Cared for Children & Care Leavers

The Scope of this JSNA covers individuals who are defined as ‘looked after’ under the Childrens Act 1989 and those who meet the definition of a Care Leaver under the Childrens Act 1989, Children and Social Work Act 2017 and the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010.

Under the Children Act 1989, a child is legally defined as ‘looked after’ (or ‘cared for’) by a local authority if he or she:
• Is provided with accommodation for a continuous period for more than 24 hours;
• Is subject to a care order; or
• Is subject to a placement order.

Nationally these children are referred to as ‘looked after’ but in Cheshire East we refer to them as ‘Cared for’ as this is what young people in Cheshire East said they preferred. The majority of cared for children are provided with a service due to abuse or neglect. Other common reasons are family dysfunction, the family being in a temporary crisis that diminishes parental ability to meet some of the child’s needs, or because of illness or disability in either the parent or the child.

Most children are brought up in their own families, but a small number of children need to live away from their families and grow up in a range of alternative care arrangements which include foster care, residential care and supported independent living. These children are described as being ‘cared for’ and are the responsibility of the local authority who are their ‘corporate parents.

Our Way of Working with Children and Young People in Cheshire East

In Cheshire East we have adopted Signs of Safety as our way of working because we believe this will support us to achieve the type of service that children, young people, parents and carers have told us they want; one that listens to them, works together with them to agree a way forward, and is open and honest about what is going to or could happen. Best practice is child-focused, solution-orientated, and respectful and inclusive of families, and this is what we want to achieve through using Signs of Safety.

Using Signs of Safety, plans are created together with the family and other people who are important to the child or young person (family network). This means the family are fully involved in creating their plans from start to finish. Using this approach is enabling extended family members to be explored and involved earlier, preventing some children and young people becoming cared for, and enabling more children and young people to be cared for within their wider family where it is not safe for them to remain with their parents. The focus on establishing strong supportive relationships is also informing work with cared for children and young people, and care leavers, and there is a real drive to support young people to develop good relationships with people in their family/community who can support them throughout their lives.
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<tr>
<td>Whilst the numbers of cared for children has risen, we are confident that these individuals need to be in our care.</td>
<td>Audit and feedback from practitioners is showing that the Signs of Safety approach is resulting in clearer support plans for children and young people, with the wishes of the individual at the heart of the plan.</td>
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<td>Although our internal foster care provision is regularly at over 85% occupancy we sometimes struggle to find sufficient local provision and have to place individuals out of area.</td>
<td>The implementation of the permanency forum and focusing on the family network has had a positive impact on the number of individuals being able to return to live with family and friends either under ‘No Order’ or under a Special Guardianship Order.</td>
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<td>Some of our young people experience instability in placements and have had a number of moves within the year or have experienced their previously stable placements coming to an end.</td>
<td>We have continued to steadily reduce the number of days it takes for children and young people to move in with their adoptive family. This has been recognised nationally with a letter of praise from the Department of Education following the release of the latest adoption scorecards in March 2019.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some of our children and young people in care don’t achieve as well at school as their peers and we need to ensure the right support is in place to enable them to achieve their full potential.</td>
<td>In some circumstances, there have been delays in individuals receiving an initial health assessment when they first enter care. This tends to be when individuals are in a placement outside of the Cheshire East area.</td>
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<td>What our Analysis Shows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire East Council has experienced a 33% rise in the number of Cared for Children since 2015. This rise can not be explained by population increases. Although there have been increases both nationally and regionally these have been at a lower level.</td>
<td>Audit and feedback from practitioners is showing that the Signs of Safety approach is resulting in clearer support plans for children and young people, with the wishes of the individual at the heart of the plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire East Council’s pledge to Cared for Children and Care leavers is outlined in our latest Corporate Parenting Strategy. This highlights 5 key pledges and what we will do to achieve them, which are:</td>
<td>The implementation of the permanency forum and focusing on the family network has had a positive impact on the number of individuals being able to return to live with family and friends either under ‘No Order’ or under a Special Guardianship Order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- We will be a good corporate parent</td>
<td>We have continued to steadily reduce the number of days it takes for children and young people to move in with their adoptive family. This has been recognised nationally with a letter of praise from the Department of Education following the release of the latest adoption scorecards in March 2019.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- We will improve education, employment and training outcomes</td>
<td>Our Care Leaver offer is strong, with a high percentage of Care Leavers in Education, Employment and Training and living in suitable accommodation. This has been recognised by the Mark Riddell who is the National Implementation Advisor for Care Leavers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- We will work to achieve permanence and keep children safe</td>
<td>We will work with secondary schools to increase the take up of Understanding of Attachment and Trauma training sessions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- We will improve health and wellbeing outcomes</td>
<td>We will work with secondary schools to increase the take up of Understanding of Attachment and Trauma training sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- We will prepare young people for adulthood.</td>
<td>We will work with secondary schools to increase the take up of Understanding of Attachment and Trauma training sessions.</td>
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Within Cheshire East the numbers of Children in Care have risen substantially over the last few years, as at the March 2018 the published figure stood at 477.

The graph below shows the rate of Cared for children per 10,000 population. This shows that whilst the rate of growth in Cheshire East has been reflective of a general picture of growth evident nationally and regionally, it is higher than its Statistical Neighbours, the exception is Warrington. Despite this increase the Cheshire East rate only reached a rate similar to the England average and remains significantly lower than the North West average in 2018.

The local rise has been in part due to an increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers accommodated in the last year. In 2017-18 we supported 22 individuals who became cared for as an Asylum Seeker. This represented 3.5% of the total number of children in care throughout the year and 9.2% of all children who entered care in Cheshire East in 2017-18.

As at 31st March 2018 there were 252 boys and 225 girls in the care of Cheshire East Council.

88% of the children and young people in care identified themselves as White British. The next biggest ethnic cohort was White Other, representing 4% of the 477 individuals being supported. This ethnic breakdown is similar to that within the general pupil population in Cheshire East schools.
Overview continued

As indicated in the chart below we have continued to see a rise in the overall numbers of children and young people in care, however the number of new individuals becoming cared for has levelled off. Although it is too early to be definitive, we believe that this may be in response to our use of Signs of Safety. For the fifth year running, the number of individuals becoming cared for has exceeded the number leaving care.

For the last two years, around 13% of those becoming cared for were aged 16-17. A significant proportion of these are unaccompanied asylum seekers. We have developed and published a joint working protocol with Housing for 16 and 17 year olds that present as homeless. This has seen an increase in early access to support under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 provision, improvement in the quality of assessment being undertaken and, where appropriate, accommodation provided. The timeliness of support has increased with support being offered as soon as the referral is received. A risk assessment has been devised to ensure the accommodation meets the need of the young person.

Number of Cared for Children at month end 2018-19
Placement profile

Understanding the needs of individuals that become cared for by the Local Authority and where they are best supported changes over time so it is important to monitor this to shape the services available. Where possible we would want individuals to be supported in a family situation such as within their wider family network or in a foster home. We would also want them to be close to friends and school so they have a consistent structure in place as coming into care can be a very unsettling time.

Placement types at year end for the last 3 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement Type</th>
<th>31/03/2017</th>
<th>Year end</th>
<th>31/03/2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31/03/2018</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire East Foster Care</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Foster Care</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption/ Foster to Adopt</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed with parents</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative/Friend</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other placements with family/ friends under</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 38 (6), Regulation 24 or Section 20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire East or Independent Home</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent living/ Supported Accommodation</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential School</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other specialist placements</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>422</strong></td>
<td><strong>473</strong></td>
<td><strong>483</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As at 31st March 2019:
- 86% of individuals living in a residential placement including schools were outside the local authority
- 78% of external foster placements were in other local authorities. This is mitigated by the fact the vast majority of these were neighbouring authorities and were still close to children and young people’s families and communities.

Over the last 3 years there has been an increase in Court orders placing individuals within their own home. Local authorities in the North West, including Cheshire East, have a high number of children on care orders at home comparative to other local authorities.

We have undertaken a regional audit of care orders at home and produced good practice guidance on behalf of the region. We are tracking all children and young people who are subject to care orders and placed at home with their parents. We have begun developing trajectory plans for these children that provides a defined timeline for further assessment and for those cases where it is safe to do so, a plan to seek discharge of the care order through the Family Court.

Split of Placements inside and outside of Cheshire East Boundaries

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A crucial element of work with our care for children and young people is ensuring that the home they are living in is right for them and that the plan of support ensures stability and reflects the long term aspirations for permanency. To achieve this, the team around each child will work together from the earliest signs of potential problems which could affect the stability of a placement.

Services and support is available to foster carers to help them support children and young people, including specific training, for example on attachment. Our specialist @ct team work with individuals aged 10-18 and their families to support placement stability. Understanding why an individual may be unhappy in their home, especially when exploring different age boundaries and peer pressure, is key. This is why it is a crucial part of the support the Addaction service provide when individuals are reported missing from home.

In 2017-18 there were a total of 73 individuals who went missing from their cared for placement. There were a total of 497 separate missing episodes. Whilst this sounds high it was a similar number to 2016-17.

Every individual is offered a return to home interview with Addaction to understand why they wanted to leave home and what can be done to help prevent this happening again. This includes helping the Child or Young person understand why we are worried when they go missing. What the individual tells us then forms part of an updated support plan.

Where placements breakdown, we look at the reasons why and reflect on what we could have done differently and hopefully stop this happening again. The approach for professionals is outlined in our Disruption Policy.

Monthly meetings between the Cared for IROs and managers from the Cared for Children service, and CP IROs and managers from CINCP, ensure there is a joint focus on placement stability. There has been a focus on increasing stability meetings to ensure that issues within placement can be addressed to prevent placement breakdown. This has led to an understanding of emerging patterns and training needs. The service has developed a dedicated role of Stability Practice Lead to support effective stability meetings and permanence for children and young people.
Sufficiency

The Council needs to ensure that there are a sufficient number, type and quality of placements available for children and young people who become cared for, in order to ensure the welfare and emotional and physical wellbeing of every child and help them achieve their potential. Whilst a small number of individuals will require specialist residential provision, where possible the priority is to ensure that individuals have the opportunity to live in a family setting until they are happy to live independently.

Cheshire East have entered into a fostering collaboration called Foster4 with neighbouring authorities Warrington, Cheshire West and Chester, and Halton. The aim is to increase the number of local Foster Carers available who can support individuals to live closer to home. We will be holding an independent review of the wider Council’s contribution to supporting Foster Carers to help us to develop our services to ensure we are offering the best support to children and young people. We will also be implementing the Mockingbird model to develop extended family support for foster carers, and strengthen foster carers’ ability to support children and young people who have experienced trauma and have complex needs.

Cheshire East is now part of a regional adoption agency, Adoption Counts. We have continued to steadily reduce the number of days it takes for children and young people to move in with their adoptive family. This has been recognised nationally with a letter of praise from the Department of Education following the release of the latest adoption scorecards in March 2019.

As at 31st March 2018 the percentage of individuals who were in care and placed more than 20 miles from their home address and out of the Local Authority boundaries was 21.7%. Whilst for some individuals this would be with family and friends, for others this was because we could not provide a suitable home more locally. The Sufficiency Statement says how we hope to change this.

Ensuring that the places our young people live in are the very best quality is a priority to us. Quality assurance visits are completed to all residential provisions annually with good relationships established with providers. Voice for Children (a Social Enterprise run by a Cheshire East Care Leaver utilising the lived experience of being in care) undertake the visits with us to ensure we capture the young person’s views.

We have a strong commissioned offer of 25 units of accommodation for 16+ young people, which includes emergency beds, taster flats to enable young people to test out their skills for independence, dispersed properties with floating support, and semi-independent living. This reduces our need to secure accommodation and support from the wider unregulated market.

As at 31st March 2019 there were 158 individuals that were living in a home that was subject to an external inspection body. 90% of these were rated good or outstanding. There were none rated inadequate.
As at March 2018 Cheshire East had:
- 49 individuals in care that had a disability recorded
- 95 individuals in care with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP)
- 25 individuals in care accessing overnight short break provision.

The local authority also has a designated social care team to support individuals and families with complex needs. As at March 2019 there were 22 individuals open to this team who were also in care.

**Cheshire East Commissions the Childrens Society to provide a Rights and Advocacy Service for cared for children and young people. This includes:**
- Children and young people in care 0-21 years inclusive
- Children moving on from care to adult life and who are entitled to a service under Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Children and young people subject to a child protection plan
- Young homeless people aged 16/17
- Children and young people making a complaint about a social work service
- Disabled children and young people 0-18 years irrespective of whether they have a current service plan
- Disabled young people after their 18th birthday receiving transition services
- Children and young people seeking asylum

**The ratio of individuals with a disability placed outside of Local Authority boundaries is 54% which is higher than the 43% of cared for individuals in total. This is primarily due to a lack of specialist residential school provision and specialist residential homes within the borough. The Sufficiency Statement says what we are doing to change this.**

**The Council currently commissions 10 different providers to deliver Short Breaks Services for Children with Disabilities, these short breaks range from activity sessions, youth groups to specialist 1:1 sessions in specialist settings including gym sessions, swimming sessions and trampolining. In addition to this, the Cheshire East Short Breaks Team administer Early Help Individual Payments, which provides access of up to £1000 per year to access short breaks services that are not Council commissioned services.**

**We have specialist foster carers for supporting children and young people with disabilities who have more complex needs, which enables us to offer children and young people a local overnight short break offer.**

**A Complex Care Dynamic Purchasing system has been established which starts at age 16 through to adulthood which improves our local offer of respite and supports good transition to adult services.**

In February 2019 we held our first ‘planning live’ SEND Ignition workshop. Building on the success of the Care leaver Ignition panel the SEND Ignition panel focuses specifically on individuals aged 14-15 with SEND (including those also in care) and how we plan their individual support pathway into adulthood and beyond.
The local authority receives £1900 for each Cared for Child to support their Education. This is called pupil premium plus.

In 2017/18 the total amount received was £691,000 for 340 school age children, 116 Early Years and 94 Years 12 and 13.

The Virtual School provide Understanding of Attachment and Trauma training sessions to Cheshire East Schools and Colleges including how to adapt teaching strategies. To date, four full day sessions have been delivered for Designated Safeguarding Leads within schools, and 14 individual school whole staff training sessions.

Each Child has a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which is reviewed every term. The initial plan is required to be completed within 20 days of a child becoming cared for. We have a ‘New into care Education Advisor’ that attends the initial PEP meeting, which has resulted in improved timeliness of initial PEPs. The PEP will compliment any requirements in an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and/ or their overall plan of support. The quality of PEP’s are audited routinely to ensure they are delivering the outcomes required.

Over the last few years the numbers of cared for children has risen. In 2018-19 there were 94 individuals who became cared for by the local authority that were aged 4-16. At September 2018 we had 16 cared for children in reception, 21 in year 6 and 48 in year 11.

The Virtual School team has a Learning Mentor to support the social, emotional and mental health needs of cared for children, to support children with transition between schools, and offer support and guidance in school, as the uncertainty in home life will often affect behaviour and performance at school.
Local Authorities are required to provide information on the health outcomes for Children who have been looked after continuously for at least 12 months.

Outcomes reported include health assessments, immunisations and developmental assessments. A Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) should also be completed. This helps understand where individuals may need specific support around emotional health.

Early life trauma impacts on a child’s health and development. Cared for children are ‘vulnerable to health inequalities, and exhibit significantly higher rates of mental health issues, emotional disorders, hyperactivity and autistic spectrum disorder conditions… as well as developmental and physical health issues such as speech and language problems, bedwetting, coordination difficulties and sight problems.’ (Royal College of Pediatrics and Child Health). Local Authorities have a responsibility to put in place interventions to improve resilience and the health outcomes of this vulnerable group. How Cheshire East intends to achieve this is set out in Pledge four of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

All individuals who enter care should receive an initial health assessment within 20 working days. This is crucial in identifying any issues that need to form part of the plan of support being provided. Likewise it is important for younger individuals to ensure that all immunisations and developmental checks are completed in a timely fashion.

For all individuals that had been in care for 12 months or more as at 31st March 2018 the following data was reported:

- In 2017-18 96% of individuals in care for 12 months or more completed an annual Strengths and Development Questionnaire (SDQ). The Department for Education (DfE) consider a score of under 14 as normal, 14-16 borderline, and 17 or over as a cause for concern.

Understanding the concerns identified helps shape an individuals plan of support and identifies the type of services we need to commission to support an improvement in emotional health.

- In 2017-18 we identified 17 individuals with a substance misuse problem. We are working hard to ensure that individuals are able to accept support around this.
A Specialist Home and Family Support Team (H&FST) has been developed, which is a therapeutic Children’s Social Care team specialising in attachment based assessments and interventions. The team provides consultation, training, support and advice to Cheshire East Council’s social workers, school staff, foster carers and parents/families of children who are primarily in foster care or have returned home from care.

Interventions include:
- Play Therapy (including Theraplay ®),
- Art Therapy,
- Therapeutic Life Story work
- Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP).

The 16+ Nurse Specialist works closely with young people’s Personal Advisors to provide health support during transition to leaving care, and completes comprehensive and meaningful health summary passports for Cheshire East Cared for children. The Care Leaver Service has developed the following approaches to improving the emotional health and wellbeing of our cared for children as they prepare to leave care:

1. **Incognito Group:** A 12 week course to improve young people’s emotional wellbeing. The group was named Incognito by young people, and is designed to be run in small groups to help young people feel comfortable.

2. **Dedicated Wellbeing Personal Advisor:** This worker solely focuses their time on working with young people who are struggling emotionally. Support includes mindfulness and they will offer bridging support until a young person is able to access primary or voluntary services. 34 individuals have been supported so far since April 2018.

3. **Pure Insight Emotional Wellbeing and Trauma Counselling:** A dedicated emotional wellbeing practitioner just for our Cheshire East Care-Leavers.

Since April 2018:
- 43 young people have been referred to the service for support

As at April 2019:
- 18 young people are currently receiving a weekly one to one service from the psychological wellbeing worker. This includes emotional regulation techniques, psych-education about specific diagnosis such as anxiety, depression, PTSD, and Bipolar Disorder.
- 7 young people are receiving weekly counselling/ have completed counselling with the service.
Care Leavers

As a local authority under Section 23 and Section 24 of the Childrens Act 1989 we have a duty to provide specific services for individuals meeting the definition of a Care Leaver. This includes supporting individuals up to the age of 25 if they are in full time higher/ further education.

In April 2018, further statutory duties were placed on Local Authorities from the Children & Social Work Act 2017 to expand their offer of support to 21-25 year olds who are not in education but want and require support.

Cheshire East have worked closely alongside Mark Riddell, the DfE’s National Care Leaver Implementation Advisor, to ensure the offer for Care Leavers in Cheshire East is fit for purpose. In October 2018 he described the offer as “a very strong offer to Care Leavers”.

The Ignition Panel allows Care Leavers to participate in the planning and shaping of their accommodation and support. Young people attend Ignition and describe their current situation and where they would like to be in the future, partners listen and then describe what they have to offer or what they could develop to meet their needs.

Suitable independent accommodation is a priority for young people. The Ignition Panel, which supports care leavers in finding accommodation, was shortlisted for a Local Government Chronicle award.

In 2018-19:
11 Ignition Panels were held
We looked at how we could help 39 individuals
28 individuals were supported to move to a new placement
25 of these were into a range of independent/ supported living

Eligible care leaver is a young person still in care aged 16 and 17 who has been in care for a total of 13 weeks from the age of 14

Relevant care leaver is someone aged 16 or 17 who has left care having been looked after for at least 13 weeks from the age of 14 (including some time aged 16 or 17). This includes young people who were in care immediately prior to being detained in a Youth Offending Institution, or hospital, from age 16

Former relevant care leaver aged 18-25 who has been an eligible and/or relevant care leaver

Former relevant child is a young person who is aged 18 to 25, and has been a relevant child (and would be one if aged under 18), or was an eligible child immediately before he/she ceased to be looked after at age 18.

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Future developments:

- **Bespoke** - We are developing a ‘no wrong door’ approach for our residential children’s homes. This will see the development of wrap around services, including early intervention for edge of care, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, psychology services, police and fostering. Following a tender exercise, two providers have been awarded contracts who are currently mobilising services across the north and south of our area. Our aim is to reduce the amount of time a young person spends in residential care and enable them to step down to fostering or to return to live with their family or to move to independence.

- The Virtual Head Teacher will be reviewing the impact and effectiveness of current arrangements to ensure support and interventions are targeted and lead to improved outcomes.

- The Virtual School will be implementing the changes resulting from the **Social Care Bill** which includes the Virtual School Head Teacher to have responsibilities for previously cared for children as well as children who are currently cared for. and to promote mental health and attachment awareness in schools.

- In 2019/20 we will be rolling out Quality Assurance visits and greater scrutiny to our 16+/ Supported Accommodation providers. We will also be working with the North West Region in a planned programme of Independent Fostering Agency Quality Assurance visits.

**Version control**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication date</th>
<th>Changes made</th>
<th>Sign-off</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 19</td>
<td>Updated to reflect the new way of working: Signs of Safety, Virtual School and the new Local offer to Care leavers</td>
<td>SCLT virtual agreement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**JSNA section contributors:** Bev Harding, Business Intelligence Manager; Keith Martin, Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers; Kayleigh Wilshaw, Service Manager for Cared for Children and Care Leavers; Jacqui Hall, Business Support Cared for Children; Sara Deakin, Head of Public Health Intelligence, Lauren Conway, Project Manager.