



Essex County Council

People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee

10:00	Thursday, 03 February 2022	Council Chamber County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH
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For information about the meeting please ask for:

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Pages

Private Pre-Meeting for PAF Members

Please note that there will be a virtual private pre-meeting for members at 4.00pm on Wednesday 2 February.

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Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

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Minutes: 9 December 2021

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2021 and consider matters arising.

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- 3 Questions from the Public**
A period of up to 15 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions or make representations on any item on the agenda for this meeting.
Please note that members of the public wishing to ask a question must email democratic.services@essex.gov.uk by noon on the day before the meeting (Wednesday 2 February 2022) and that questions must relate to an item on the agenda for the meeting.
- 4 Essex SEND Strategy 2021 Update** **12 - 46**
- 5 Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2022-2027** **47 - 72**
- 6 Domestic Abuse Task and Finish Group** **73 - 81**
- 7 Work Programme** **82 - 85**
- 8 Future Meeting Dates** **86 - 86**
- 9 Date of Next Meeting**
To note that the next meeting will be held on Thursday 10 March 2022 in County Hall.
- 10 Urgent Business**
To consider any matter which in the opinion of the Chairman should be considered in public by reason of special circumstances (to be specified) as a matter of urgency.

Exempt Items

(During consideration of these items the meeting is not likely to be open to the press and public)

The following items of business have not been published on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. Members are asked to consider whether or not the press and public should be excluded during the consideration of these items. If so it will be necessary for the meeting to pass a formal resolution:

That the press and public are excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the remaining items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, the specific paragraph(s) of Schedule 12A engaged being set out in the report or appendix relating to that item of business.

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Urgent Exempt Business

To consider in private any other matter which in the opinion of the Chairman should be considered by reason of special circumstances (to be specified) as a matter of urgency.

Agenda item 1

Committee: People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Enquiries to: Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

Recommendations:

To note

1. Membership as shown below
2. Apologies and substitutions
3. Declarations of interest to be made by Members in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct

Membership (Quorum: 4)

Councillor R Gooding	Chairman
Councillor S Barker	
Councillor L Bowers-Flint	
Councillor M Durham	
Councillor J Fleming	
Councillor M Goldman	
Councillor C Guglielmi	Vice-Chairman
Councillor J Lumley	
Councillor P May	Vice-Chairman
Councillor A McGurran	
Councillor R Playle	
Councillor L Shaw	
Councillor W Stamp	
Councillor A Wiles	

Non-elected Members

Christine Martin (St John Payne Roman Catholic School - Catholic diocese representative)

Co-opted educational representative members may advise and vote on all matters relating to children's services in schools. Two places are available for church Diocesan representatives. Two further places are available for parent governors at maintained schools in Essex (one primary and one secondary school). To date one representative is in place as above. A review of representation is underway.

Minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 10.30am on Tuesday, 9 December 2021 in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Chelmsford.

Present:

County Councillors:

R Gooding (Chairman)

L Bowers-Flint

M Goldman

C Guglielmi (Vice Chairman)

A Wiles

P May (Vice Chairman)

L Shaw

R Playle

S Barker

M Durham

J Fleming

A McGurran

Members of the Health Overview Policy and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC):

J Henry (Chairman of HOSC)

C Souter (Vice Chairman of HOSC)

B Massey

C Mayes – Maldon District Council (co-opted member)

A McQuiggan

Also, present:

Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Jasmine Carswell, Democratic Services Officer,

Michael Hayes, Democratic Services Assistant and

Sharon Westfield de Cortez from Healthwatch Essex,

1. Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

The report on Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations was received and the following was noted:

- i. Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Lumley and Stamp.
- ii. Under agenda item 4 Dr Mike Gogarty declared an interest as a non-executive director of Essex Suffolk and North East Essex Foundation Trust

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2021 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Questions from the public

There were no questions from the public

4. Health and Adult Social Care 4-year strategy 2021-2025

The Committee considered the Health and Adult Social Care 4-year Strategy, 2021 – 2025.

The Committee was invited to review the aspirations and targets being set for Health and Adult Social Care in Essex, and to identify any further scrutiny work to schedule into its work programme.

The following people from Essex County Council joined the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

Cllr John Spence, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care (left the meeting at 11.55am)

Mike Gogarty, Director, Wellbeing, Public Health & Communities

Nick Presmeg, Executive Director, Adult Social Care

Peter Fairley, Director for Integration and Partnerships

Cllr John Spence introduced the Health and Adult Social Care 4-year strategy.

Dr Mike Gogarty presented the Public Health 4-year ambition and approach. During subsequent discussion, the following was highlighted, raised and/or noted:

- i. There were two aspirations relating to Public Health within the ECC organisational plan - one was regarding healthy lifestyles and the other focussed on reducing health inequalities.
- ii. The Robert Wood Johnson Model, which focussed on the wider determinants of health was being used to develop new health initiatives. ECC would be working with the Health and Wellbeing Board in connection with this and now had identified a network of anchor institutions to also help take forward health and wellbeing initiatives.
- iii. A new joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy was being developed as ECC had limited ability to influence the whole health and wellbeing agenda and needed community and partner involvement to facilitate wider change.
- iv. Members discussed social isolation and whether, as a result of the lockdown, it had been more of an issue and how long it would take to address. ECC was identifying ways in which people can be brought together but loneliness remained

a challenge as it seemed very common and the highest incidence could be amongst the younger age groups.

- v. How education could influence and encourage healthy weight, including initiatives to improve school meals and physical activity lessons both in primary and secondary schools.
- vi. Different interventions and local small level projects to tackle weight loss, such as free leisure centre initiatives and GP intervention, particularly for those with Type 2 Diabetes. However broader initiatives were also needed. There was also an opportunity to influence during maternity and post- natal support.
- vii. There seemed to be a significant disparity between different GP practices in the ease and time to access appointments
- viii. Commissioning the recovery foundation around substance misuse
- ix. Recognition that some medical conditions made weight loss more difficult.
- x. The more that ECC could support people to partake in the physical activity they enjoy, the more likely they were to sustain it and for it to become a lifestyle change.

Nick Presmeg and Peter Fairley presented the Adult Social Care Business Plan 2021 – 25. During subsequent discussion, the following was highlighted, raised and/or noted:

- i. The plan purposefully focussed on both activities and services that worked well and those that did not. Plans would continue to be impacted by the pandemic and other ongoing events and ECC would have to adapt accordingly.
- ii. The vision was to put communities at the heart of Adult Social Care enabling people to live life to the fullest.
- iii. There were seven priority areas of focus within the Business Plan: Prevention and Early Intervention; Carers; Housing and Employment Opportunities; Care Market; Place-Based Working and Integration; Practice; and Digital and Technology.
- iv. There were six enabling strategies to support delivery of the business plan which were: Financial Strategy; People Plan; Market Strategy; Data Analytics and Insight Strategy; Digital Strategy; and Operational Delivery plan.
- v. There was growing demand for services supporting complex cases.
- vi. That over the next 4 years local organisations would be developing Integrated Care Systems and ECC would be working with partners in a multi-disciplinary way to provide place-based support.

- vii. The pandemic had further stretched the care market and had accelerated the trend for a reduction in the demand for residential care and a growing demand for domiciliary care. It was stressed that ECC would not place individuals in unsuitable settings and would seek to ensure that they supported people safely.
- viii. Members suggested greater recognition for the role of both family and professional carers. ECC was evaluating possible additional support that carers could find helpful.

Conclusion

It was agreed:

- (i) Further detail on the Multi-Disciplinary Team project operating in Tendring would be provided.
- (ii) Officers would doublecheck that training on cooking skills and recipes aligned with the typical content of food bank programmes.
- (iii) That a more detailed update on carers would be brought to a future meeting.
- (iv) Further information to be provided about information and support available for and targeted at grandparents who had caring duties.
- (v) Officers would follow-up with Councillor Fleming on the Maldon Day Centre respite care local practice to ascertain if it could be developed elsewhere.
- (vi) Further information to be provided at a future meeting on 'Houses for Life' and closer collaboration and sharing information with Districts on local needs (for example to help planning for, and development of, assisted living schemes) and addressing geographical differences.

5. Work Programme

The Committee considered and noted report PAF/18/21 comprising the work programme for the committee.

6. Date of Next Meeting

To note that the next meeting would be held on Thursday 13 January 2022, in County Hall – timing to be confirmed.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12:08.

Chairman

MATTERS ARISING (page 1 of 2)

Date	Agenda item	Action	Status
9 December 2021	Adult Social Care and Health portfolio priorities	Further detail on the Multi-Disciplinary Team project operating in Tendring to be provided	Separate process underway with local Tendring members - TBC
9 December 2021	Adult Social Care and Health portfolio priorities	Officers would doublecheck that training on cooking skills and recipes aligned with the typical content of food bank programmes	TBC
9 December 2021	Adult Social Care and Health portfolio priorities	That a more detailed update on carers would be brought to a future meeting	To be scheduled
9 December 2021	Adult Social Care and Health portfolio priorities	Further information to be provided about information and support available for and targeted at grandparents who had caring duties.	To be included in the above more detailed carers update.
9 December 2021	Adult Social Care and Health portfolio priorities	Officers would follow-up with Councillor Fleming on the Maldon Day Centre respite care local practice to ascertain if it could be developed elsewhere	Cllr Fleming to confirm.
9 December 2021	Adult Social Care and Health portfolio priorities	Further information to be provided on 'Houses for Life' and closer collaboration and sharing information with Districts on local needs and addressing geographical differences.	To be scheduled for a future meeting – probably April or May 2022 meeting.
10 November 2021	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 2021 Update	Suggestions made for changes to draft Strategy (rationale, reference to CQC/OFSTED inspection, metrics, promote further partnership working, community transport options).	To be incorporated into revised draft scheduled to return to the Committee in February 2021

Date	Agenda item	Action	Status
14 October 2021	Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2022	Delivery plan/timetable and significant milestones, further information and analysis of the Word Gap with Essex context and the feedback from the various surveys and consultations, and the numbers accessing funded places and breakdown including disadvantaged children;	To be incorporated into further update scheduled for February 2022
14 October 2021	Home Education and Children Missing Education	Further update once a response was received to ECC's submission to the Education Select Committee and Government and/or when the Cross-Party Working Group had any further aspects to report or consult the Committee on	Further update to be scheduled – Date TBC
14 October 2021	Domestic Abuse	Chairman and Lead Officer to discuss potential Task and Finish Group activity and requests for further information; Information to be re-sent to food banks in good time before Christmas;	Focus of a Task and Finish Group agreed to look at information available for local members to help signposting to services.

Report title: Essex SEND Strategy 2021 Update	
Report to: People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
Report author: Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer	
Date: 3 February 2022	For: Consideration and identifying any follow-up scrutiny actions
Enquiries to: Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer at graham.hughes@essex.gov.uk.	
County Divisions affected: Not applicable	

1. Introduction

The Committee has previously been consulted on the development of a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy. This is the requested follow up and update.

2. Action required

The Committee is asked to consider:

- (i) **The attached update; and**
- (ii) **Identify any follow-up scrutiny actions**

3. Background

- 3.1 The Committee last discussed SEND services in November 2021.
- 3.2 A link to the meeting papers for the meeting held on 10 November 2021 is here – [PAF 10 November 2021 meeting papers](#) . It was agreed at the meeting that there would be a further update to the Committee prior to the SEND Strategy being finalised which should include a workplan. Members also made other suggestions around content. The minutes of that discussion have been reproduced in Appendix A to this report.

4. Update and Next Steps

- 4.1 The update is attached in the Appendix. Next steps are as proposed under Action Required.

Expected attendees to support the discussion:

County Councillor Tony Ball, Cabinet Member – Education Excellence, Life-Long Learning and Employability.

Essex SEND Strategy 2021 – Update

Alex Abercrombi - Education Delivery Manager
Helen Wall - SEND Strategy Lead: Participation and Inclusion

5. List of Appendices

- A Extract of the minutes of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10 November 2021;
- B PowerPoint Briefing Paper: Essex SEND Strategy – Update Jan 22: My Life, My Rights – Essex Local Area SEND Strategy 2021;
- C SEND Strategy Working Document January 2022 – First page titled Rationale for New SEND Strategy.

Extract of the Minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 10.30am on Wednesday, 10 November 2021 in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Chelmsford

3. Questions from the public

There were two questions from the public relating to agenda item 4 (the questions are reproduced in the Appendix to these minutes).

Ralph Holloway, Head of SEND Strategy and Innovation answered both of the questions raised, key points were as follows:

- (i) There was no specific SEND provision located in Maldon. A service sufficiency review, which would complement the main SEND strategy, would look at capacity across local areas. There was a headteachers roundtable forum to encourage and support local mainstream schools to be more inclusive and enhance provision in mainstream schools including looking at the expertise and resource within the school workforce.
- (ii) ECC wanted to extend how it worked with local communities, parents and young people so that families also had options other than just mainstream and statutory services. Mr Holloway confirmed he would reach out to the questioners to see how ECC could further help them and link them with the Family Forum.
- (iii) An ECC aim was to ensure journey times were kept to a bare minimum.
- (iv) A key point within the SEND strategy was preparation for adulthood and provision beyond school.
- (v) Work was being undertaken with the Targeted Employment team and employers to widen opportunities for young people with SEN and to think about possible routes into employment.

4. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 2021 Update

The Committee considered report PAF/15/2021 comprising a further update on the development of a draft Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy. The following people from Essex County Council attended the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

Councillor Tony Ball – Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Life-Long Learning and Employability,
Ralph Holloway – Head of SEND Strategy and Innovation.

Essex SEND Strategy 2021 – Update

Ralph Holloway introduced the content of the draft strategy which included aspirations for improving equity, inclusion and equal access to opportunities and outcomes for young people with SEND. He also highlighted ECC's vision for every child and young person, and the ECC pledge to act in their best interests.

During subsequent discussion, the following was highlighted, raised and/or noted:

- (i) Some of the content in the strategy was about addressing the serious weaknesses that were identified by the CQC/Ofsted inspection report. During Covid further discovery work had taken place of what worked and did not work in the local system and had included conversations with the Essex Family Forum and the Multi Schools Council.
- (ii) There would be a SEND sufficiency strategy which would look at where provision was based including where the population was likely to develop in the future to determine where there could be gaps in provision. Members emphasised the importance of working closely with local communities and district councils on local planning and housing issues.
- (iii) Essex compared relatively well compared to other counties in respect of the proportion of young people aged 16-17 with SEND who were not in employment, education or training. Opportunities to fund and support new businesses that would employ young people with SEND was being looked into.
- (iv) The Department for Education would be completing a SEND review which could impact what went into the strategy, it was important to ensure the strategy was a live document that responded to changes and circumstances and there was continued engagement with families.
- (v) Outdoor learning such as Forest Schools was being explored.
- (vi) Some Members raised concerns on long journey times and the sustainability of driving young people back and forth to specialist education centres. ECC was further encouraging how specialist provision could be included within mainstream schools to meet the needs of young people which could help reduce the need to travel long distances. ECC would continue to encourage all schools to sign up to the Inclusion Policy and emphasise the benefit to the whole community in promoting a culture of inclusion. Essex Passenger Transport could help with community transport options.
- (vii) An Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) might name a local school to attend but sometimes that school could not accommodate. This could then lead to a tribunal and the child missing out on formal education during the course of the appeal process. One of ECC's aspirations was to reduce the number of tribunals being requested. A piece of work was being undertaken that looked at where a young person with an EHCP lives and where they attended school, this helped to understand why parents made a decision to go to a school that's further away than other schools.

Essex SEND Strategy 2021 – Update

- (viii) The main way a child was referred into the system was by a request from the parent or school for a statutory assessment, Essex County Council had a duty to consider requests and decide whether an assessment would be completed of that young person and decide within 20 weeks whether an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) would be issued.
- (ix) It was rare that a EHCP was ceased until the young person had left education. There was a need to consider whether there could be plans that were ceased earlier if that young person's outcomes had been reached and seen as a success.
- (x) Some parents felt they had no choice but to elect to home educate their child and this would be responded to in the strategy to try and reduce the conflict that sometimes caused that decision to be made.
- (xi) There was a need to prepare young people to be independent and parents to be more resilient and to support that independence. Opportunities were being looked into to use other sites to help prepare a young person. Also, ECC had invested in residential provision in two of their special schools to support independence and preparation for adulthood.
- (xii) Members highlighted that some young people may be 'falling through the net', especially during the pandemic and the challenge of reaching out to families not engaged with schools.

Conclusion:

It was **agreed** that there would be a further update to the Committee prior to the SEND Strategy being published which should include a workplan.

Members suggested the strategy needed:

- more detail on the rationale for a new strategy, and acknowledge the current failings in the system;
- that the narrative should link with the outcomes of the CQC/OFSTED inspection and subsequent actions;
- to include metrics as part of the section on Ambitions, and look for outcomes beyond just formal qualifications and link with individual Education Health Care Plans. Members challenged the outcomes being sought and there was the suggestion that some objectives could include reducing the number of tribunals, making it easier for parents to navigate the local system, clearer information and communications on alternatives to an EHCP and more early intervention.
- to actively promote further partnership working particularly in the community and with districts,

Essex SEND Strategy

Update
Jan 22

My Life, My Rights Essex Local Area SEND Strategy 2021



Introduction – Cllr Tony Ball

Since we last presented to scrutiny we have:

- Engaged further with education, health and care colleagues including schools and settings through virtual workshops
- Engaged further with the Essex Family Forum
- Used all the above intelligence to create a full five-year SEND strategy which incorporates the feedback from scrutiny:
 - Alignment with Ofsted/CQC inspection outcomes
 - More detail on the rationale for a new SEND strategy
 - Actively promoting partnership working

The Essex SEND strategy will drive forward and embed the changes made to date across the Local Area and help to focus all services in education, health and social care on driving forward the required changes so that children, young people and their parents experience the difference.

The delivery plan that accompanies the strategy will set out the specific projects and contributions of all partners and the measures that we will use to evaluate the impact across the Local Area and hold ourselves to account.

Alignment with the Essex SEND Sufficiency Strategy is key. The sufficiency strategy sets out the provision, resources and skills required to meet the demand in Essex.

Rationale for a new SEND Strategy

Families, children and young people tell us that change is needed:

“My Life, My Rights”

Ofsted/CQC tell us that change is needed:

The 2019 SEND Local Area Inspection concluded that a joint written statement of action was needed to address three areas of significant weakness:

- Accurate identification of need
 - Quality of EHC plans
 - Joint commissioning

Professionals working within the system tell us that change is needed:

Challenges within the SEND system are becoming progressively more complex and increasingly require a system wide approach to resolve.

SEND Strategy Overview

01.

Section 1
Introduction

02.

Section 2
What do we need to improve in Essex?

03.

Section 3
The strategy vision and test

04.

Section 4
Test questions and golden threads

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Section 5
The local area pledge

06.

Section 6
The five strands

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Microsoft Edge
PDF Document

Vision for SEND

Our vision for the SEND system is based on the fundamental rights of all children and young people as defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

All children have the same rights.

The rights for children set out in the United Nations Convention have been agreed by almost every country in the world.

Our vision is that every child and young person:



is safe



has the best possible health and wellbeing



develops their personality, talents and abilities to the full



is connected to, and plays an active part in their local community



is able to live a full and meaningful life with independence and dignity

Our vision applies to all children:



whatever their age



whatever their circumstances



whatever their unique characteristics



and without discrimination

How will the strategy address the inspection findings?

The inspection found **variation in services across the local area**, which we will address through the **Equity** thread.

“Procedures vary across the local area, which delays the identification of children’s needs.”
“Children and young people have not benefited from equitable access to services to meet their needs”.
“some children and young people get access to assessments and support and others do not.”



Equity

The inspection found that the pace and impact of change had not been sufficient, which we will address through the **Ambition** thread.

“The ambition to systematically promote good practice is high, but at an early stage across most services.”
“Weak use of measurable and clearly understood outcomes hampers the development of services ... across the local area.”



Ambition

The inspection found that not enough was being done to **secure high quality outcomes for children and young people**, which we will address through the **Inclusion** thread.

“reasonable adjustments are not made to help [children] to attend each day and to do well.”



Inclusive

What does that mean in practice?

Improvements made to date:

Accurate identification of need

Following implementation of new guidance, training and support, Essex data is now in-line with national averages.

Quality of EHC Plans

All new EHC plans are quality assured and no inadequate plans are issued.

Through new quality assurance framework, training, support and guidance and improved collaboration across education, health and care, we are improving the % of 'good' and 'outstanding' plans and reducing the % of plans requiring improvement.

Joint commissioning

The new Joint Commissioning Framework demonstrates the commitment of local commissioners across Essex to develop shared commissioning and delivery models to meet the diverse needs of children and young people with SEND in the county.

Strategy will build on to deliver:

- Early identification and early support
- Effective One Planning & SEN support
- Inclusive communities and equal opportunities
- Excellent universal and additional services
- Preparing for adulthood from the earliest years

- All planning is person-centred
- Information is available and accessible
- Clear pathways to access support and services
- Effective One Planning & SEN support
- Joined up planning and support across E,H,C
- Preparing for adulthood from the earliest years
- High quality transitions
- Next steps and employability

- The right support, from the right people, at the right time
- Joined up planning and support across E,H,C
- Excellent universal and additional services
- Specialist excellence in Essex
- Preparing for adulthood from the earliest years
- High quality transitions
- Next steps and employability
- More opportunities beyond age 16

Alignment and Enablers



SEND Workplan and Strategy Delivery Plan
Joint Written Statement of Action
SEND Capital Programme
SEND Data Dashboard, forecasting and effectiveness measures
Effective early intervention and statutory processes



Public questions for PAF Scrutiny on SEND Strategy on 10th November 2021

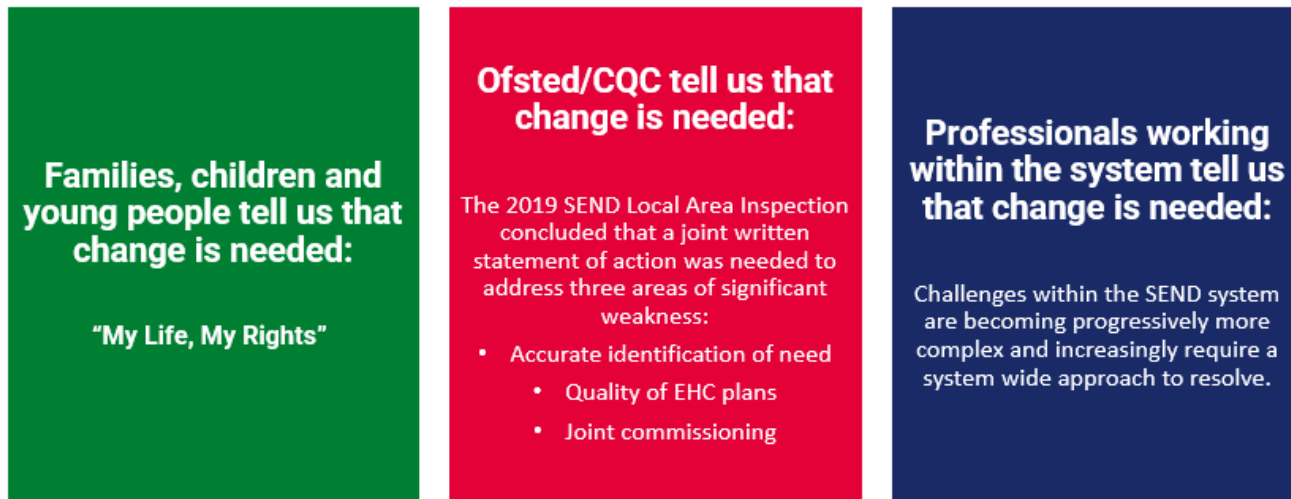
- Ralph Holloway, Head of SEND Strategy and Innovation, met with Tara Strydom in November following the PAF Scrutiny meeting
- Tara is a newly appointed Family Champion for Essex Family Forum
- A further meeting with a wider group of parents from the Dengie area to discuss SEND and local provision is being arranged (an earlier meeting had to be cancelled to find a better time for parents)
- Work is underway, following an initial meeting with Essex Family Forum and Essex Carers Network, on priorities for young people and their families as they move beyond school based provision
- A case study approach will be used to capture the experience of a range of young people and families and looking at provision and outcomes beyond education.

Partnership Working

- The task of delivery is not just about the practicalities of plans and processes, but also about **how we work together across the Local Area**. The inspection noted a **shared commitment from senior leaders** to making sustainable change and we are continuously strengthening our ways of working together to achieve the vision set out in this strategy through a new **SEND Partnership Board** and associated governance structure.
- It requires a commitment across the Local Area to **work in close partnership with families** and ensure that children, young people and their families are fully included in all matters that affect them.
- We recognise that there are challenges ahead. The Covid-19 pandemic has put significant pressure on individuals, families, teams, communities and organisations and full recovery will take time. However, as we begin that recovery, **prioritising the things that matter and working together** will give us the best chance of improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND in Essex.

We must do this together.

Rationale for a new SEND strategy



In September 2019, the Local Area had a joint inspection by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Ofsted. The inspection looked at how well the Local Area is delivering the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014.

The inspection focused on the Local Area, not just the Local Authority. The Local Area includes all the teams, services and providers in Education, Health and Social Care that work with, support and care for children and young people with SEND.

The inspection concluded that:

The pace of change across education, health and care services has not been quick enough to implement the disability and special educational needs reforms since 2014. Since 2017, partners in education, health and care have worked more closely to improve services. Senior leaders now have a shared commitment to learn from one another, make use of what they know, and make sustainable change. Their work has not yet made the required difference to parents, carers and their children. (Local Area Joint Inspection, 2019)

Strategic leaders across education, health and social care are still working on creating a shared agreement about the outcomes that they want for children and young people with SEND in Essex. Leaders are not reviewing the wealth of information that they have available to them well enough. They do not yet use this information to measure the impact of the work that they have already undertaken or to evaluate whether enough improvement is being made. (Local Area Joint Inspection, 2019)

The findings from the joint inspection were in line with the areas for improvement that we had identified during the period of engagement with young people, families and partners in Education Health and Social Care. All were in agreement; there needs to be changes in the SEND system in Essex.

This five-year SEND strategy will drive forward the changes that have been started in the Local Area and help to focus all services in education, health and social care on making the required changes so that children, young people and their parents begin to experience the difference. The delivery plan that accompanies the strategy will set out the measures that we will use to drive and evaluate the impact across the Local Area.

Who has helped create and inform the new strategy?

In chronological order:

- We asked what is important to families (SEND Public Engagement, 2019; National POET survey, 2019)
Between March and May 2019, Essex County Council held a SEND public engagement asking parents, carers, young people and education settings to complete a survey to develop the SEND Strategy in Essex. 1027 responded to the survey, including 511 parents and carers, 358 from an education setting and 104 who work for Essex County Council across Education and Social Care and 4 young people with SEND.
- We held engagement session in schools to better understand the views that had been expressed in the SEND Public Engagement (Autumn Term, 2019). We held 25 school engagement sessions across Essex in autumn term, with an additional Early Years setting specific webinar and a Further Education specific engagement session. The Essex Family Forum held eight engagement sessions with families across the County to explore the key challenges faced by children, young people and their parents.
- Young people told us what matters to them (National POET survey, 2019; Children and Young People's POET challenge, March 2020; Multi-Schools Council minutes, 2019-2021)
- We held regular virtual keeping in touch meetings throughout the COVID pandemic to understand the new pressures and emerging challenges that children, young people and families were facing (April 2020-ongoing). Leaders from across all services came together weekly with the Essex Family Forum to keep each other updated. Practitioners from across the Local Area, alongside the Essex Family Forum, hosted weekly drop-ins for all parent support groups to share the issues that families were raising with their teams.
- The Essex Family Forum asked families about their lived experiences and identified eleven key challenges. (Family Impact Survey November, 2020)
- The Essex Headteacher Inclusion Roundtable continue to work in partnership with the Local Authority to help us understand the strengths and challenges for schools, colleges and EY settings on the ground.
- The parent carer network for Essex, the Essex Family Forum share termly feedback of lived experience through their virtual Graffiti Wall.

What are our challenges?

1. Variability in quality and availability of services across Essex

The size and scale of Essex is both a strength and a challenge. The size offers great opportunities and expertise; the challenge is ensuring equity across every ward in every district.

There is too much variability in the quality and availability of services, including education, across the Local Area which inevitably leads to mixed parental satisfaction. This variation in experience is common across surveys, conversations and was also a finding of the Local Area joint inspection in 2019.

Parental satisfaction is mixed across the local area, often linked to two particular things: first, there is too much variability in the quality and availability of services between the four quadrants within Essex and the CCGs; second, the experiences of children and young people are often dependent on individual professionals rather than on consistently high-quality services and robust systems for sharing information. (Local Area Joint Inspection, 2019)

There is a similar wide variety in the levels of confidence that parents have in the SEND support (or One Planning as it is often called in Essex) that children and young people receive. Parents recognise the effort that schools and education settings make but feel that the amount and quality of support is inconsistent from school to school, setting to setting. Parents feel that not all teachers and settings are well equipped to meet their children's needs and feel some schools and settings need more support. Lack of confidence in the amount or quality of support a child receives through SEN support (One Planning) is a common reason for applications for an EHC Needs Assessment.

2. The ever changing profile of SEND

The profile of SEND in Essex has changed considerably over the last ten years. Schools, colleges and Early Years settings are being asked to meet the needs of an ever changing population and ever changing circumstances.

There was a fundamental change to the SEN Framework in 2015/16 with the former categories of School Action, School Action Plus and Statement of Special Educational Needs being replaced by either SEN Support or Education Health Care Plans (EHCP). Since 2015/16 both the volume and profile of SEN pupils in Essex schools has changed.

Whilst the all-pupil school population has increased by 6.7% (2015/16 to 2020/21), the number of pupils in receipt of SEN Support has risen by 14.8% and those with an EHCP by 15.7%.

As well as the SEND pupil school population growing at more than twice the rate of the all-pupil school population, the nature of needs among these pupils has shifted. Historically Essex has had much higher proportions of pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD). However, over the same period the proportion of SEND pupils with MLD has reduced by 28.2%. In contrast there have been significant increases in the pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (+81.8%), Social, Emotional & Mental Health (+39.3%) and Speech, Language & Communication Needs (+29.7%).

For children and young people for whom Essex has responsibility for their EHCP, in addition to the increased numbers and changing primary need types, the age profile has changed. Whilst the proportion of pupils aged under 10 with an EHCP has reduced slightly over recent years, there has been growth among older children and young people. This is most pronounced among 16-19 year olds where nearly one in five of all EHCPs are held by young people of this age group. In addition, around one in twenty of EHCPs are held by young people aged 20-25. Collectively, 22.8% of the EHCP population was above statutory school age in 2021.

Over the past 5 years exclusions and suspensions for children displaying persistent disruptive behaviour have been steadily increasing. Many of these young people receive an alternative education offer where their needs are then assessed, and many are identified as having SEN.

The evidence from both national surveys and from local feedback from our Essex schools and settings is that for the majority of children and young people the pandemic has had a negative impact on their emotional wellbeing and mental health. There is an increase in concerns about anxiety, self-harm and disordered eating. This is backed up by the referrals to our tier 3 commissioned service called EWMHS (CAMHS) and the significant number of children and young people referred to the Local Authority for educational support. Whilst technically classed as medical referrals many of these young people suffer from anxiety resulting in emotionally based school avoidance.

The surveys suggest children and young people missed school because of everything it brings into their lives; structure, routine, friendships and belonging including other essential basic needs such as food.

The evidence suggests that families also struggled with home educating and then with return to school with all the anxiety of whether schools were safe places for their children to return to.

School staff have had to be incredibly resilient over the last two years and to adapt to all the changes. There is evidence of lots of fatigue within educators. Headteacher wellbeing is something we are mindful of as they have at times had to make very important decisions at times of high national stress.

3. Inclusion and equal opportunities

The Essex Headteacher Inclusion Roundtable work in partnership with the Local Authority and are a key driver in looking to improve inclusion across the county. The intention remains that all Essex schools, colleges and settings operate in a truly inclusive way, and that pupils with SEND will always receive the right support they need, to be happy and successful learners, and with genuine choices open to them in the future so that they can go on to lead purposeful and fulfilling lives. There is a belief among many in the system that not all schools, colleges and settings are equally inclusive, but to date much of the evidence has been anecdotal.

Feedback from young people and their families supports the view that not all places in communities (education and leisure) are equally inclusive. A young ambassador for the MultiSchools council shared her experience: *"Being part of the community is really important because people with disabilities are isolated and when they do go out, they are not always treated with the same respect and acceptance as non-disabled people. I can't stand but my mind works."* Young person, Essex POET team. 2020

The pandemic created a raft of different experiences for families in Essex. The parent of a child with complex additional needs described a situation where the local SEND support group (SNAP, Brentwood) responded so

positively and creatively to the national lockdowns that she, and her daughter, felt “*fully included for the first time ever*”. Services moved online, theatres, zoos and other entertainment moved online and she was able to access things that had never previously been available to children and families with the most complex needs. However, for others the pandemic created deeper feelings of isolation and exclusion when normal support channels and options were not available for considerable periods of time, creating unprecedented levels of stress for many families.

We have begun a piece of work to analyse existing data on where children and young people with SEND live and where they attend school. We intend to present this analysis to ask new questions about the SEN provision in Essex. For example,

- Are there schools that are providing education to a higher (or lower) proportion of their local SEN population and why is this?
- Are there schools that could support a pupil closer to home?
- Are there areas within the county where provision is not available to support local need?
- Does the picture look different for pupils with an EHCP, and for pupils who are receiving SEN support?

The initial headlines from the early part of this work tells us that:

- The majority of children with SEN are not travelling very long distances to their school (5% of pupils with an EHCP and 3% of pupils on SEN support travelled over 5 miles)
- Pupils with an EHCP are travelling further, on average, to their primary school, than their SEN support and non-SEN peers;
- Districts where all children travelled further were the more rural districts of Uttlesford and Maldon, however, children with SEN travelled further than children without SEN in these districts.

Work will continue to look at the data at a micro level to determine differences within districts and to open up the conversation about inclusion in Essex.

4. Increasing demand for specialist provision

There is a growing number of requests for EHCPs each year. The number of requests for Education, Health and Care Needs assessments have increased by 66% from 2015/16 to 2020/21, which equates to an additional 1084 requests a year. In 2020/21 49% of requests led to an EHCP.

Historically Essex has always had a higher proportion of pupils with an EHCP placed in a mainstream school than other local authorities. Having been around half of pupils with an EHCP (49.7%) in 2019, this rate has reduced to 44.9% in 2021. However, this still remains higher than the national average of 39.9%.

The proportion of pupils with an EHCP placed in a mainstream school is anticipated to decrease further over coming years to be more in line with the national average. Purely looking at newly issued EHCPs since 2018 shows that Essex is placing fewer pupils in mainstream than across England. Of all newly issued EHCPs during the 2020 calendar year, 32.2% of those in Essex were placed in mainstream compared to 37.0% nationally.

98.8% of the total available places at Essex special schools are filled at any one time. Half of the special schools in Essex are regularly full or over their commissioned number. If demand for Essex Special School places continues at its current rate, it will outstrip the new provision currently being developed in Essex within 3 to 5 years.

Essex County Council and Essex schools commission 574 alternative provision places at our pupil referral units (PRUs). In January 2022, many of the settings are close to capacity which is a significant concern given the stage of the academic year. The settings are all reporting that many of the children and young people are displaying challenging behaviour and some of them are struggling to access much education. Many of these young people are unlikely to be able to reintegrate back into their school settings in near future putting additional pressure on all parts of the system.

Referral rates into the Education Access Team for children and young people at risk of exclusions are currently 50% higher than the equivalent period last academic year and referral rates for children unable to attend school for medical reasons. are currently 30% higher than the equivalent period last academic year.

We are seeing a significant growth in the number of commissioned therapy hours since the commencement of the contract with Provide in 2017. The figure currently stands at a 40% increase.

Social Care are seeing an increase in the last three years in the number of children with certain types of needs who are open to social care; for example, there has been a 40% increase in children with ADHD, and a 22% increase in children and young people with communication difficulties. The number of children experiencing seizures has increased from 16 to 33 (106%). The numbers of children on the caseload of social care teams with autism has risen slightly and then fallen over the past three years (from 261 to 277, then down to 269) and the number of children with a learning disability has fallen from 198 to 133.

5. Gaps in specialist provision

The SEN capital programme (begun in 2015) is nearing completion. There has been a significant and incremental growth in Essex's special schools over the last seven years. The Chatten School (the first new special school in Essex since 2015) opened in September 2021; Chatten is the first Essex special school designed specifically for children and young people with autism. Three more new schools will follow in the next two years (Hawthorns and Sir Geoff Hurst schools in Chelmsford and Greenwell in Harlow).

However, despite this investment, there are still gaps in specialist education provision in Essex. Coupled with the number of schools at capacity, and those that have significantly more children and young people than their buildings can adequately accommodate, school places remains a challenge. We are working on a SEND sufficiency strategy to inform our future planning both in special schools and via specialist provision in mainstream schools.

Essex is very similar to other Local Authorities in our use of the independent non-maintained special school (INMSS) sector. However, there has been an increase over the last five years in the number of children and young people requiring an INMSS place as we do not have the right Essex school place to offer. If trends continue as they are, we will see more children being placed outside Essex in special and INMSS schools.

Placing a child or young person outside of Essex provides a challenge on many levels. Firstly, there is a personal impact to the child or young person and their family. We want every child and young person to have a school place close to their home and community where they can access local services and support networks.

We have a programme of individual pupil monitoring and whole school quality assurance within the INMSS sector, and we work closely with other LAs to share information on quality of provision. However, we have seen a number of the INMSS schools we use receiving poor inspections and notifications from Ofsted. In addition,

the cost of individual placements is increasing year on year.

Within social care we want to increase our awareness and knowledge around working with children and young people with autism. Where we provide a direct payment to families to purchase their own care for their disabled child some have experienced difficulties in recruiting personal assistants with skills and knowledge of learning disability and there is also a lack of sufficiency in direct provision from care agencies. We are investing in different approaches to address these national care shortages at a local level, this includes the recent launch a micro-enterprise project which seeks to connect people of all ages to sources of support.

We recognise that children and young people who have special educational needs and disability and children and young people with autism may still not get the support that they need to thrive so an inclusive, integrated approach linking with system partners will be needed to address this.

6. Relationships, communication and working together

Young people and families have mixed experiences of teams and services across the Local Area. Some services are in high demand and are in a position of reacting, rather than planning ahead and providing what is needed to children, young people and their families in a timely and well-considered way.

Information and communication is described by some as sparse, by others as 'overwhelming' and 'not knowing where to start'. Some parents feel well supported, others describe their experience as a 'fight'. Some children and young people do not feel that their views, feelings and wishes are always included in decisions about their care and support.

7. An under-developed post16 and 19-25 offer across the Local Area

There is no data that collects young people's aspirations, talents and skills and how these can be transferred into meaningful opportunities that are available in their local communities. The lack of insight into this work is a concern in itself as the limited data available will not allow us to map or match the journey from education into employment.

The challenge this presents is that it is difficult to shape a post 16 and 19-25 educational offer, that has appropriate employment pathways into work, aligned to young people's aspirations, talents and skills and that are realistically matched to real jobs within local labour markets.

The impact is there is often a lack of information, aspirations and opportunities when considering the world of work throughout education. This is reflective of conversations with young people and families.

We are currently reviewing our short breaks offer, with our Short Breaks Clubs and Activities are due to be recommissioned in 2022/23, as families have shared that there is a lack of clubs and activities for the 19-25 age group.

8. Recovery and return

The Covid-19 pandemic has put significant pressure on individuals, families, teams, communities and organisations and full recovery will take time.

Essex, like many local authorities, noted a significant rise in the number of children and young people registered as electively home educated (EHE) as a direct result of Covid-related anxiety within families across the county. Whilst, since the start of this new academic year (2021/22), it is clear that some families are seeking to return their child/ren back to a school roll, as their Covid-related anxieties reduce, it is apparent that some families will continue to exercise their right to home educate their child/ren on a longer-term basis. The number of children and young people registered as EHE within Essex remains above 2400 in January 2022, with just over 100 children or young people with an EHC plan.

What are our strengths?

1. The people

The people in the system remain our greatest strength. The last eighteen months have been an unprecedented and challenging time, yet everyone across the system has worked tirelessly to support children and young people.

Partnership working between leaders from early years, primary, secondary, special schools and the Local Authority is strong and the Essex Headteacher Inclusion Roundtable is an important mechanism for driving forward the changes. A network of Lead SENCOs are in place to support local clusters and help embed new developments and training across groups of schools.

The Essex Family Forum (the parent carer forum) communicates with a far greater number of parents and carers than before. The forum has recently established family champions, whose role is to gather the views of those groups of parents and carers who are not part of the forum. (Local Area Joint Inspection, 2019)

The Multi-School Council is well established and growing in size and influence. The council meets termly and involves 138 schools. The council is a group of children and young people with SEND from across the Local Area. They provide opportunities to raise awareness within schools and with leaders about the needs and views of children and young people with SEND, particularly those with social, emotional and mental health needs. Local area leaders are keen to listen to what this group of children and young people have to say about what is important to them. (Local Area Joint Inspection, 2019)

There is also a strong and hugely valued offer from voluntary and support groups across the Local Area. Voluntary groups and charities, such as Families in Focus, MAZE, SNAP and PACT offer invaluable support to parents, carers and families of children with SEND.

2. Education system

We are proud that the education system in Essex is largely inclusive; around nine of every ten Essex children and young people with SEND (89.0%) are educated in mainstream settings.

There are 19 special schools in Essex. Of the 18 that have been inspected by Ofsted, 15 of these (83.3%) were graded good (10) or outstanding (5). 91.6% of special school pupils attend good or outstanding provision.

Over the last seven years Essex has used a SEN Capital Programme to grow capacity in the Essex special schools. The programme has delivered expansions at eight Essex special schools and created new facilities

for residential provision at three schools. As well as investment from ECC and the Essex Schools Forum we were able to successfully develop plans for four new special schools via the free school route. One, Chatten, has already opened with a further three to follow. We have a thousand more children attending an Essex special school in 2022 than we did in 2015.

Specialist teachers give good support to school staff in assessing and meeting the ongoing needs of children and young people with visual impairment, hearing impairment, and physical and neurological impairment. The collaboration between professionals ensures that there is effective planning for children and young people's needs, including planning for children and young people as they get older, or as their needs change. This joined-up approach also helps professionals to respond quickly when the unexpected happens and children and young people are in urgent need of support. (Local Area Joint Inspection, 2019)

3. Social Care in Essex

Children's social care has a dedicated child and family support team who support parents of children with SEND and we are increasing the confidence and capacity of both Family Solutions and our Team Around the Family Support Offers (TAFSOs) in working with children and young people with SEND.

Our specialist Occupational Therapy team support children and young people with disabilities by providing advice and information, loaning specialist equipment and making adaptations and our Rehabilitation Officer works with children with visual impairments by providing advice, support and training to help minimise the impact of visual loss.

Every social care team has a SEND Champion who is supported by a quadrant SEND link worker and our SEND Development officer to provide advice and support to their team around SEND and we have developed closer understanding and working relationships with SEND Services via a series of joint development days and quadrant meetings.

What must the strategy achieve?

Equity

We must address equity across Essex.

We know that children, young people and their families do not experience equal access to a consistent, high quality range of educational support, health services and specialist provision. Access varies too much depending on where families live and the schools children attend.

- Quality and availability of services, support and opportunities across Essex.
- Raise the bar, bring standards up so that everyone receives the very best support and care.
- Good and outstanding provision for all children and young people within or as close to their community as possible.

Inclusive

We must address inclusion.

Children, young people and their families have told us that they don't always feel included and that they do not have equal access to opportunities – in the community, in some education establishments, in training and in the workplace.

- Community inclusion.
- Remove barriers, tackle culture change.
- A whole school approach to inclusion with SEND at the heart of school leadership.
- Redefine mainstream education to meet the ever changing needs of local communities.
- Increase confidence in the early help/early support offer to reduce demand on statutory services.
- Develop participation of children, young people and their families at all levels

Ambition

We must address ambition.

We know that outcomes for children and young people with SEND are not yet good enough.

- Equal access to opportunities throughout every stage of life, but most notably at the end of formal education so that there are meaningful choices for living and employment for every young person.
- Education as a pathway and part of the journey, not the end destination in itself.

Potential barriers to implementation of the strategy

Parental confidence.

Parents hold the belief that some schools are better equipped than others to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND and this drives their choice of preferred school. There is a lack of confidence among some parents that mainstream schools can meet their child's needs and this is evidenced by increasing requests for an EHCP and a place at a special school. It will take time to change the confidence of parents. *The Ordinarily Available Offer will be a step forward in having an agreed offer for all children and young people, no matter which school they attend, no matter where they live.*

Changing the narrative around SEND. The rhetoric around SEND is largely fed by social media and the accepted narrative is often more negative than positive. This is in many cases in direct contrast to the experience and academic outcomes achieved by children and young people with SEND in Essex. *We will need to have an increased focus on capturing and sharing the positive experiences of children, young people and families in Essex to improve the culture and perception of the SEND system in our local area.*

Physical capacity of special schools. New places can be created but this takes time and can contribute in itself to driving demand up. If funding is transferred to the high needs block to fund additional places, this can have an impact on the schools block. *The SEND Sufficiency strategy will be crucial in looking at current and forecasted demand and along with the SEND Capital Programme, to ensure we make best use of existing estates and new opportunities.*

School funding. Further to the above pressure on schools block funding, mainstream schools who have a higher proportion of children and young people with SEND within their school population have to make finances 'stretch' further. This can hamper schools' ability to participate in new ways of working. *The review of SEND funding in Essex will deliver a new approach to effective funding arrangements for SEND and through the Inclusion Framework we are piloting creative approaches to effective early intervention and invest to save opportunities.*

Recovery and return from the COVID19 pandemic. During the COVID19 pandemic some specialist resources, particularly within health services were redeployed. This along with suspension of certain face to face services, has resulted in backlogs of appointments, consultations and in some cases access to support and/or diagnosis. Plans are in place across the SEND system to 'recover' and address the backlogs but the delay has been felt by schools, children and young people and their families. COVID19 has also had an impact on our ability to accurately assess and identify needs, which in some cases, have been exacerbated by the pandemic and time out of school. The long term impact of the disruption to education over the last three academic years is as yet unknown and although mitigation and recovery plans are in place we must remain cognisant of this. *The Education Task Force established in 2021 will drive the educational recovery post COVID19 and along with the school partnership structures across Essex, are prioritising SEND and Inclusion.*

Changing health landscape. In Essex the five CCGs restructured into three Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships and are now undergoing further change to become three Integrated Care Systems. The boundaries overlap with neighbouring counties of Suffolk and Hertfordshire as well as the unitary areas of Thurrock and Southend, all who have their own commissioning and statutory processes in place. *We will work hard to align and connect the Essex region successfully for the benefit of our children and young people, reducing bureaucracy and removing organisation boundaries.*

Working together across the Local Area

The strategy is a high level plan. It sets out what we are focused on and the approaches we will take to achieve the very best outcomes for children and young people with SEND. It doesn't detail all the different work plans and projects that are in place to make the changes happen. These are documented in the implementation plan.

The task of delivery is not just about the practicalities of plans and processes, but also about how we work together across the Local Area. The inspection noted a shared commitment from senior leaders to making sustainable change and we are continuously strengthening our ways of working together to achieve the vision set out in this strategy.

Successful delivery and sustainable change is not just what we do as organisations and services, it is also about how we work together with children, young people and their families. It requires a commitment across the Local Area to work in close partnership with families and ensure that children, young people and their families are fully included in all matters that affect them.

We recognise that there are challenges ahead. The Covid-19 pandemic has put significant pressure on individuals, families, teams, communities and organisations and full recovery will take time. However, as we begin that recovery, prioritising the things that matter and working together will give us the best chance of improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND in Essex.

We must do this together.

What is the vision for SEND in Essex?

“My Life, My Rights”

After feedback from a range of families, we decided to base the vision for the SEND system on the fundamental rights of all children and young people as defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). We are using the language of the articles to avoid any discussion of word choice: “



Article 24 (health and health services) Every child has the right to the best possible health.

Article 29 (goals of education) Education must develop every child’s personality, talents and abilities to the full.

Article 15 (freedom of association) Every child has the right to meet with other children and to join groups and organisations.

Article 23 (children with a disability) A child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and, as far as possible, independence and to play an active part in the community.

How will we work across the Local Area?

Local Area pledge to children and young people

As people who teach, support and care for children and young people:

- We will respect and fulfil the rights of all children and young people with special educational needs and disability in Essex.
- We will listen to the views, feelings and wishes of children, young people and their families in all matters affecting them and take their views seriously.
- The best interest of the child or young person will always be our top priority in decisions and actions.
- We will step in and take positive action to protect these rights; we will look at where things have gone wrong and make sure this doesn't happen again, and we will share where things have gone right so others can learn from success.
- We will value every individual for the unique contribution that they make to our community.

This pledge applies to all children and young people, without discrimination, whatever their age, stage, unique characteristics or circumstances. In this pledge, there are no "ifs and buts" and you will not find the words "wherever possible".

Five strands and commitments

There are five strands to the strategy. Beneath each strand are a number of commitments that we are making as the Local Area.

My Voice, My Choice: Every child and young person's views, feelings and wishes are always considered and taken seriously in all matters that affect them.

There are three Local Area Commitments:

All planning is person-centred

Support is planned and delivered in a way that works for the child or young person. It is balanced to include what is important to the individual, as well as what is important for the individual. Children, young people and their families are involved in decision making in all matters that concern them. This means children, young people and their families have greater choice and control over their support.

Information is available and accessible

Children, young people and their families can find what they need, make informed choices and navigate the system easily from the earliest years to early adulthood.

Co-production with children, young people and families

More young people and families are involved in strategic decision making and the coproduction of services. This means there will be a better fit between what children, young people and their families need and what is provided.

My Health and Well Being: Every child and young person has the best possible health and wellbeing.

There are four Local Area Commitments:

Early identification and early support

Children and young people's health needs, and importantly their mental health, are identified early and support is put in place at the earliest opportunity. We do not wait for children to be in crisis before we offer support.

Clear pathways to access support and services

Children, young people and their families understand how to access support, receive good communication and have a positive experience from all services.

The right support, from the right people, at the right time

Children and young people get the support that makes a difference and helps them make progress towards the outcomes that matter to them.

Wellbeing in all Essex educational settings

The emotional wellbeing of children and young people is part of the life and work of schools and colleges and there is mental health expertise in every school and setting. Educators take a whole-school/setting approach to mental health and it is part of the life and work of schools, not a bolt on. School leaders demonstrate the contribution that positive emotional and mental health makes to school improvement and positive outcomes for all children and young people.

My Education and Training: Every child and young person's education and training should develop their personality, talents and abilities to the full.

There are four Local Area Commitments:

Inclusion

All children have access to quality inclusive childcare to make an excellent start to their early education, development and learning. All education settings have an inclusive culture and children and young people receive the same high-quality offer, regardless of which school, college or setting they attend, regardless of where they live.

Early identification and early support

Children and young people's needs are identified accurately and there is early, evidence-based intervention to support them. Children, young people and their families can access advice, support and intervention with no need to wait for a formal diagnosis and without unnecessary, bureaucratic delay.

Effective One Planning & SEN support

SEN support (One Planning) is of an equal high standard across all education settings. Children and young people can attend their local education setting and feel confident that they will be fully included and have their needs met effectively. Children and young people's talents and strengths are at the forefront of all discussions. This means all planning and support thinks about the whole person, and positively builds upon the unique strengths, talents and personality of the individual.

Joined up planning and support across education, health and social care

Every service plays their part and children young people and their families experience high quality planning and provision from the most appropriate teams and services.

My Community: Every child and young person is connected to, and plays an active part, in their local community.

There are three Local Area Commitments:

Inclusive communities and equal opportunities

Children, young people and their families can access more inclusive provision across the county. Children and young people will be made welcome, staff will be able to meet their needs and physical accessibility improves.

Children, young people and their families can access the places they want to go and the things they want to do, alongside their friends and families in their local community.

Excellent universal and additional services

Children, young people and their families can find and access support that meets their individual needs without needing a referral or diagnosis and without being dependent on others.

Specialist excellence in Essex

Children and young people with the most complex needs can be met close to home from the earliest years, through education and into employment. We want to extend the support that we can offer to children and young people with the most complex needs so that we have an Essex school place for every Essex child.

My Life, My Opportunities: Every child and young person has the education, care and support they need to lead a full and purposeful life with dignity and independence.

There are four Local Area Commitments:

Preparing for adulthood from the earliest years

Children and young people are supported and encouraged to build on their strengths and be ambitious for their next steps and future. We provide more opportunities for young people to develop their skills, experience and independence in areas that interest them so that they have a direction and purpose beyond formal education.

High quality transitions

There are high quality, planned transitions between services, settings and phases. Children and young people continue to progress at every move and are supported seamlessly by well thought out transitions, whether this is between services, settings or phases.

Next steps and employability

Young people are well prepared for their next steps and education, training and opportunities leads to employability for more young people with SEND.

More opportunities beyond age 16

Education settings, training providers, and employers demonstrate their commitment to equality and inclusion and offer positive opportunities to more young people, valuing and appreciating individual's differences and contributions. This means there are more (both amount and variation) of opportunities available to young people and there is something purposeful for everyone. For many this will mean employment; but for others this will look different. The aim must remain that there is a meaningful option for everyone.

Ownership in all services: What is the first year implementation plan?

Does everyone know what we are trying to achieve and what their role is in helping to achieve it?

What are the co-ordinated actions that we can take to overcome our core challenges and which create the biggest impact at achievable cost/effort?

Next step Alex/Helen Coproduced plan of action/roles

How will we measure our success? (metrics)

How do we know if our actions have had a positive impact?

Next step Alex/Helen Coproduced measures of success

Appendix: OFSTED – Evidence of golden threads

EQUITY

- The provision of universal antenatal and integrated two-and-a-half-year checks **varies too much** across the local area. There has been a drop in the number of checks made, which limits the opportunities to identify children's needs at the earliest point and to check on children's readiness for school.
- Arrangements within health services to notify the local authority of children under five with SEND are not thoroughly embedded. Procedures **vary across the local area**, which delays the identification of children's needs. Leaders are working to standardise approaches, but this has not yet been achieved.
- The completion of annual health checks for those children and young people over 14 years of age with a learning disability **varies too much**. While there was a good uptake at some GP practices, other GP practices have not completed any checks on those children and young people known to them. When completed, the outcomes of the checks were not often shared with the special school nurse services. This lack of joint working limits the opportunities to meet children and young people's health needs.
- Strategic, needs-led joint commissioning is not sufficiently developed for children and young people up to the age of 25. As a consequence, the children and young people **have not benefited from equitable access** to services to meet their needs. The quality of, and access to, educational support and health services **varies too much depending** on where families live and the schools their children attend.
- The lack of shared learning expectations and outcomes across the CCGs has affected children and young people with SEND aged 0–25 in accessing the services they need to meet their needs. Weaknesses in commissioning and strategic oversight have resulted in **unwarranted variation**, gaps in provision and unacceptable waiting times before needs are assessed and addressed. In some areas, the waiting time for autism spectrum disorder assessments can be as long as 18 to 24 months and post-diagnosis support is not effective, which is not compliant with National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines. An autism assessment has been developed in one CCG, with positive outcomes for families and their children, but the findings are not being used to develop practice in other CCGs at the required pace.
- The gaps in the commissioning of services for speech and language therapy (SALT), physiotherapy, occupational therapy and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder services between CCGs mean that **some children and young people get access** to assessments and support and **others do not**.
- Some specialist nurses actively work with local schools to improve awareness of specific health needs and the impact on capacity to learn and behave well, but this is **not a shared approach across the local area**.
- Annual reviews of EHC plans, including those for children and young people placed in independent schools outside the local area, are **not consistently completed** within the required timescales.

INCLUSION

- 'One planning', which underpins assessment and support for children and young people identified for SEN support or with an EHC plan, is seen by many parents and carers as unhelpful in meeting their children's needs.
- In schools, for some children and young people, **reasonable adjustments are not made to help them to attend each day and to do well**. A lack of basic attention to educational, emotional and behavioural needs leads to anxiety and not getting the learning that they are entitled to.
- Many parents and carers are **not confident that their children's speech and language needs are met**. The SALT services often give school staff relevant advice, training and programmes. However, this guidance is not always followed through in school. This has created much dissatisfaction among parents and carers.

- Children and young people **do not always get the specialist equipment they need in schools in a timely way**. In some instances, education and health services act quickly to adapt premises and provide sufficient funds and equipment. However, other children and young people experience lengthy delays in getting necessary resources. Where this occurs, schools and families often are forced to step in to provide whatever they can to support the child or young person in their care.

AMBITION

- The Essex Child and Family Well-being Service does not proactively check for health needs in school-aged children through their school years. This **reduces the opportunity** to identify children's needs or review children's changing health needs after the age of five. As a result, the service is reactive and, too often, does not provide what is needed to children in a timely and well considered way.
- Ongoing provision in EHC plans is not always clear enough to make sure that young people moving from paediatric to adult services get continued support from like-for-like services, such as therapy services.

TOGETHER

- The completion of annual health checks for those children and young people over 14 years of age with a learning disability varies too much. While there was a good uptake at some GP practices, other GP practices have not completed any checks on those children and young people known to them. When completed, the outcomes of the checks were **not often shared** with the special school nurse services. This **lack of joint working** limits the opportunities to meet children and young people's health needs.
- Significant weaknesses in the local area's approach to joint commissioning have not ensured that processes for planning and implementing EHC plans is effective for children and young people aged 0–25 years with SEND. The weaknesses result in **insufficient advice from the right professionals** in health and social care services, which weakens the effectiveness of plans to meet children's and young people's needs.
- Some plans are not specific enough about what must be provided and **do not always fully consider social care and health needs**, such as tracheostomy care.
- Information and plans linked to combinations of education, health and care needs are **not sufficiently joined up** to identify how support will be coordinated.
- EHC plans are **not shared effectively** with health practitioners even when they had provided advice. Staff are unaware whether their advice is used accurately to specify the needs, provision and outcomes.
- The CCGs do not have robust oversight of the provision specified in EHC plans, which limits assurance that needs will be met. This is exemplified by weaknesses in health provision at a special school that was not fully meeting children's and young people's needs.
- In some cases, parents and carers were **not informed in a timely or compliant way** that their children's EHC plans would cease.
- Children, young people and their families **do not experience a 'tell it once approach'**. They often have to explain their concerns and circumstances over and over again.
- **Joint working** between some paediatricians and settings is **limited at times** because **information is not shared effectively** and in a timely manner. Delays in typing some clinic letters and the quality of the information shared limit planning to better meet children's and young people's needs. Furthermore, too great a reliance was placed on parents and carers to share this information with settings.

Report title: Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2022 -2027	
Report to: People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
Report author: Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer	
Date: 3 February 2022	For: Consideration and identifying any follow-up scrutiny actions
Enquiries to: Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer at graham.hughes@essex.gov.uk.	
County Divisions affected: Not applicable	

1. Introduction

In October 2021 the Committee was consulted on the development of an Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2022-27 (see Background below). This is the requested follow-up and update on the further development of the Strategy.

2. Action required

The Committee is asked to consider:

- (i) **The attached update; and**
- (ii) **Identify any follow-up scrutiny actions**

3. Background

- 3.1 On 14 October 2021 the Committee discussed a draft of the Early Years Strategy 2022-27. A link to the meeting papers for that meeting and the minutes are here –

<https://cmis.essex.gov.uk/essexcmis5/CalendarofMeetings/tabid/73/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/410/Meeting/4684/Committee/130/Default.aspx>

An extract of the minutes for the discussion are reproduced in Appendix A. It was agreed that a delivery plan/timetable and significant milestones would be brought to the Committee in early 2022, to include a brief executive summary-type overview of a 5-year plan and key objectives.

4. Update and Next Steps

The update is attached in the Appendix B. Next steps are as proposed under Action Required.

Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2022

Expected attendees to support the discussion:

County Councillor Tony Ball, Cabinet Member – Education Excellence, Life-Long Learning and Employability.

Carolyn Terry - EYCC Sufficiency and Sustainability Manager

5 List of Appendices

- A. Extract of the minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee held on 14 October 2021.
- B. Power Point Briefing Paper: Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2022-27.

Extract of the Minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 10.00am on Thursday, 14 October 2021 in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Chelmsford

4. Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2022

The Committee considered report PAF/11/2021 and the following people from Essex County Council attended the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

Councillor Beverley Egan – Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Early Years,
Carolyn Terry – EYCC Sufficiency and Sustainability Manager.

The Committee received a presentation on the background of the Early Years and Childcare Strategy including the consultation and engagements taken place, the positive impact of the previous Strategy and the vision for Early Years and Childcare incorporating the new strategic aims and key priorities.

Following the presentation, the following was highlighted/raised:

- (i) Early identification of the children who needed support was critical. Work was undertaken with the Essex Child Family Wellbeing Service and childcare providers to help identify those children as early as possible.
- (ii) Summer born children could be at a disadvantage and did not always achieve a good level of development and that was mainly due to being a year younger than some of their peers.
- (iii) A non-academic way of assessing a child or young person was being launched across schools in Essex including early years settings.
- (iv) The Free Early Education Entitlement Funding was allocated to Essex based on demographics such as population numbers, indices of deprivation and rurality. There continued to be a national debate around the levels of funding for early years settings and school run settings. Essex was funded on a participation level, with the more children that accessed the funding the more funding Essex received.
- (v) The feedback from the consultation survey formed a big part of the design of the strategy. The survey had been available online but had also been sent to all early years settings and schools, and distributed through the Essex Child Family Wellbeing Service, the Working Families Facebook page and ECC Twitter account.
- (vi) The majority of under-5s attending an early years’ provider would be in a setting rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’. Early years settings that did not receive ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ from Ofsted received intensive support with teams deployed to work with them to help improve their outcomes. If they were unable to improve then any Free Education Entitlement funding could be withdrawn.

Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2022


- (vii) There had not been Good Level of Development data collated at a national level since 2019 due to Covid, with the next collated GLD data to be available in summer 2022. However, in the meantime, preschools would still have been assessing their own children and their levels of development. In the summer holidays some summer holiday activity groups took place to help children's physical and social interaction.
- (viii) Pre-schools and schools ran early years provision only in term time. However, the Essex Wellbeing Service and the Family Hub had comprehensive family support programmes throughout the summer holidays for children that needed more help.
- (ix) All district and borough councils were invited to the engagement sessions and workshops and ECC were keen to engage with them further.
- (x) The engagement sessions had been attended by some childcare providers. As part of the school's forum there was an Early Years Subgroup with representation from each type of childcare setting.
- (xi) A childcare efficiency audit was undertaken every year, to consider future housing developments and the forecast need for each type of childcare setting.
- (xii) There was a childcare brokerage service for parents who were unable to access childcare, the team supported them to look into how they can find childcare and what options there were.

Conclusion

The Chairman stressed that the strategy was aspirational and that more detail was needed on implementation. It was **agreed** that the following further information be provided:

- (i) A delivery plan/timetable and significant milestones would be brought to the Committee in early 2022, to include a brief executive summary-type overview of a 5-year plan and key objectives;
- (ii) Some further information and analysis of the Word Gap with more Essex context;
- (iii) Further analysis and breakdown of feedback from the various surveys and consultations;
- (iv) More information on numbers accessing funded places and breakdown including disadvantaged children;
- (v) Information on the childcare brokerage service

Contributors were thanked for their attendance and left the meeting



Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2022 - 2027

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Content of session

- A summary of: -
 - the content of the Strategy, Vision and Aims
 - The Year 1 Delivery Plan priorities, timetable and significant milestones
- Approach to closing the Word Gap and setting the Essex Context
- Summary of the analysis of feedback from Surveys and Consultations undertaken
- Summary of numbers of children accessing Free Early Education Entitlement funding places



The Strategy, Vision and Aims

The Strategy: -

- covers the range of early years services and support, but with a particular focus on prioritising support for those children and their families that most need it
- will plan to continue with this focus for the next 5 years between 2022 and 2027, reflecting each year on the progress made and identifying the next year's priorities building on the successes and work already underway
- the Year One delivery plan sets out the priorities, timetable and significant milestones for 2022, all of which will contribute to the Levelling Up work
- Oversight Board will be in place to undertake quarterly monitoring of progress



The new Early Years and Childcare Strategy at a glance

Early Years & Childcare Vision

In Essex there will be no barriers to children achieving the best they can be and realising their full potential. To achieve this vision, we will ensure:

- There are sufficient affordable, quality and inclusive early years and childcare places for all children in Essex
- All schools in Essex are inclusive and provide quality education for children no matter what their needs are
- All children in Essex are supported through all their transitions in Early Years
- All families are supported to be the best they can be
- Families understand the services available to them and how they can access these
- All children in Essex can express themselves in their individual way and are confident in how they communicate with others
- Essex County Council provides access to the support and expertise needed to fulfil this vision

Strategy Aims

1. Children and their families achieve their potential with support from an effective and connected early years system that has a clear vision, purpose, and direction
2. All children have a positive journey through their early years and are well supported to transition to Reception and start Year 1
3. Children who may be at risk of poor outcomes are prioritised for high quality targeted support
4. Children's early learning and development is expertly supported by a strong, skilled, and knowledgeable early years and childcare system workforce
5. Parents can access AFFORDABLE, sufficient, high quality and fully inclusive childcare places that support early learning and Working Parents
6. Families are enabled to be the best they can be

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Strategy Outcomes

Each Strategy Aim has an agreed set out outcomes that the strategy intends to deliver over the next 5 years

These will be underpinned by performance and progress measures

The key priorities for Year One of the new Strategy

The Year One Delivery Plan will focus on the following elements:

- The impact of Covid-19 on young children's learning
- Continue to build on the good outcomes we have achieved so far in the last strategy, with an ambition to further increase the % of children achieving GLD
- Focus on identifying those children as early as possible that will need more support, ie improved assessment at the 2 year check, focusing on the cohorts we know generally do not achieve a GLD ie summer born / SEN
- Increase the take up for eligible 2 year olds to access a funded learning place
- Focus on economically disadvantaged children to help narrow their word gap
- Contributing to the Levelling Up Agenda with a focus on the Strong Foundations in Early Years goal
- Join up with the Life Long Learning Strategy and the Education Taskforce Year of Reading planned for 2022
- Focus on the Working Families Programme aims for early years
- Making sure our Parents are as informed as they can be in order to make the right choices



Increase the Free Entitlement funding take-up for disadvantaged 2 year olds

Maintain and increase the Good Level of Development outcome for 5 year olds

Earlier identification of disadvantaged children

Focus on economically disadvantaged children to help narrow their word gap

Contributing to the Levelling Up agenda

Understand the impact of Covid on young children’s learning

Working Families Stakeholder Forum

Supporting parents to make the right choices for their children

Babysitting Platform development

Contribution to Lifelong Learning Strategy

Exploration to extend Council role as childcare provider

Provide earlier information on childcare

Develop Provider Clusters

Employer Childcare model

EY Charter to support Working Families

Develop accredited Early Years Charter modules

Explore implementing a Parent Cooperative

Year One Delivery Plan

Increase take-up of funded 2-year-old places for economically disadvantaged 2 year olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set baseline of current take-up of funded 2-year-old places • Action plans to address identified barriers in take up • Increase take-up of places of 1% in year 1 • Mapping of children identified that need additional support • Improve data collection to allow children's progress to be more effectively mapped • Production of Essex data set showing Word Gap
Maintain and Increase Good Level of Development (GLD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce new GLD baseline at a county and district level • Produce training plan to support childcare settings and Family Hubs • Build on the Talk, Listen and Cuddle campaign • Plan for transition experience for children into the school environment, being consistently positive with school ready for continuing the learning journey for every child
Earlier identification of children that need more support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and focus on key cohorts that generally do not achieve a GLD (such as summer born children) • Develop improved assessment / identification of need i.e., 2-year check • Develop shared systems on early language identification measure results, identifying children at high risk • Upskill workforce in identifying children that need more support earlier • Implementation of targeted support
Focus on economically disadvantaged children to help narrow their word gap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit childcare providers to undertake relevant evidence-based training programmes • Recruit and train Communication Friendly settings and Family Hub Communication Champions • Build on the Talk, Listen and Cuddle campaign • Develop an accessible Early Years Speech and Language Communication (SLC) pathway
Ongoing review of the impact of Covid on young children's learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse the negative impact of Covid on young children • Development of Essex data of children's outcomes • Plan interventions and support to implement • Collaboration with early years sector on needs, ensuring high quality provision and practice

Year One Delivery Plan

Contributing to the Levelling Up Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop targeted programmes of support for localities and local need, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Harlow Futures project • Winter Reading Challenge • Year of Reading • Economy and financial wellbeing of families
Contributing to the Lifelong Learning Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop shared objectives/ vision/agendas with other internal functions • Review regional collaboration on deprived communities to help with school readiness. • Build on the Talk, Listen and Cuddle campaign
Supporting parents to make the right choices for their children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure information, advice and guidance offers are aligned and mutually supportive and meets Section 12 of the Childcare Act duty • Build on the Talk, Listen and Cuddle campaign
Look to partner with an existing Babysitting Platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research into current babysitting platform models • Seek to contract with commercial babysitting platform • Design content for Essex offer • Action plan and resources in place • Understand needs of parents and explore current offers available
Review the viability of extending existing Council childcare provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore expanding existing provision and creating new provision • Research role of Councils in delivering childcare provision • Produce analysis and recommendations on concept • Action plan and resources in place to progress
Provide earlier information on childcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan a programme of parent engagement • Analysis of engagement outcomes • Design and Implementation of programme • Launch improved information service

Year One Delivery Plan

Launch an Early Years Charter to support the needs of working families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise and launch Charter • Promote signing of Charter with early years sector, schools and Family Hubs • Research and design accredited modules to further develop the Charter • Develop Charter further addressing identified barriers • Support parents to access relevant benefits and financial assistance
Explore the need for an Employer provider of childcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore current employers with childcare provision on site • Approach local large-scale employers in areas of childcare need • Consult with employees around requirement for onsite provision • Explore other Local Authorities that support onsite employment provision
Further develop the growth of Multi Childcare Provider clusters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with parents on childcare needs • Research and analyse providers whom provide shared care • Gather information on providers (offer overnight and weekend childcare) • Gain insight into how providers promote offer • Explore provider barriers in extended hours or shared care
Explore funding the development of Parent Co-operative childcare provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and engagement with parents on appetite for model • Analysis of research and engagement • If viable option, create concept proposals / business case to proceed • Action plan to implement required solutions (potential financial costs)
Stakeholder Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create mission statement of how partners will support working parents in Essex • Gather insight on key issues to allow for further work to identify solutions

Year One Delivery Plan

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Further information and analysis of the Word Gap, with more Essex context

A priority for the coming year is to ensure that we have effective systems in place to help us identify, as early as possible, those children that need most help and track their progress – the main focus will be the disadvantaged 2 year old children that have been identified as eligible to access a funded childcare place

These children will also give us the cohort to focus on supporting their early language and communication development to close the word gap outcome

The DWP provides lists of the eligible families twice a term enabling us to more easily identify the cohort and we are currently reviewing the ECC Capita system to allow us to gather more data to improve our ability to track progress for these children



Approach to closing the Word Gap and setting the Essex Context

As part of the year one priorities, work will be undertaken to reset the baseline data:

- **for 5-year-olds** this is informed by the Early Years and Foundation Stage Communication and Language data - due to Covid, Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data has not been available since 2019 but there will be data available at the end of the Summer 2022 term. This will be used to create a new baseline of Communication and Language data at both a county and district level
- **for 2-year-olds** this is informed by the Public Health Communication and Language data - this is gathered from the 2-year-old assessments undertaken by the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service and identifies children needing more targeted support to enable them to meet their full potential. The assessment is a simple word list and child observation – known as the Early Language Identification Measure (ELIM) – that is undertaken during routine home visits when children are aged between two and two-and-a-half years. Research shows the ELIM can identify 94% of toddlers with early language needs
- An evaluation is also planned on the accuracy of the 2-year-old checks assessment compared with the outcomes for these children aged 5 by selecting a sample range of data across the county
- All of the above will provide us with the current Essex position and enable us to monitor the Word Gap going forward

Approach to closing the Word Gap and setting the Essex Context Cont.

- **Focus on increasing the number of funded disadvantaged 2-year-olds in high-quality provision –**
 - the take-up of the two-year-old FEEE during the Autumn term 2021 was 3,556, which was 83.8% of the 4,244 eligible two-year-olds in the county. This is significantly higher than the national take up level for the Autumn 2021 term of 61.8%
- Build skills and capacity to help disadvantaged parents support their child's language development from birth onwards
- Work together across the Early Years system to develop a workforce skilled in early language, and consistent systems for identifying early and providing for those children needing extra help.

Summary of the analysis of feedback from Surveys and Consultations Undertaken



Key findings 1

Background:

- There were more than **1,200 responses** to the survey.
- Majority of respondents were working parents living as couples, not receiving any income or other support packages

Types of childcare used:

- For pre-school children, most respondents used formal childcare – to provide stimulation, enable parent to work and to help child get ‘ready for school’. Location and the setting being the best for the child were the main reasons for selecting them.
- For school-aged children, more than half didn’t use any childcare. Formal childcare was used to enable parents to work.
- Under a third of parents used informal childcare – overwhelmingly provided by grandparents. This is driven by the combination of no cost and child enjoying being with family.
- Not using any childcare appears to be driven more by personal choice than actual cost.

SEND:

- Relatively small sample (n=230).
- Parents of pre-school children tend to suspect SEND, whereas parents of school-aged children tend to have a formal diagnosis.
- Most frequent conditions are Autism and ADHD.
- Provision of one-to-one/additional support is the most important to enable these children to attend formal childcare. This is more likely to be provided to pre-schoolers than school-aged children.

Getting ready for school:

- Majority of parents of recent ‘school starters’ have felt confident about their child’s transition to school. This applies for two-thirds of those starting Sept 2021 too
- Majority had an excellent or good experience of transition – good communication received from the school before starting school was key to an overall positive experience.

Key findings 2

Term of birth:

- Only 38% (n=51) of parents of recent Summer-born school starters had concerns, usually based on the child being younger and potentially not being emotionally and developmentally ready to start school yet.

ECC resources:

- Awareness and thus usage of ECC's existing resources (Talk, Listen and Cuddle, Essex Family Information Service, Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service) was low. Those who have used it generally rated it as 'helpful' and 'clear'.

Knowing other parents:

- Majority of parents place great importance on knowing other parents of children of a similar age, which provides much needed support networks and opportunities for social interaction (although also comparisons between children and potential competitiveness).
- Parent / Toddler groups and the school/childcare setting are the key places to get to know each other, but ECC could support this further by providing more classes / courses / groups and more open access spaces.

Supporting children's learning while at home:

- Most parents feel confident at supporting their children's learning while at home, drawing on a wide range of sources of information, albeit not 'official' as such, with general Google search, family, school and friends being the key sources.

Key findings 3

Childcare needs during and after coronavirus lockdown:

- Less than 20% (n=79) of key worker children continued to attend a formal childcare setting during the first coronavirus lockdown (March – May 2020), with their needs being met. The rest either decided to keep their children at home, or their usual childcare setting was closed.
- Responses indicate no particular destabilisation of the formal childcare market as a result of the coronavirus lockdown. Majority of 'keyworker' children returned to their formal childcare setting after 1 June 2020, without a change to their childcare needs.
- For those whose childcare needs changed, this was generally related to changes in work patterns or not being able to use family for childcare.

Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) funding and Tax-free childcare:

- Awareness of FEEE (2, 3 and 4) and the Extended entitlement (30 hours) is high (91%). Main benefits are around getting children 'ready for school' and improving family finances.
- Two thirds of respondents are aware of Tax-free childcare, but less than a third use it.

Further comments:

- The top 5 themes mentioned were:
 1. Supporting working parents through the provision of suitable and affordable childcare
 2. General support for parents, especially new parents (importance of baby/parent/toddler groups)
 3. Need for more wrap around care and holiday clubs
 4. FEEE eligibility from the age of 2, supporting working parents
 5. The high cost of childcare negatively impacting family finances

Summary of numbers of children accessing Free Early Education Entitlement funded childcare places



FEEE take up: Essex countywide level vs national (where applicable)

Autumn 2021	2 year olds			3 year olds			4 year olds			Extended Free Entitlement	
	Eligible	Takeup	%	Population	Takeup	%	Population	Takeup	%	Takeup	£
Essex	4,244	3,556	83.8%	17,647	16,833	95.4%	17,981	17,086	95.0%	6,562	£1,194,961
England	201,562	124,543	61.8%	664,515	574,845	86.5%	686,773	637,146	92.8%	-	-

This table shows the take up of FEEE at the countywide level for the Autumn 2021 term for 2 year olds, universal 3 and 4 year olds, and extended entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds against eligibility / population (dependent on age) and compares Essex against the national figures, where available.

GP registration data, used for the population figures, are static since Autumn 2020; also, they only provide the year of birth, not the qualifying term, so the % of those accessing education may be greater than 100%.

The take up in Essex exceeds the national levels in each of the distinct 2, 3 and 4 year olds groups.

There are no national data available for EFE.

FEEE take up: Essex district level

Autumn 2021	2 year olds			3 year olds			4 year olds			Extended Free Entitlement	
	Eligible	Takeup	%	Population	Takeup	%	Population	Takeup	%	Takeup	£
Basildon	759	593	78.1%	2,576	2,283	88.6%	2,575	2,553	99.1%	825	£160,297
Braintree	410	340	82.9%	1,723	1,681	97.6%	1,757	1,720	97.9%	707	£127,742
Brentwood	145	131	90.3%	943	912	96.7%	942	869	92.3%	298	£51,912
Castle Point	242	177	73.1%	957	907	94.8%	965	891	92.3%	317	£57,935
Chelmsford	400	333	83.3%	2,103	2,148	102.1%	2,147	2,087	97.2%	845	£153,025
Colchester	546	443	81.1%	2,347	2,131	90.8%	2,438	2,166	88.8%	845	£148,498
Epping Forest	331	247	74.6%	1,619	1,435	88.6%	1,501	1,382	92.1%	421	£79,862
Harlow	440	359	81.6%	1,331	1,208	90.8%	1,379	1,251	90.7%	439	£86,724
Maldon	133	141	106.0%	596	652	109.4%	645	633	98.1%	283	£50,252
Rochford	168	165	98.2%	882	951	107.8%	947	833	88.0%	347	£61,443
Tendring	513	479	93.4%	1,486	1,413	95.1%	1,568	1,405	89.6%	511	£89,093
Uttlesford	157	130	82.8%	1,084	1,060	97.8%	1,117	1,081	96.8%	439	£78,377
No match	0	18		0	52		0	215		285	£49,802

This table shows the take up of FEEE at the district level for the Autumn 2021 term for 2 year olds, universal 3 and 4 year olds, and extended entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds against eligibility / population (dependent on age).

GP registration data, used for the population figures, are static since Autumn 2020; also, they only provide the year of birth, not the qualifying term, so the % of those accessing education may be greater than 100%.

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The **highest** and **lowest** districts by % and £ are colour-coded.

Thank you

Any questions?



Report title: Domestic Abuse Task and Finish Group	
Report to: People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
Report author: Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer	
Date: 3 February 2022	For: Consideration and identifying any follow-up scrutiny actions
Enquiries to: Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer at graham.hughes@essex.gov.uk.	
County Divisions affected: Not applicable	

1. Introduction

This is a report of the one-off meeting convened in the form of a whole-committee Task and Finish Group looking at information available to local members to help them signpost to services.

2. Action required

The Committee is asked to consider:

- (i) **This report; and**
- (ii) **Identify any follow-up scrutiny actions**

3. Background

- 3.1 At the full committee meeting in October 2021, Members requested that it would be helpful in their role as local members to know where to signpost and refer people when they came to them for advice on domestic abuse. The Lead Officer had also indicated that this would help the service area to deliver on its strategy.
- 3.2 Furthermore, such a review aligned with and supported strategic measures within Everyone's Essex: Our Plan for Levelling Up Essex, 2021-25 to facilitate Essex being a Good Place For Children and Families to Grow, and Health Wellbeing and Independence for All Ages.
- 3.3 Consequently, a one-off briefing with Clare Burrell - Head of Strategic Commissioning and Policy was held on 13 January 2022 which was attended by most of the Committee (attendees listed in Appendix 1).

Domestic Abuse Task and Finish Group

4. Report of the briefing session held

Session objectives

4.1 The session was structured to enable members:

- to increase their knowledge about domestic abuse;
- to raise their awareness of issues around domestic abuse;
- to raise their awareness of Partnership arrangements and functions in Essex and of commissioned services and programmes of work;
- to increase confidence in recognising potential domestic abuse and how to support and signpost to services available.

Session content

4.2 Members were briefed on some typical signs that someone might be being abused and these included both physical and behavioural signs.

4.3 Members were advised that the different types of domestic abuse included:

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Violent or threatening behaviour
- Controlling or coercive behaviour
- Economic abuse
- Psychological, emotional or other abuse

- Intimate Partner Violence
- Abuse by Family Members
- Teenage Relationship Abuse
- Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse

- Stalking & harassment
- Honour Based Violence
- Forced marriage
- Female Genital Mutilation
- Modern Slavery

Any of the above could consist of a **single incident** or a **course of conduct**, and would apply to any person 16+.

4.4 Members were advised of some of the signs that someone might be being abused:

Signs of physical abuse

- Bruises, black eyes, lacerations, rope marks

Domestic Abuse Task and Finish Group

- Broken bones
- Open wounds, cuts, punctures, untreated injuries in various stages of healing
- Broken eyeglasses/frames, or any physical signs of being punished or restrained

Behavioural signs of abuse

- Unexplained changes in behaviour or personality
- Becoming withdrawn and/or seeming anxious
- Apologetic and excusing behaviours
- Uncharacteristically aggressive
- Stops seeing friends
- Hiding injuries
- Being jumpier or more on guard
- Having difficulty with sleep or having nightmares
- Withdrawing and not wanting to be around other people
- Losing interest in activities they once liked

4.5 Existing local partnership arrangements were outlined:

- The Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board (SETDAB) had five 2020-2025 key priorities:
 - Helping people to form healthy relationships;
 - Supporting those experiencing and at risk of abuse and help them rebuild their lives;
 - Supporting and disrupting perpetrators to change their behaviour;
 - Communities, professionals and employers being able to recognise abuse at the earliest opportunity and have the confidence to take action. It was this last priority that particularly aligned with the purpose of the member session.
- The Essex Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) was a regular meeting to discuss how to help victims at high risk of murder or

Domestic Abuse Task and Finish Group

serious harm. Multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) were in place where statutory services worked together with other key partners to identify, assess and manage violent and sexual offenders. Operation Encompass, a police and education early information safeguarding partnership to offer immediate support to children experiencing domestic abuse, was due to be piloted in Essex.

4.6 The 2021 Domestic Abuse Act had placed new duties on Essex County Council:

- To appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board to:
 - assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support
 - develop and publish a strategy for the provision of such support
- To deliver the strategy through commissioning and de-commissioning decisions:
 - monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy
 - report back to central government

The provision must provide support to victims and their children residing in:

- Refuge accommodation
- Specialist safe accommodation
- Dispersed accommodation
- Sanctuary schemes
- Move-on or second stage accommodation
- At home if robust safety plans in place

The County Council must make provision for:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| ○ Advocacy support | - Plans |
| ○ Prevention advice | - Support |
| ○ Specialist support | - Protected characteristics/complex needs |
| ○ Children's support | - Therapies and advocacy |
| ○ Housing-related support | - Advice |

4.7 Members were briefed on top tips for difficult conversations with those who may be suffering from or perpetrating domestic abuse including good listening skills.

4.8 During discussion the following key points were highlighted, acknowledged and/or agreed:

- Significantly more females than males suffered domestic abuse;
- Many services still seemed to be focussed on supporting women. e.g. women's refuge not for men;

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- LGBTQ members of the community facing domestic abuse could also have additional barriers to overcome and may instead go to specific LGBTQ services for support which may mean there could under reporting or not complete formal reporting of domestic abuse for this part of the community.
- More people speaking about domestic abuse, and a higher profile given to it, would make it easier for more people to come forward for help;
- Victims did not always know they were being abused and can take a lot of prompts before they accept it.
- The preferred default is to support victims to continue to stay at their own home if it is possible and safe;
- £2.763 million of specific government financial support had been received but the settlement for any similar financial support post April 2022 was unknown at the current time.
- There had been domestic abuse adviser posts at hospital A&E which had been jointly funded with the NHS. Funding had been withdrawn and the posts no longer retained although this was now being revisited.
- Contingency and Covid specific response plans had been put in place to give greater flexibility to the resources available.
- Officers worked closely with district councils with many employing a domestic abuse adviser within their housing teams to help identify cases amongst those presenting as homeless.
- Members were tasked with further raising awareness of domestic abuse in their respective local communities and the help lines available.

Signposting to support services

- 4.9 Members were advised of the contact details for immediate support and advice and details of awareness training available (see Appendices A and B attached)

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Members were very grateful for the comprehensive presentation and briefing given.

It was **agreed** that more information should be provided to the full committee providing:

- (i) A further breakdown of the figures on domestic abuse including:
 - indicating the number and/or trend in relation to same-sex relationships;

Domestic Abuse Task and Finish Group

- distinguishing between where coercive control had been identified and physical abuse;
 - the extent of child on parent abuse.
- (ii) A list of schools in programme.
- (iii) The prices of the training programmes available.
- (iv) Research findings of Multi-disciplinary Team project in Tendring pilot.

Draft Recommendations (to be finalised):

1. To accept the offer from the Healthwatch Essex representative to include speaking to representatives from the Trauma Ambassador Group as part of future evidence gathering for future relevant scrutiny sessions.
2. That an all-member communication be sent advising of the availability of domestic abuse awareness training.
3. That information on COMPASS should be reproduced on business cards for members to use and hand-out.
4. That parish councils be offered J9 training so that they have the option and capability to become local places of safety for those suffering domestic abuse. Members also welcomed Healthwatch Essex's offer of assistance in relation to supporting appropriate training.
5. That the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee be advised how the case backlog in Courts was impacting on domestic abuse issues and support.
6. That the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee be further updated on local support services, the roll-out of new early intervention services and meeting the new statutory duties, in a few months' time.

6. Appendices

- A. Signposting to support services
- B. Awareness Training
- C. Attendees at one-off briefing with Clare Burrell - Head of Strategic Commissioning and Policy which was held virtually on 13 January 2022.

Appendix A – Signposting to support services



Immediate advice and support

Contact Children's Social Care

If you're worried that a child is being abused or neglected call Children's Social Care on 0345 603 7627

Contact Adult's Social Care

If you're worried about a specific concern about abuse and safety call Social Care Direct 0345 6037630

Emergency Services

If a child, young person or adult is in immediate danger call 999

**Resources and
information for everyone**

SETDAB

<https://setdab.org/>

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Appendix B – Awareness Training



Provide awareness and training sessions online and are for those working within any workplace or community group.

Provide understanding, information, and build confidence and skills in recognising the signs of domestic abuse and reaching out to someone who may be affected.

Places can be booked individually via [Alpha Vesta's Eventbrite page](#).

Contact enquiries@alphavesta.com if you would like to book a private session for your whole workplace, community organisation or a larger group.

J9 Initiative



J9 training sessions are intended to raise awareness and increase knowledge and understanding of domestic abuse for staff in public and voluntary sector organisations.

In the course of their work, these staff may come into contact with someone they suspect is a victim of domestic abuse, or a client may reveal that they are suffering abuse.

The training aims to ensure that staff are equipped to respond appropriately and effectively. <https://setdab.org/j9-initiative/>

Domestic Abuse Task and Finish Group

Appendix C - Attendees

County Councillors:

Ray Gooding (Lead Member)
Lynette Bowers-Flint,
Mark Durham,
Jane Fleming,
Carlo Guglielmi
Marie Goldman,
June Lumley,
Aidan McGurran,
Ross Playle,
Andrew Wiles
Peter May,
Susan Barker
Laureen Shaw

Also present: Sharon Westfield de Cortez from Healthwatch Essex

Apologies for absence:

County Councillors Simon Crow and Wendy Stamp.

Supporting Officers:

Clare Burrell - Head of Strategic Commissioning and Policy, Essex County Council
Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer, Essex County Council

Report title: Work Programme	
Report to: People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
Report author: Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer	
Date: 9 December 2021	For: Discussion and identifying any follow-up scrutiny actions
Enquiries to: Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer at graham.hughes@essex.gov.uk.	
County Divisions affected: Not applicable	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The work programme for the Committee continues to be developed and the current position is outlined below and overleaf.

2. Action required

The Committee is asked to consider this report and issues under consideration in the Appendix and any further development or amendments.

3. Background

Work has continued to identify priorities and future agenda items. This has included discussions with Committee Members, Cabinet Members and Officers. This work has reflected the adoption of the Everyone's Essex – Our Plan for Levelling Up the County: 2021-2025 organisation strategy at Council on 12 October 2021.

4. Everyone's Essex

The Committee should take account of the Everyone's Essex – Our Plan for Levelling Up the County: 2021-2025 strategy when considering the work programme and future items. Particular attention should be paid to the strategic ambitions (and associated commitments and performance measures) most relevant to the work of the Committee: 'Health Wellbeing and Independence for All Ages', and 'A Good Place for Children and Families to Grow'. A link to the Strategy is here - [Everyone's Essex: our plan for levelling up the county 2021 to 2025: Foreword from Kevin Bentley - Essex County Council](#)

5. Update and Next Steps

- 5.1 See Appendix.

6. Appendix

- 6.1 current work programme.

People and Families Policy and Scrutiny - Work Programme as at 3 February 2022

Provisional Date	Topic Title	Lead Contact	Purpose and Target Outcomes	Relevance to Scrutiny Theme *	Cross-Committee Work Identified (where applicable)
3 February 2022	Early Years' and Childcare Strategy	Cabinet Member and EYCC Sufficiency and Sustainability Manager	To consider the adequacy of a draft delivery plan/timetable and key objectives		
3 February 2022	SEND Strategy	Cabinet Member Education Excellence, Skills and Training and Head of SEND Strategy & Innovation	To consider an updated draft incorporating amendments requested by the Committee		
3 February 2022	Domestic Abuse Task and Finish Group session	Head of Strategic Commissioning and Policy/ Members	To consider report back on the support and information available to help local members signpost		
10 March 2022	Libraries – public consultation	Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Community, Equality, Partnerships and Performance, and Head of Libraries	To consider feedback received during public consultation on a broader community role		
10 March 2022	Corporate Parenting Strategy	Cabinet Member and Director Local Delivery (Children and Families)	To consider an early draft of a refreshed strategy and input and influence further development of the draft		

Provisional Date	Topic Title	Lead Contact	Purpose and Target Outcomes	Relevance to Scrutiny Theme *	Cross-Committee Work Identified (where applicable)
April 2022 - TBC	Essex Children's Safeguarding Board	Independent Chairman, and the Board Manager	To consider the report of the activities and focus of the Board, and some operational issues.		
Spring 2022	Essex Safeguarding Adults Board	Independent Chairman and the Board Manager.	To consider the report of the activities and focus of the Board, and review of one or two operational issues.		
Spring 2022 [schedule for April meeting?]	Adult Social Care	Cabinet Member Adult Social Care and Health /Executive Director, Adult Social Care	To consider current trends and work with market providers to manage an orderly reduction in residential market capacity		
Spring 2022	Carers	Cabinet Member Adult Social Care and Health /Executive Director, Adult Social Care	See Matters Arising below		
Spring 2022	Houses for Life	Director Strategy Policy & Integration (People)	See Matters Arising report elsewhere in Agenda pack.		
TBC	Education	Cabinet Member Education Excellence, Skills and Training	Everyone's Essex /portfolio priorities and development of a Lifelong Learning Strategy		
TBC	Home Education and Children Missing Education	Cabinet Member Education Excellence, Skills and Training	Further update on work after ECC's submission to the Education Select Committee		

Further issues not scoped or currently being scheduled

Working Families Programme – strategy approved by Full Council in October.

Children in care being placed outside Essex

Backlog in Courts and Justice System - impact on Youth Offending Team, fostering and adoption

Education - academisation - impact, role of Regional Schools Commissioner and the role ECC has in supporting general standards

Possible Task and Finish Group reviews – to be confirmed

Impact of the pandemic on Essex County Council

Suicides in Essex

Report title: Future Meeting Dates	
Report to: People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
Report author: Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer	
Date: 3 February 2022	For: Consideration
Enquiries to: Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer, graham.hughes@essex.gov.uk .	
County Divisions affected: Not applicable	

Action required

The Committee is invited to consider and agree the following committee meetings and/or activity days for the period May 2022 – April 2023.

Proposed Dates:

Thursday 12 May 2022
Thursday 16 June 2022
Thursday 14 July 2022
Thursday 15 September 2022
Thursday 13 October 2022
Thursday 17 November 2022
Thursday 14 December 2022
Thursday 12 January 2023
Thursday 16 February 2023
Thursday 16 March 2023
Thursday 13 April 2023

Members are requested to hold 9.30 – 15.30 in their diary for each of the above dates.