TOGETHER for Children and Young People

Together we will make Cheshire East a great place to be **young**

Cheshire East Parent Participation, Advocacy and Support Directory

Practitioner Resource

November

2026



Cheshire East Council

1. PURPOSE, SCOPE, AIMS AND VISION

1.1 This directory should be read alongside the Parent and Carer Participation and Advocacy Procedure and Participation Support Guide. It is intended to help practitioners identify current support routes after first considering what the parent needs in order to participate meaningfully.

1.2 How to use this directory

Start with the parent's need, not the service.

- someone they trust alongside them;
- independent help to understand Children's Services and express their views;
- specialist support because of domestic abuse or other circumstances;
- help with communication or accessibility;
- statutory advocacy because of their individual circumstances; or
- a combination of these.

1.2.1 Advocacy is not the only response to a participation need. The involvement of one service or professional should not automatically be assumed to meet a different identified need. More than one form of support may be appropriate.

1.2.2 Live resource note: Service eligibility, commissioning arrangements and contact details can change. Practitioners should check current information before making or promising a referral.

INDEPENDENT HELP TO UNDERSTAND CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND HAVE MY VOICE HEARD

Disability Positive - Child Protection and Family Support Advocacy

Type of support: Independent advocacy / Child Protection and Family Support Advocacy

May be appropriate where: A parent or carer has difficulty understanding or participating in Children's Services, education or legal processes because of a learning disability, mental health difficulty or communication need.

What the service can support with:

- Section 47 enquiries
- Child Protection Conferences
- Core Groups
- care reviews
- communication with professionals
- understanding information and decisions
- preparing questions and expressing views
- some education/SEND processes
- court processes

An advocate can help the parent understand what is happening, prepare for meetings, communicate their views and participate more effectively.

Access/funding: Disability Positive advises that, from April 2026, its advocacy provision must be privately funded or commissioned by a local authority. Practitioners should therefore establish the current Children's Services commissioning/funding route before promising provision to a parent.

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Current contact: 01606 331853 (ask for Advocacy) | advocacy@disabilitypositive.org

Practice note: A learning disability, mental health difficulty or communication need should also prompt consideration of reasonable adjustments. Advocacy should not be used instead of making the Children's Services process itself accessible.

SPECIALIST SUPPORT FOR MOTHERS INVOLVED IN CHILD PROTECTION OR BORN INTO CARE

Believe Project - Her Place Charitable Trust

Type of support: Specialist parent support / advocacy

May be appropriate for: Women whose children are subject to a Child Protection Plan or who are on the Born into Care pathway.

Believe provides relationship-based practical and emotional support to women navigating Children's Services and other agencies. Support can include:

- a dedicated support worker/advocate
- preparation for and support at meetings
- help navigating Children's Services and other agency processes
- emotional and practical support
- counselling
- signposting and connection to other specialist services

Access: Women can self-refer and professionals can make referrals with the woman's agreement.

Current contact: 01606 557666 | believereferrals@her-place.co.uk | Partner-agency referral route available through Believe/Her Place.

Practice note: Believe is specifically designed for women within the relevant pathways and therefore does not constitute a universal parent advocacy offer. Other identified needs, including domestic abuse risk, communication support or statutory advocacy, should be considered separately.

DOMESTIC ABUSE, RISK AND SAFETY

Cheshire East Domestic Abuse Family Safety Unit (DAFSU)

Type of support: Specialist domestic abuse support

May be appropriate where: A parent is experiencing, or may be experiencing, domestic abuse.

DAFSU provides a Cheshire East route to specialist domestic abuse advice, assessment and support. This can include:

- advice and assessment
- identification and management of domestic abuse risk
- safety planning
- referral/access to appropriate specialist domestic abuse services
- support relating to safe accommodation where required
- access to higher-risk domestic abuse responses where appropriate

Access: Parents can seek help directly. Professionals can also seek advice and make referrals through the current Cheshire East pathway.

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Current contact: 0300 123 5101 (Monday-Friday, 9am-4.30pm) | Text 07777 941464 | dafsu@cheshireeast.gov.uk | Online self-referral and professional referral routes are available through Cheshire East Council.

IDVA - INDEPENDENT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ADVISER

Type of support: Specialist domestic abuse support, particularly in relation to higher risk

An IDVA provides independent specialist support concerned principally with domestic abuse risk, safety, options, reducing harm and supporting recovery. IDVA involvement may form part of the Cheshire East domestic abuse pathway, including where risk requires a higher-level multi-agency response.

Important distinction: An IDVA is not automatically a substitute for an independent Children's Services advocate. A parent may need domestic abuse support alongside separate parent support, advocacy or reasonable adjustments. Children's Services remains responsible for ensuring its own processes and meetings are safe and accessible.

SEND INFORMATION, ADVICE AND SUPPORT

Cheshire East Information, Advice and Support (CEIAS)

Type of support: SEND information, advice and support

May be appropriate for: Children and young people aged 0-25 with SEND living in Cheshire East and their parents/carers.

CEIAS provides free and impartial information, advice and support about:

- SEN Support
- Education, Health and Care Plans
- accessing education
- SEND rights and processes
- preparing for adulthood
- understanding options and routes for resolving SEND-related concerns

Practice note: CEIAS is not general Child Protection advocacy. Where the parent's difficulty relates to participation in Children's Services rather than SEND processes, consider the other routes within this directory. Where a parent is already receiving ongoing support from a solicitor or another SEND advocate, check whether CEIAS is able to provide additional advice.

Access: Use the current CEIAS referral/contact arrangements published by Cheshire East.

STATUTORY ADVOCACY ARISING FROM THE PARENT'S OWN CIRCUMSTANCES

VoiceAbility - Cheshire statutory advocacy

Type of support: Statutory independent advocacy

VoiceAbility currently provides a number of statutory adult advocacy services across Cheshire. A parent's entitlement arises from the relevant legislation and their own individual circumstances; it does not arise simply because their child is involved with Children's Services or Child Protection processes.

IMHA - Independent Mental Health Advocate: May be available to people who meet relevant Mental Health Act criteria. An IMHA can help an eligible person understand their rights, care and treatment and express their views.

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IMCA - Independent Mental Capacity Advocate: May be required in specified circumstances under the Mental Capacity Act where a person lacks capacity in relation to a particular decision and the relevant statutory criteria are met.

RPR - Relevant Person's Representative: A role associated with applicable deprivation-of-liberty arrangements. An RPR represents and supports the relevant person in relation to their deprivation of liberty, including supporting their rights and access to challenge.

Care Act Independent Advocacy: May be required where an adult has substantial difficulty being involved in relevant Care Act assessment, care and support planning, review or safeguarding processes and the applicable statutory criteria are met.

NHS Continuing Healthcare Advocacy: Support may also be available in relation to NHS Continuing Healthcare processes.

Current VoiceAbility contact: 0300 303 1660 | helpline@voiceability.org | Check current eligibility information and referral routes through VoiceAbility.

Practice note: Where a parent already has a statutory advocate, discuss with the parent what role, if any, that advocate can appropriately play in Children's Services processes. The existence of a statutory advocate should not automatically be assumed to meet a separate Child Protection participation or advocacy need.

A TRUSTED SUPPORTER

Type of support: Informal participation support

A parent may choose a family member, friend, partner (where safe and appropriate) or another trusted person. A trusted supporter may help a parent prepare for a meeting, understand information, remember what has been discussed, formulate or ask questions, express their views and feel emotionally supported.

A trusted supporter is not an independent advocate but may be exactly what the parent wants or needs. Any decision to restrict a parent's chosen supporter should be individually considered, justified, explained and recorded. Where domestic abuse, coercion or controlling behaviour is known or suspected, consider carefully whether the proposed supporter genuinely enables the parent's voice.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND ACCESSIBILITY

Type of support: Reasonable adjustment / communication and accessibility support

Where a parent is struggling to participate, consider whether the barrier is one that Children's Services should remove or reduce. Support may include:

- professional spoken-language interpretation
- British Sign Language interpretation
- Easy Read or other accessible information
- communication aids
- information in an alternative format
- additional preparation time
- shorter meetings or planned breaks
- alternative meeting arrangements
- support to understand written information
- specialist communication support where required

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Interpretation and advocacy are different functions. A parent who requires an interpreter may also require advocacy. Providing an advocate does not remove the responsibility to provide appropriate interpretation or reasonable adjustments. Family members, partners or children should not be relied upon to interpret where professional interpretation is required.

ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO PARTICIPATE

Type of support: Participation arrangement

Attendance at a meeting is not the same as participation. Where a parent cannot attend, does not wish to attend in the usual way, or where full attendance would be unsafe or counterproductive, consider:

- pre-meeting discussion with the social worker or Chair
- written views
- recorded views
- remote attendance
- attendance for part of the meeting
- separate attendance arrangements
- views conveyed by an advocate or supporter
- other individually agreed arrangements

The record should make clear how the parent's views were obtained and considered.

NO AVAILABLE SERVICE MEETS THE IDENTIFIED ADVOCACY NEED

Unmet advocacy need

Type of response: Management oversight / escalation / quality assurance

A parent's need does not disappear because they do not meet the eligibility criteria for an existing service. Where independent advocacy has been identified as necessary or likely materially to improve a parent's ability to participate, but there is no appropriate available route:

1. Discuss the need and its impact with the relevant manager.
2. Record the identified need and attempts to meet it.
3. Consider immediate reasonable adjustments and alternative support.
4. Consider whether advocacy can be commissioned or otherwise secured through an available route.
5. Escalate the unmet need through the agreed Children's Services route where it materially affects fair and effective participation.
6. Ensure unmet advocacy needs contribute to service-level quality assurance and commissioning intelligence.

Do not record simply "Not eligible for advocacy." The outstanding question is: **"What does this parent need in order to participate meaningfully, and what are we going to do about it?"**

Quick practitioner guide

If the parent says or demonstrates...	Think...	Then check...
I don't understand what Children's Services are saying or I can't get my point across.	Independent advocacy / participation support	Disability Positive where relevant; other available advocacy; unmet-need pathway

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I need someone who understands what it is like going through Child Protection.	Specialist parent support	Believe / Her Place where eligible
I'm frightened of my partner/ex-partner.	Domestic abuse risk and safety	DAFSU / IDVA pathway
I need someone I trust with me.	Trusted supporter	Parent's chosen supporter
I can't understand/read/hear/access what's being discussed.	Accessibility / communication	Reasonable adjustments / professional interpretation / specialist communication support
My difficulty relates to my child's SEND.	SEND information and advice	CEIAS
Parent has relevant adult social care, mental-health or mental-capacity circumstances.	Possible statutory advocacy	VoiceAbility / relevant statutory eligibility
I can't come to that meeting.	Alternative participation	Agree another meaningful way of contributing
None of those services will help me.	Potential unmet advocacy need	Management discussion, alternative arrangements and escalation

KEY PRINCIPLE

One parent may appear in several rows.

Do not ask only: "Which service are they eligible for?"

Ask: "What is getting in the way of this parent participating meaningfully, and what combination of support or changes will address it?"

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