

## DECISION REPORT

### Corporate Parenting Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 17 November 2020

**Report Title:** Corporate Parenting Update Report

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Kathryn Flavell, Portfolio Holder for Children and Families

**Senior Officer:** Mark Palethorpe, Executive Director of People

#### 1. Report Summary

- 1.1. This report will advise the Corporate Parenting Committee of how the service are delivering the priorities for cared for children and care leavers which are clearly set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- 1.2. This report will provide the third update to the Corporate Parenting Committee since the restrictions of Covid-19 came into force. Services for cared for children and care leavers embraced new ways of working in the initial stages of the pandemic; this report will outline any existing variations to our statutory service delivery and also highlight the progress in planning for children and young people now seven months into the pandemic.

#### 2. Recommendation/s

2.1. Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of the report.
- Provide support and challenge in respect of outcomes for children and young people as outlined in the report.
- Provide support and challenge in relation to the key performance indicators as outlined in the presentation.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendation/s**

- 3.1. The Corporate Parenting Committee is an 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 needs to be able to scrutinise and challenge performance to improve outcomes for cared for children and young people and care leavers.

### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1. None; this is an update report.

### **5. Background**

- 5.1. This report provides an update to the Corporate Parenting Committee since the last report which was presented on the 29 September 2020. The lived experiences of our cared for children and care leavers have featured significant delays in planning for their future, particularly where children had plans to move on to more permanent homes such as adoption. The extent of these delays has been well-documented in previous reports to the Committee however it is pleasing to report that we are now moving forward and children's plans are progressing.
- 5.2. In response to the initial stages of pandemic, the government introduced the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 for Children' Social Care services. These regulations provided guidance for Local Authorities and Social Care providers in the alternative options for service delivery. These regulations were reviewed by Parliament on the 25 September 2020 and the majority of the variations to service delivery were removed. This ultimately means that frontline services have a statutory obligation to operate within a mainly business-as-usual model. There remains a small number of regulations in place to assist Social Care services in responsibly managing their statutory safeguarding responsibilities to children and young people whilst managing the risks of the virus to frontline workers. The remaining regulations include the possibility of undertaking virtual visits only if there is a specific Covid-related risk identified and variations to the processes in stage one and two for assessments of prospective adoptive parents and foster carers. These regulations were reviewed before the most recent tiered system to tackle the pandemic was enforced. It is therefore possible that a further review may take place in the future. The current regulations expire on the 31 March 2021.
- 5.3. The service has continued to comply with our statutory obligations towards children and young people. Between 79% and 86% of our visits to children

and young people were completed in line with statutory timescales (Quarter 2).

- 5.4. Individual risk assessments continue to be in place for all of our frontline workers and are updated in light of new information from Public Health and the government. There are a small number of frontline workers across the service where face-to-face working would place them at greater risk from Covid-19, and therefore their duties are varied and remain solely virtual. This has resulted in some young people experiencing changes in Social Worker and some additional capacity challenges, however there is no evidence at present that this is impacting on outcomes for children and young people.

## **6. Pledge 1 - Being a Good Corporate Parent**

- 6.1. Cheshire East Council committed to the pledges of the Corporate Parenting Strategy at full council on the 13 December 2018. It is the responsibility of all corporate parents across the council to consider the needs of our children and young people and advocate for how services can be designed, delivered and crucially influenced by the views of children and young people.
- 6.2. We must, particularly at this time, look to prioritise our cared for children and young people and care leavers where we know they are likely to have experienced the pandemic in a detrimental way. Some of these known areas are in relation to access to employment, education and training, mental health services and where they are experiencing social isolation. Officers and partners are focused on how we offer services creatively across the Council to ensure that these young people are prioritised as we move through the pandemic.
- 6.3. Elected members to the Corporate Parenting Committee have embraced the challenge of the Corporate Parenting role and volunteered to participate in a number of different forums and activities across the service. These observations and interactions will enable members to gain an understanding of frontline service delivery and collectively, with officers, continue to influence the way that Cheshire East Council prioritises our cared for children and young people and care leavers at this challenging time.
- 6.4. The service has historically celebrated the achievements of our cared for children and care leavers at the annual Star Celebration event. Unfortunately, we have been unable to hold this event this year due to Covid-19, however, in the true spirit of corporate parenting, we ran a competition for our young people across the service to design a logo to be printed onto a tote bag which would be sent to all children and young

people. Below are a sample of some of the entries we received, and I am pleased to say that we have sent all of our children and young people a tote bag with books and activities in recognition of how brave they have been this year. We will continue to celebrate the achievements of our children and young people and continue to think about creative ways to show them how important they are.



- 6.5. My Voice are an established group of cared for children who support the service and the Committee to understand the lived experience of children and young people in Cheshire East. Currently the support to My Voice is delivered via the Youth Service which is situated within Early Help and Prevention. We have taken the decision to move the resource into the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Teams, and from early November we will have a part-time Participation Lead working within the service. This is a fantastic opportunity to strengthen the voice of children and young people as we continue to drive improvements forward and we will see further developments in shaping services using the feedback that young people provide.

## **7. Pledge 2 – We Will Improve Education, Employment and Employment Outcomes**

- 7.1. The challenges for our young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) have been well-documented in previous reports to Committee. The service has participated in a Council-wide NEET summit to give the best opportunity for care leavers to have a strategic priority as we move forward and tackle the unemployment challenges resulting from Covid-19. Within the Care Leavers service, we have a dedicated NEET Lead who has coordinated for the second year a NEET programme which will begin on the 2 November 2020. This will run as two groups of four young people to reintroduce them to the world of education, training and employment. Young people will choose a community initiative that not only re-establishes their aspiration for their own path to EET but also gives back to the community. Last year the programme focused on homelessness and had a significant social value impact for the young people attending the course and the broader community.
- 7.2. Cheshire East recommissioned a contract with Voice4Children in April 2020 with a focus on supporting care leavers into employment in a creative way. The project is in its initial implementation stage which will see a commissioned care leaver mentor work with a small cohort of care leavers to set up small entrepreneur businesses with the intention of creating sustainability in their future employment.

## **8. Pledge 3 - Achieving Permanence and Keeping Children Safe**

- 8.1. Achieving permanence for cared for children and care leavers is one of our service priorities and we have a clear plan to ensure that the children who do require local authority care receive this in a timely way; that the care they receive is excellent; and, for children who no longer need to be in care, that their plans are progressed without delay. The service has reviewed how we strategically link our priorities to the operational delivery of services and from the 21 October 2020 we launched a new 'Resource and Accommodation Panel' where Heads of Service are setting expectations about the timeliness of plans and the resource allocation across the service.
- 8.2. Committee has been made aware of the significant delays as a result of Covid-19 for children with plans of adoption. I am pleased to share that we have seen some progress in this area and three children have now been legally adopted, with an additional 26 children placed with their adoptive families and awaiting final orders to be made. A further 22 children have a legal order in place to enable the local authority to actively family-find and place children for adoption.

- 8.3. It is also positive to report that, despite the delays in Court and the impact of the pandemic, the frontline service has continued to drive our priorities forward and three children have been discharged from care as they no longer require that level of safeguarding. Cheshire East Council are identified as an outlier in relation to the number of children living at home and subject to Care Orders, however, there is now clear evidence that the work that the service have been doing to make this cohort of children a priority is becoming evident and is fundamentally achieving positive outcomes for children and young people.

### **Bespoke Children's Homes**

- 8.4. This year the service has opened four commissioned residential children's homes for cared for children, achieving a return to the borough for a number of children who have previously lived in externally commissioned children's homes. The outcomes for these children and young people are positive and their needs are being met.
- 8.5. Unfortunately, our home in Macclesfield experienced significant difficulties in staffing and infrastructure and made the decision that because of this they were unable to provide safe care to two Cheshire East children. Both of these young people transitioned to their next home and are described by their Social Workers as feeling safe, and they understand that the unplanned moves were a result of the staffing and not themselves. We have put a clear plan in place with the commissioned service to recruit the right staff with the right qualifications and skills to provide excellent care to our children and young people.

## **9. Pledge 4 – We Will Improve Health and Wellbeing Outcomes**

- 9.1. The health needs of our cared for children continue to be positive and in the period between 1 April to the 30 September, 81% (relating to 65 children) of requests for a health assessment were made within timescales. 83% of our Cared for Children had an up-to-date health assessment where any health needs are identified within statutory timeframes and services put in place to respond to these needs. The Social Care service and the Health service continue to work in partnership to understand the complexities for children and young people in accessing health screening and assessment.
- 9.2. The emotional wellbeing and mental health needs of our cared for children and care leavers has been an issue raised throughout the pandemic and is a current focus for Shan McParland, our Lead Nurse for Cared for Children and Care Leavers. We seek to make the offer to children and young people much more visible to them as we continue in our recovery phase and challenge providers to ensure that cared for children and care leavers are prioritised in the delivery of their services.

## **10. Pledge 5 – We Will Prepare Young People for Adulthood**

- 10.1. The service has worked closely with care leavers to coproduce a tender for the 16+ supported accommodation offer for cared for children aged 16-18 years old, including emergency accommodation. The tendering process has been successful, and we have identified two providers to deliver excellent support and accommodation services to our young people at a crucial part in their journey. The service is now in the mobilisation phase of the contract and has a very strong offer in place to support our young people.
- 10.2. The Care Leavers Service has in recent years experienced a higher demand as a result of changes in legislation to support care-experienced adults from 21-25 years old. A service redesign has taken place and resulted in an internal restructure and Service Manager Steve Nevitt being appointed as the leader of the service. Steve and the team intend to reignite the corporate parenting challenge in Cheshire East and have plans to continue to drive the service forward, tackling some of the known challenges for care leavers such as NEET, and also to review the Local Offer for Care Leavers in early 2021.

## **11. National or Legislative Changes**

- 11.1. The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 were introduced to provide flexibility in the statutory obligations of local government relating to cared for children, adoption and fostering. These regulations were reviewed on the 25 September by government and significantly reduced the flexibilities initially introduced. However, the renewed regulations were delivered prior to the current tier system that is in place nationally and it is therefore possible that these regulations will be reviewed again in the future.

## **12. Implications of the Recommendations**

### **12.1. Policy Implications**

- 12.1.1. Cheshire East is ambitious and committed to ensuring that it is a great place to be young and that every child has the best start in life. This is demonstrated through the Council's core priorities that people live well and for longer and have the life skills and education they need to thrive. These priorities are supported and driven through the Children and Young People's Plan and the Health and Wellbeing Strategic Plan. Our Corporate Parenting Strategy has a clear vision that our cared for children and care leavers are safe, happy, healthy and achieve their full potential.

## **12.2. Legal Implications**

12.2.1. The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) regulations 2020 were introduced to provide flexibility in the statutory obligations of local government relating to cared for children, adoption and fostering. These regulations were reviewed on the 25 September by government and significantly reduced the flexibilities initially introduced. However, the renewed regulations were delivered prior to the current tier system that is in place nationally and it is therefore possible that these regulations will be reviewed again in the future.

## **12.3. Financial Implications**

12.3.1. There are no financial implications or changes needed to the MTFS as a result of the recommendations of this report.

## **12.4. Equality Implications**

12.4.1. Cared for children and care leavers can be a vulnerable group because of their experiences and so the impact of Covid-19 could mean further marginalisation.

## **12.5. Human Resources Implications**

12.5.1. HR and Public Health have been supportive of officers in ensuring that robust risk assessments are in place and available to staff in undertaking their duties.

## **12.6. Risk Management Implications**

12.6.1. Cared for children and care leavers are a vulnerable group that are at risk of a number of factors, including poor education and training, health, safeguarding and transition into adulthood; the Corporate Parenting Strategy prioritises these areas.

## **12.7. Rural Communities Implications**

12.7.1. There are no direct rural communities' implications of this report.

## **12.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children**

12.8.1. The contents of this report have implications for cared for children and care leavers, who are some of Cheshire East's most vulnerable children.

## **12.9. Public Health Implications**

12.9.1. The impact of Covid-19 is well documented within this report.

## **12.10. Climate Change Implications**

12.10.1. There is a commitment to ensure that Cheshire East Cared for Children live as close to their home community as possible, wherever this is safe to do so. This will ensure that children can continue to feel connected to their families and local community. It also reduces the geographical footprint of children, families and staff as travel is reduced.

## **13. Ward Members Affected**

13.1. 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.

## **14. Consultation & Engagement**

14.1. My Voice, our Cared for Children Council, continue to meet virtually on a weekly basis. They provide their views on topics that affect their lives and have been a key stakeholder, sharing their views with the Committee system.

14.2. The local authority is currently undertaking an annual participation survey that will help the service to continue to understand the needs of our children and young people and align any newly identified needs to the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

## **15. Access to Information**

15.1. None.

## **16. Contact Information**

16.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

Name:	Kerry Birtles
Job Title:	Head of Cared for Children & Care Leavers
Email:	<a href="mailto:Kerry.Birtles@cheshireeast.gov.uk">Kerry.Birtles@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a>