
Minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 10:30am on Thursday, 11th December 2025 in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Chelmsford.

Present:

Cllr Graham Butland	Chairman
Cllr Carlo Guglielmi	Vice-Chairman
Cllr Mike Mackrory	Vice-Chairman
Cllr Wendy Stamp	Vice-Chairman
Cllr Peter May	
Cllr Marshall Vance	
Scott Tatum	Healthwatch Essex
Tom Coen	Co-opted Member, The Roman Catholic Diocese of Brentwood

Jasmin Langley, Senior Democratic Services Officer, Chloe O'Malley, Democratic Services Officer and Sophie Campion, Interim Democratic Services Manager were also present throughout the meeting.

1. Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations was received and noted.

The report on Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations was received and noted.

Apologies were received from Cllr David Loxton, Cllr Ross Playle, Cllr Mike Hardware, Cllr Susan Barker, Cllr Pat Reid and Reverend Alan Moss. Cllr June Lumley, Cllr Simon Crow and Cllr Andy Wiles were not present.

Cllr Graham Butland declared an interest during item 4, due to his role as Leader of Braintree District Council and the location of the Weathersfield site within his County division.

2. Minutes: 14 November 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2025 were approved, subject to one amendment to the figure recorded in Minute 4, paragraph 1. The sentence, 'Officers confirmed £77 million had been invested since March last year to reduce backlogs, with some progress achieved,' was amended to read, 'Officers confirmed £7 million had been invested since March last year to reduce backlogs, with some progress achieved.' The amended minutes were then signed by the Chairman.

3. Questions from the Public

There were none.

4. Essex Safeguarding Adults Board (ESAB) Annual report (PAF/27/25)

The Committee received a report PAF/27/25, outlining the ESAB Annual Report 2025/26.

The following attended the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

- Deborah Stuart-Angus, Independent Panel Chair - EASB
- Michala Jury, ESAB Safeguarding Board Manager, ECC
- James Butler, ESAB Safeguarding Adult Review Officer, ECC
- Alison Clark, Head of Safeguarding Adults & Mental Capacity, ECC
- Detective Superintendent Matt Cornish, Thematic Lead for Domestic Abuse and head of adult and child safeguarding, Essex Police
- Natalie Hammond, Director of Nursing and Quality, Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB
- Dr Giles Thorpe, Executive Chief Nursing Officer, Mid and South Essex ICB

The following was highlighted during the presentation:

- An overview of the Board's structure and governance arrangements was shared, as well as its legal duties. It was confirmed that the Board operated in accordance with its statutory responsibilities as set out in the Care Act section 42 - 44, ensuring compliance with all legal duties.
- The Board was 20 months into its 2024-27 strategy, which focused on three core priorities: Prevention, Learning, and Quality.
- The Board's annual budget was outlined, with total partner contributions amounting to £247,548 of the overall £259,528 budget. These contributions were provided by three statutory partners, including the NHS, which was contributed through three former Integrated Care Boards (ICBs). It was noted that changes were anticipated as these bodies merged into a single ICB. Additional, smaller voluntary contributions were received from district, borough, and city councils.
- Additional income for the year was £12,980, generated through modest charges for training attendance. These charges were designed to cover costs only, as the Board was not permitted to make a profit. A review of the current pricing structure was underway to ensure it remained cost-effective. Charges were also applied for non-attendance to mitigate wasted resources.
- Expenditure for the year was detailed as follows:
 - Staffing costs totalled £203,521.
 - Training costs amounted to £14,000. Most training had been made available via e-learning modules. These modules were made freely available to partners and covered a wide range of safeguarding topics including specific, specialised subjects.
 - Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs) accounted for £52,000 of expenditure. The Board highlighted that SAR cases had become increasingly frequent and complex. During the year, 31 referrals were received, of which 8 were taken forward and 17–19 remained under consideration. This represented a significant increase compared to previous years and aligned with trends observed in other large counties.
 - Office expenses remained minimal due to support from ECC, with office space, IT services, legal advice, and data provision supplied free of charge.

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- A financial review comparing Essex with Southend and Thurrock revealed significant disparities in statutory partner contributions across the region. Adults in Essex received the lowest safeguarding funding per head compared to Thurrock and Southend.
 - Essex Children's Safeguarding Board received 42% more funding than the Adults Board despite having similar statutory responsibilities, this was also replicated in Southend and Thurrock.
 - Statutory partners had agreed a 15% uplift over three years to sustain ESAB in response to an increase in SARs, the first uplift requested in 10 years and in line with Care Act 2014 requirements. However, the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner had been unable to deliver its share, creating a serious risk to ESAB's ability to implement the Safeguarding Adult Strategy and discharge its statutory duties.
 - The Southend SAB received funding from HM Prison and Probation Service, whereas Essex Probation had contributed a one-off amount to the ESAB of £7,000 two years ago, but was unable to do so this year.
 - The outcomes of the board achieved over the past year were set out and included:
 - A Specialist Project Officer had been appointed to lead initiatives including transitional safeguarding for young adults moving from children to adult services. This work aimed to ensure continuity of care and legal compliance during service transitions. The project promoted a multi-agency approach and had been highly successful, including collaboration with Oxford University on a research initiative.
 - The Board continued to provide patient safety assurance, holding health partners accountable for safeguarding practices and supporting the Lampard Inquiry at a national level.
 - Work continued with the police to ensure compliance with the 'Right Care, Right Person' initiative.
 - The Board engaged with the Home Office regarding safeguarding concerns at the Weathersfield asylum accommodation site. These concerns related to health, mental health, and risk management for vulnerable individuals. The Board secured direct engagement with senior Home Office officials to seek accountability, and this work remained ongoing.
 - Co-production remained a key focus, with efforts to engage seldom-heard groups and develop outreach plans aimed at preventing safeguarding risks.
 - Healthwatch delivered training to the partnership, ensuring that strategies were informed by lived experience.
 - Communications were improved, with a 12% increase in newsletter engagement reported, a 67% increase in positive social media impact, a 584% increase in Facebook followers and positive feedback received on the refreshed website.
 - The Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) process and methodologies were reviewed, with improvements agreed and implemented. Legal literacy training was also provided to ensure effective safeguarding in relation to SARS.

- Work was undertaken to improve understanding of appropriate safeguarding referrals, aiming to reduce unnecessary referrals and lessen the impact on the service.
- Organisations were required to evidence improvement through action plans, and accountability was sought where this was not demonstrated. Ensuring improvements were embedded remained a challenge due to difficulties in verification.
- Safeguarding leads from health, social care, care homes, voluntary sector, and councils met to review the new safeguarding portal and its impact on referrals, self-neglect, mental capacity, and domestic abuse. It was agreed to strengthen formal links between adults' and children's boards and local authorities through biannual meetings to improve collaboration and share priorities.
- An audit was carried out on completed Section 42 enquiries linked to safeguarding referrals. Key themes were identified, and peer challenge sessions were held to support partner improvement in safeguarding practice, with 32 organisations participating. An action plan was developed in response to the identified themes to drive continuous improvement.
- The Board faced significant challenges, including a 38% increase in SAR referrals over the past year, which placed additional pressure on resources. Ensuring efficient and equitable resource allocation remained critical, alongside partners fulfilling their statutory safeguarding responsibilities.
- Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) presented both challenges and opportunities. Future arrangements for safeguarding boards covering children and adults had not yet been determined, leaving the Board operating in a period of uncertainty.
- The Board identified and outlined several key requirements to ensure continued delivery of its statutory responsibilities including stronger engagement, a lead officer for oversight, formal recognition of its status, financial parity with the Children's Board, and a sustainable funding model.

In response to questions from members, it was noted that:

- The service acknowledged the predicted deficit of £110,000, marking the first time this had occurred in its annual reporting. This was attributed to an unprecedented increase in SARs. While projections had anticipated between four and eight SARs per year, actual numbers more than doubled, significantly impacting expenditure. The increase was considered partly due to greater awareness among partners and the community, driven by training and engagement initiatives, which encouraged organisations to identify learning opportunities and reflect on preventable deaths. Although this was welcomed as positive progress, it created substantial financial pressure.
- The Board reported that finances had also been impacted by the decision to employ a Specialist Project Officer to support cross-working with Children's Services on transitional safeguarding. This role was considered essential to strengthen collaboration, and the Board agreed to fund the post by drawing on reserves, as no budget allocation was available.
- Due to the Board drawing on reserves, it had requested a 15% uplift in partner contributions, spread over three years, based on current contribution levels. After

discussions, the NHS, through its three ICBs, committed approximately 80% of the proposed uplift, and Adult Social Care agreed in full. However, the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) was unable to meet the requirement. Funding arrangements for police contributions varied across regions, and in Essex, funding was provided directly by the PFCC. Although the PFCC declined the percentage uplift, they agreed to provide a one-off contribution of £10,000. The NHS also offered a one-off payment of £2,000.

- Police and health partners acknowledged disparities in funding across safeguarding boards. It was noted that boards submit requests at different times, creating challenges within finite budgets during a difficult financial period. To address this, it had been proposed to bring together all board chairs to review funding collectively and explore options for equalising financial contributions.
- It was confirmed that £20,000 would be required to retain the Specialist Project Officer post. Additional one-off funding of £12,000 from the NHS and PFCC would contribute towards this amount, but further funding was still needed. Without this, notice would need to be issued in February. A £20,000 increase for the next two years was required to maintain the post until 2027.
- Members were reminded of the agreed 15% uplift in partner contributions over three years, which remained essential to sustain the strategy. Due to changes in ICB structures, further discussions were needed to secure commitments.
- Members discussed ways to identify safeguarding concerns in the community, including joined-up reporting by frontline workers and the use of technology to monitor wellbeing. Work was ongoing with councils to share safeguarding information offline for older residents wary of online engagement. The Board emphasised co-production and engagement with seldom-heard groups, noting isolation and self-neglect as key risks. Additional ideas, such as creating a mechanism for refuse collectors to report potential safeguarding concerns, would be referred to the Prevention Group for consideration.
- Officers reported that approximately 2,500 safeguarding referrals per month were received from a wide range of sources, including care providers (the highest volume), police, health services, hospitals, fire service, DWP, district councils, family members, and individuals. The current conversion rate to Section 42 enquiries was 31%, an increase from last year. All referrals were reviewed within 24 hours, with triage completed within 72 hours. The most common referral reason was neglect and acts of omission under the Care Act, followed by physical harm and self-neglect, which had increased over the past three years. Mental health-related referrals had also risen, though many did not meet the threshold for secondary mental health services.
- Referrals were managed by Adult Social Care, a statutory partner alongside the NHS and Police, through a centralised team using a streamlined web-based portal. The rise in referrals had placed significant pressure on resources and correlated with increased SARs. Officers noted that some referrals were inappropriate and highlighted the launch of a new safeguarding framework on the ESAB website. This framework provided clear guidance on when to raise a safeguarding concern, when to follow local routes, and when to consult ESAB. Education and engagement with care providers continued.

- Officers confirmed that ESAB operated under a set of multi-agency policies and procedures shared with Southend and Thurrock, covering all aspects of safeguarding for adults at risk with care and support needs. These include guidance on making referrals, recognising abuse, and whistleblowing. It was agreed that the guidance and whistleblowing policies would be shared with the committee.
(*Post-meeting note:* The whistleblowing guidelines referenced were provided following the meeting and circulated to members. The guidelines can be found here, on page 62 – Appendix 4:
https://www.essexsab.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-07/set_safeguarding_adult_guidelines_-_v10_-_may24.pdf In relation to ECC staff members specifically, the relevant policy and how to raise a whistleblowing concern that can be found here: [Raising a concern about your workplace \(whistleblowing\) | Essex Intranet](#))
- Officers confirmed that a wide range of care technology equipment was available, and that Adult Social Care worked with ‘Livity Life’ the contracted provider for these services.
- Officers reported that the Weathersfield site had created significant additional workload for the Board and partners. The Board held the Home Office to account, identified gaps in risk assessment and management, and sought evidence of change. With partner support, improvements were secured, though progress was slow. Concerns also extended to other accommodation sites, leading to further engagement with the Home Office on safeguarding practices in hotels, including staff training and risk management. While some assurance was provided, gaps remained, particularly around risk management. The Board submitted detailed questions and, following unsatisfactory responses, agreed to escalate the matter to seek clarity and assurance. This ongoing work continued to place significant demands on Board resources, and no additional funding was received for work on Weathersfield or other sites.

Conclusion:

It was resolved that the Committee would consider a recommendation on ESAB funding outside of the meeting.

Post meeting note:

Further to the suggestion that the Committee formulate a recommendation relating to the funding of the ESAB, a detailed recommendation was collated outside of the meeting which is as follows:

- That the Committee recognises and commends the significant contribution and valuable work undertaken by the Essex Safeguarding Adults Board (ESAB).
- That the Committee write to the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable of Essex Police to:
 - Request clarification on the rationale for Essex Police providing funding to the Southend and Thurrock Safeguarding Boards, while Essex receives funding from the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

- Seek an explanation as to why Southend receives £15,000 funding from the Prison and Probation Service, whereas Essex does not.
- That the Committee writes to Cllr John Spence, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Public Health and Integration, to:
 - Request that he gives strong consideration to the financial sustainability of supporting ESAB's work and its funding arrangements.
 - Express concerns regarding the current funding of the ESAB, acknowledging ECC's financial and practical support, and ask that given there are only two years left before of LGR whether ECC could consider contributing more, as well as encourage statutory and non-statutory partners to review their contributions with a view to increasing them.
 - Seek clarification on why the Children's Safeguarding Board receives 42% higher financial contributions compared to ESAB.
 - Recommend that, as part of LGR considerations, the feasibility of establishing a single Greater Essex Safeguarding Board covering the entire Greater Essex area be explored, and that he considers whether the Council should lobby Government to amend current legislation, if required, to enable this change.
- That the Committee writes to Deborah Stuart-Angus to provide her with contact details for all 12 district, city and borough councils in Essex so that she may write to them regarding making some meaningful financial contributions to address the predicted shortfall.

An update on these actions would be reported back to the Committee as and when appropriate.

5. Work Programme (PAF/28/25)

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

6. Date of the next meeting

The Committee noted the next meeting would be held on Thursday 15 January 2026 at 10:30am in Committee Room 1, County Hall.

7. Urgent Business

There was none.

8. Urgent Exempt Business

There was none.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12:39.

Chairman