

Cheshire East Council

Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting: 19th September 2017

Report of: Nigel Moorhouse, Director of Children's Social Care

Subject/Title: Corporate Parenting Update

Portfolio Holder: Cllr George Hayes

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an update to the Corporate Parenting Committee on national and local developments in relation to cared for children and young people and care leavers.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to:
- 2.1.1 Note the contents of the report.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. The Corporate Parenting Committee is as advisory group to the Cabinet and, as such, needs to be aware of any national or local issues that are likely to impact on cared for children and care leavers. The Corporate Parenting Committee need to be able to scrutinise and challenge performance to improve outcomes for cared for children and young people.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. None; this is an update report.

5. Background

National Developments

Outstanding inspection reports from other local authority areas

- 5.1. Ofsted are continuing to inspect local authority arrangements under the single inspection framework. Inspection reports are a good way of learning from good practice in other areas. Two recently published reports have received praise the corporate parent arrangements and members are encouraged to read these reports as follows:

[Stockport](#) – judged good for for children looked after and achieving permanence (adoption – outstanding)

[Bracknell Forest](#) – judged outstanding for children looked after and achieving permanence

[Islington](#) - judged good for children looked after and achieving permanence

Local Developments

Rising demand in Children's Social Care

- 5.2. The rise in demand for children's social care services over recent years has put increasing demand on the service both in terms of staffing and placements. The biggest impact from a budgetary perspective is the rise in the number of individuals being cared for by the local authority.
- 5.3. As at March 2014, Cheshire East supported 333 individuals. As at March 2017, this had risen to 428 individuals – a rise of 95 (29%). This continues to rise and as at July 2017 was 459.
- 5.4. An internal foster care placement including friends and family placements cost approximately £20,000 per annum and an external foster care placement approximately £40,000 per annum. In addition a residential placement/ NHS placement costs somewhere between £150,000 and £200,000 per annum on average. By way of example in March 2016 we had 89 individuals in an external foster care placement but due to an increase in individuals entering care by July 2017 we have 102. This alone equates to annual increase of at least £520,000 if each individual stays in care for 12 months. Throughout this we are maintaining over 80% occupancy rate in our internal foster care provision and recruiting new carers. Likewise in March 2016 we had 36 individuals in either an internal or external residential placement, by July 2017 this has increased to 45 (including residential schools) so adds a minimum of £1,650,000 to costs of care.
- 5.5. The other escalating costs being seen in supporting our vulnerable children who are looked after by relatives and friends instead of being in care, is the increase in special guardianship order allowances the carers receive.. Whilst there are individual scales of weekly payment depending on the age of an individual being supported, this equates to an average of about £189 per week per individual. In 2013-14 we paid allowances for 117 individuals, by 2016-17 we were paying 166 allowances. This is an increase of over £500,000 in the two years.
- 5.6. In order to mitigate as far as possible the impact of rising numbers and costs, the following action is being taken, ie, we are:
 - Working hard to increase the numbers of children leaving care through adoption and in 2016/17 we had an increase of 44% compared to the previous year (regional adoption agency)

- Working as part of a shared fostering service with Cheshire West & Chester, Warrington and Halton Councils to improve the recruitment of internal foster carers
- Commissioning 5 new children's homes to reduce the costs of requiring external placements and ensuring individuals can remain closer to their established networks of support
- Investing in project Macclesfield and Crewe to prevent the escalation of need
- Continuing to improve social work practice (Signs of safety)
- Working with the LSCB to improve the early help offer

Star Awards and November Children's Rights Month

- 5.7. Work is underway to plan for the annual Star Awards as part of November Children's Rights 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. One of the main celebrations for cared for children and care leavers in November is the 'Star Awards'. This is a celebration event and awards ceremony for cared for children and young people and care leavers in Cheshire East, with every young person receiving an invite in the post to attend. The event is co-organised by young people and nominations have been requested by 22nd September. This year the event will take place on Sunday 19 November 2017 in Crewe.

National Adoption Week 2017

- 5.8. National Adoption Week is 16th – 22nd October and work is underway to celebrate this in Cheshire East, along with other areas as part of the Adoption Counts. This includes a range of activity including a media campaign (billboards, posters, bus rears, digital screens and digital media adverts). There will also be press adverts during adoption week in a range of newspapers, including the Macclesfield. Adoption will also be promoted through social media, including facebook and twitter using using hashtags #nationaladoptionweek and #supportadoption.

National Care Leavers Week 2017

- 5.9. National Care Leavers' Week is 25th October - 3rd November. The week is about highlighting the needs of care leavers, and encouraging the agencies responsible for looking after them to work in a coordinated and effective way. Cheshire East's Care Leavers Service is currently working with our care leavers to look at a range of ideas on how best to celebrate in the Borough. Current ideas include a 'Hollywood Bowl' in Crewe and a poetry competition. The service is also in discussion with the Sexual Health Nurse and Everybody Leisure to plan a FIFA tournament with the young people, with access to a sexual health advice (C-Card & chlamydia testing) and information on physical health advice and access to gym passes.

Overview of Education Results

- 5.10. Improving outcomes for cared for children remains a priority for all staff but most especially for the Virtual School. All children have been allocated a named Advisor and additional support and tuition has been made available.
- 5.11. There has been an improvement in the number of children who reach the expectations at the end of reception. This is now at 50%, 10% above the 2016 level and the highest result for Cheshire East.
- 5.12. Due to the number of children leaving care there were only four children who completed the Year 2 tests after 1 year in care. Of these, two were not entered for the tests, one reached the expected levels in maths and English and one did not.
- 5.13. This is the second year of the new curriculum and assessment and so comparisons can only be made with 2016. Although there was an increase in the percentage gaining the expected standard in three of the four areas, the number reaching this in reading, writing and maths (RWM) has fallen, which is disappointing for the pupils and their teachers as well as for those in the Virtual School who have been supporting them. Despite this, there are some children who have made excellent progress and should be congratulated on their efforts.
- 5.14. All the children were offered additional tuition from January and this was put into place for 13 children. This included all the children who gained the expected levels in RWM and increased the confidence of children even when they did not quite reach the standard score in particular subjects. A Kindle Club was set up to promote reading in children who were identified as needing support in this subject. All the children who took up this offer gained the expected level in reading, although one boy did not wish to participate and he gained the expected level in all subjects except reading.
- 5.15. Strategies are already in place to improve outcomes in 2018, which include replacing agency tutors with and an in-house teacher who will focus specifically on Year 6. These include the purchase of tablets with pre-loaded Key Stage 2 (KS2) learning and revision materials which allow usage and progress to be tracked and additional sessions for carers on how to raise aspirations and support children to prepare for and complete the tests.
- 5.16. One young person who has ended KS2 has written an autobiography and has agreed to take part in a video recording to be used to help schools understand and support cared for children. In this she describes how school offered her safety and support and has equipped her for the future.
- 5.17. Under the new scoring and reporting system for GCSEs for cared for children, 19% of children have gained Level 2 in maths and English. This is a provisional figure but is an increase of 7% from 2016 and is above the reported national figure for 2016, which was 17.5%.

- 5.18. The number of 16-18 year old care leavers who are in education, employment or training remains high, with 37 completing college courses this year. With intensive support, all but 2 completed their courses and have plans in place to move on to further education, training or employment. The post-16 tutor employed through the innovation fund has worked with 8 young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and has succeeded in helping 5 move from NEET into re-engagement programmes including maths/English tuition. Support plans are still in place for the remaining young people and others who require additional support. The Cygnet programme, which aims to develop employability and work skills has moved to the Virtual School. A tender was drawn up and Total People were awarded the contract to start in April. Twelve young people have been referred to the programme, with 11 requesting the initial interview. Some have decided that they do not wish to continue or work with Total People and 5 have continued to the next step. Because of this feedback from young people, the specification has been revised to allow more flexibility and this will operate from October.

Official Schools Adjudicator Report

- 5.19. Section 88P of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 requires Local Authorities to make an annual report to the Schools Adjudicator. The information required by the schools adjudicator report, submitted in June, included how well admission arrangements serve cared for and previously cared for children. For Cheshire East this was reported as 'well' because most primary schools are willing to accommodate these children showing necessary adjustments and flexibility. It was not reported as 'very well' because secondary school places can sometimes be hard to secure, which means children are without a school place, particularly those with SEN or challenging behaviour who require the routine of a school quickly. Where delays occur, schools are challenged robustly and made aware that the LA will follow measures such as appeals, direction and reporting to Secretary of State in order to secure an appropriate school place.

Independent Visitor Standards

- 5.20. The Independent Visitor Service in Cheshire East is currently delivered by The Children's Society (TCS). TCS adhere to the new National Independent Visitor Standards, which have been developed alongside other voluntary organisations. There are 14 Standards in all and, more recently, these 14 standards have been made more child and young person friendly by children and young people involved in an Independent Visitor Service. This is expected to enable more children and young people to understand their right to an Independent Visitor.

South Cheshire College Awards - Cared for Winners

- 5.21. Two Cheshire East care leavers were recently commended at an awards ceremony at South and West Cheshire College. Despite setbacks in their education, and through the support of our Virtual School, both of these young

people have exceeded in their field. One of these young people won Health and Social Care student of the year for her hard work and determination and is now moving onto University to study mental health nursing. The other young person won the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) student of the year, having arrived in Cheshire East in December 2016 as an unaccompanied asylum seeker through the dispersal programme.

6. Wards Affected and Local Ward Members

- 6.1. Although the number of Cheshire East cared for children and young people is relatively small, they are a vulnerable cohort, who live across Cheshire East and in other local authority areas.

7. Implications of Recommendation

7.1. Policy Implications

- 7.1.1. There are a number of policy implications as a result of local and national developments and these will be reported, as appropriate to the relevant Committee.

7.2. Legal Implications

- 7.2.1. The national and local developments described in this report are wide ranging and will in many particulars have legal implications. Legal advice will be sought, as appropriate, upon all relevant emerging issues.

7.3. Financial Implications

- 7.3.1 The rising demand for Children's Social Care services are impacting on the Council's budget position.

7.4. Human Resources Implications

- 7.4.1. The rising demand for Children's Social Care services has human resource implications for the Council as more staff are needed to deal with this rising demand.

7.5. Equality Implications

- 7.5.1. There are no equality implications as a result of this paper.

7.6. Rural Community Implications

- 7.6.1. None.

7.7. Public Health Implications

7.7.1. None identified at this stage.

8. Risk Management

- 8.1. Cared for children and care leavers are a vulnerable group that are at risk of a number of factors – poor education and training, health, safeguarding and transition into adulthood.

9. Contact Information

Contact details for this report are as follows:-

Name: Gill Betton
Designation: Head of Children's Developments & Partnerships
Tel. No.: 07764 166262
Email: gill.betton@cheshireeast.gov.uk