea of a takeaway takeover menu, where adults can chose from a range of options to see what it feels like to be a young person today. Some of the options relating to cared for children and care leavers included:

- The £21 challenge – to experience what it feels like for a care leaver to try and purchase a weekly shop for only £21.

- A day at a children's home – a commitment to spend a day with those in children's homes, and understand the difficulties they face daily.
- Setting up home - for care leavers, setting up home is a difficult job. The challenge was to try and set up your own home, but on the budget of a care leaver.

One of the main celebrations in November was the 'Star Awards'. This is a celebration event and awards ceremony for cared for children and young people and care leavers in Cheshire East. The event is co-organised by young people. This year's event took place on Saturday 20th November 2016.

In 2016-17 Cheshire East care leavers took part in a north west event around looking at issues that affect them. The group decided on the 10 key things that would improve the help and support they receive. Regionally care leavers said that they wanted:

- To feel listened to by everyone who is supporting us
- For our friendships to be valued
- To have accurate information about our rights
- Council tax exemption for care leavers up to 25
- Help to get into work
- To have our life choices respected
- Improved multi-agency working for care leavers
- To be able to remain in care homes until we're 21, if we ask to
- To be encouraged and supported to pursue our interests and form our own identities
- Better mental health provision for care leavers

Provide me with a good, safe home

- Improve the availability, quality and stability of local placements
- Ensure that children and young people are fully engaged in decisions relating to their placement choice
- Ensure that only those children who have no alternative placement will reside in care

Improving the availability, quality and stability of local placements is key to ensuring that children and young people feel safe and settled when they are in care. This revolves around the ability to maximise the internal accommodation capacity via fostering and residential

homes. It is good to see that Cheshire East Council has the highest percentage of cared for children in a family setting (78%) when compared to all local authorities across the North West.

September 2016 saw the launch of the regional foster carer recruitment campaign called 'You Can Foster'. The theme of the campaign was 'Ambition' focussing on the important role foster carers play in supporting children and young people and helping them to realise their dreams. The campaign featured on regional TV and radio as well as online via social media channels such as Facebook.

The recruitment and retention of high quality Cheshire East Foster Carers continues to be a priority for the service. A survey in 2016-17 provided some key feedback on what is important to our Foster Carers. The service is working on an action plan to address these issues.

Cheshire East is currently undertaking work on a shared fostering service alongside Cheshire West, Warrington and Halton. The aim of this work is to share best practice in relation to marketing, recruiting and the training of foster carers and strengthen our market position thus ensuring more local foster carers can be recruited.

In 2016-17, the commissioning process for the redesign of the borough's residential homes for children in care was completed. A contract was awarded to BetterCare Keys, a national children home provider, to run from 1 April 2017. The aim is to provide a more flexible range of children homes and to increase the capacity to care for more of our children within the borough.

The 16+ accommodation and support at Watermill House, Macclesfield has been re-tendered and P3 were successful in maintaining their contract to operate this provision from April 2017. The opportunity was taken to improve the staffing model supporting the young people within the provision and increase the number of places commissioned from 5 to 6 (including the ability to access a placement on an emergency basis).

Crewe YMCA was successful in their tender submission for the Housing Related Support contract for the South of the borough (led by our Strategic Housing team). The provision in the South also includes accommodation and support at Hungerford Road which was previously operated by Plus Dane. Children's Commissioning have taken the opportunity to propose a different model of support for our 16 and 17 year olds that have accessed Crewe YMCA in the past and suggested consolidating all our placements in Hungerford Road as far as possible. This proposal will require a small increase in staffing support at Hungerford Road, but should reduce the risks inherent when utilising a large YMCA for our 16 and 17 year olds.

The ability to place our cared for children locally is sometimes hindered by the lack of Special School/Resource Provision capacity within the borough. A significant amount of

work has been undertaken during 2016 to analyse and map the sufficiency position in respect of Special Educational Needs capacity and work up options to improve our position. Cheshire East submitted an expression of interest to establish a Special Free School in the Crewe area to cater for pupils with a primary need of Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) and on the 13th April 2017 received notification from the DFE that we were one of 20 Local Authority's to be successful.

The innovative approach of improving the local offer for 16+ accommodation and inclusion of the direct input of young people in the decisions about their next steps via a new Ignition Panel continues to work well.

Quality Assurance visits to residential homes continue to form an important part of ensuring a good and safe home. A programme of visits has been set again for 2017-18 and the enhancement to visits via the attendance of Voice for Children, applying their lived experience, will also continue as Voice for Children were successful in the re-commission of the Participation and User Engagement service from April 2017.

Cheshire East has joined an innovation bid with Stoke to run the 'House Project'. This involves setting up a company with children in care and care leavers to recycle derelict houses. This is intended to develop the ownership and participation skills of these children and young people.

By the end of 2016-17 final plans were completed for the launch of our Regional Adoption Agency, called Adoption Counts. This is a partnership with Stockport, Trafford, Salford and Manchester Councils, which will be one of the first new adoption agencies to open for business in July 2017. The aim of 'Adoption Counts' will be to maximise the economies of scale and expertise so that more children are matched with adopters much sooner and locally within the geographical boundary of the agency. There will be a particular focus on placing more children for adoption who; have complex needs, are part of a sibling group, and are from black and ethnic minority backgrounds. Adopters and children will also benefit from a regional approach to post adoption support.

Keep me healthy

- Ensure that all Cheshire East cared for children have an initial health assessment within 20 working days of entering care, and statutory review assessment and a robust health care plan agreed (6 monthly for under- fives, annually thereafter).
- Improve the emotional health and wellbeing of cared for children, young people and care leavers
- Promote healthy lifestyles amongst all cared for children.
- Ensure effective health transition planning

The timeliness of initial health assessments (IHAs) continues to be an area of focus as performance in this area is below expectations. In response to this poor performance, a

root cause analysis has been undertaken across four Cheshire CCGs and recommendations made to improve the compliance with completion of IHAs within 20 working days. It has been agreed that dedicated admin support and dedicated IHA clinics will take place in Cheshire East and are becoming established. The pathways for IHA and escalation have been updated and a draft strengths and difficulties questionnaire pathway on entry into care has been developed. Further improvements around this will be ongoing in 2017-18.

Systems are in place for recording review health assessment data on the case management system. Any missing data has been tracked in preparation for end of year returns.

There is further work to be developed to improve the emotional health and wellbeing of cared for children, young people and care leavers. An initial meeting has taken place with the Adoption Team Manager to take this work forward.

Work to ensure the opportunity for self-completion of mental health screening using strengths and difficulties questionnaires for 16 & 17 year olds is underway and progressing via joint work between the Nurse Specialist 16+ and Transition with the care leavers team.

The cared for children's health team has recently transferred to the same provider as the 0-19 service which gives potential for improved working together.

To promote healthy lifestyles amongst all cared for children, the following activity has taken place in 2016-18:

- A session to promote teenagers health and transition has been delivered to foster carers.
- A session to promote the health of babies and toddlers has been delivered to foster carers.
- A joint session promoting the health and development of children in early years is planned for September 2017.
- The 16+ Nurse has been working with the Personal Advisors to develop their understanding of the health needs of care leavers. More formal training workshops will be arranged in 2017-18.
- Leisure passes continue to be available and will continue to be promoted.

Information has been updated to the 'Your Health' information. The leaflet is ready for reprint. Suggestions have been made regarding updating the electronic version which may be presented in a different manner.

This process of providing health information to young people as they leave care is developing but not yet embedded in practice.

A new PA Champion for Health was appointed on the 1st April to focus on a number of work areas including pregnant care leavers, work around parenting, health passports, sexual identity and sexual health work. This is a target priority area for 2017-18.

From October 2016 the care leavers service has been working closely with the 16+ nurse and the IRO service to develop an assessment tool around emotional well-being and this was piloted in January/February 2017. A work group is evaluating this and will finalise the tool based on feedback with the young people who took part. A dedicated PA is working closely with a task work group who meets fortnightly to develop resources, strengthen working relationships and offer increased support to care leavers in this area. The council has also commissioned Kooth to support emotional well-being.

18 young people have completed the health tool and this will aim to improve the support offer to them. Those care leavers who were NEET due to poor emotional well-being and health issues have decreased and are now engaging in positive activities or re-engaged with EET.

Help me to achieve

- Ensure that schools are challenged and supported to help all children progress and achieve to their full potential
- Improve the way that children move between schools so that this is timely, smooth and well supported
- Increase the number of children with excellent attendance and reduce the number of days lost through exclusions
- Increase the number of young people who sustain transition from school to training and employment

The summer network event for Designated Teachers focussed on making sure that teachers understood their responsibilities regarding cared for children and how the Virtual School can assist in these. There was a focus on the quality of target setting within personal education plans (PEPs) and the group produced a revised framework for assessing the level of support needed and the rating of the PEP quality. Schools have also been supported with bespoke training and this has taken place in more than ten schools or colleges with individual teachers or groups of staff who support particular children.

The main focus for training in 2016-17 has been to develop attachment awareness amongst primary schools so that they are better able to understand and respond to the needs of children who have experienced trauma or insecure attachment. Two conferences were held in Autumn 2016, attended by over 100 delegates in total which were very well received. Schools were then invited to take this further by carrying out action research projects and becoming attachment aware schools. Thirteen schools have asked to be involved and the initial findings should be known by the autumn term.

The PEP process was reviewed with the Designated Teachers and the expectations around completion and return have been increased. This raising of the threshold for a 'good or better' PEP has caused an inevitable decrease in the number rated in the higher category but with ongoing support there is now an improvement again.

Schools have been supported to help children reach their potential in tests and exams through an increased focus on the predicted outcomes and rate of progress. Additional funding for interventions and boosters has been made available and this has resulted in more children having 1:1 tuition.

The SDQ score has been included on the PEP form and social workers are asked to complete this so that schools are aware of any interventions or the need for them to provide additional mentoring/support.

The previous monitoring of PEPs was for those who had a PEP within the past 6 months. From 2016 this has changed to number with PEP within the term. As the terms are only three or four months long this has proved a considerable challenge but in the autumn term there was a return of over 90% within the term.

The Virtual School Council, which was due to expand the quality assurance process to include young people, has not met since September while the structure of the Children in Care Council was being revised. It is intended that this will start again from September 2017 but the 'My Voice' section of the PEP has been modified to allow the young person to give feedback to the Virtual School on how they are supported and what they feel needs to change about the way this support works. So far the feedback has been generally positive or no feedback given.

The Reference Group for headteachers met in the summer of 2016 and discussed the way the Virtual School works and how this can be improved. Issues raised, such as increase in Educational Psychology support, have been acted upon and there is currently a vacancy for this post advertised with the intention that the increased capacity will be available from September 2017.

There is improved working with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and PEPs are now aligned with SEN review meetings. The system for supporting children with SEN who are placed out of Cheshire East remains cumbersome at times and meetings are currently looking at how this can be made more efficient.

Foster carer training has been expanded to include a session on raising aspirations and an understanding of the new curriculum and assessment systems for primary and secondary children. These were very well received with excellent feedback and will be offered again next year.

52 children had a change of school during the academic year. The most common reasons were change of carer or to provide the additional support for SEN required. All except two were made with the agreement of the school – in these cases on appeal and one direction were used. Transfer between primary schools has proved to be easier with children moving very quickly. Transfers between secondary schools have taken longer, particularly if the child has behavioural difficulties although all children were allocated a place.

There were few cases of children moving between or into Cheshire East schools last year but experience during 2016/17 shows that this is still an area of concern in some cases which is being addressed by Senior Officers within the Education and Skills Service.

Integration into new schools has been a key focus this year and schools have been able to request funding to put into place a practical plan to ensure a successful start. This has been successful and a number of children with troubled educational histories have been able to move into their new schools.

The Virtual School Council was asked for thoughts on school moves and their ideas have been incorporated into practice. Ongoing work with SEN will ensure that moves involving children with EHCP are given a high priority and are made in good time.

A monitoring system is now in place and certificates issued for children who have full attendance for each term. When a child's attendance falls below the 90% minimum threshold the carer is contacted by phone or letter to identify any issues and offer advice. School are also involved in any plans put in place to improve attendance. The overall number of days lost through exclusion fell in 2015/16. Work is ongoing to reduce this further, particularly for those children who experience repeated exclusions. The increased educational psychology support will be used to further support schools to reduce exclusions through observations and advice.

Exclusions for children in special schools remain low and when these do take place we follow up with telephone calls and visits. Schools have been made aware of their responsibilities to find alternative provision if they feel there is no option but to exclude and to start this from day 1 to avoid pressure on the placement.

The post-16 advisor post has been expanded to include liaison with all Year 11 pupils during the summer term to ensure that here is a details post-16 plan in place. A new Key Stage 4 advisor has been appointed in July 2016 to support pupils in Year 10/11. As well as supporting through PEPs, this advisor arranged a series of engagement activities for young people at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET) and also revision sessions for young people and carers to prepare for GCSEs.

A post-16 tutor has been employed via the Innovation fund to work predominately with young people who are NEET or at risk of leaving a post-16 course but who can also support Year 11, where needed.

The Virtual School has been given management over the Cygnet programme which is a commissioned service to provide bespoke traineeships with enhanced 1:1 support. Following a tender process, the contract was awarded to Total People from March 2017.

The reporting of NEET levels are monitored monthly and the system has been refined to consider cared for and care leavers separately which allows more targeted support. The levels of NEET in both groups has currently fallen.

Support me to move to adult life

- Increase the number of young people aged 18-21 who are education, employment or training
- Prepare young people for independent living, to ensure young people have suitable accommodation and are able to live independently with limited support, and experience greater stability
- Young people have the skills and knowledge they need and can protect themselves from risk

In October 2016 Cheshire East appointed an Education, Employment and Training (EET) champion to oversee work with our young people 18-21 who are NEET. The NEET figure has reduced from 52% (July 2015) to 31% (March 2017). This is largely through a targeted approach to each of our young people, and building links with providers.

The targeted approach to improving 16+ destinations for care leavers includes funding from the Innovation Fund Bid and employment of 2 full time staff members who will focus on NEET status of care leavers to support the work with 16-18 year olds and 18+. There is a sub-group called SPEED, which focuses on 16+ Education, Employment Destinations, which is a work group from across the services and focuses on tracking 16-18 year olds and also 18-21 year olds.

Improved data reporting and reliance on the case management system as a central point for data collection has been a central feature over this past year. There is a tracker and monthly challenge meetings now measure EET.

An EET PA Champion has liaised closely with all potential providers, agencies and resources within Cheshire East and providing more offers and choice of job, training or apprenticeship to care leavers. Three young people have progressed and completed apprenticeships in August 2016. During 2016-17 we updated our EET reports to improved tracking of these young people.

NEET figures for 18-21 year olds have been reduced through a targeted approach; there is an expectation on staff that all young people who are NEET have an updated CV and care leavers have been supported by their PA's to have CV's and work ready programmes such as

'Just drop in', Youth Support Team drop in, EET champion and improved funding to support this.

There are a number of developments across 'readiness for independence' and a new PA Champion for this has been appointed from 1st April 2017 to continue to drive forward the work in this area. In 2016-17 there were 4 workshops that took place with 18 young people taking part in these.

In addition to the focus on developing work around the strategy and work streams, there has been a drive to improve the quality of pathway plans and the tools used with care leavers. A task group worked on a new look pathway plan and this 'went live' on the children's system on the 10th January 2017. Service Manager's thematic audits and challenge meetings have explored a range of topics including; adoption breakdowns in adolescence (13 to date over 16+), university attendees (10), apprenticeships (7-9), Pregnant and Parents (24), foyer accommodation, 'staying put' arrangements (16), EEA nationals and unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) support as part of a deeper dive into our work.

Independence packs (bronze, silver and gold) have been designed by the PA's to use as a tools to work with young people in thinking about the work needing done to support their independent skills. A number of social workers are using this tool to assess their young people's independence skills. In the past year, 18 young people have completed independence packs in total; some completing all three.

The tenancy readiness programme offers care leavers the opportunity to think about the merits of having their own property and the responsibilities that may come with this. Four programmes were set up over 2016 and 13 young people engaged in this work over a 4-6 week period, with 4-6 care leavers participating at any one time. 7 have successfully moved to independent living, 2 have moved into supported lodgings, 3 have taken part in a trial at a taster flat and one has a moving on plan for semi independence from residential care in the coming months. One care leaver fed back "The course reiterated to him that he is not yet ready for independent living and requires further support from his host."

We now have improved knowledge of our data, better oversight and understanding of our service and a 16/17 year old tracker to think about next steps accommodation options. There is also better data tracking on numbers in staying put arrangements, semi-independent provisions and forum housing. These are reviewed by the Team Manager in monthly challenge sessions.

Last year 25 young people were referred to the 'Ignition panel', which is an innovative project that has been established to support young people to have the best, most appropriate transition for when they leave care. Ignition is for young people aged 15½ plus who are thinking about where and how they would like to live when they leave care. Making

sure our young people start independence at the right time and in the right place provides the best chance for a positive journey to adulthood and will support the best possible life chances. The panel shares ideas, suggestions, good practice etc. to develop an action plan that will support each young person to achieve their future living goals. This may be accessing a taster house, supported lodging or being supported through a semi-independent setting with a phased transition to young people being in their own property. Three young people who attended panel availed themselves of the taster flat over a 6 month period. Others obtained advice, more options to consider while others moved on to semi-independent provisions.

There are better 16+ options with ring fenced properties and even closer working with commissioning services and input into the Sufficiency Statement. Having the training flat aids the work in supporting care leavers make up their minds on their next steps.

We are working hard to try and reduce the experiences of care leavers facing homelessness and debt issues; with work being developed by the Team Manager and housing providers to prevent debts accruing and threat of eviction so there's a warning bell ringing out to our service long before this is considered an option. Council Tax exemption to care leavers who are the liable payer is up to 25 years old.

Risks to care leavers are now being captured when in semi-independent provisions through risk assessment tools (this was an Ofsted recommendation). This is tracked and reviewed in the care leavers challenge meetings.

The child sexual exploitation (CSE) tool being used in the service and training opportunities for all new staff is mandatory.

A good number of our care leavers now have their own bank accounts. Those who are unable to because of poor credit history or debts have access to a Credit Union account and several of our care leavers have accessed this.

PEPs are set up for all young people over 16 and these include the long term goals and aspirations. When a young person does not wish to have PEP, the support plan is still recorded and it is made clear that this is accessible when the young person requires it. All Y10 and Y11 are registered on the apprentice website unless they have a firm offer and plans to going to FE.