



Essex County Council

People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee

10:15	Thursday, 14 April 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
<p>** Private Pre-Meeting for PAF Members Please note that there will be a virtual private pre-meeting for members at 4.00pm on Wednesday 13 April.</p>	
<p>1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest</p>	4 - 4
<p>2 Minutes: 10 March 2022 To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2022 and consider matters arising.</p>	5 - 12
<p>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 the day before the meeting (Wednesday 13 April 2022) and that questions must relate to an item on the agenda for the meeting.</p>	
<p>4 Education Co-opted Members</p>	13 - 14
<p>5 Essex Safeguarding Children Board update</p>	15 - 16
<p>5a Appendix A - ESCB Briefing Pack for Scrutiny April 2022</p>	17 - 21
<p>5b Appendix B - Induction Pack March 2022</p>	22 - 33
<p>5c Appendix C - ESCB Annual Report 2020-21</p>	34 - 78

5d	Appendix D - ESCB Presentation to Scrutiny Committee April 2022	79 - 84
5e	Appendix E - NHS Presentation Safeguarding in the Context of Health	85 - 90
6	Our Co-Parenting Strategy - How we do Corporate Parenting in Essex	91 - 95
6a	Appendix A - Our draft Co-Parenting Strategy	96 - 124
6b	Appendix B - Our draft Co-Parenting Strategy - Executive Summary	125 - 127
7	Work Programme	128 - 131
8	Date of Next Meeting To note that the next meeting will be held on Thursday 12 May 2022, in County Hall.	
9	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.

10	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.
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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 11.00am on Thursday, 10 March 2022 in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Chelmsford.

Present:

County Councillors:

R Gooding (Chairman – present for items 1-4)

L Bowers-Flint

M Durham

J Fleming

M Goldman

C Guglielmi (Vice Chairman, in the Chair items 4-6)

J Lumley (participated via Zoom)

P May (Vice Chairman)

A McGurran

R Playle

L Shaw

Members of the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee:

A Goggin (Chairman of PSEG)

M Steel

Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer and Gemma Bint, Democratic Services Officer were also present.

1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

The report on Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations was received. Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Susan Barker and Wendy Stamp and Sharon Westfield de Cortez from Healthwatch Essex.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2022 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3 Questions from the public

There were none.

4 Briefing on the consultation and development of the new library plan: Everyone's Library Service 2022 - 2026

The Committee considered report PAF/06/2022 comprising of an update on:

- The consultation and engagement process with Essex residents and key stakeholders on the draft plan for Essex libraries: Everyone's Library Service 2022 – 2026,
- The outcomes of the consultation,
- The next steps to finalise and adopt the plan and prepare for delivery.

The following people from Essex County Council attended the meeting to introduce the item, deliver a presentation and respond to questions:

- Councillor Louise McKinlay – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community, Equality, Partnerships and Performance,
- Juliet Pirez – Head of Libraries,
- Suzanna Shaw – Director of Customer Services.

The presentation provided information on the Everyone's Library Service 2022 – 2026 including the outcomes of the consultation, summary of the engagement and eight week public consultation that had taken place which received 2,213 responses from Essex residents, what had been amended in the plan and the next steps including the timeline up to March 2026. There were key themes under three pillars of the Plan which included Library Service and Literacy, Communications and Infrastructure, and Supporting our Communities and Levelling Up.

A service update was given to the Committee including activities that would be taking place in the libraries such as a memory café, Reading Friends sessions, the development of Colchester library as an accredited Library of Sanctuary and that there would be 15 events as part of the Essex Book Festival due to take place in June 2022. Harlow library was currently being redeveloped and it was expected to re-open on 20 June 2022. A wide range of children's events was being delivered and ECC was working with schools to introduce the Literacy Lead scheme.

Following the presentation, the following points were highlighted, raised and/or noted:

- (i) Members were keen to identify and maximise opportunities to continue to reach out to those residents not currently using libraries and encouraged ongoing work with individuals, partners and other groups to continue so that they could disseminate information within their own networks. There was a library newsletter that went out to everybody who had provided their email address, members encouraged consideration of how to further expand the number of subscribers.
- (ii) A meeting had taken place with the Young Essex Assembly and they had provided suggestions, the dialogue would continue with them going forward.

- (iii) Members queried whether further breakdown and analysis of responses and feedback was possible using demographics and locations to see if certain types of usage could be identified in certain areas for example. There was the suggestion that officers may pursue that to some extent.
- (iv) Members referred to what seemed to be a low number of organisations that had responded to the consultation and queried what more could be done to improve interaction with these and other organisations and with school aged children.
- (v) As part of the discussion on increasing footfall and usage of the library buildings, members referred to the pre-pandemic launch of the London Library Community Fridge initiative and officers agreed to look further at this to see if something similar was viable in Essex.
- (vi) Members recommended adding virtual tours of some libraries onto ECC's website and it was agreed that this would be further considered. Members also stressed that such tours could emphasise the use of space in libraries to provide some re-assurance to those pre-pandemic users who still remained nervous about returning to use the library buildings.
- (vii) ECC were ensuring marketing of events and activities was the best it could be. Social media was used a great amount and ECC was working on a strong communications and engagement plan to help further reinforce and promote what was available.
- (viii) ECC were looking at how to strengthen links with schools and nurseries to start to ingrain literacy and use of libraries. As part of the Year of Reading ECC would be supplying library cards to every primary school and Year 7 child and all children within special schools across the county, it was expected that the cards would be distributed within May half term.
- (ix) Members noted and supported the plans for promoting literacy with literacy co-ordinators on site and emphasised that library staff would need to be trained so to be able to deliver that. It was agreed that a further update on promoting literacy may better be incorporated into the next committee discussion on educational attainment planned for the summer.
- (x) There were two large library vehicles and a new smaller van, this was more agile and the model would be developed going forward as it was more attractive to drive. There were opportunities to promote the van where very high footfall was expected such as country parks in half term. It was confirmed that the stock on the vehicles did get rotated regularly and that it was flexible, stock was updated to be relevant to where the van was visiting.

- (xi) The commitment was there for the 74 libraries to remain open, however as housing developments grow it might mean that people move about and therefore a library might not be suitably situated in terms of where the bulk of the populace was, and there was a need to ensure there was an opportunity to respond to this.
- (xii) It was emphasised that the consultation and the report to the Committee were at the level of a strategic plan and that detailed plans for each library would follow in due course after the strategic plan was adopted by the Cabinet and further discussions with local community groups. Members stressed that smaller libraries and local communities wanted to work with ECC especially as part of determining the longer term future of those libraries with smaller footfall.
- (xiii) Volunteers were important to the service and training and support was given to them as appropriate.
- (xiv) There was discussion about factoring in aspirations and changes for some library buildings within the capital programme alongside a more detailed piece of work for the next layer of opportunities. Some members were particularly keen to explore this further at an appropriate point in the future whilst it was acknowledged that such follow-up scrutiny work would likely sit within the remit of the Place Services and Economic Growth Committee rather than the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee.
- (xv) ECC libraries were currently running a campaign which asked for people to take a photograph in the place where they best liked to read to raise awareness of the importance of reading, the photos would be displayed in the libraries. Going forward footfall could indicate how many people had been engaged with in terms of how reading was promoted. The fundamental question was what should be measured and if it could be demonstrated that more families had been engaged with through the service and awareness had been raised this would indicate success.
- (xvi) Members challenged how the success of changes would be measured and it was stressed that whilst some measurement will be straightforward, such as the numbers taking out library cards, numbers attending courses and events held at libraries, the more difficult part to measure would be the impact of changes and how it was correlated to better levels of development and school readiness.

Conclusion:

It was **agreed** that there would be a further update to the Committee with a more detailed implementation plan in approximately six months' time.

Contributors were thanked for their attendance and left the meeting.

5 Work Programme

The Committee considered and discussed report PAF/07/22 comprising the work programme for the committee.

6 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to be held on Thursday 14 April 2022.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 1.00pm.

Chairman

MATTERS ARISING (page 1 of 3)

Date	Agenda item	Action	Status
10 March 2022	Consultation and development of the new library plan: Everyone's Library Service 2022 - 2026	Encouraged ongoing work with individuals, partners and other groups to continue to reach out to those residents not currently using libraries. Encouraged trying to further expand the number of subscribers for the library newsletter.	TBC/ to follow up at next update
		To consider whether further breakdown and analysis of responses and feedback was possible to see if certain types of usage could be identified in certain areas for example.	TBC/ to follow up at next update
		To look at how future communications can be further targeted to improve interaction with local groups and organisations including school-aged children.	TBC/ to follow up at next update
		To look further at the pre-pandemic launch of the London Library Community Fridge initiative to see if something similar was possible and viable in Essex.	TBC/ to follow up at next update
		To consider adding virtual tours of some libraries onto ECC's website.	TBC/ to follow up at next update

Date	Agenda Item	Action	Status
		A further update on promoting literacy may better be incorporated into the next committee discussion on educational attainment planned for the summer.	To be raised in preparatory planning discussions for educational attainment item.
		Factoring in aspirations and changes for some library buildings with the capital programme.	Likely to be follow-up scrutiny work specifically for the Place Services and Economic Growth Committee.
		It was agreed to provide a further update and more detailed implementation plan in approximately six months' time.	Added to Work Programme
3 February 2022	SEND Strategy	That there would be a further update to the Committee as the Strategy developed into implementation.	To be scheduled into Work Programme in consultation with officers
		To report back on the ongoing evaluation between investing in specialist schools and where/when to incorporate into mainstream and more detail on relevant aspects of planned capital programme;	TBC
		That a brief written response be provided on how climate considerations were to be incorporated in the approach to home to school transport in future.	TBC
		Further information would be circulated on the Young People's POET challenge, how families can share their views with the independent parent carer network for Essex through a virtual graffiti wall, and the newsletter for families.	Links provided as follows: http://www.essexlocaloffer.org.uk/yp-poet/ https://essexfamilyforum.org/parent-surveys-and-feedback/virtual-graffiti-wall/

Date	Agenda Item	Action	Status
3 February 2022	Early Years' and Childcare Strategy	I Can Do advice to be distributed.	TBC
		Further information to be provided on the rates of school readiness	TBC
		A further update to be scheduled to review progress.	TBC
		To include in the next update, some further information on the consideration of the environmental impact of Early Years' settings and work planned with providers on this.	TBC
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.

Report title: Education Co-opted members	
Report to: People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
Report author: Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer	
Date: 14 April 2022	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 This report updates on a change to the process for seeking nominations to serve as an Education representative on the Committee which was approved by Full Council in February, as well as new attempts to increase the current representation on the Committee.

2. Action required

The Committee is asked to note this report and support the actions to be taken.

3. Background

The law requires us to have external co-opted members as follows:

- One Church of England diocesan representative
- One Roman Catholic diocesan representative
- Between two and five parent governors of maintained schools.

Co-opted education representatives can vote on education matters only. Maintained schools are those which are funded by ECC. Therefore, academies are not maintained schools.

Historically one place has been allocated for a parent governor of a maintained primary school and another place for a parent governor of a maintained secondary school.

In 2020 nominations were invited from both primary and secondary school governors with only nominations received for the former and an appointment to be a primary school representative was made in 2020 (after an election was held). Unfortunately, the person appointed had to subsequently stand down as they no longer met the eligibility requirements. Since then both parent governor seats have been vacant.

Education Co-opted members - update

The increase in the number of academies means that it is now virtually impossible to get a nomination from a maintained secondary school in Essex. Therefore, going forward, the past practice of seeking separate primary and secondary school parent governor representatives no longer seems feasible, appropriate or proportionate.

Within the Council Issues Report presented to Full Council in February 2022 (link to it below under Supporting Documents) was a proposal to change the representation for maintained schools and have two seats for parent governors of maintained schools which are open to any parent governor of a maintained school (i.e. not distinguishing between primary and secondary schools). This was approved and it is thought that this practice would be more likely to result in vacancies being filled as we are likely to receive sufficient nominations. It also aligns to the practice of neighbouring authorities

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 It is proposed to start the process to invite nominations from parent governors at maintained schools in Essex to fill the two vacancies so that new appointees can be in place by the start of the next school academic year at the latest.
- 4.2 In addition, as the place for a Church of England diocesan representative also has been vacant for some time, a further approach will be made to seek a new nomination from the Church of England Diocese.
- 4.3 The Roman Catholic diocesan representative is the only current co-opted Education representative on the Committee although the representative has been unable to attend a meeting for some time. It is proposed to seek confirmation that the current representative is still able to continue their membership or whether we should seek a new nomination from the Roman Catholic diocese.

5. Supporting documents

- 5.1 [Full Council - February 2022 - Council Issues Report \(see page 3\)](#)

Report title: Essex Safeguarding Children Board update	
Report to: People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
Report author: Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer	
Date: 14 April 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 agreed to review the work of the Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB) on an annual basis and last did this in October 2020. This is the latest update which is later than it would normally be scheduled.

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 has previously agreed to review the work of the Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB) on an annual basis and last did this in October 2020. The minutes of that discussion can be accessed using this link (scroll to page 4 in the minutes) – [PAF minutes - 8 October 2020](#).
- 3.2 Recent statutory guidance has removed the previous statutory framework for local safeguarding children boards. Instead, the guidance stipulates three statutory local partners (Upper Tier Council, Police and Health) who should determine the local governance structure in future for safeguarding children. To support discussion on the Essex governance arrangements, representatives from the NHS and the Police will also be in attendance.
- 3.3 The Committee Chairman and Vice Chairman held a preparatory discussion with the ESCB Independent Chair Facilitator last month to agree format and expectations and specifically asked for some additional disclosure on Children Missing Education and those Home Educated and this has been included in the agenda papers, partly as an introduction to further scrutiny work by the Committee on the impact of County Lines and drug gangs.

4. Update and Next Steps

The update is attached in Appendices A-E. Next steps are as proposed under Action Required.

Expected attendees to support the discussion:

David Archibald	-	Independent Chair Facilitator.
Louise Mcspadden	-	Service Manager - Children and Families
Alison Cutler	–	Essex Safeguarding Children Board Business and Performance Manager.
Andrew Packer	-	Deputy Chief Superintendent, Essex Police
Jane Kinniburgh	-	NHS West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group

5 List of Appendices

- Appendix A - ESCB Briefing Pack for Scrutiny (April 2022)
- Appendix B - Induction Pack March 2022 – For ESCB Members and anyone interested in the work of the Essex Safeguarding Children Board
- Appendix C - ESCB Annual Report 2020-21
- Appendix D – Essex Safeguarding Children Board – Power Point Presentation to ECC Scrutiny Committee – 14 April 2022
- Appendix E - NHS Power Point Presentation – Safeguarding in the Context of Health.



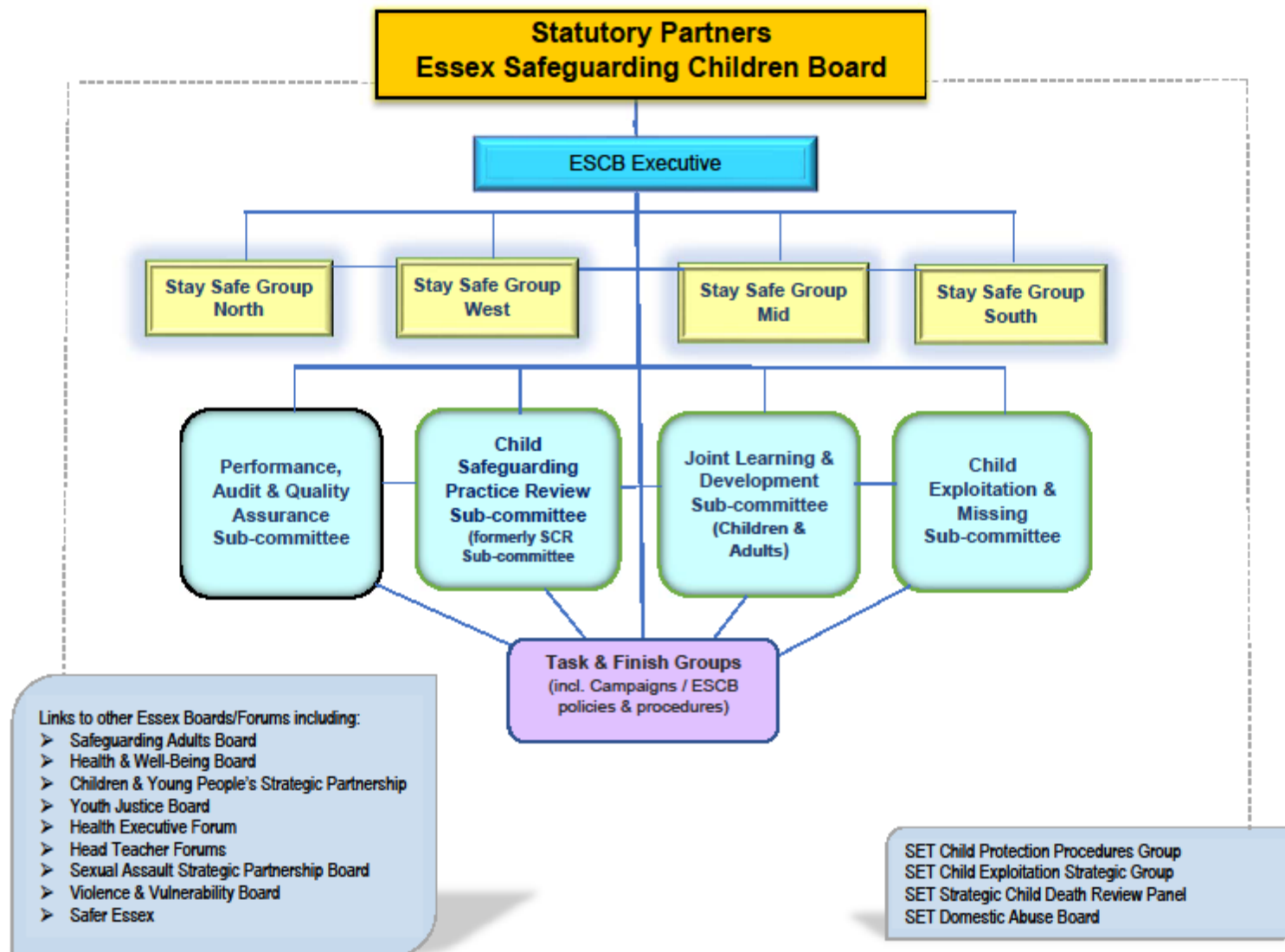
E S S E X
Safeguarding
Children
B O A R D

Essex Safeguarding Children Board
Briefing Pack for Scrutiny
April 2022

Contents

1. Induction Pack (see attached)
2. Structure Chart of ESCB
3. Annual Report 2021-22 (see attached)
4. Draft Business Plan
5. Update regarding Children Missing Education (CME) and Elective Home Education (EHE)
6. Slide Presentation (see attached)
7. Additional information from Health (see attached)

2. Structure Chart of ESCB



Essex Safeguarding Children Board – Draft Business Plan 2022 - 2027

PRINCIPLES

- Principle 1.** Championing the interests and rights of children and young people.
Principle 2. Involving all partners in Essex in their statutory duty to co-operate on safeguarding matters.
Principle 3. Receiving independent challenge and scrutiny, to ensure feedback, accountability and learning.
Principle 4. Change is led by measurable improvements in the safeguarding systems and outcomes for children and their families.
Principle 5. Address challenges faced by disadvantaged or minority groups by tackling inequalities between children, connecting families to services, and ensuring that all Essex children grow up in a safe environment with access to good education, regardless of their background.



PRIORITIES	AREAS OF WORK	
SAFER AT HOME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early help/intervention • Family inclusive practice 	<p>Responsibility for the monitoring of the Business Plan lies with the Statutory Partners via the ESCB Executive.</p> <p>Work in these areas will be carried out by Sub-Committees and links in with the work of four quadrant-based Stay Safe Groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance, Audit & Quality Assurance Sub-Committee • Child Safeguarding Practice Review Sub-Committee • Joint Learning and Development Sub-Committee • Child Exploitation and Missing Sub-Committee • SET Procedures Working Group
SAFER IN THE COMMUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Exploitation/Missing Violence and Vulnerability work (links to Violence and Vulnerability Board) • Operation Henderson and other campaigns • Multi agency working • Learning from reviews (Learning and Development Sub-Committee) 	
SAFER SAFEGUARDING SYSTEMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitional safeguarding (across ESCB/ESAB) • Statutory Partners and Board • Mental health and wellbeing • Child on child abuse • Child Missing Education / Elective Home Education 	
SAFER IN EDUCATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harmful Sexual Behaviour • Online safety 	

5. Update regarding Children Missing Education (CME) and Elective Home Education (EHE)

Prepared ahead of the ESCB Scrutiny Panel – 14th April 2022

As at 1st April 2022, the total number of children and young people, falling into cohorts Reception through to Year 11, listed as CME across Essex is 542 and, in respect of EHE, is 2626. Whilst the number of CME remains consistent with that which has been noted in Essex in previous years, the number within the EHE cohort has risen slightly, a pattern which has been noted by colleagues in most local authority areas. Many of the children who were de-registered in favour of EHE during the academic year 2020/21 have since returned to a school roll, now that parental/family anxieties linked to the pandemic have eased. It is, however, fair to say that Essex does have a lasting legacy of EHE registrations which occurred during the peak of the pandemic, which has caused our overall levels of EHE to remain high, when compared to pre-pandemic levels.

CME

The Local Authority makes use of all available avenues of enquiry and information sharing protocols to establish the whereabouts of children who have been reported as CME. Where it is confirmed that a child is resident at an Essex address and it appears that their parent/s is/are not proactively seeking a school place, the Education Compliance team (part of the Specialist Education Services portfolio within the Education directorate) will use available statutory powers, namely the School Attendance Order process, as set out within the Education Act 1996.

EHE

With regards to the EHE cohort across Essex, the Education Compliance team will act upon all concerns which indicate that a child may not be in receipt of a suitable home education and will make use of all available intelligence when prioritising cases for assessment. Concerns are received via a wide variety of sources including schools (at the point of de-registration), health colleagues, members of the public, other local authorities, family members, Youth Offending Team, etc. In addition, locally agreed processes allow for any child who is known to social care (either historically or currently) to automatically be prioritised for an EHE assessment, to enable the LA to satisfy themselves that parents are committed to providing a suitable education to their child/ren. Where parents are not able to satisfy the local authority of their commitment/ability to provide a suitable home education, the status of the child is updated to reflect that they are a child missing from education (CME) and the School Attendance Order process is instigated.

Update provided by Anita Patel-Lingam (Statutory Education Compliance Manager) – April 2022

Induction Pack

For ESCB Members and anyone
interested in the work of the Essex
Safeguarding Children Board



Safeguard and
promote
welfare of
children

Strategic
planning of
children's
services



The Essex Safeguarding Children Board



1 MINUTE GUIDE BOARD SUMMARY

The ESCB is the name for the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) in Essex. Under the arrangements there are seven agencies in Essex who are jointly responsible by law for keeping children safe. These are called the Statutory Partners and they are the key decision makers who form the ESCB Executive and are responsible for the direction of travel (with identified relevant partners).

There are quadrant-based Stay Safe Groups, which address local safeguarding issues, while ESCB Sub-Committees address specific areas of partnership work.

The work of the Essex Safeguarding Children Board is co-ordinated by the ESCB Support Team.

Statutory Partners

There are seven organisations (Statutory Partners) in Essex who are jointly responsible for the partnership arrangements for keeping children safe, these are Essex County Council, Essex Police and five Clinical Commissioning Groups.





Statutory Partners

The Statutory Partners (the decision makers) elected for the ESCB Executive Board to be chaired by an Independent Chair Facilitator and appointed David Archibald in 2019. Whilst his role does not hold any statutory responsibilities he provides a strong independent voice, ensuring that the ESCB operates effectively in promoting the safeguarding, wellbeing and interests of children and young people in Essex.

Purpose of the Essex Safeguarding Children Board

- Ensure children are safeguarded and their welfare promoted
- Partner agencies collaborate, share vision for how to achieve improved outcomes for vulnerable children. They must also challenge appropriately and hold one another to account effectively
- Early identification and analysis of new safeguarding issues and emerging risks
- Learning is promoted and embedded in a way that local services for children and families can become more reflective and implement changes to practice
- Information is shared effectively to facilitate more accurate and timely decision making for children and families



[Read more about the workings of the Board in the Multi-Agency Statutory Arrangements \(MASA\) on the ESCB website.](#)

Executive Board

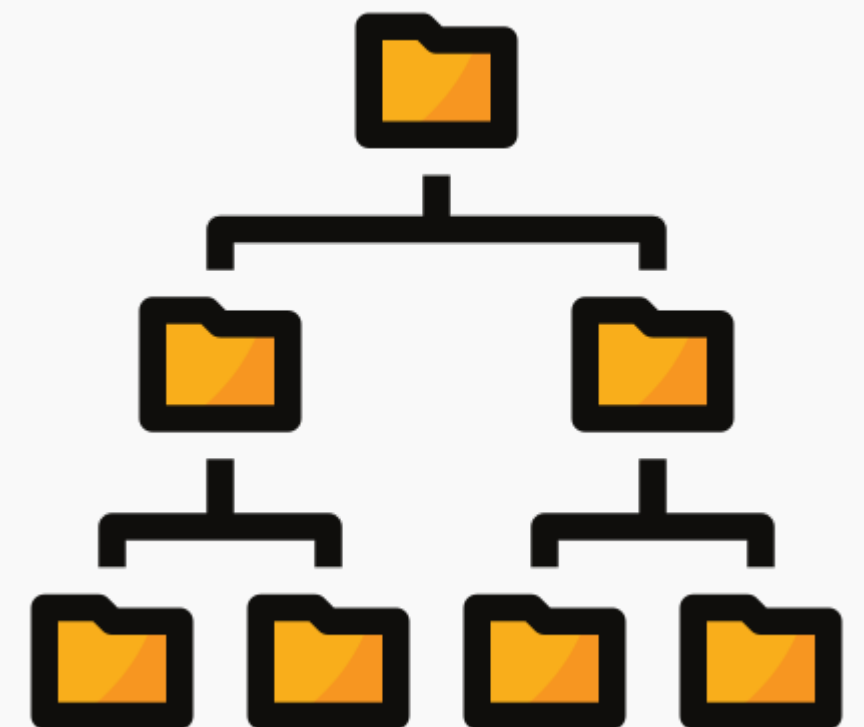
- Statutory Partners
- Education
- Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services (ECVYS)
- District, City & Borough Councils
- Office of Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner
- National Probation Service

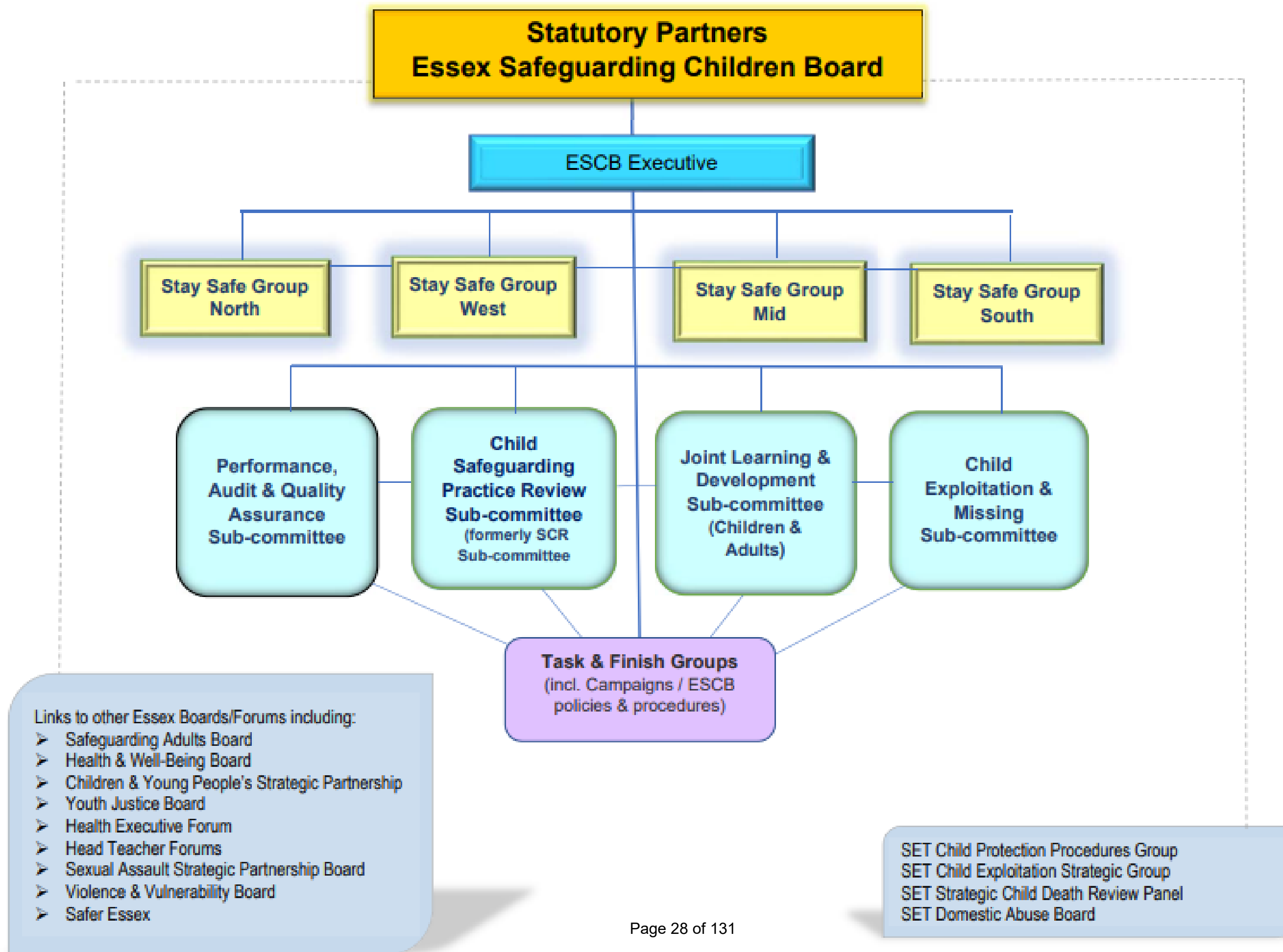
Links to other groups

- Safeguarding Adults Board
- Health and Wellbeing Board
- Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership
- Youth Justice Board
- Health Executive Forum
- Headteacher Forums
- Sexual Assault Strategic Partnership Board
- Violence and Vulnerability Board
- Safer Essex

Structure and Membership

[FULL STRUCTURE CHART](#)





Responsibilities

Essex Safeguarding Children Board is responsible for coordinating and ensuring the effectiveness of work undertaken by local agencies to safeguard and promote.

The safeguarding partners and relevant agencies included in these arrangements will fulfil their statutory duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children from Essex who live or are placed outside of our local authority area.

Each agency retains their own existing lines of accountability for their services.

Roles and Responsibilities of ESCB Executive

Membership of the Executive should be at as senior level as possible; reflecting the Working Together guidance stating that they should hold a strategic position within their organisation with respect to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Specifically, ESCB members must be able to:



- Speak for their organisation with authority
- Hold their organisation to account



- Ensure appropriate representation on the ESCB work streams as appropriate to their organisations
- Ensure that there is a clear communication pathway between the ESCB and their organisation and be able to effectively share information within their organisation



Sub-Committees

There are four Sub-Committees as well as four quadrant-based Stay Safe Groups.

- Performance, Audit & Quality Assurance Sub-Committee
- Child Safeguarding Practice Review Sub-Committee
- Joint Learning and Development Sub-Committee (Children and Adults)
- Child Exploitation & Missing Sub-Committee



Stay Safe Groups

The Stay Safe Groups co-ordinate and lead the local safeguarding agenda focusing on improving local outcomes and highlighting emerging issues and risks so that they can be appropriately addressed at operational level. They also act as learning hubs to ensure effective sharing of learning and practice and a multi-agency approach to safeguarding children. They provide annual reports to the Executive. A member of the Executive also links to the Stay Safe Groups and the Chair and Vice Chairs of each group meet with the Independent Chair/Facilitator of the Board quarterly.



ESCB Support Team

Alison Cutler, Business Manager

Karen Hammett, Practice Development Manager

Sally-Ann Millar, Child Exploitation Project Manager

Stephanie Rosser, Senior Communications Officer

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ANNUAL REPORT

2020-2021

Essex Safeguarding Children Board



Contents

Foreword	3
Introduction	4
Governance	4
Business Plan	10
Priority One – Safe at Home	11
Priority Two - Safe in the Community	16
Priority Three - Safe Safeguarding Systems.....	22
COVID-19	29
Summary	43
Next steps.....	44

Foreword

I am delighted to introduce the annual report of Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB) for 2020/21, which covers the first full year of the new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, which were implemented on 29 September 2019. As 2020 began, the three Statutory Safeguarding Partners (Police, Clinical Commissioning Groups, and the Council's Children's Social Care) were working together to fully implement and deliver their new joint and equal accountability for safeguarding children in Essex. This involved an important period of cultural change, and that joint and equal accountability led to an early decision to move to joint and equal funding of ESCB by the Statutory Partners, in a strong, clear, and confident statement of intent.

The strong relationships and partnership developed were soon exposed to the challenges of COVID-19, and the partnership responded magnificently, putting in place more frequent meetings, initially weekly, to work together, update on temporary service models, and ensure an even stronger spirit of partnership, cooperation, and commitment to ensuring that children and young people are safeguarded as well as possible. Delivering this joint response has without doubt further strengthened the partnership, leaving strong foundations for future joint working.

The partnership has experienced a particular peak in the number of cases requiring a review, and again has responded well. Although there have been some delays as the learning is extracted from these reviews, often for reasons beyond the partnership's control, good progress has been made. One of the priorities for the partnership going forward is to reduce the number of reviews, in order to free up more time to invest in implementing the learning from reviews. This is consistent with the approach taken by the National Panel.

Given the size of Essex, there is a crucial role for the four Stay Safe groups for each quadrant of the county, where local managers ensure effective practice, excellent working relationships, and the implementation of learning from reviews. The operation of the Stay Safe Groups has been reviewed, with new terms of reference, and joint chairing and vice-chairing, at a local level, by the three statutory partners.

Going forward, key priorities for the ESCB are completing existing reviews, implementing the learning, continuing to respond effectively to the challenges presented by COVID-19 and its aftermath, and maintaining and further developing the joint and equal accountability of the three Statutory Partners. The partnership and the safeguarding system across Essex has performed very well during this period, and is in a very strong position to continue to do so.

David Archibald
Independent Chair/Facilitator



Introduction

Essex is a two Tier Local Authority with a population of around 1 ½ million people, of which over 310,000 are children.

Essex has lower levels of deprivation than two-thirds of English Local Authorities, but relatively high levels of deprivation when compared to counties across the south-east. It is a county of contrasts, with very wealthy and extremely deprived neighbourhoods; and the number of children living in poverty has doubled since 2015.

Health Services in Essex are provided by the five Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) which are set to become three Integrated Care Systems (ICSs), all three of whom will work across more than one Local Authority area.

Policing services in Essex are provided by Essex Police who work across Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET).

Children's Social Care is provided by Essex County Council.

Whilst Education is not a mandated Statutory Partner, we firmly see Education as our fourth partner and their involvement in and contribution to all we do is highly valued. We ensure that Education are well represented on the ESCB Executive and all of our Sub-Committees.

Governance

This is the annual Scrutiny Report of the Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB) for 2020/21 and covers the period from April 2020 to September 2021.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the work of the ESCB during this 18-month period and will be discussed in more detail later in the report.

Function of the Local Safeguarding Arrangements/ National Requirements

The Essex Safeguarding Children Board is a Local Safeguarding Children Partnership, (LSCP). It was agreed that the new LSCP would maintain the name of the Essex Safeguarding Children Board, although in all other ways it is a LSCP. It was considered that the identity and brand of the ESCB was strong within the community and with partners and that the name should be maintained to provide a smooth transition into the new arrangements.

LSCP's are bound by Statutory Guidance for Partners, from universal services through the provision of preventative and early intervention services, to more complex statutory services.

Working Together 2018 (WT 18) details the functions of the LSCP to support and enable local agencies and organisations to work together in a system to safeguard children and promote their welfare (WT 18 Chapter 3, Paragraphs 8-14).

All three of the Statutory Partners have an equal and joint responsibility for the local safeguarding arrangements. Should the lead representative delegate their functions this must be to a senior officer who has responsibility and authority for ensuring full participation whilst the lead representative remains accountable for actions and decisions taken on their behalf. The lead representative or their delegate must also be able to hold their own organisation to account on how effectively they participate and implement local arrangements.

The Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB)

This partnership is firmly built on strong collaborative working relationships for children and young people in Essex and has continued to develop these working relationships further during 2020/21, which has been especially important given the challenges presented by COVID-19.

This collaborative approach extends to working closely with Southend and Thurrock Safeguarding Partnerships as well as others across the Eastern region and nationally. In Essex there are seven organisations who now are jointly responsible by law for the partnership arrangements for keeping children safe:

- Essex County Council
- Essex Police
- Five of the seven Clinical Commissioning Groups covering the county of Essex

They have identified relevant agencies which are legally required to cooperate with [local safeguarding arrangements](#).

Funding Arrangements

The Statutory Partners have agreed a 2-step transition towards funding changes and the overall funding of the ESCB will be split into equal shares of 33% for each of the three partner agencies from next year (22/23). In addition, the ESCB receives small contributions from the Districts and Boroughs, the National Probation Service and previously the Community Rehabilitation Company.

Executive and Sub-Committees

The Board meets quarterly in the form of an Executive at which key agencies are represented. These include:

- Health Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG)
- Police
- Local Authority

- Education
- National Probation Service**
- Community Rehabilitation Company** (**became one service June 2021)
- District, City and Borough Councils
- Health Providers
- Office of the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner
- Voluntary and Community Sector

The vision of the Essex Safeguarding Children Board is that multi-agency child safeguarding arrangements in Essex are of the highest quality, with the child at their heart; and that practice continuously improves and evolves across all agencies to reflect changing needs and circumstances.

This vision is underpinned in part by the work carried out by the Sub-Committees of the ESCB, which are:

- Child Safeguarding Practice Review
- Learning and Development (joint with Adults Board and Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board)
- Performance, Audit and Quality Assurance
- Child Exploitation and Missing

These Sub-Committees each carry out work linked to the ESCB Business Plan. The structure of the Board including its Sub-Committees can be found on the [ESCB website](#). The flow of information to and from the ESCB Executive which illustrates how we develop our business priorities can also be found on the [website](#).

In addition to the Sub-Committees there is a SET-wide working group that coordinates the updates to the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Child Protection Procedures.

Stay Safe Groups play a vital role and sit across each of the four quadrants in Essex, they are made up of a wide range of designated and named professionals or managers with safeguarding responsibilities including 0-19 services, education, acute and primary health providers, local council representatives, voluntary sector and police.

The terms of reference of our local Stay Safe Groups have been reviewed and refreshed and are chaired by Police, Health and the Local Authority. These focus on operational practice and also act as local learning hubs to disseminate learning as required such as sharing lessons from reviews – thereby allowing practice to be developed and embedded locally and improve outcomes. These groups are also a conduit for escalating issues and risk to the Statutory Partners and Executive - there is thus a constant link between strategic planning and operational issues and practice.

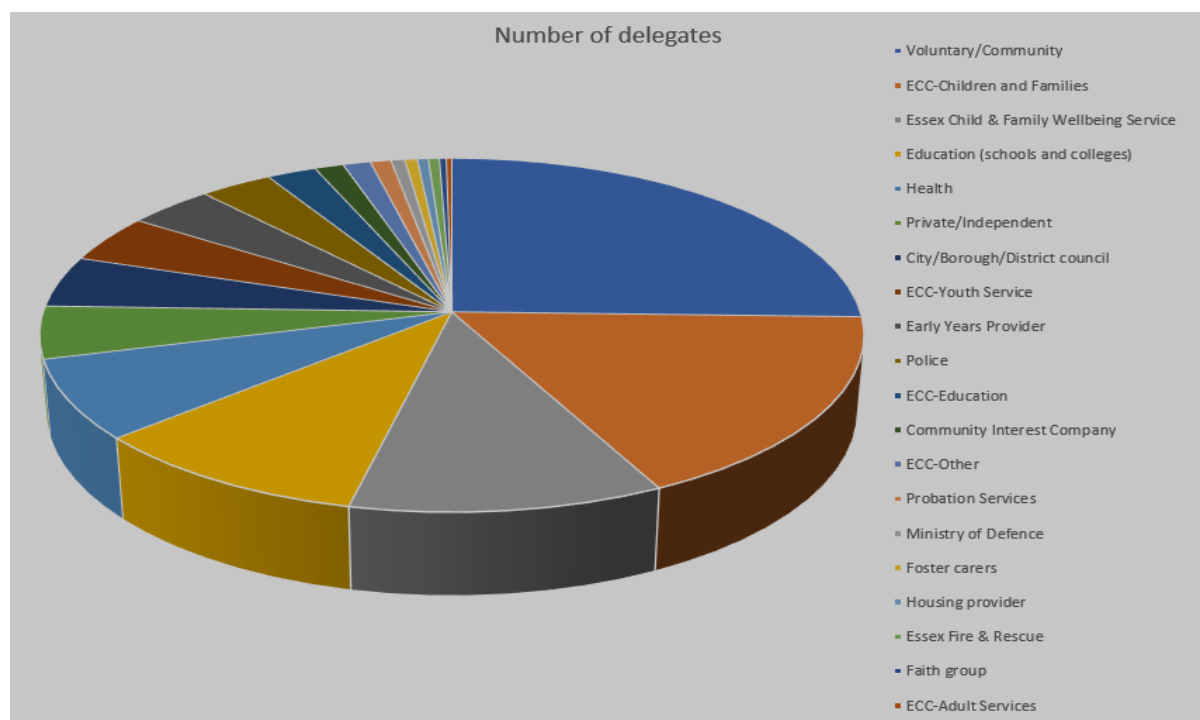
Quarterly meetings are held with the Stay Safe chairs, vice chairs and the Sub-Committee chairs and the Independent Chair/Facilitator and the ESCB Business Manager and Practice Development Manager to identify emerging issues and ensure how work is best shared and tackled across the various groups.

Working Together 2018 sets out in Chapters 31-35 an outline for independent scrutiny. It is tasked with providing assurance in judging the effectiveness of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and includes the arrangements to identify and review serious child safeguarding cases. Statutory Partners must ensure that scrutiny is objective, acts as a critical friend and promotes reflection to drive continuous improvement. The Independent Scrutineer should consider the effectiveness of arrangements for children and their families as well as practitioners; in addition to how well the Statutory Partners provide strong leadership.

In Essex, we have taken the approach that the Independent Chair can provide independent scrutiny of the safeguarding activities of the Statutory Partnership. Our Chair provides an independent perspective on the effectiveness and impact of our multi-agency safeguarding children partnership. We trust our partnership arrangements to be open and transparent in terms of what works well, what may not work so well and what needs to be developed. Moving forward, we believe that the best scrutiny of our safeguarding activities come from those who receive this intervention, and we want to focus more on what our children and young people and their families tell us about these activities across the partnership. This can be captured from the audit activity that is undertaken both together and within agencies, our safeguarding reviews, feedback activities where we directly ask for views or from the complaints about service, and the compliments that highlight what we do well. We will continue to work across the region and national networks to build on this approach to scrutiny and respond to developments.

Training

The training offered by the ESCB has had a wide reach in terms of agencies who participate and notably community and voluntary sector organisations continue to be the biggest users of our training.



In addition to our own scheduled training, ESCB has received funding from the Violence and Vulnerability Unit to work in partnership with Southend and Thurrock Safeguarding Children Partnerships to deliver a programme of webinars under the theme of child exploitation and a series of courses focused on understanding and working with trauma.

Feedback

Working with Trauma

'I don't think I've ever been on a course where I've learnt something that would have that much impact within such a short space of time. It's going to revolutionise how we chat to our Children and Young People at all levels.'

'The learning from the course is continuing to influence my day-to-day practice when working with trauma - from small pieces of guidance like not saying 'this is not your fault' / asking 'what' instead of 'why' and the rationale behind choice of language to understanding how to approach and discuss trauma and the impact of ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences)'

'I have used the information provided to update any training packages I am delivering. I have shared the knowledge and information learnt via my team meetings with other staff members. Starting to embed learning into direct contact I have with young people, particularly the style of questions I use.'

Violence and Vulnerability Unit funded webinars on the theme of child exploitation

'Psychology of the offender has influenced the way we now work closer with the whole family using our family liaison worker.'

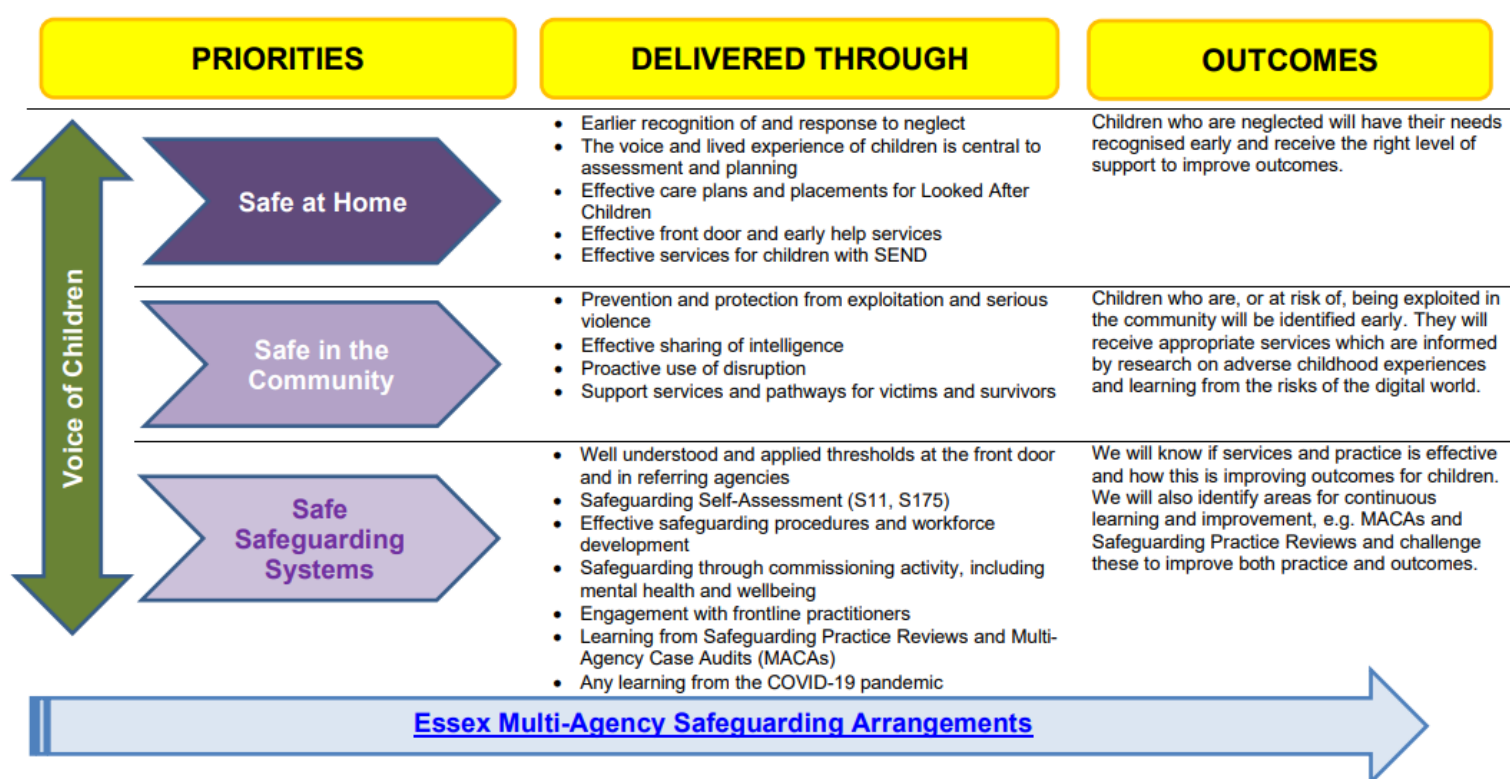


Business Plan

The ESCB has a two year Business Plan in place through to 2022. The identified priorities are that children and young people are **Safe at Home, Safe in the Community**, and there are, **Safe Safeguarding Systems**.

These priorities were set prior to the pandemic, and to varying degrees work targeted at these priorities has been interrupted as services and attention diverted to the pandemic response.

ESCB Business Plan Priorities 2020/22



Priority One – Safe at Home

Neglect is to be the subject of the next Multi-Agency Thematic Audit process to assist the partnership to develop an action plan to address this priority. There is a Neglect Working Group which continues to consider the multi-agency response.

Essex has four Team Around the Family Support Officers (TAFSOs) with a Team Manager. The TAFSOs do not case hold and operate within Level 2 of the Effective Support for Children & Families in Essex guidance. They will support all professionals in their quadrant to work with children and families using a whole family approach. This includes supporting and coaching professionals to act as the Lead Practitioner, facilitate professionals to coordinate a Team Around the Child process and undertake training.

In 2020/21 the TAFSO's have facilitated 418 Team Around the Family meetings (TAFs) which has more than trebled from the previous year. They have continued to coach practitioners in Early Help approaches and again their reach has nearly doubled since last year. The TAFSO's have facilitated 28 workshops, which is almost a third of the workshops delivered last year. They have attended 106 networking events which is almost the same as the previous year.

The reach of the TAFSO's has been broad and they have supported colleagues across all levels as well as acting into support roles with the commissioned domestic abuse services and supporting the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service responding to the needs of Essex residents caused by COVID-19.



Case Study

School Nurse was invited to a Team Around the Family (TAF) meeting by School for a 6-year-old child with a moderate developmental delay. The school were confused as how the child presented differed from what the mother had advised them. The School Nurse compiled a health chronology and identified multiple discrepancies in the record, compared to what the mother had told the school. As the case had a perplexing presentation a Professional meeting was arranged by Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service with GP, Paediatrician, Dietician, Continence Nurse and Designated Nurse.

This meeting concluded that Mother appeared to be exaggerating and misreporting the child's symptoms. The outcome of this meeting was for the paediatrician to meet with the mother and clearly set out the details of the child's health needs. There was also a plan to reiterate this through TAF meetings.

The Mother was challenged in TAF meetings but persisted to exaggerate the child's health needs. To reduce the impact of this continued medicalisation on the child a decision was made (with the mother's full consent) to make a Request For Support.

A Social Worker is now liaising with health professionals and the family with the aim of gaining an understanding of the family dynamics and ultimately create a plan to allow the child to reach her full potential.

Feedback from professionals has been positive:

'The TAF meeting is going ahead tomorrow and feel like having this planning session with you has really upskilled my knowledge. I have already made up the templates you suggested on Who to Call in a crisis. I felt like I was out of my depth but you reassured me that I am offering and coordinating a lot of services for this family.' Paediatric Dietitian, NHS

'I found the session extremely helpful and will help me no end with regards to running my own TAF meetings and supporting my colleagues.'
Secondary School Designated Safeguarding Lead

'I have since identified a potential family that would benefit from a Team Around the Family approach. I have emailed mum the flyer about it and awaiting her response at

present. If mum would like to proceed I will then contact my local TAFSO. I do not think I would have had the confidence to do so prior to the training.'

Anon Professional

Case Study

A six-year-old was subject to a Team Around the Family (TAF) meeting after having never attending school. The mother suggested that the child was highly anxious and felt attending school would increase the child's anxiety. The Child Missing in Education team were involved, but no progress was being made. The School Nurse presented this case to the Early Help Drop in. Within Early Help Drop in, the School Inclusions Team became involved. The TAF meetings are continuing, but there is now a robust multi-agency plan in place to support the mother and facilitate the child attending school with her peers.

Our Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) inspection in autumn 2019 identified three areas of improvement.

1. Over-identification of moderate learning difficulties (MLD) which could mask underlying difficulties in communication and language, or social, emotional and mental health.
2. The joint commissioning arrangements between the Local Authority and the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) did not work well enough to provide children and young people with SEND the services they need.
3. Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans do not include the information needed to secure high-quality outcomes for children and young people, and strategic oversight was not effective in making sure that EHC plans were fit for purpose.

Our Joint Written Statement of Action details our collective response to these areas of concern, and Education, Health and Social Care have worked in collaboration with Essex Family Forum (Parent/ Carer Forum) to address each issue. A review of the SEND governance arrangements was undertaken, resulting in new joint governance arrangements to oversee and drive forward SEND improvements across the local area. Workstreams have been established to address the significant areas of improvement, focusing on reviewing our strategies, processes and data relating to SEND in Essex to establish and implement the specific improvements needed.

Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)

Root cause analysis has informed training on accurate identification of needs, including speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) which has been rolled out to all schools and settings, as well as education, health and care staff. Alongside this, guidance to record needs on the census return was issued. Countywide data was

assessed and schools targeted with further support and intervention from the Local Authority SEND teams where a need was identified. As a result we have realised a significant improvement in the data for MLD and SLCN, showing that Essex is now more in line with the national averages (January 21 census data).

Joint commissioning

A Joint commissioning group was established, and a final draft of the Joint Commissioning Strategy is awaiting signoff. Waiting times for assessment of Autism and Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) have been baselined across the county, with data being used to measure performance. Mapping of need, commissioning, and provision across the three therapy areas (SLCN, Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy) and engagement with families, schools and other stakeholders has taken place.

The Local Offer website is undergoing extensive redesign and a 12-week discovery phase has been undertaken involving parents, carers, volunteers from local support groups and practitioners from across Education, Health and Social Care. An independent review of the Send Information Advice and Support (SENDIAS) service was delivered and recommendations have been implemented. An understanding of waiting times and trends for pieces of equipment was instigated alongside guidance for families around the process when a child may need equipment.

Improving quality of Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans

An end-to-end review of EHC processes has been undertaken. Joint decision-making processes with Education, Health, and Social Care have been implemented. New Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) guidance and criteria has been launched to clarify the purpose of an EHC Plan as well as other forms of additional support. A new quality assurance framework and process is in place. New guidance for supporting children and young people with medical needs in schools has been implemented.

Role of the Emotional Wellbeing & Mental Health (EWMH) Strategic Board – Shared Outcomes

The focus of this Board is to bring Education, Health, Social Care and Public Health together around the theme of Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health. The Board reports into: the Children's Partnership Board and local boards, Essex Safeguarding Children Board and the Health and Wellbeing Board. It also liaises with the Essex Suicide Prevention Steering Board, Mental Health Partnership Board (South and Mid Sustainability Transformation Partnership), All Age Prevention of Suicide Group, SEND Strategic Governance Group, the Collaborative Commissioning Forum.

The Board worked with stakeholders, including children and young people, to identify and agree these six outcomes.

Children and young people in Essex:

1. Feel safe (feel safe and be safe)
2. Have good self-worth and positive identity
3. Are resilient
4. Have trusting and positive relationships with adults - parent/carer and significant adult in your life (not a professional)
5. Have trusting, healthy friendships and relationships with others (friends and peers, professional/education staff)
6. Have a connection with their community e.g. education, jobs, support groups, etc.

The work of the EWMH Strategic Board will focus on meeting these outcomes. One of the initial priorities of the EWMH Strategic Board was to develop a common language for emotional wellbeing and mental health. The Board produced new guidance in collaboration with the members of the board, SEND quadrant teams, Association of Secondary Headteacher in Essex and Essex Primary Headteachers Association along with children and young people forums and the Essex Family Forum. There are three versions of this guidance for practitioners, families and young people as well as a poster for young people. All are available to download from the [Essex Schools Infolink](#) as well as other resources from the 'Let's Talk' suite.

In September 2021 the EWMH Board launched the [new schools Infolink portal](#) for Social, Emotional and Mental Health and is now the 'go-to' place for Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) resources, advice and guidance for schools, settings and colleges.

Following the publication of the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's Report in 2020 'Out of Routine: A review of sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI) in families where the children are considered at risk of significant harm' it was decided that a local review would be conducted. This was undertaken with the Child Death Overview Panel. 17 cases were identified between December 2017 and September 2020 and audited. Whilst the report is yet to be finalised, the preliminary findings correspond to those in the national report.

Priority Two - Safe in the Community

The Child Exploitation Sub-Committee works closely with the Violence and Vulnerability Partnership. The Memorandum of Understanding for Missing has been relaunched with Care Providers, Missing and Child Exploitation (MACE) 1&2 (the operational and local strategic groups) have been reviewed with changes recommended and risk in the community workshops and exploitation training events have been held. A data subgroup is taking place to consider how best to use data from across the partnership to develop a problem profile which leads to an action plan to measure our impact. A Task & Finish group is meeting to consider various pathways for tackling exploitation across the partnership so we can define our 'Risk in the Community' approach. A partnership strategic online exploitation plan is also being developed with actions to be reviewed at each MACE 2, which aims to target resources where they are needed and raise understanding and skills of the workforce to identify and respond to online exploitation.

Going into 21/22 multi-agency e-learning on exploitation will be launched as well as release of a SET partnership child exploitation pathway tool. A task and finish group to explore improvements in the systems around missing has been agreed and the 'Imagine' pilot in North will help recognise reachable moments in working with girls and young women to help develop practice targeted to interrupt exploitation.

Operation Henderson was rolled out in June 2021 aimed to raise awareness of young people missing and/or vulnerable to exploitation using trains and taxis. This was a collective campaign across SET and included local policing and community safety partners, Youth Service, Social Care, British Transport Police, The Railway Children and Reach Every Generation. Total social media reach was 202,596 and total face to face engagements were 976. Discussions took place with train station staff, businesses local to train stations and taxi drivers as well as passengers. It is hoped that the campaign will be repeated twice next year and there has been interest from London Boroughs to join on a day of action, thus extending the reach even further.

The ESCB has linked with Active Essex and provided a training session for local sport clubs/after school club providers about signs of exploitation and how to report it. Discussions continue about raising awareness via their communication channels and further training events for volunteers, coaches and youth workers.

Violence and Vulnerability funded 'Every Contact Counts' sessions took place in 2021. Community Safety Partnerships allocated places to council workers in the community and it has been identified that exploitation training for those working in the night-time economy appears to be required so sessions planned for early 2022 will be offered to door security staff at nightclubs/pubs, taxi marshals, CCTV operators and call handlers for taxi operators.

Investment for Essex Police included the formation of a Child Sexual Exploitation Investigations Team.

Operation Kirn (Makesafe) is a national initiative around educating hoteliers and similar accommodation providers, around recognising the signs of sexual and criminal exploitation. In May 2021, all hotels across SET were contacted and invited to participate in training funded by the Violence and Vulnerability Unit. Upon completion they were given a certificate, signed by a senior Police officer from Essex, to confirm staff have been suitability trained. They can then promote that accreditation on their advertising and display the certificate within their premises. Since May 2021, there has been some testing carried out by local policing teams and the council in Chelmsford and Epping Forest, which will be extended into more areas. There have been some positive results in these areas, however due to the high turnover of staff in hotels, the ESCB has developed a webpage for hotels. This outlines their roles and responsibilities to safeguard young people from exploitation. It includes safeguarding processes to be followed, obligations under the law, how police can respond if they fail in their duty and how to access staff training. The ESCB are working with colleagues in Southend and Thurrock to create a recorded presentation that hotels can use in staff training. Licensing teams have circulated the webpage to hotels and asked them to use this as a guide.

Operation Innerste went live in Sept 2020, it is the national operation developed as a multi-agency response to the complex issues surrounding missing unaccompanied migrant children. The focus is to deal with the children and young people who arrive without documents and to divert them from custody into local care placements. Between October 2020 and January 2021, Essex Police were able to divert 26 young people from custody.

In 2020, Essex Police also developed Operation Bluebird, the Force's response to any suspected incident or investigation into Organised Immigration Crime. Thus, acknowledging the serious and organised crime which lies behind immigration crime, rather than focusing solely on the immigration offences. Operation Bluebird was designed to ensure all available investigative and intelligence opportunities are captured, to ensure victims are safeguarded and suspects brought to justice.

Essex Police have created a dedicated Missing Person Prevention Sergeant post, this was a growth bid and was to fund a post to supervise the already established Missing Person Liaison Officer posts (MPLOs), aiming to improve the consistency of MPLO supervision and enhanced team working through a centralised Missing Person Prevention Team (MPPT), under Crime & Public Protection command. This team will be prevention led, working across our three local authority areas (Southend, Essex and Thurrock).

When a young person in Essex aged over 10 years goes missing from home or care they are offered a 'Missing Chat' from the Involvement Service. In lockdown, these face-to-face meetings were replaced with online discussions, supported by more regular and accessible contact via WhatsApp. Between March and October, responses to this offer increased from 108 in 2019 to 390 in 2020, while Parental Missing Chats increased from 202 to 329, despite the overall number of missing episodes actually going down. The more regular and accessible communication technology made the service more reachable to young people, resulting in more frequent communication, and these technologies will continue to be used even as face-to-face meetings are able to resume. All young people were sent activity and wellbeing packs, while mental health concerns that did emerge were more quickly identified and referred to partner agencies.

In 2020 the Youth Offending Service (YOS) completed a project known as 'Lived Experiences' involving the stories of 10 young people exposed to Child Criminal Exploitation and this captured a great deal of rich information about how young people felt professionals supported them (or not) and how well both families and professionals understood their thoughts, feelings and risks.

The stories were translated into four animations which are the basis of the online learning sessions that the YOS provides. The learning has been shared across the Eastern Region and targeted training is scheduled to commence in 2022.

This is an [explanatory video](#) of the work undertaken and some of the key messages.

In February 2021 Essex became aware of the Everyone's Invited website and the national and local campaigns that highlighted the prevalence of Harmful Sexual Behaviours and sexualised behaviours within education settings.

Essex Police organised a multi-agency forum to agree a joint strategic and operational approach during the Summer Term 2021. A clear referral pathway was created within existing systems to ensure that all partners knew where referrals should be directed. No formal referrals have been received by Essex Police and Operation Hydrant (the national response) have stopped reviewing the Everyone's Invited website. This recognises that it is up to victims to decide if they wish to report offences.

A variety of materials have been made available to education settings already via a dedicated section on the subject of Harmful Sexual Behaviour and sexualised behaviour on the Essex Schools Infolink. A Harmful Sexual Behaviour Guidance is expected for April 2022 as is a Common Language Framework and resources to support settings in Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) curriculum delivery which has been co-produced with the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service and Public Health.

The Head of Education Safeguarding and Wellbeing has communicated with schools on the outcomes of the National Safeguarding Review and the Essex County Council response in a range of ways, attending Secondary Schools Behaviour and Attendance Partnerships to brief schools, via the termly education setting safeguarding forums and also through other forums and written briefings. In addition, a whole day of training for secondary schools was held in June 2021 and contributors included Police, Children's Social Care and Youth Offending Service. Further training for primary schools, secondaries, and school governors will be offered in summer 2022. A guidance document on harmful sexual behaviour and a range of accompanying resources will be launched in the summer term 2022 and these will be highlighted at the safeguarding forums and by other means.

The Head of Education Safeguarding and Wellbeing has joined the Sexual Abuse Strategic Partnership Board to provide the link back into education settings. Trauma Perceptive Practice (TPP) is the Essex schools approach to understanding behaviour and supporting emotional wellbeing. All schools/settings are encouraged to become trauma perceptive in their practice and this programme has been developed for Essex practitioners by Essex practitioners to ensure that all settings hold a shared understanding of behaviour and know how best to respond when children and young people are faced with additional challenges.

The Trauma Perceptive Practice values are:

- **Compassion and kindness** instead of blame and shame
- **Hope** instead of hopelessness
- **Connection and belonging** rather than disconnection

There are already 300 settings which have started the training, with just under 50 others who have signed up for it. There has been such enthusiasm for the TPP approach from partners across Essex that we have also widened the TPP training offer further. This includes TPP now being embedded in Healthy Schools accreditation thanks to collaboration with the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service. They have also enabled a group of staff in their service to become trainers in TPP, who will be training their entire workforce and be able to support schools and settings with their healthy schools and TPP journey. TPP is now also offered as part of the Essex Teacher Training programme. An alternative version for families is currently in a pilot phase and two annual conferences have been held with over 200 attendees at each.

A series of awareness sessions has been delivered to share the main principles and values of TPP, as well as abridged TPP training sessions which are open to all service partners across education, health, social care and any interested partners within the community. This wider interest and enthusiasm is enabling a TPP cultural shift to be

embedded across the system, including aligning the common language, policy updates and best practice.

Through TPP, the 'KASH' Framework, a reflective tool to enable change in Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills and Habits has been introduced. While it can be difficult to measure the impact of TPP in isolation, the changes in the attitudes and habits of the workforce demonstrate some impact.

Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Portal for Schools, Colleges and Settings – [SEMH Training](#) on Schools Infolink.

This is a huge commitment from education as we realise this is a change of culture and has seen a huge uptake for the training. This approach complements the training in other agencies and the across the Statutory Partners in Essex to develop a trauma informed workforce.

The Essex Youth Service continued to deliver a significant range of services to young people during the pandemic. The 'Good Man' and 'Sisters in Strength' mentoring programme for boys/young men and girls/young women providing education around the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships saw a move to online sessions in lockdown. This proved popular, particularly to those whose anxiety made it difficult to attend in person, and waiting lists reduced from 3-4 months before lockdown to 1-2 months.

Youth workers based at Basildon A&E hospital working with vulnerable children (those with poor mental health, victims or perpetrators of violence and those with anxiety about being in hospital) provided an on-call and referral service to A&E during lockdown and kept in regular contact with young people through weekly online sessions, returning to shifts within the hospital from July 2020.

In August 2020, coinciding with children returning to school after lockdown, the Essex Safeguarding Children Board ran a week-long campaign around online child exploitation, with podcasts and videos promoted across social media platforms, a BBC Essex radio interview recorded by Essex Police and a livestream training event reaching over 100,000 people.

The ESCB have run an online safety campaign four times per year. This now includes Facebook live events whereby parents can ask any question of local experts. The events include evenings with 'The 2 Johns' and Brook (who develop school PSHE materials). We have developed a large library of up to date and useful resources, including podcasts by local experts from across the partnership, such as 'how to talk to your child about consent'. These are always accessible on the ESCB webpage. The campaign reach has been growing, in July 2021 it reached 326,546. Increasing online

exploitation and low workforce confidence in identifying and responding to this has been a theme in the updated COVID-19 study. In response to this, there will be a SET workshop in February 2022 with 'The 2 Johns' and a working group is being formed to develop a partnership 'Thinking Tool' to guide professionals on how to identify and respond to online exploitation, which is part of the strategic plan.



I DIDN'T KNOW!

When using social networking sites:

- *there are a lot of fake accounts*
- *people can screenshot and share photos and videos without permission.*

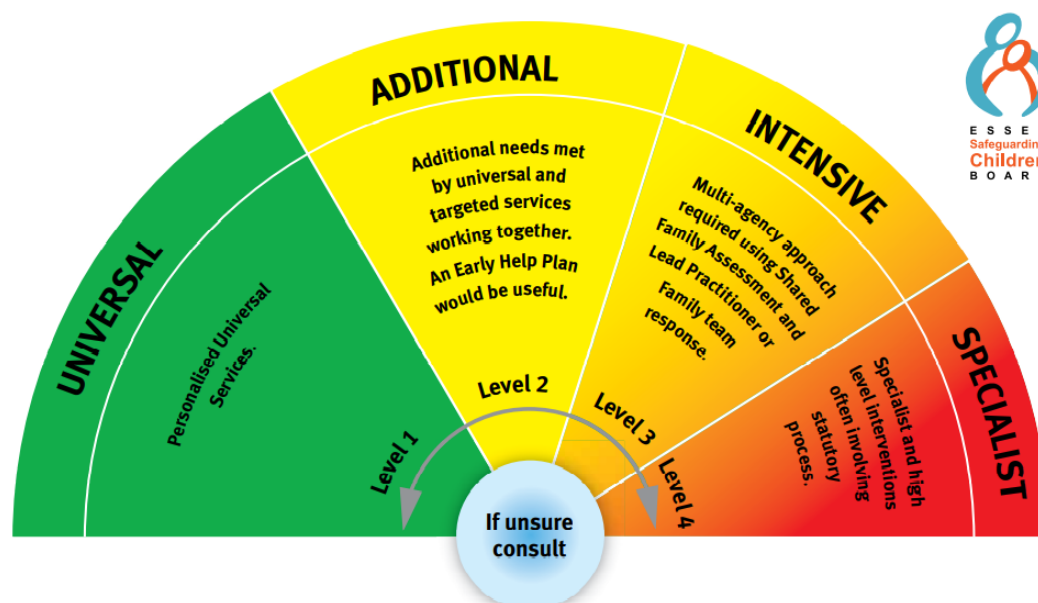
 SOUTHEND
Safeguarding
Partnership

 THURROCK LOCAL
SAFEGUARDING
CHILDREN BOARD

 ESSEX
Safeguarding
Children
BOARD

Priority Three - Safe Safeguarding Systems

The Essex Effective Support Windscreen



In Essex we have four levels of need for children: Universal, Additional, Intensive and Specialist. Services for children with additional and intensive needs are sometimes known as targeted services, such as behaviour support, additional help with learning in school, extra support to parents in early years or targeted help to involve young people through youth services. Children with additional needs are best supported by those who already work with them, such as Family Hubs or schools, organising additional support with local partners as needed. Our Team Around the Family Support Officers (TAFSO) and Family Solutions sit within the Targeted Services offer and Children's Social Care and Youth Offending Services delivers under Intensive Needs.

In 2020/21 the TAFSO's have facilitated 418 Team Around the Family meetings which has more than trebled from the previous year. They have continued to coach practitioners in early help approaches and again their reach has nearly doubled since last year. The TAFSO's have facilitated 28 workshops, which is almost a third of the workshops delivered last year. They have attended 106 networking events which almost the same as the previous year.

The demand on services at Tier 3 and 4 have changed during the first 12 months of the pandemic, so it is perhaps too soon to note if there are any trend changes within need.

Requests into the service were up by nearly 10% on the previous year, but a smaller percentage of these requests were progressed to contacts and then referrals than the previous year.

When work was progressed into the Child Protection Pathway however, of those children and young people who were heard at an Initial Child Protection Conference there was an increase in those progressed and made subject of a Protection Plan from the previous year. This might be a reflection of the comments that all agencies are making about the number of more complex families they are working with and the higher needs of these families.

Overall children who were subject of Child Protection Plans had reduced at the end of 2020/21 from 626 to 611 from the year before; 99.6% of our child protection conferences were held in timescale and 11.6% of children with a protection plan had had an earlier child protection plan within the previous 2 years. Essex have remained below the national average for children subject of a child protection plan for 2 years or more. Essex continues to maintain the second lowest numbers of children subject to child protection plans per 10,000 in the eastern region.

Of the nine Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews currently open, one child was subject of a protection plan and one child was about to progress for consideration of a child protection plan. We believe that this demonstrates that known, suspected and/or understood risk to children is managed well by the partners and that the right children are in the right part of the service.

Children who were looked after had increased slightly by the end of 2020/21 from 1071 to 1082 from the year before. By the end of 2020/21, 100 or just under 10% of our Children in Care cohort was made up of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

In 2020/21 referrals into the Children's Workforce Allegations Team were reduced by 24% from the previous year, this was expected given the impact of COVID-19. 30% of referrals are categorised as allegations and 18% of these referrals concerns allegations of historical abuse and this is similar to previous years. 29% of our allegations concern children who are looked after which again is not unexpected when the effect of COVID-19 is factored in and care settings are the most referred setting. The highest outcome for Allegations is Substantiated (16%).

The team have begun to review the performance indicators they have previously been using and into the later part of this reporting period are looking more closely at those settings who do not make or feature in referrals, collating more quality assurance information where they have challenged professionals and starting to look at the 'Top 10' settings i.e. education, residentials and nurseries. This is enabling the team to liaise more with other teams and provide feedback and highlight where additional work,

support or development may be needed within the workforce. This has led to the some working groups being set up to address problems arising.

The Education Safeguarding team has continued to provide regular (at least termly) safeguarding briefings to all schools (including independent) and other education settings. The termly safeguarding forums are regularly attended by over 400 settings each term. They moved online this year and have continued to be well attended.

The Education Safeguarding Team held the first Early Years Safeguarding Forum online in October 2020. 180 settings were able to attend and these will continue termly. The team also now provides an early years termly safeguarding briefing and other materials and resources to support settings with their safeguarding arrangements. This includes the safeguarding audit, model child protection policies and templates for reporting and recording concerns.

Child Death Reviews

Whilst the function of Child Death Review has moved away from the ESCB, this remains an important pathway of safeguarding activity that partners contribute to. There have been 98 child deaths reviews completed through the Child Death Overview Panel in 2020/21. Just over 60% of these children had no recorded modifiable factors identified and just under 40% did. A modifiable factor is not necessarily an indication of abuse or neglect but rather a factor that is a known risk to the mortality of children. This could include for example an acute medical or surgical condition, infection, deliberate self-harm or a deliberately inflicted injury.

Audit Activity

Multi-Agency Audits are organised into two categories; Multi-Agency 'Single' Case Audits (MACAs), and Multi-Agency Thematic Audits (MATAs), which draw upon the learning from a larger number of case examples with a common thematic practice element. MACA's were interrupted by COVID-19 and the programme was paused.

MATA's has proved to lend themselves to a wider impact and strategic approach. MACA's offer best value when there are unusual/unique sets of circumstances that warrant that deep dive and space for shared thinking and problem solving as a localised approach.

In October 2020, A MATA commenced regarding 'Working with Parental/ Adult Mental Health, this was an Essex wide audit looking at eight cases. 13 Agency Overview of Findings Reports were produced. 71 professionals attended from 18 agencies between both MATA findings meetings in October and January 2021. These meetings developed the Multi-Agency Cross Cutting Practice themes which have in turn informed a Draft Plan of Service Development Aspirations which is being progressed.

Working with other Boards

The ESCB works closely with other Boards - across SET, the eastern region and nationally. This is essential in order to avoid duplication of work, build on the joint understanding of cross cutting themes and ensure consistent messaging to our workforce.

In Essex the ESCB works with the Children's Partnership, Health and Wellbeing Board and the SET Violence and Vulnerability Unit, SET Domestic Abuse Board and the Adults Board (ESAB). We have joint work in place such as learning from reviews workshops bringing together key cross cutting themes to multi agency practitioners, child exploitation campaigns and joint webinars as well as a joint learning and development sub-committee formed of the Children, Adult and Domestic Abuse Boards. Measuring the impact of such work is still being monitored and work on avoiding duplication with other Boards is underway.

We also work closely with the neighbouring partnerships of Southend and Thurrock, as well as on joint initiatives across the multi-agency partnerships of the eastern region. Work strands within SET include the SET child protection procedures, CE and missing work and joint initiatives around learning from reviews. Links are also made with head teacher forums and the Health Executive forum via representatives of the ESCB Executive who sit on these groups.

These working relationships are set out in the [flow chart and structure of the ESCB](#) .

The ESCB statutory partners hold regular meetings, and they exercise clear strategic leadership in these meetings, while working very closely with the broader Executive.

Statutory partner meetings were set up across Southend Essex and Thurrock initially weekly in 2020 in response to COVID-19 in order to monitor the effectiveness of the safeguarding system. These built on existing SET (Southend, Essex and Thurrock) partnerships, and these meetings allowed partners to share information and coordinate actions as required – these included encouraging people to still attend hospital appointments and A&E in case of an emergency, learning from each other and reviewing any patterns such as neglect or child deaths. This coordinated action and sharing of information has been helpful in formulating responses to emerging risks. Attendance at school, mental wellbeing, supporting families and neglect are key themes emerging from these meetings, as well as the ongoing challenge of engaging with families via a mix of virtual and face to face meetings. Additionally, these meetings have also discussed the impact on staff both in terms of absence from the workplace but also on emotional health and wellbeing. These meetings now take place monthly.

The ESCB has agreed a programme of joint work with the Essex Safeguarding Adults Board (ESAB) in relation to 'Think Family' and Transitional Safeguarding.

Safeguarding Reviews

At the end of financial year 2019/20 there were seven reviews ongoing as agreed by the Serious Case Review/ Child Safeguarding Practice Review (SCR/ CSPR Sub-Committee.)

Since the change from Serious Case Reviews to Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, the ESCB has been trialling a number of different formats and methodology to see what works best, the methodology is decided based on the needs of each individual case. At that stage not all reviews would have been classed as a CSPR, subsequent advice from the National Panel that any review of a case decided following the Rapid Review should be a Local CSPR is now in place.

The ESCB Child Safeguarding Practice Review Sub-Committee reviewed processes to ensure that they are also reflective of a partnership approach. All new CSPR referrals are initially considered and triaged by representatives from the three Statutory Partners to ensure they meet the criteria to progress to a Rapid Review.

One of the critical themes that has emerged from reviews is 'Think Family'. This concept is not as well embedded in Essex as we want it to be and a multi-agency piece of work has been started to begin to address this. This is being jointly undertaken with adult services and the partnership. We are working towards an inaugural Practitioner Summit involving first line managers and above to begin to develop ideas that will enable us to embed Think Family within existing agency structures by widening thinking, curiosity and changes in culture to improve communication and collaboration and break down barriers that prevent this happening.

Other themes which have emerged from these reviews have included:

- The sharing of information
- Notification to professionals of outcomes of assessments
- Lack of understanding of the expectations of 'others' roles and responsibilities
- That barriers that exist which prevent change being effective need to be addressed to make effective changes
- Reflective supervision to explore knowns and unknowns in a supported way to increase curiosity and understand risks
- Assessments of risks not being sufficiently explored or understood

There has been an increase in the number of children and young people being referred to the CSPR Sub-Committee for consideration for review during 2020/21 and this

increase in requests and subsequent CSPR's may now be slowing. The Business Manager will continue to monitor workloads and resources to ensure that quality of provision is maintained.

Work has started with the Statutory Partners to review our CSPR work to determine what has worked best and this will form the basis of a review and update of our guidance.

Learning from Reviews

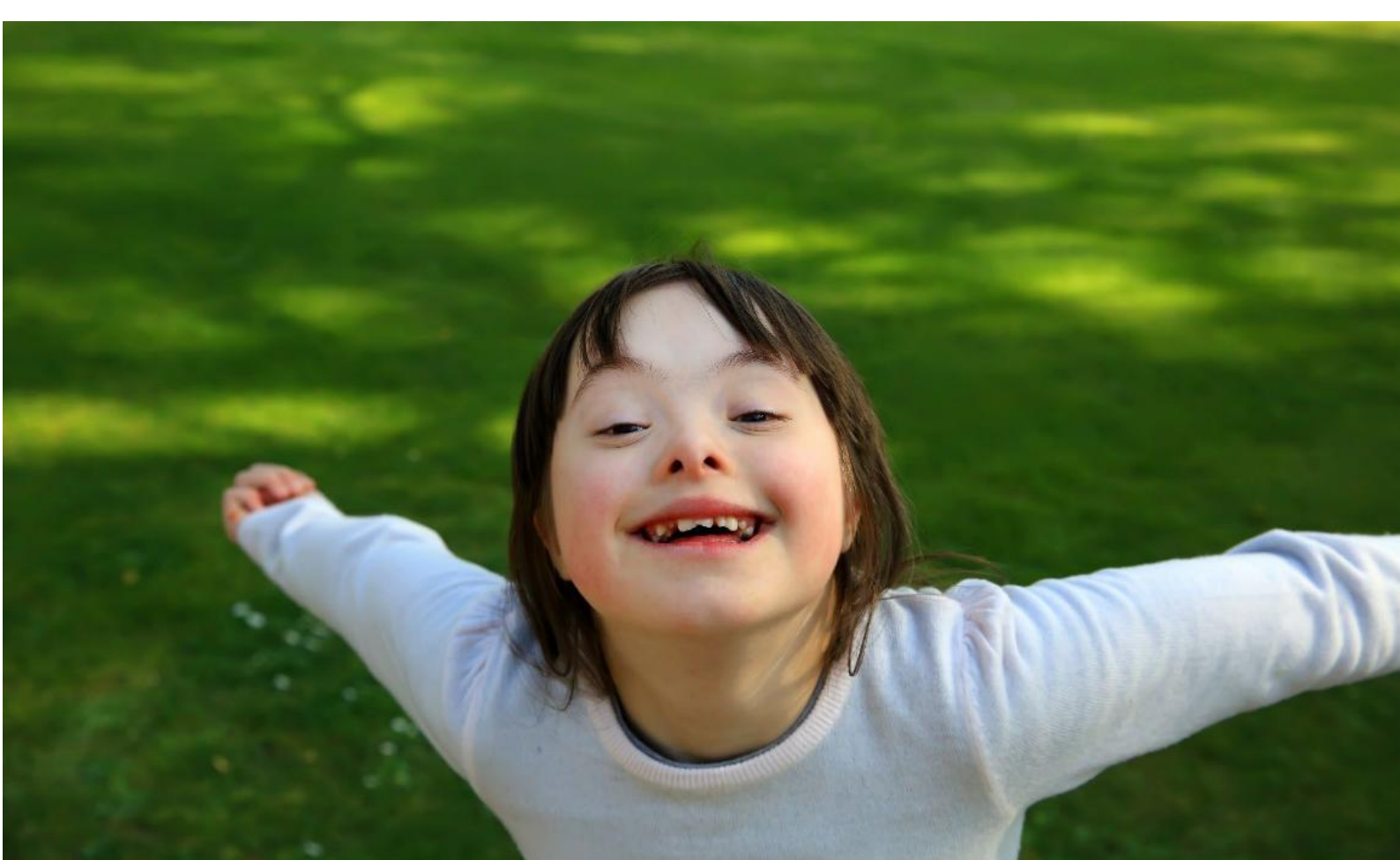
This is a critical area of work for the ESCB which the partnership is continuing to develop. The partnership is also involved with regional and national initiatives around this via the Eastern Region Chairs and Business Managers group and also the National Association of Safeguarding Partners.

Some of the initiatives include:

- The ESCB is working on a new refreshed learning from reviews process - this will focus on agencies providing evidence of the impact of learning from reviews as opposed to simply responding to what has been done to implement recommendations. This evidence of impact on practice will be quality assured by a multi-agency steering group formed of representatives from the statutory partners. This work will continue in 2021 to further strengthen the embedding of learning.
- Building on previous work, a working group of the Boards across adults, children and domestic abuse came together and produced a Podcast on the theme of Think Family to be released in October 2021.
- Looking at themes nationally, regionally and being involved in the development of initiatives to further share learning such as joint multi agency webinars and workshops.
- Work continues to assist agencies in sharing learning – this includes via multi agency workshops and briefings. These activities are evaluated and the responsibilities of each agency to disseminate learning are clearly set out.
- The Section 11 and Section 175 audits (safeguarding audits for the partnership and education) are taking place in 2021; the S11 Audit was distributed at the end of June 2021 and the S175 Audit will commence after the autumn half-term. Once the findings are analysed this will also enable the partnership to further monitor the impact of learning arising from reviews.
- In Autumn 2020, we began to look at new ways of gathering evidence of the impact of the learning from reviews from agencies. This replaced the previous actions plans which were sent out after each review.

- Workshops have been delivered to practitioners via the ESCB and within Children's Social Care regarding what to expect if involved in a CSPR. This has led to a video and presentation also being available on our website.

All of this work will continue in 2021/22 to ensure that agencies are taking forward the learning and recommendations from reviews and that they can evidence these changes.



COVID-19

This 18-month period has been a time like no other in history. It is impossible to over-estimate the impact which the COVID-19 pandemic has had on children and young people, their families, communities, services and on staff. It has been the dominant factor of 2020 and 2021 and continues to be so as the effect of the Pandemic continues. Services have not all yet been able to re-establish business as usual operations or implement fully plans for recovery back into their usual working 'space'. It is important that we take this into account when scrutinising progress. Some services have reduced as funding has been squeezed in the not for profit/ voluntary sector and services are yet to understand the medium and long-term implications of COVID-19.

It is a testament to the courage and tenacity of the public, professional agencies and voluntary sectors regarding the speed and efficiency with which they responded to the challenge and the increased cooperation between agencies. It must also be acknowledged that as well as the heroic efforts of staff across the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership, staff wellbeing has been seriously affected. Staff are weary and for many, traumatised directly or vicariously by their experiences. Many of our staff are grieving for lost loved ones as well as supporting others who are also grieving.

The ESCB thanks all the staff and volunteers working across Essex for their hard work, diligence, and fortitude.

Impact of COVID-19

All agencies have reported that COVID-19 has had an immediate impact on requests for services with most seeing requests reduce during periods of lockdown and increase when restrictions are eased. Many partners are reflecting that the cases being referred were more complex and so pressure increased in the system in the greater support needs of these children and families. These complex presentations were heightened by COVID-19 anxiety, including mental health, substance misuse, return to school anxiety, domestic abuse, and online safety.

Throughout the pandemic, the lockdowns and the restrictions placed on everyday life and activities has reduced professional contact with children and their families. Professionals have been concerned about several potential risks that the pandemic may exacerbate for vulnerable children and families:

- Increased stress on family life, more conflict, increase in domestic abuse or neglect
- Reduction in referrals as children in less contact with professionals and abuse and harm going unseen/ unheard
- The mental and emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people and reduced access to support services

- Anxiety and depression increasing for children and young people caused by the pandemic, fear of contracting or passing on COVID-19
- Worsening mental ill health or emotional health for parents' and their children's experiences of this; increase in young carer responsibilities, more exposure to abuse and neglect
- Low take up of school places for vulnerable children
- Poverty, increased pressure on incomes already overstretched making it difficult to access food and hygiene products.

At the onset of the pandemic, Children's Social Care applied priority rating (RAG system) to open cases to ensure availability to respond to the highest/ most risky situations. Level of concern guided the level of response and oversight. Some visits changed to virtual formats, some visits were conducted outside and doorstep visits were completed. Most meetings initially changed to virtual formats and later hybrid meetings were offered which were more tailored to the needs of the family whilst still being unable to bring all professionals physically together. All group work was initially put on hold.

Some families were anxious about meeting with workers and asked not to be visited in person, this was particularly and noticeably seen for those parents of children with complex disability and additional health needs, with high levels of families shielding.

It is also likely that some families used the opportunity to keep professionals at a distance and away from their homes which reduced access to their children. To counter some of these anxieties and attempts to avoid workers Children's Social Care supported families through delivering care and activity packages, 'Boredom boxes', being involved in the roll out of digital equipment funded by government and supporting the delivery of essential support provided through the Essex Wellbeing Service.

There was a marked increase in members of the public referring to local services (up by 57.3%). This dramatic rise could have been attributable to a number of factors; as the community offer reduced or was less accessible or that the uplift in community spirit that saw communities coming together to support each other made families more visible to members of the public. And finally, the periods of lockdown and restrictions saw more people aggrieved when others did not follow the rules and saw an increase in reports of anti-social behaviour to the police and could have had the effect of motivating people to contact local services.

It became more difficult for some support services to operate within the pandemic including intervention and behaviour change work. This reduced the practical support available to families, in addition not all families have found it easy to work with professionals using virtual/ digital formats.

Entries to Family Solutions increased during the pandemic and it is believed that a 'new' cohort of families were being seen, i.e. those who would generally cope were affected by increasing stress factors worsened by the pandemic and this exacerbation led to requests for support.

Some providers also placed restrictions on face-to-face access to children, including some children's homes and young offender institutes. Foster carers experienced anxiety in having professionals in their home during the initial stages of the lockdown as well as concerns that children would be exposed to COVID-19 during Family Time. Agencies have responded by hosting a variety of events and information sharing forums in which some of these anxieties can be addressed and fears allayed. Essex County Council has worked closely with local representatives of Public Health England to ensure that messaging is accurate and consistent.

There has been a follow up study about the impact of COVID-19 on child exploitation and missing. This has reflected on the last 18 months of COVID-19 restrictions and the impact on children, families, service delivery and the workforce. In particular it has highlighted that exploitation methods have adapted because of COVID-19, online exploitation and exploitation within private residential addresses has increased, which has made exploitation harder to detect. Also, increased push/pull factors for young people impacted by COVID-19 means a larger volume of young people are vulnerable to being targeted for exploitation than before. It has also been shared that partners are experiencing long waiting lists for services and workforce exhaustion. However, this period has seen a rapid change in the use of technology which means there is more choice on engagement methods for children and families, in some situations the reach has increased, however communication through technology could be barrier to meaningful interactions and can give the wrong messages to young people about being safe online.

Fluctuations of crimes involving children and young people both as perpetrators and victims have largely followed the patterns of lockdowns, less crimes being noted during periods of lockdown.

This trend is also evident for cases of physical abuse where the investigation sat within the Child Abuse Investigation Team. Given that crimes held in this team involve family members, it was unclear why these trends followed the same patterns, as this group was less likely affected by the lack of opportunity that lockdown presented.

The need to use powers of police protection did however not change during periods of lockdown and locally we saw an increased need during periods of lockdown for police to exercise Section 136 (Police emergency powers to take someone from a public space to a place of safety based on concerns for the person's mental ill health as per

the Mental Health Act) for children and young people, indicating that children and young people were more likely to have a mental ill health crisis during periods of greater restriction.

There was some concern in the partnership community that domestic abuse would increase within the population as families had to spend more time together in pressurised conditions. The reported incidents do not reflect this. However, this may be that incidents have gone unreported as suspects have been home more and victims have been unable to call for assistance and alert their perpetrator to their actions to seek help. Patterns of reported domestic abuse usually experience a seasonal uplift in the summer and so there was no real discernible pattern related to COVID-19.

Attendances by children to Emergency Departments significantly dropped in March 2020 and at year end they also had not fully recovered to the pre-pandemic levels. In part this may be due to reduced contraction of ordinary disease in the population caused by better hygiene and social distancing and reduced physical activities leading to less injury but the biggest barrier was likely to be anxiety about entering the health system and exposure to COVID-19. The lack of recovery to pre-pandemic levels could be an indication of behaviour change within the population as they became more used to using non-emergency alternatives and an increased sense of value and need to protect the NHS. This does not remove the concern that children who might need emergency treatment may still not be presented via hospitals.

The partnership has been concerned about children and young people's emotional and mental health due to the pandemic. In the community, the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service provides the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Tier 3 service. In 2020/21 they saw a 15% reduction in referrals into the service and most notably these reductions have occurred during periods of lockdowns but at other times in the year seasonal fluctuations have been similar to the previous year. This is in contrast to the information from Police about the use of S136 but these are small numbers to draw any conclusions on. Despite the reduction in referrals, care contacts being made to young people have increased by nearly 4% showing that the need to 'touch in' with children and young people receiving services has been higher.

Case Study

A 17-year-old looked after young person was placed by Essex in another area, due to requiring a specialist residential provision. The young person had previous long-term Tier 4 Mental Health inpatient admissions. The Young Person was at high risk of placement breakdown due to escalation in risk taking behaviours, risk to self and others. The specialist residential provision gave notice due to concerns of 'death by misadventure'. Health professionals escalated their concerns and director conversations took place, however, access to mental health support was unsuccessful; a care coordinator was also not allocated. The Young Person is now supported in semi-independent accommodation out of area. Planning conversations were undertaken prior to this move to ensure the new area were fully aware of their complex needs and support they required. There has been frequent, informative, and purposeful contact between professionals. At times there has been intensive multiagency work in the form of twice weekly escalation calls over several months, involving senior health and social care representatives, looked after child health team both from originating area and in the placement area, transforming care team, CCG colleagues, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), placement team and staff from the placement.

There has been excellent communication between the multidisciplinary network in addition to the agreed professionals' meetings meaning that everyone could respond swiftly to any escalating concerns and increase support as required, ensuring robust safety planning in place. The Young Person has become more settled and a smaller professional network are now focused on transition planning post 18. Several assessments (including Autism Spectrum Disorder, sensory and Speech and Language Therapy) have been requested and commissioned to ensure we have as much information as possible about ongoing need so the right placement can be found post 18, as this Young Person will require long term support into adulthood. Currently comprehensive mental health support is in place from local CAMHS team, which is enabling support to the Young Person, together with review of their positive behaviour plan by the multiagency network. Placement requested supervision for staff so via the multiagency network it was agreed this could be provided by ECC mental health coordinator to protect and maintain the placement.

Extensive work has been undertaken by the multidisciplinary network which to date has prevented further Tier 4 admission. There has been a strong commitment from all the professionals involved to attend these regular meetings ensuring the best

Through the work of the Child Death Review Team, some indirect factors have been identified which may have had an impact during this year:

- Late presentations to hospitals due to fear of COVID-19 or a desire to protect the NHS
- Voice of the child has been missing due to a lack of face-to-face consultations
- One young person who killed themselves was noted to be significantly affected by the impact of COVID-19 i.e. lack of structure, routines and contact with friends
- Organisations themselves not being clear what was being offered and no face-to-face reviews being undertaken.

Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service (ECFWS) has seen consistent levels of demand on services to pre-COVID-19 levels, however the nature and complexity of needs coupled with the pressures on affiliated services has meant that staff are feeling stretched and tired, particularly given the psychological nature of the work they are doing.

This may indicate or reflect that families held-on and put-off seeking help or were self-sufficient during the preceding periods of lockdown, or that simply their vulnerabilities went unseen and unmet.

In short, complex need within vulnerable families should be expected to increase over the coming months and years and services must work in a joined-up way to maximise the impact they have and to maintain resilience.

It was noticed that in the initial months of the lockdown Child Protection plans throughput was reduced. This was when some agencies reduced face-to-face activity and behaviour change work was not possible. Visits were conducted in different ways with perhaps less ability to undertake direct work. This created some drift in progression for many cases and contributed to an initial rise in children subject to a Child Protection Plan.

Response to COVID-19

The challenge of COVID-19 required strong leadership and a multi-agency response, which we can evidence at various levels within the body of this report. Local responses included:

- Weekly meetings with statutory SET partners
- ESCB Coronavirus webpage
- Lockdown campaigns (safer sleeping, accidents in the home, online child exploitation)
- The Essex Wellbeing Service that addressed needs within the community for vulnerable residents and family including those who were shielding

- Promoting use of A&E

Services have had to adapt in how they have operated during COVID-19 to ensure that they can continue to engage in safeguarding activities. Some examples include:

- Measures put in place by front-line social care, police and health services including use of PPE during visits and risk assessments as well as virtual methods to see and meet with children and young people and their families
- Online engagement from Involvement service (e.g. annual It's My Life event)
- Online engagement from Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services (ECVYS)
- Response from schools to partially open to the children of key workers and vulnerable children. There has been huge engagement from schools to stay in touch with those children who have stayed at home during the various lockdowns and restrictions
- Some clinics and health appointments moving to a telephone or online platform

Case Study

A 4-week-old baby lives alone with her mother. The mother has had her previous children removed by Social Care due to maternal mental health. In this pregnancy Social Care undertook a pre-birth assessment and decided there was no need for Child in Need or Child Protection Plans at that time. There was domestic abuse towards the mother from the baby's father. The Health Visitor referred the mother on to Compass and the Perinatal Mental Health Team. Compass provided the support of an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor, who went on to support the mother to move to a new location. The Perinatal Mental Health team were able to support the mother with a change of medication that kept her mental health stable and did not impact on the care of her baby. The GP continues to support the mother's long term mental health condition. The Independent Domestic Violence Advisor has supported an application for a non-

In response the dramatic drop in children being presented through Emergency Departments at the beginning of the pandemic, significant work was undertaken across the partnership to publicise that hospitals and GP practices were open as usual. The Royal College Paediatrics & Child Health published traffic light e-posters for parents and carers and for young people to recognise signs of illness and deterioration. The poster for young people included a section on mental health.

Family Solutions (FS) have worked throughout the pandemic, families knew that they could contact their Family Worker and they would support them to keep safe at all times, this was particularly important at a time where many agencies were not available. FS worked together with foodbanks to ensure that all children had

emergency food and provisions delivered and stronger links were built with many voluntary sector agencies. Family Solutions also adapted to delivering programmes in virtual forums. There were successful parenting programmes delivered including Triple P, Non Violence Resistance and Piecing it Together.

At the start of the pandemic Child Protection Conferences were initially held in a virtual format; after some restrictions were lifted the team set up Hybrid conferences which included the family, the allocated social worker and the Child Protection Coordinator, other professionals joined virtually. These were seen as beneficial for parents to be in a safe space and with support.

During periods of lockdown schools remained open and available to vulnerable children. Schools worked incredibly hard with other partners to risk assess their pupils and provide a system of welfare checks for children not attending on site to keep them as safe as possible during their time out of school. As well as providing an education offer for pupils not attending, schools also provided a raft of support to children and families to address concerns at an early stage and signpost to appropriate services for support on a range of issues.

This meant schools needed to adapt to change and create a 'new normal'. For schools/settings this can be a challenge. Because of this, the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Board supported by creating a range of COVID-19 related guidance and resources with support from the Essex workforce, local schools/settings and children and young people. These aim to support the Recovery and Return for school staff, children and young people back to their Education Settings. The [pre-recorded webinars](#) were seen as particularly useful have been watched thousands of times.

To ensure that children in care felt supported and heard in the initial lockdown, there was regular contact with daily or weekly text, telephone or video calls as well as some distanced visiting. Activity sessions were carried out on Zoom (e.g. sessions on learning new skills) and individual 'boredom boxes' were delivered, containing activities to do at home as well as supportive information. Consultations with young people helped to identify how they were feeling and what services they needed to help get through the lockdown. Key messages from this research was used to produce a series of videos with quotes from young people sharing their experience of lockdown, which were published on the Children in Care Council website.

Lockdown Learning Thoughts and Feelings

Young people of the Children in Care Council (CICC) [talk about lockdown](#) and what advice they would give other young people.

These measures received very positive feedback from young people, who reported that they felt cared for during lockdown thanks to the regular communication and

range of activities. This helped to alleviate boredom and anxiety, while more joined-up work with internal and external partners helped to signpost young people to additional support (such as mental health services) more quickly. The more innovative use of different technologies helped make services feel more accessible, which will be continued post COVID-19 alongside more traditional practices. The combination of different needs and more regular contact meant that young people were able to help shape what support was offered as lockdowns progressed, making services more responsive to their needs.

A similar range of services and activities were offered for care leavers as well as the provision of food parcels and takeaway deliveries to ensure sufficient access to food, and greater support for addressing concerns around finances, housing and health. After six weeks of lockdown, the Involvement Service conducted a quick research project with care leavers to evaluate support provided in lockdown and identify any gaps in provision. This found that most young people had felt supported, with regular contact and quick access to support being identified as particularly important.

Some things that young people had found difficult were: being stuck inside, not seeing family or friends and seeing a rise in anxiety, particularly those who are themselves parents of young children. From this, greater support for young parents was provided with parental support groups set up, and an emphasis placed on ensuring better access to mental health services. The key findings from this were published in a lockdown newsletter produced by the Children in Care Council, written by and for care leavers. This also featured suggestions of things to do in lockdown and contact details for anyone who felt they needed additional support.

The Essex Youth Service also did additional work during lockdown, with over 30,000 email and telephone welfare checks conducted with young people between April and July, as well as over 2,000 online or remote youth sessions attended by over 6,000 young people. As a result of these welfare checks, they made nearly 700 referrals to other agencies. The service also took steps to help better safeguard young people during lockdown, working in partnership with the police in operations where large groups of the community had been gathering, and supporting young person's officers to visit young people in semi-independent accommodation for welfare checks and signposting to online provision. In addition, the Young Essex Assembly led an online campaign producing short videos and posters highlighting the importance of social distancing and why young people should follow government guidance. Posts on Facebook and Instagram received over 1,000 likes and reached an audience of 82,000 people.

Following the cancellation of the final part of the learning and development programme in March 2020, ESCB suspended the learning and development programme between April and August 2020, initially there was a plan that we may be

able to deliver face to face training later in the year, but this was not possible and a decision was made to move all learning and development virtually. This was easier for some training providers than others and some took longer to set this up than others.

ESCB has offered a total of 66 learning opportunities to 1631 people this year; although the table below shows the number of courses and number of delegates trained in previous years, this year's figures are not comparable as the learning and development programme only ran between September 2020 and March 2021. Virtual delivery has also meant that some trainers have requested smaller numbers on courses.

What our young people say

The Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services (ECVYS) ran over 300 detached sessions with young people between April and August 2020, with over 6,000 people attending. The young people attending raised the key issues they were experiencing, such as concerns about their exams and future, missed opportunities and relationships, tensions at home and a lack of things to do. As a result of this, youth workers were able to help direct young people to mental health services, online activities and other relevant services, as well as discussing the importance of social distancing and ways of engaging with local councils to advocate for better facilities.

From April to June 2020, an ECVYS project 'Youth in Lockdown' involved sessions with over 200 children across 16 different youth groups across Essex asking questions about their experience of lockdown. Most said that they were 'OK' or doing well, enjoying a greater sense of community and appreciation for the environment. Online technology was important in helping to maintain relationships with friends and wider family, but young people still missed face-to-face interactions as well organised activities. The majority were concerned about their education and the impact this will have on their future, while youth workers expressed concern about those young people who do not have access to youth groups or a trusted adult to talk to.

In 2021, the ECVYS ran the Listening Project, which was designed to listen to people's views about youth violence across Southend, Essex and Thurrock and provide recommendations to inform the priorities of the Violence and Vulnerability Unit in 2021 and beyond.

95% of young people said that youth violence was an issue, up 20% on information captured in 2019. This was in contrast to 25% of young people being victims of youth violence. 53% of young people said they were fearful of being stabbed and information was shared about some young people feeling safer if they carried a knife.

Two thirds of youth groups felt they would like more education about gangs and youth violence plus saying that they wanted more structured youth activities and places to be safe both inside and outside in the community.

Whilst 76% of the wider community would go to the police if they needed help and support, only 27% of young people would do the same.

Young people reflected that COVID-19 and lockdowns had increased feelings of isolation, frustration and boredom as well as social restrictions causing an increase in mental health issues in young people alongside increased online activity and decreased adult monitoring and supervision.

18 recommendations were identified which have been shared with the Violence and Vulnerability Unit and also with the Essex Stay Safe Groups. These recommendations included activities aimed at increasing young people's confidence and relationship with the police and to help young people feel safer in the community.

The Involvement Service deliver an annual 'It's My Life' festival, which brings together young people receiving services from Essex Children and Families service. Traditionally, this takes place at an outdoor centre over five days but in 2020 this was not possible due to the pandemic. Instead, it was delivered as a partly online event with activity Zoom meetings, virtual discussions between young people and decision makers, as well as with some socially distanced face-to-face activities, including two evenings of an outdoor family cinema.

Over 300 young people attended the festival, with children in care, care leavers, unaccompanied asylum seeking children and those on Child in Need or Child Protection Plans taking part in research interviews about their experience of the pandemic. Topics covered included education, relationships with friends and adults as well as their own emotional health and wellbeing. Experiences in education were shared with Virtual School to communicate key learning with schools (e.g. some being slow to adapt to online learning), while it was identified that Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and those on Child in Need and Child Protection Plans found lockdown particularly difficult.

The following quote from a young person was collected by the Youth Offending Service when they collected young people's views for their 'Lived experiences' work:

"You did not give up and were on me from day one. You were on me more than my boss and this made a difference. You were harder to shake and have a way of making me feel that the right choice was to do your stuff and sessions. There came a point where it twisted and pleasing you became more important than pleasing my boss. My

boss only wanted me for what I could do for him, you wanted me to help me do things for me.” (young person)

Inspection

Maternity Services at Essex Hospital - All providers have received CQC visits to maternity services and consistent themes have been identified, particularly relating to workforce in midwifery and obstetricians. Each Integrated Care System has a Local Maternity and Neonatal Systems Board (LMNSB) who are responsible for overseeing the CQC action plans and improvement to services.

Essex Children’s Social Care was deemed Outstanding in the last Ofsted inspection of November 2018. Whilst this achievement is widely celebrated and the organisation is very proud of this attainment, it is also a reminder that there can be no complacency and Essex Children’s Services continues to work hard to deliver top quality services to the children and families of Essex and continue to innovate and build on existing practice.

The last full Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) inspection of Youth Offending Services was October 2018, and the service was rated Outstanding. In June 2020 Essex was one of 10 YOTs to have been inspected by HMIP to assure the HMIP about COVID-19 arrangements. The published report indicates that there was a high level of assurance.

Essex County Council maintains two children’s homes for Children with Disabilities, both offer respite care. Lavender House in Colchester and The Maples in Harlow, both were rated as Good following their previous Ofsted inspections in February 2020 and September 2019 (respectively).

From these inspections, they both only had one requirement which was that all staff had attained their Level 3 Diploma for Residential Childcare within two years of starting work as they both had a member of staff who was unable to complete their diploma within the timescale. Remedial action was taken by both homes to remedy this situation.

Essex Partnership University Trust (EPUT) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) inpatient services underwent an unannounced CQC visit in May 2021; following this, in June 2021 EPUT were served with a Section 31 notice, immediately suspending all new admissions to EPUT CAMHS Inpatient Wards.

The CQC identified twenty-two areas for improvement (thirteen must do, nine should do) for which EPUT have developed an action plan to address these and taken immediate actions to make improvements, as part of this EPUT have weekly meetings of the CAMHS Clinical Intensive Support Group.

Through collaboration of EPUT, NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE/I), East of England Provider Collaborative, local authorities and Pan-Essex CCGs the improvement agreement has been reviewed and agreed.

EPUT are attending weekly meetings with NHSE/I to monitor progress and achieve a sustained reopening of services; however, overarching accountability remains with EPUT to identify improvement support and resources to facilitate the safe and phased re-opening of EPUT tier 4 CAMHS wards, the CQC and NHSE/I have authorised the reopening of two beds at present.

Police OC Triage was Peer Reviewed on 4 December 2020 by invitation by a team from Children's Social Care.

The review was triggered by information that between 01 November 2019 to 31 October 2020, out of the 9,092 Requests for Support created from the Police 7,679 (85%) did not progress to Children's Social Care or Family Solutions for an intervention. Time incurred completing and processing these Requests have a significant resource implication on both agencies.

Where Section 47 threshold had been met, referral to the Children and Families Hub was timely.

As a result, training and policy / procedure has been reviewed, both deemed to provide sufficient guidance to officers. However, due to the varied and complex nature of frontline policing, additional training is arranged to be delivered as part of officers scheduled 'flex' training days to reinforce the key messages and processes to improve referral compliance / content. Following the first input 85% of officers 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' their 'knowledge and understanding has improved as a result of this training'. Furthermore, the need for additional growth / staffing support for the Child and Family Operations Hub (C&FOH) is under review.

There are 555 schools in Essex (including Primary, Secondary and Special) and just over 88% have a Good or Outstanding Ofsted rating. There are also around 50 independent schools.

Unique events

In August 2021 during the Allies withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, a number of Afghani families seeking asylum were placed in Essex on arrival in the UK. This was a fast paced and large-scale humanitarian crisis and operation. Essex had provision for Managed Quarantine Services (MQS), Bridging facilities and wider asylum contingency facilities locally. People and organisations came together quickly and willingly to respond to the needs of these families and there was good use of existing pathways

processes including unaccompanied minors into safeguarding pathways. The local health system in particular faced additional pressures and local primary care was mobilised to manage initial health assessments and gateway people into appropriate services including maternity, child health, acute and mental health services. The voluntary sector responded quickly and at scale to support welfare across the Essex facilities.



Summary

The Essex Statutory Partners feel that together we work well as a partnership and our response to the Pandemic is seen as a particular strength. Clearly, we are on a journey of change as we have implemented the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements and are using opportunities to learn and grow from these early experiences and ultimately determine what works best for all partners. This scrutiny report has been useful to evaluate what we have been doing well and areas where we need to make further progress and we have highlighted that we need to do more to measure the impact of what we do.

COVID-19 has had a huge impact on services, both in terms of limitations and opportunities and what we have learnt is that we have an amazing capacity to be flexible, collaborative and collegiate in how we work together and within any limitations we face. We have seen that technology has largely been a benefit when we have faced times when face to face work is restricted and that adoption of more technology will be seen post COVID-19. Many families and children and young people have reported that this has been helpful and we have seen an uptake in professionals accessing meetings and training virtually.

Despite COVID-19, there has been a huge amount of work across the Partnership that focuses on our priorities. We accept that some work is just better when we can come face to face and so some pieces have been delayed and should COVID-19 continue to have an impact on ways of working, we will need to adapt in order to make progress.

We have found through this scrutiny report that evidencing our impact has been more difficult to achieve and we need to consider the measures and outcomes which will evidence this going forward. We have also found that we have a great deal of children and young people's feedback about safeguarding services but this does tend to be held by Children and Families Service and the Violence and Vulnerability Unit. We believe that this feedback needs to be wider across the partnership so we can evidence the voice of children and young people and understand what they say about the experience of having support and protection.

We have also found that whilst we consult with our staff on many issues, making the connection between the Board and practice has not always been obvious and is an area that we need to enhance.

Next steps

There continue to be times when the escalation process is not effectively used by partners and it is unclear what the barriers are to this being followed or the process understood. We will work to understand what the issues are and find solutions that work across the system.

Evidence of the direct impact of the work of the ESCB has been harder to evidence in particular for children and families and the workforce and we will revisit measurable and identifiable outcomes to answer this going forward.

The feedback from children and families is strong in certain parts of our safeguarding system, but could be stronger across the partnership and we will revisit this to look for opportunities to seek targeted feedback.

The feedback from our collective workforce is strong in certain aspects of what we do, but not consistent and we will look for the opportunities to strengthen feedback across the partnership.

Continued work to develop the function and purpose of the Sub-Committees and stay safe and ensure that feedback loops are used to feed actions and objectives both to and from Board.

Work with the Children and Families Hub and the wider partnership is needed to ensure that early help and intervention is considered and actioned prior to a Request for Support being raised, providing timely, proportionate support to children and their family.

The work across the partnership to develop the concept of Think Family and how this can be effectively embedded into practice and ensure that we embed the learning from reviews that focus on Think Family is in its infancy and we are committed to making progress.

Our partner agencies are keen to trial a pilot of Operation Encompass designed to improve the support available to children and young people in education who experience domestic abuse at home and we will be meeting to discuss implementation of this pilot.

That we have not made as much progress as we would have liked in our work with Neglect, mainly due to COVID-19 having stalled this work but have the plans in place to progress this action, initially via the planned Multi-Agency Thematic Audit and the working group.

Our new Business Plan is due for renewal in April 2022 and the above identified activity will be considered for inclusion in the plan whilst other activities will remain as part of our business as usual function.

Essex Safeguarding Children Board

Presentation to ECC Scrutiny Committee

14 April 2022

David Archibald

Independent Chair/Facilitator

- Role
- Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
- Role of partners
- Business Plan
- Annual Scrutiny report

Paul Secker

Director for Safeguarding

Essex County Council

- Safeguarding in the context of social care - challenges/ themes/ issues
- Themes from reviews
- Emergence from COVID

Andrew Packer

Detective Chief Superintendent

Head of Crime & Public Protection Command

Essex Police

- New developments - Voice of the Child, new contextual safeguarding work; victims code of practice dashboard to audit compliance
- Project Goldcrest
- Operation Encompass
- Victims Bill on the horizon, children will be treated more as victims rather than witnesses

Jane Kinniburgh

Director of Nursing and Quality

West Essex

- Safeguarding in the context of Health
- Contribution to the partnership
- Progress and impact of re-structuring/risks during transition period
- Emergence from COVID

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Safeguarding in the context of Health

Complexity of the new health landscape as CCGs merge into ICBs; maintaining a robust placed based safeguarding function which is congruent with the local authority.

Capacity of health services to meet increased demand for care, exacerbated by the increased complexity of need for some CYP presenting, with limited resources, high levels of staff vacancies and on-going peaks in covid infections.

Effective multi-agency collaboration has enabled innovative and creative solutions to be reached to manage high risk safeguarding cases.

High level of commitment and involvement of health to support the Afghan Resettlement programme and the Ukrainian Crisis response, ensuring the needs of children and families are identified and supported.

Review of arrangements for Initial Health Assessments for Looked after children to increase quality and timeliness.

Investment in SEND to increase capacity and timeliness of ASD assessments.

Preparation for the introduction of the LPS; extensive training offered across the health economy on MCA.

Contribution to the Partnership

Representation from Director of Nursing of each ICS as part of the statutory partnership arrangements

Joint in – put into planning of safeguarding priorities

Forum for partnership and system learning

SET approach to Safeguarding policy and practice development

Health Executive Forum – all health agencies represented (provider and commissioner) collegiate view feeding in to ESCB

Strong locality working - Quadrant locality Stay Safe groups in place

Sharing of intelligence and key agency concerns

Risks During Transition Period

Maintaining stability of staff and teams at a time of organisational change

Statutory partnerships facing a number of Local Authority footprints and systems
Essex/Herts/Suffolk/Southend/ Thurrock

Capacity to ensure visibility and presence at both the strategic and operational level

Stability, and continuity of relationships

Managing wider understanding of complexities (NHSE/I - ICS footprint doesn't work for safeguarding in our system)

Risk of fragmentation we need to maintain strong collaborative working and an aligned and consistent approach (3 ICS's in the Essex footprint)

Understanding in relation to joint accountability for assurance

New emerging inspection regime with CQC

Emergence from COVID

Increased complexity and number of children and young people presenting with mental health illness and/ or behavioural difficulties requiring system level oversight and intervention.

Insufficient provision within the system to support the complexity of need for those children, challenging existing resources.

Evidence of effective multi-agency partnership working, via virtual platforms, to seek innovative and creative solutions to provide wrap around support for very vulnerable CYP, i.e., EWMHS crisis team support, whilst awaiting appropriate placement.

Collaborative approach to escalation for looked after children at risk of placement breakdown, recognising the corporate responsibilities of each statutory body.

Local system pressures within acute paediatric services and the 0-19 provision, due to staffing shortfalls, requiring targeted intervention for those CYP and families identified as most vulnerable.

Risk of hidden vulnerable children within universal services, as evidenced by the recent increase in NAs to young infants.

Reduced opportunities for effective prevention and early intervention.

Continuation of a hybrid model of virtual consultations, particularly for Primary Care, with low thresholds for conversion to face to face.

Examples of positive progress

Joint working with the Hertfordshire safeguarding team to share examples of best practice, i.e., SET CDR provision, Hertfordshire Primary Care electronic Child Protection report template, focused safeguarding training sessions.

Multi-agency training on the emotional well-being of separated migrant children/trauma informed practice delivered by Refugee Council in west Essex, to enable practitioners to support the high number of SMC placed in Harlow.

Procurement of SET CAMHS and Tier 2 virtual support

Focus on transitions within commissioning

Work to embed learning from National CSPR 'The myth of invisible men' within local health economy.

	Emerging 1	Developing 2	Mature 3
Vision and strategic planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICS has been prioritised however planning has only recently commenced. It has been identified that planning should span neighbourhood, place and system level with some services identified to develop plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a plan to develop a shared vision and shared narrative with alignment to national policy / NHS LTP / intercollegiate documents etc Plans span neighbourhood, place and system level Safeguarding vision and planning is holistic and include community, primary, hospital and specialist care services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vision is clearly articulated with a shared narrative and there is alignment to national policy /NHS LTP/intercollegiate documents etc Plans span neighbourhood, place and system level Safeguarding planning and delivery is holistic and include community, primary, hospital and specialist care services
Enablers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is an understanding of planning required across universal, targeted and specialist services for safeguarding To identify and develop joint governance arrangements across local authorities, the third sector and the NHS Plan and identify safeguarding team/s across the ICS Plan and Identify key workstreams for a coordinated approach Gather collective data across the ICS to inform workstreams and population needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding of the population is developing across universal, targeted and specialist services There is a plan to develop joint governance arrangements across local authorities, the third sector and the NHS Safeguarding oversight for co commissioning models of health and care services Partnership working – Able to provide examples which demonstrate improvements in safeguarding workstreams Safeguarding team/s planned and being developed Workstreams being developed for coordinated approaches across primary, community and secondary care. Develop and review data to support the safeguarding workstreams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well-developed understanding of the whole population across universal, targeted and specialist services Joint governance arrangements are in place for safeguarding. This may be demonstrated via shared policies. Good partnership working examples seen and improvements demonstrated in safeguarding workstreams Data sharing agreements are in place. Strong safeguarding leadership is in place with strong working relationships Well developed workstreams with coordinated approaches across primary, community and secondary care Robust data is in place to support the safeguarding workstreams
Partnership working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage and support joint working around safeguarding responsibilities through new and existing partnership arrangements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop strong partnership arrangements with statutory partners Ensure safeguarding policies and procedures are coproduced including citizens with lived experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of established partnership arrangements Embed and align coproduced safeguarding policies and procedures through the ICS Partnership working to have insight across and beyond the ICS Representation from each partner/stakeholder is proportionate

Reference number: PAF/10/22

Report title: Our Co-Parenting Strategy – How we do corporate parenting in Essex	
Report to: People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
Report author: Sukriti Sen, Director of Local Delivery	
Date: Thursday 14 th April	For: Review and input
Enquiries to: Sukriti Sen, Jo Boyd-Wallis, Senior Strategy Advisor and Chris Carpenter, Senior Strategy Advisor	
County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Everyone's Essex

- 1.1 Our vision for children and families is to help achieve the best outcomes for all families, children and young people by building resilience, raising aspirations and protecting the most vulnerable.
- 1.2 'A Good Place for Children and Families to Grow' is one of the four strategic aims for Essex County Council, as set out in Everyone's Essex. Under this aim, there is a commitment to improving outcomes for vulnerable children, including children in care and care leavers.
- 1.3 Our new Co-Parenting Strategy sets out how we will meet our legal duty¹ to children in care and care leavers. It responds to what children, young people, carers and families have told us. It sets new outcomes designed to improve the lives and life chances of the children and young people in our care and care leavers. Cabinet is expected to approve the strategy at their meeting in May.
- 1.4 Everyone's Essex also offers many opportunities to indirectly improve the lives of children in care and care leavers, with action outside of social care and children and families' services. Evidence shows that there is a strong link between poverty and abuse and neglect². Our Levelling Up agenda aims to tackle the cause of inequality and poverty to create a fairer society for everyone.
- 1.5 Central to our Levelling Up agenda is the belief that a person's potential should not be defined at birth, by who their parents are or where they live. The council and our partners should play a role in helping people define their own destiny. As good corporate parents, we should put children in care and care leavers at the heart of this agenda.

¹ The Children's Act 1989 and Children & Social Care Act 2017 (Corporate parenting principles)

² Bywaters et al (2016) The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: an evidence review <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/relationship-between-poverty-child-abuse-and-neglect-evidence-review>

- 1.6 Vulnerable families and care leavers are also affected by the shortage of suitable, affordable social housing in Essex, so should be part of strategic discussions on Housing.
- 1.7 By supporting our most vulnerable children to have good mental and physical health, get the most from their education and grow into independent adults with high aspirations for the future, we will also help meet the strategic aims of:
 - Health wellbeing and independence for all ages
 - Strong, inclusive, sustainable growth
- 1.8 Our Co-Parenting Strategy is our statement of intent. Following its publication, we work with partners to develop Delivery Plans to achieve our stated outcomes, consulting children, young people, carers and families as appropriate.
- 1.9 As a result of our strategy, we want officers, Elected Members and our partners to ask themselves: *“What can I do in my role to help children and young people in and leaving care?”*

2 Purpose

- 2.1 Committee members are invited to:
 - Review the draft Corporate Parenting Strategy making comments and suggestions for the consideration of the Cabinet Member and noting the Priorities of Home, Health, Self, Learning and Independence
 - Consider how we can collectively raise awareness of corporate parenting responsibilities with all Members, officers and partners
 - Consider potential partnership opportunities to inform delivery of the strategy, such as overcoming housing and employment challenges for care leavers

3 Background

- 3.1 It is Essex County Council’s legal duty to act as Corporate Parents and care for children and young people who are unable to live with their parents or guardians. Established in The Children’s Act 1989, this duty is not just with social workers and professionals who work directly with children and young people, but with all county council staff and elected Members.
- 3.2 The Act also places a duty on our partners - including Health, Education and Housing services - to support Children’s Services departments to meet Corporate Parenting responsibilities. We need help from our partners across the Essex system to give our children and young people stability, community and the best start in life.
- 3.3 Our purpose is to provide early help to children and their families, to prevent them from becoming children in need and to protect children and young people

from neglect and abuse. We work on bringing the right children into care for the right amount of time. When children are in our care, we support them to maintain relationships with their families and friends and reunite them with their families as safely and as soon as possible.

- 3.4 As a result of our approach, we have one of the lowest rates of children in care in the country and we are proud of our Ofsted Outstanding rating in this area, but we always want to build on this success, learn from children and peers and continue to be better.

4 Development of the Strategy

- 4.1 As Corporate Parents, we are required to have a Corporate Parenting Strategy. The previous Strategy ran from 2017-20, with an update in 2021 in response to the Covid19 Pandemic.

- 4.2 In 2021, we achieved a positive Ofsted Focussed Inspection on Care Leavers. During the inspection, it was recommended that our next strategy:

- Reflected the achievements and innovations since the last strategy
- Amplified children and young people's voices
- Included measurable outcomes

- 4.3 We have taken these recommendations forward in the development of our new draft strategy, which is attached at Appendix 1.

- 4.4 When we spoke to care leavers about the strategy, they told us that the formal term "Corporate Parenting" does not appeal to children and young people. They wanted to use "Co-Parenting" instead, as it covers the various people who work together to care for them. We have adopted this as our brand for the strategy and will use this when we talk to children and young people about corporate parenting.

- 4.5 We have drafted the new strategy based on evidence and insight collected from children, young people, carers, families and professionals through the Involvement Service, Independent Review and Audit Services and many other professionals who work with children and young people in and leaving care.

- 4.6 Our Priorities are designed to be meaningful to children and young people in and leaving care and reflect their experiences. We have run key parts of the draft strategy past a group of care leavers who have helped bring the strategy to life with their suggestions, including making sure we use tone and language that speaks to children and young people.

1. **Home:** Providing good homes, stable placements and ensuring children and young people feel cared for
2. **Health:** Supporting emotional wellbeing, championing healthy lifestyles and keeping children and young people safe

3. **Self:** Celebrating individuality, championing diversity and inclusion and helping children and young people understand where they come from
4. **Learning:** Helping children and young people learn, have high aspirations, grow as people and enjoy school, college, university and training
5. **Independence:** Helping care leavers achieve independence as successful, happy adults who can feel confident in work and if they become parents themselves

4.7 Related to these Priorities, our overall approach of ‘the right children in care for the right amount of time’ and our commitment to listening to children, young people, carers and families, we have seven Outcomes:

	Our Outcomes
1	The right children are in care, the length of time in care is safely reduced, and families feel involved and supported
2	Children and young people in care, care leavers and families feel listened to, involved and understand what is happening to them
3	Children and young people in care are settled and secure in their placements and feel part of a family
4	Children and young people in care and leaving care are happy, healthy and safe
5	Children and young people in care and leaving care are proud to be who they are and feel a sense of belonging
6	Children and young people in care and leaving care feel happy, confident and secure in school, college, university or training, have improved educational outcomes and high aspirations for the future
7	Care leavers feel cared for, settled, connected to others and supported to find jobs and start adult life

5 Working in partnership

- 5.1 In publishing our new Co-Parenting Strategy, we need to highlight the importance of working together across the Essex system to help tackle the challenges that Essex County Council cannot tackle alone, such as housing and employment for care leavers.
- 5.2 We presented our emerging Priorities at the Children’s Partnership Board (December 2021) and Children in Care and Leaving Care Partnership Board (January 2022) and invited partners to share their ideas for improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers.
- 5.3 We presented the draft Co-Parenting Strategy to an Extraordinary Corporate Parent Panel meeting on 4th April 2022. At this meeting we received endorsement of the strategy, helpful feedback and ideas for future

communication to help raise awareness and galvanise action across the Essex system post-publication.

- 5.4 The Chair of Corporate Parenting Panel, Cllr Beverley Egan, has written to our District, Borough and City Councils Leaders and Chief Execs to raise awareness of our emerging strategy and invite ideas for working together on delivering it. This shares our priorities for children and young people in and leaving care and is a first step to gaining partners' commitment to helping children in care and care leavers.
- 5.5 Following publication of the strategy May 2022, we will carry out comprehensive engagement to promote and embed the Co-Parenting Strategy across the council and beyond.
- 5.6 This will include consultation and collaboration with partners to develop Delivery Plans for action across the council and with partners from across the Essex system.

6 List of Appendices

Appendix A - Our draft Co-Parenting Strategy

Appendix B - Our draft Co-Parenting Strategy - Executive Summary

Our Co-Parenting Strategy 2022-27

How we do Corporate Parenting in Essex

Contents

Forewords	2
A message from care leavers	3
1. Introduction	4
2. Our new strategy	5
3. Our achievements since 2017	6
4. Our approach in Essex.....	8
5. About the children in our care and care leavers.....	10
6. Listening to children and young people.....	11
7. Our Priorities	13
8. Co-Grandparents.....	22
9. Our Outcomes: What we will achieve.....	23
10. Working together across Essex.....	27

Forewords

Cllr Beverley Egan

As the lead Member for children services in Essex, I know that it is vitally important that we set out how we will ensure children and young people in and leaving care are well looked after. Our last corporate parenting strategy sent a strong message that Essex goes beyond our statutory duties and that as an organisation we take our corporate parenting responsibilities very seriously. Our job is to ensure that children are not just safeguarded, but are happy and well looked after, encouraging them to be confident and independent so they can succeed and thrive in life. In Essex, our approach has always been to put children and families first in our thinking and our corporate parenting strategy embodies this.

We must all remember that each statistic in our care system represents a child, in many cases very vulnerable children. In developing this strategy, we have listened to what children of all ages have told us is important to them and this has shaped our priorities and actions. I was delighted when I visited the It's My Life festival in the Summer, where children spoke very positively about their experiences with our frontline social care officers as well as our foster carers and residential staff. They also had the confidence to give thoughtful feedback around what things they thought could be improved.

This strategy must mean something to children and young people, so we have listened to what they tell us is important to them, in their own words, and played this back to them to ensure we have understood. Following a discussion with care leavers we have adopted from them the term "Co-Parenting" as our brand for the strategy. This recognises that we need to work together with everyone who has a role in caring for them.

Because we cannot do this all by ourselves. Our partners across the public sector can help make things better for children who enter the care system and as they grow up and find their independence. This is Everyone's Essex and we want everyone to be proud of themselves and able to achieve their aspirations, no matter their background. We all play a vitally important role in encouraging and supporting children and young people to be the best that they can be, and I am confident that this strategy will take us even further.

Helen Lincoln, Executive Director for Children and Families

(to follow)

A message from care leavers

Stability is really important and helps us build positive life-long relationships. Many of us leaving care do not have family to guide us into adulthood and we can often feel lonely. Helping us build positive friendships and relationships throughout our care experience is so important.

Most of us in care feel loved and cared for by our carers, are happy where we live and feel safe and protected from harm. Nearly all of us have an adult to talk to about worries and most think our social workers are really good listeners. But being singled out as different feels horrible and can lead to bullying. All our Co-Parents should challenge the negative perceptions of being in care and care leavers... our lives are nothing like Tracy Beaker.

Many of us don't have family members to call on in difficult times - lonely times such as Christmas, birthdays and life's big events. That's why our Personal Advisers are so important. They listen to us, care about us and support us on our road to independence.

If we become parents ourselves, you can play an important role as Co-Grandparents. Some of us haven't had a good experience of parenting so we need help learning those skills. Having a newborn baby is hard, especially with no family around. You can help us become great parents.

Of course we miss our families and many of us want to spend more time with them, particularly our brothers and sisters. We need lots of support to keep those relationships. Not living with family can mean we lose our sense of identity. You can help us explore our backgrounds and celebrate who we are and who we want to be.

As Co-Parents, please take interest in us as individuals. Listen to us, take the time to get to know us. Help us achieve our goals. Don't give up on us. Help us believe in ourselves and be the best we can be.

Co-producing our strategy

We have worked with our Children in Care Council to develop our Corporate Parenting Strategy, which they have re-branded Our Co-Parenting Strategy. We are grateful for the time they have spent reflecting on the themes to bring this strategy to life. It is admirable how our young people want to support others coming up through the care system and help make their experiences better.

You can read more about the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and how the Involvement Service and others work with children and young people to get their voices heard in Chapter 6.

We know that children and young people want to see the results of this work, because it is actions not words that matter. The CiCC will be involved as we create our Delivery Plans and children and young people, along with our Corporate Parenting Panel, will hold us to our commitments.

1. Introduction

“I believe that there’s no limits for children in care. There’s no limits for any child, ever... It’s what they get, what they’re given and the love they’re given and the time they’re given, is what makes them amazing”
[Care Leaver]

All children deserve to be cared for, respected, listened to and supported. To feel safe and loved. All children deserve opportunity and support to grow into happy and successful adults. Our Children in Care and Care Leavers are no different, but without a stable family to support them, and often having experienced trauma, they face more challenges in achieving their aspirations.

As corporate parents, it is our responsibility to step in and be the supportive parent in times when their own parents are unable to fulfil this role. For those young people with their own children, we can also become “corporate grandparents”.

This responsibility is not just with social workers and professionals who work directly with children and young people, but with all county and district, borough and city council staff, elected Members and partners. We want everyone to read this strategy and ask themselves: **“What can I do in my role to help children and young people in and leaving care?”**

Our legal duty

ECC’s social care, education and health services are committed to supporting children to remain within their families where possible, only using care for the right children, at the right time. When children or young people are unable to live with their parents or guardians, it is the duty of local authorities to care for them, as established in the Children Act 1989. Corporate parenting principles are set out in the Children & Social Care Act 2017:

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
- To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
- For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

The Children Act 1989 also places a duty on the council’s partners, including Health, Education and Housing services, to provide help, support and services so that Children’s Services departments can meet Corporate Parenting responsibilities. We need a whole system approach and effective partnerships so that we can succeed in supporting them in all aspects of their lives, no matter where in Essex they live.

“I started adult life early... to the point I now feel I’m 40” [Care Leaver]

2. Our new strategy

We are building on the successes of our Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017-20, responding to changes in the world and reflecting what children, young people and their families tell us is important.

Our new strategy is a framework of Priorities, Outcomes and Actions, which will be developed into Delivery Plans with our partners. It is a call to action for our Elected Members, officers and public sector partners to work together to achieve better outcomes for the children and young people in our care and care leavers.

The term “corporate parent” does not speak to children, or in fact to many adults who do not work in social care. Our care leavers wanted “Co-Parenting” as it covers all the various people who might be involved in their care and implies “they all work together for the best outcome”.

So we have adopted Co-Parenting as the brand for our new strategy and will use this when we talk to children and young people.

Attributes of a Good Parent

With every decision about a child or young person, we need to put ourselves in their shoes and ask ourselves “would this be good enough for my child?”. Every child is different and we need to help them to stand on their own two feet and achieve their own aspirations. Our 10 Attributes of a Good Parent reflect what children and young people tell us is important to them:

- ✓ Listening to children and young people, putting ourselves in their shoes and responding with empathy
- ✓ Considering their feelings and individual challenges
- ✓ Taking the time to build relationships
- ✓ Involving them in decisions about their own lives

- ✓ Sticking up for them and challenging negative stereotypes
- ✓ Giving them the confidence and support to achieve at school and work and to grow as people
- ✓ Considering them in our decisions that affect them
- ✓ Not giving up on them - focussing on the present and future, not the past
- ✓ Helping them understand their strengths and achieve their individual aspirations
- ✓ Being open, honest, clear and proactive in our communication

“To listen to you when you have something to say and not just brush you off, because it’s too difficult to deal with or something like that. Even if it’s just talking about how your day went. That’s really important” [Care Leaver]

“Having the right social skills and personality is as important as knowledge/educational based skills in engaging families” [Family Centre Worker]

3. Our achievements since 2017

We believe in moving forward and building on our successes. We look for opportunities to innovate. We have listened to what children, young people and families have told us about their experiences in care in building our services. We are proud of our achievements and progress so far and our new strategy builds on these foundations. Since 2017 we have achieved the following:

Children in care

- Our numbers of children in care are stable and remain low compared to the rest of the country
- Introduced and implemented the Life Plan, an engaging document co-produced with children in care and care leavers which replaces the Care Plan, and brings to life the voice of young people and what matters to them.
- We have developed MAP (My Assessment Plan) for children and young people with disabilities, to help social workers capture their views, wishes and feelings in a more creative way, such as using photographs.
- We have expanded our inhouse Divisional Based Intervention Team (edge of care service) to include the Connecting and Uniting Families Team who focus on using the highly effective solution focused approach to re-unite and return children in care back to their birth families. In 2020/21, the Connecting and Uniting Families Team worked with 82 children and young people, 89% of who were supported to return to live with family.

- We have invested in strengthening and expanding our in-house fostering service by improving our fees structure, providing wraparound therapeutic fostering using a trauma informed model with psychologists and mental health co-ordinators. We have created Oasis Networks, offering informal support, advice and sleepovers between fostering households. At end March 2020, 79% of fostered children were cared for by in house foster carers, a significant increase from 73% in March 2018.
- The Virtual School and Education teams have worked with schools to support children in care to have high aspirations and achieve their goals. We have rolled out innovative emotional and behaviour awareness training, bespoke learning support and a new Personal Education Plan (PEP) process which involves children and young people to create a live record of their experience and progress.
- The success of the innovative Inside Out¹ project, funded by DfE and co-designed with the Children in Care Council. Led by Essex in partnership with Hertfordshire, Norfolk and the Children's Society, the project worked with very complex children in residential care using 'team around the coach' approach to support children to step down to foster homes or back home.
- We have redesigned Missing Return Home Interviews as 'Missing Chats' to be more meaningful and engaging. The child or young person has control over if, how and when support is provided.
- We have improved our Public Law Outline (PLO) support which helping families to avoid court where possible and

¹ Inside Out: Final Evaluation Report, The Tavistock Institute (2021)

have developed a Toolkit for other local authorities which is now recognised nationally as best practice. We are supporting all regions to embed the recommendations from the Public Law Working Group Report 2021.

Care leavers

- We achieved a positive Ofsted Focused Visit of Care Leavers in October 2021 with high praise for our Personal Advisers.
- We have worked with district, borough and city council partners to make care leavers exempt from paying council tax across all of Essex
- Our Targeted Youth Advisers and Employability Workers have helped 63% of care leavers into education, training and employment. We support employers to keep young care leavers in employment with a range of adjustments and wellbeing support.
- At Essex County Council, we guarantee a job interview for care leavers who meet the baseline criteria for that role. Our resourcing team will also provide extra support during the recruitment process including interview techniques, interactive brochure and calls on the day of interview to check in.
- Our [Life Portal](#), designed in partnership with the CiCC, provides practical advice to care leavers on a huge range of things that come with living independently.

4. Our approach in Essex

Our Vision for Children and Families

Our purpose is to provide early help to children and their families, to prevent them from becoming children in need and to protect children and young people from neglect and abuse. We want to support and enable them to grow up healthily and safely, enjoying life, learning and working, so that through their achievements they can make a positive contribution to society as adults. To do this we work with our statutory and other partners to provide a whole system approach.

We do this by intervening early, listening to the lived experience of children and working creatively with families. We have a systemic and strengths-based practice model of work that supports us to work pro-actively and alongside families to identify individual and family strengths and build resilience.

We work on bringing the right children into care for the right amount of time. When children are in our care, we support them to maintain relationships with their families and friends and reunite them with their families as safely and as soon as possible. As a result of our approach, we have one of the lowest rates of children in care in the country and we are proud of our Ofsted Outstanding rating in this area, but we always want to build on this success, learn from children and peers and continue to be better.

This video outlines the social care process, from the perspective of a 10 year old child: <https://vimeo.com/556210644/8640faca0f>

Our whole system approach

We work closely with partners including health, schools, district, borough and city councils and police in a whole system approach to children's needs to provide wrap-around support for children, their carers and their families.

Where children do have to come into care, we seek to provide high quality substitute care, preferably within family settings but otherwise in suitably matched high-quality residential homes, as near as possible to their home locality to maintain links with their families and communities.

"Looking for and acknowledging the positives in the people we work with is a massive way to build trust" [Social Worker]

Box out: Tom's Story – working together on positive solutions

Tom², his mum and brothers moved to a refuge in Essex when he was 12 to escape violence at home. Tom and his older brother were then targeted by criminal gangs and started to be involved in county lines drug running, leading to Tom going missing many times and being arrested. Tom was moved into foster care in a new area of Essex when he fell out with his gang and police believed his life was in danger.

He did well in foster care to begin with but placements would break down when he kept going missing to travel back to his old community. A violent episode led to some time in a young offender's institute, then into residential care further away for his safety. During this placement, Tom became more settled and wanted to move back home, but his mum was worried about the impact on his younger brother and how she would cope emotionally. Our Connecting and Uniting Families team helped them to explore and rebuild their relationship, with 1-2-1 sessions helping

² Name has been changed

her to explore these feeling without judgement and the team could see her parenting confidence growing.

Tom's older brother moved home and wanted to move on from his criminal past and build a new life, so was a positive role-model for Tom.

Social care and youth offending teams worked closely together with the family, and following more intensive support (including with court appearances), talking and increasingly frequent home visits, extending to overnight, Tom successfully moved back home.

Tom was able to start thinking about his future and his education, taking his GCSEs in maths and English and is now enrolled in college. The Youth Offending Team are considering ending his order early due to his positive attitude and non-involvement in crime. The family is now closed to social care.

5. About the children in our care and care leavers

This page paints a picture of the children we look after:

<to become an infographic>

- No. of children in care: 1088 in December 2021
- Ages 15, 16 and 17 are most common ages of CiC
 - Add age profiles of CiC from latest Panel report
- 1/5 children entering care in last 12 months were <1 year old. 21% were 16 years, 11% were 17 years old
- 17% CiC are from a BAME background
- 82% of children in care were in foster care in December 2021.
- Stability
 - % children in placements for 2+ years = ~2/3 (67.6%)
 - 3+ placements in a year = ~1/10 (9.7%)
- 45 young people in care were recorded as risk of sexual and criminal exploitation in January 2022
- Over last 3 months, 68 children and young people (14 Separated Migrant children and young people) went missing for a total of 197 times
- No. of care leavers aged 18-25: 776 in December 2021
- Currently, 63% of care leavers are in education, employment or training (EET)

[Box out] Separated Migrant Children and Young People

Separated Migrant Children and Young People have different care profiles and needs so their data is considered separately. In 2021, 89 Separated Migrant Children and Young People (also known as Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)) entered care in Essex. We are part of the National Transfer Scheme, working with Government and other local authorities to take our share of Separated Migrant Children and Young People who might arrive in other counties such as Kent. We have two specialist teams to support high quality support to these young people.

Separated Migrant Children and Young People are alone without their parents in a new country, with a new language, many having experienced trauma. In 2021, the youngest Separated Migrant Child to come into care in Essex was 13 years old. Most of these children and young people came originally from the continent of Africa or the Middle East, with the largest number in the last year from Iran (22%). It is important we help connect them with others from similar backgrounds.

It can take a long time to be granted a work permit, so many Separated Migrant care leavers are unable to find paid work.

- No. of Separated migrant children and young people: 127 in December
 - And trend graphs showing change year on year for each (in CP Panel report)

“It’s hard here. Before I lived with my parents, now I don’t, I don’t know where they are or have any contact” [Separated Migrant Child]

“In Eritrea, when you finish school, you go into the military. You have no choice. I left before my final school year when I was 14. I didn’t want to go into the military when I grow up.” [Separated Migrant Child]

6. Listening to children and young people

Children in Care Council (CiCC)

Every child in care in Essex is considered a member of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) by right. Coming into care is a frightening time and all children entering care receive a letter from the CiCC. This reassures them that they are not alone in their experiences and that there is network of peer support available for them

Members of the CiCC regularly engage to seek support, build relationships, celebrate their identity and make a positive difference to the lives of other children in care. When young people struggle to find their place in their community, they are welcomed by the CiCC and accepted by a group that cares and understands. Members of the CiCC often feel a sense of belonging and many describe the CiCC community as an extended family.

The Involvement Service

Building relationships is at the heart of the work of our Involvement Service. The Service uses a range of meaningful participatory methodologies including action research, co-design and peer research to inform service design, governance and evaluation, underpinned by a nurturing approach. They empower children and young people to build resilience and navigate challenging hurdles by walking alongside them throughout their difficult times, as well as life's celebrations.

The Involvement Service supports the Children in Care Council to meet regularly with decision makers and Corporate Parenting Panel members (a minimum of four times a year) as well as enabling young people to attend and present at meetings and take part in discussions with directors, partner agencies, service managers and team managers.

The CiCC is supported to understand and represent the views of hundreds of other children in care and care leavers which are collected through the Involvement Service.

"I see the Involvement Team as like my home. As like my safe place... I feel safe, I feel home when I'm with you guys" [Care Leaver]

Language that speaks to children

We have recently transformed our statutory care plan documents into **Life Plans**, co-designed by the CiCC. Life Plans are live documents that social workers and children and young people complete together. This means that the young person's thoughts and feelings are explored and recorded in a way that means something to them, rather than just being a professional assessment of that child. This is an approach we will take in other areas of our work with children and families, including children with disabilities.

New approaches during and after lockdown

Our Social Workers and Independent Reviewing Officers have adopted new ways of communication following the first Covid19 lockdown that some children find more comfortable than formal face-to-face meetings. This includes using Zoom and occasional checking in via WhatsApp/text message. This means that children and young people can be involved how suits them, for example dipping in and out of a virtual meeting and being able to turn their cameras off, or knowing that someone is thinking about them when they receive a message, but not having to respond.

[Box out] Care Leavers research project

A group of Essex care leavers and care leavers from five other local authorities were supported by Anglia Ruskin University to lead a research project on care leavers' experiences of the pandemic. They found that the pandemic exacerbated challenges they were already facing, such as

emotional wellbeing, practical issues (such as moving accommodation), connection/loneliness and getting support from services. They developed eight recommendations to take forward in our role of corporate parents, during the pandemic and beyond:

1. Clear and up-to-date information on the range of support and proactively share this with all care leavers
2. All care leavers should have the same opportunities and level of practical and emotional support within their local authority, reflecting their individual needs and circumstances
3. Extra support to care leavers with children, including allowing their children to attend nursery or school during lockdowns
4. Provide basic technology (internet, laptop, mobile phone) so that care leavers can stay connected and access education, employment and services
5. Help with connection with others e.g. support bubbles, innovative use of technology and enabling face-to-face interaction, especially for care leavers living alone or newly independent
6. Proactively reach out to care leavers and make sure they have someone independent to their case/care to turn to for support
7. Participatory research with care leavers to better reflect their priorities and understand their experiences to inform action
8. Corporate parent services and central government should make a promise setting out how they will improve the support for care leavers during the pandemic and beyond

They shared their findings at a national conference of social work professionals attended by almost 200 delegates. You can read the full report here: <https://flipbooks.gs-cdn.co.uk/aru-final-report/2/>

“I struggled quite badly with mental health before [the pandemic], then it was like I finally got back on track and then lockdown hit so I went back to how I was before” [Care Leaver]

“All it needs to be is a text. It makes the world of difference to [care leavers] to know that the [local authority] actually care about them” [Care Leaver]

7. Our Priorities

Our Priorities - as told by children and young people in and leaving care

We have taken the feedback from children and young people gathered through the CiCC, the Involvement Service, Have Your Say³ surveys and audits to understand what really matters to children and young people.

We have then consulted the Children in Care and Leaving Care Partnership Board, the Children in Care Council and professionals across Children & Families to develop our five priorities for children, young people and their families:

1. **Home:** Providing good homes, stable placements and ensuring children and young people feel cared for
2. **Health:** Supporting emotional wellbeing, championing healthy lifestyles and keeping children and young people safe
3. **Self:** Celebrating individuality, championing diversity and inclusion and helping children and young people understand where they come from
4. **Learning:** Helping children and young people learn, have high aspirations, grow as people and enjoy school, college, university and training
5. **Independence:** Helping care leavers achieve independence as successful, happy adults who can feel confident in work and if they become parents themselves

In reality these five Priorities are complex and interlinked. If a child or young person is struggling with one of these things, such having as a

difficult time in their placement or suffering with anxiety or depression, it will impact all the other aspects of their life such as their learning or vulnerability to being recruited by gangs. This is why the collaboration with our partners and wrap-around support of the whole system in Essex is so important.

*“It’s helped me to focus on school and what I want for my future”
[Child talking about Emotional Wellbeing support]*

The Pledge and Care Leavers Charter

As Corporate Parents, Essex County Council is required to make a Pledge to our children in care and leaving care. This is a set of promises written by children and young people being looked after us. The Care Leavers Charter relates specifically to our commitment to support young people after they leave care.

Children and young people helped to write the Pledge and Charter. Each year they get to have a say about what is important to them and whether the promises need to change. The Pledge sets out how we will be good Co-Parents and make things better for children and young people around their Priorities of Home, Health, Self, Learning and Independence. Each year children in care and care leavers have an opportunity to evaluate how well Corporate Parents are meeting their promises they make through the Pledge and Charter Checker surveys.

[Box out: The Essex Pledge – updates to follow]

We will do our best:

³ Annual Have Your Say surveys ask questions around home, school, family, friends and social workers

- To do everything we can to make you feel cared about, valued and respected as an individual
- To make sure you have a social care worker who will spend time with you and get to know you
- To make sure you have opportunities to achieve and succeed
- To help you keep in touch with your family, brothers and sisters and friends when you come into care
- To involve you in decision-making so your views are listened to and to explain when we make a decision you may not like or agree with

The Pledge and Charter are published on the Children in Care Council website: <https://cicc.essex.gov.uk/being-in-care/corporate-parenting-pledge-our-promise-to-you/>

NB Each priority ideally designed to fit onto a page with relevant images – might be able to include images of artwork from It's My Life festivals>

Priority 1: **Home**: Providing good homes, stable placements and ensuring children and young people feel cared for

Stability and consistency in good homes is paramount for children and young people to feel safe, loved and cared for. Entering a new placement is frightening and can lead to changing behaviours and “acting out”. This can put pressure on that new placement and other relationships such as at school. If placements do have to change, then it is important that children know what is happening and why, and that moves are planned where possible with time to get to know their new home and carers.

“Home is about making memories with other people” [Care Leaver]

“I have nice food and they find nice things for me to do to make me happy.” [Child in care]

“I couldn't ask for anyone better. [Our social worker] does a fantastic job. She is in regular contact with us at visits but also emails and calls. She keeps us informed and follows things up promptly. She spends time with the children 1:1 and knows them so well” [Grandmother]

“My foster carers changed my life. I wouldn't be who I am” [Care Leaver]

“Special, special superheroes” [Care Leaver]

You told us: <speech bubble design>

- Coming into a new placement is scary.
- It takes time and effort to get to know one another.
- Being placed far away from your friends and family is very hard and can be a reason for going missing
- It's normal to want to fight or runaway when you're scared, it's not troublemaking. Don't give up on us.

- Siblings want to stay together, but those relationships can also be difficult
- Care leavers accommodation often doesn't feel like a home – Welcome Packs with lots of information help them settle into a new area, help to meet people. Being able to redecorate helps.
- Semi-independent accommodation options for care leavers are limited and expensive and with no family support they can easily slip into rent arrears, especially when coming of Housing Benefit when starting a job

Priority 2: **Health:** Supporting emotional wellbeing, championing healthy lifestyles and keeping children and young people safe

We know that a child's experiences and environment impact their physical and emotional wellbeing. Children in care are more likely to face health risk factors such as past trauma, loss, poor self-esteem and adverse experience. Care leavers often face inadequate housing, poverty, poor diet and limited access to green spaces. The Covid19 pandemic had a negative impact on emotional wellbeing as well as immunisations and dental checks, though did also have positive benefits for some children and young people, such as having more time to connect with their foster families during lockdown.

Health inequalities are strongly linked to success in school and employment opportunities, which in turn impact life chances. Children and young people in care are particularly vulnerable, especially when unhappy or lonely. This can lead to risky behaviours, such as drug-taking, meeting people online, going missing or getting involved in gangs and violence. We need to stay alert and quick to adapt to new dangers, such as gang recruitment moving to social media during the pandemic.

"We get Costa. And she asks me about school and stuff and she's my favourite social worker I've had" [Child in Care]

"I get support and guidance, if I fall off track they help me to get back on track" [Child in Care]

"Many people in care have severe anxiety, so going to places like work, school, that is a big thing for us" [Care Leaver]

You told us

- The term "mental health" implies something bad, you would rather talk about emotional wellbeing
- It can be hard to know how to access emotional support before issues become crises
- The pandemic negatively impacted a lot of your emotional wellbeing, with too many of you suffering from anxiety, depression, loneliness, missing family and/or bereavement
- Friends and peer support are very important for your emotional wellbeing
- Care leavers need help with registering for doctors, dentists etc. and this has been made harder by the pandemic
- Separated Migrant Children and Young People would be helped by more opportunities to speak with young people from your own background

Priority 3: **Self**: Celebrating individuality, championing diversity and inclusion and helping children and young people understand where they come from

“It’s very easy to forget that every child in care is different, no two are the same” [Care Leaver]

In 2020 the Black Lives Matter movement highlighted how racism and inequality impacts our citizens. In Essex we recognised that we must do better to support Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) children and young people by tackling systemic inequality, championing diversity and practicing empathy in our individual roles. We must also help children and young people in care to meet others with similar backgrounds and stay connected to their culture while they are apart from their family. Our children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) need special consideration as many are non-verbal or have difficulties communicating their thoughts and feelings and can feel excluded.

You told us:

- You need help to understand your background and connect to others like you
- You sometimes feel judged because of your background
- Photos and drawings can help you to share your feelings and make sense of what’s happening to you (young children and those with disabilities)
- At It’s My Life 2020, of 39 Separated Migrant Children and Young people:
 - 81% said they feel part of the family where they live.
 - 64% said they have had opportunities to meet other young people with similar backgrounds to their own

“I am worried about my future and I don't have document from Home Office.” [Separated Migrant Child]

“I worry that people don't understand me” [Separated Migrant Child]

“It’s important to be able to talk to someone in Tigrinya. I can talk to my social worker. I trust my social worker. We start off talking in English but then we slip back into Tigrinya.” [Separated Migrant Child]

[Box Out] A ‘Proud to be Me’ sub-group of the CiCC came together in 2021 to explore culture and identity, including developing their “Please Do, Please Don’t” guidelines.

Please do...

- Make sure I understand my history and why decisions are made
- Embrace every child’s culture and help them know their future
- Make sure I understand the culture of my birth family
- Look after our well-being, our hair, our skin. Think about food and cookbooks. Use these things to ‘welcome’ us.
- Support us to tell our ‘story’ about being in care and why we’re in care
- Look forwards, not backwards
- Create a charter for children and young people who identify as black, Asian or from a minority ethnic group

Please don’t...

- Think we are all the same
- Make assumptions about my religion, ethnicity, skin colour and culture
- Treat me differently to others in my school

- Get my name wrong
- Compare us to foster carers' own children
- Force us to change
- Make me feel like I'm not good enough
- Treat me differently to foster carers' own children]

DRAFT

Priority 4. **Learning:** Helping children and young people learn, have high aspirations, grow as people and enjoy school, college, university and training

Children in care and young people can face many additional challenges that can impact their learning including past trauma, attachment and trust issues, missed school, bullying and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Children in care leave school with fewer qualifications than other pupils (the “attainment gap”), which can impact the rest of their lives.

[Box out: The Virtual School]

The Essex Virtual School has statutory responsibilities that extend to every child in care until end of Year 13. Though children in care attend many different schools, they are part of the Virtual School community. The Virtual School monitors progress and supports schools to raise educational outcomes and ambitions of children in care. It advocates for children to receive the right support in a high quality learning environment.

Our Virtual School has high aspirations for children in care and care leavers and encourages them to share those aspirations for themselves. It acts as a champion for care-experienced children, helping and challenging schools to provide the support each child needs to thrive in education and achieve their goals. Each child in care is involved in meetings about their Personal Education Plan, which is a living record of the child’s individual experiences, progress, achievements and ambitions.]

“I am really excited about going back to school and seeing my friends [after lockdown]. Also, to be taught properly so I can understand better.” [Child in Care]

“I like all things to do with my schooling and I am proud of my drawings.” [Child in Care]

“I had a problem at school with one of my friends asking about me being in care. [My social worker] spoke to my teacher and this was sorted out.” [Child in Care]

You told us:

- Please use positive words, encouragement, don’t focus on negatives. Push us forward.
- It is difficult to open up about being in care in school as it can lead to bullying (physical and emotional) and being treated differently
- Some of you need extra help with schoolwork, especially if you have missed some time at school or if English is not your first language
- It can be embarrassing to be taken out of lessons for social worker meetings and this affects your learning
- We need to educate others to tackle pre-conceptions, stereotypes and labelling as a potential “trouble-maker”

Priority 5: **Independence**: Helping care leavers achieve independence as successful, happy adults who can feel confident in work and if they become parents themselves

When young people leave care at 18, they can feel alone, isolated and financially unprepared for living independently. They have been through more trauma than most children and young people and if they have no connection with their families, they can suddenly find themselves alone in the adult world. Housing is a huge issue – as a two-tier authority it is not possible for the county council to provide guaranteed housing, we need to work with our district, borough and city council partners. Care leavers can struggle with the confidence and qualifications needed to find and keep a good job, and the cost of housing makes it hard to make ends meet. Some have children of their own to look after without any extended family support.

“Budgeting is a big one. If you don’t know how to budget you could mess up your whole chances of being happy” [Care Leaver]

“Mental health is a struggle because you’re on your own” [Care Leaver]

“Transition to a PA is well managed. I’ve had the same PA for the last 4 or 5 years. We’ve built a good relationship” [Care Leaver]

[Box Out] Care Leavers Covenant

In Essex, we are signed up to the Care Leavers Covenant, which commits us to providing additional support to young people around five themes that are important to care leavers:

1. Independent Living

2. Education, Employment & Training
3. Safety & Security
4. Emotional & Physical Health
5. Finance]

In 2020, Coram Voice published the report “What makes life good? Care leavers’ views on their well-being”⁴. With responses from over 1,800 care leavers, the study found that there were 10 indicators most associated with wellbeing which we can take forward in our all our work with care leavers: [re-draw diagram and credit to Coram Voice]



You told us:

- Housing is too expensive. It is harder when you get a job as you

⁴ What makes life good? Care leavers’ views on their well-being – Coram Voice, 2020

lose housing benefit. It is easy to get into rent arrears with no family support to fall back on.

- Being placed in semi-independent housing away from friends is hard, you would like more choice on where to live
- You talk highly of your personal adviser (PA) and value their support with budgeting skills and in helping find employment or education
- You need a chance to “practice” independence while still in care as being suddenly on your own at 18 is abrupt and scary
- You need help finding job opportunities that don’t require qualifications and work experience
- There is a feeling of a “postcode lottery” in terms of support e.g. information about the local area, quality of housing and support such as leisure passes
- Separated Migrant Young People aren’t able to have a paid job while you wait for your “papers”. Many of you are keen to work as soon as you can and would like more help to find unpaid work experience

8. Co-Grandparents

Care leavers and their children “come as a unit”. Young people in care and care leavers with their own children are likely to miss out on the normal support that a grandparent might provide such as: financial support with rent or purchasing baby items; being there when mums and dads need support, advice or a break from childcare; helping provide stability around the family; help with homework and reading; helping to navigate benefits and childcare entitlement.

Growing up in care means missing out on the role-modelling that comes as being part of a stable family. Care leavers that become parents themselves may lack confidence, having not had the opportunity to learn the skills directly from their own parents.

As well as being co-parents, we (Essex and our partners) can adopt some of the grandparent roles that many new parents enjoy when starting a family. This can be practical - building on the Essex Life Portal, our online tool which provides advice on life skills, health skills and financial knowledge. It should also be providing emotional wellbeing support, vital for all new parents, as part of our ongoing duty of care.

The pandemic has highlighted that in times of crisis, we should give special consideration our care leavers with children and think creatively about the support we could give them as Co-Grandparents, such as continued access to school and childcare during lockdown (like key workers). We will continue to work with the CiCC to develop this new approach and our role as Co-Grandparents.

“Some care leavers don’t have their parents around, so they won’t have people to take care of the baby, or help them go out shopping. With a newborn it’s hard to do things like that.” [Care Leaver]

“Some of us don’t have parents, so who do we turn to if we have rent arrears etc.?” [Care Leaver]

9. Our Outcomes: What we will achieve

Our Mission

We will work together across all aspects of children and young people's lives, so that all children in care and leaving care are happy, loved, safe and able to achieve their aspirations.

Our Outcomes

We want all officers, Elected Members and our partners to ask themselves: **"What can I do in my role to help children and young people in and leaving care?"**

Based on what matters to children, young people and their carers and families, we have seven Outcomes to work towards:

- Outcome 1 relates to our wider vision for Children and Families
- Outcome 2 is about listening to and involving children, young people and their families, and must underpin everything we do
- Outcomes 3-7 directly relate to the five Priorities as told to us by children and young people in and leaving care

For each Outcome, we have suggested new actions which will go into our Delivery Plans, alongside the work we already do, and performance measures to keep us on track. Our progress will be reported to our Corporate Parenting Panel and new actions discussed with the CiCC.

[Each of these to be designed up and easy to read with icons etc.]

Outcome 1: The right children are in care, the length of time in care is safely reduced, and families feel involved and supported throughout	
Taking action	Measures
➤ Continue to involve children and families in shaping and improving care services	Numbers entering care year on year

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Supporting siblings to stay in touch and build strong relationships if they can't be housed in the same placement ➤ Refreshing our Sufficiency Strategy, including looking at how we can address the market shortage of suitable residential care in care in Essex and ensure placements are as close to family as possible ➤ Continue our Public Law Outline work to avoid court proceedings where possible 	Length of time in care
	How well have you been supported by Children's Social Care? (audit question)

Outcome 2: Children and young people in care, care leavers and families feel listened to, involved and understand what is happening to them	
Taking action	Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Using creative communication tools in our work with younger children and those who find it harder to communicate (e.g. children and young people with disabilities and Separated Migrant Children and Young People) ➤ Develop a video around the Priorities and Attribute of a Good Parent to get message across to a wider audience ➤ Invite CiCC to input into themed Corporate Parenting Panel meetings around the Priorities – in person or by video 	Have Your Say results to: - "Do you understand the plan to see your family?" - "Thinking about your care, do you feel listened to?" - Question on understanding care plan
	Number of meetings in a year

	with decision-makers e.g. DLDs, the Panel and CiCLCPB
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Outcome 3: Children and young people in care are settled and secure in their placements and feel part of a family	
Taking action	Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Working with young people and our strategic partners Barnardo's on providing residential accommodation in Essex that will better meet the needs of Essex Children in Care than offered by the market currently ➤ Continuing trauma-awareness training, access to therapeutic support and promoting the Oasis Network - building an ecosystem of support for foster carers in difficult times, such as when a young person goes missing ➤ Mental health and other support to children in care and their carers to support placement stability ➤ Promoting the CiCC and events such as It's My Life to help those coming into care meet others who've been through the experience 	Have Your Say responses to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Do you feel cared about by the people you live with?"
	Long-term placement stability (2+ years)
	Short-term placement stability (3+ placements in year)
	% children in care fostered and % of those in foster care are in-house

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Work on joint protocol for prioritising care leavers for accommodation across all districts ➤ Working with district, borough and city councils and accommodation providers to support care leavers by sharing good information about their local area and community 	Distance placed from home and % placed within Essex
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Outcome 4: Children and young people in care and leaving care are happy, healthy and safe	
Taking action	Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Working with partners to improve access to mental health and emotional wellbeing support including strengths and solution-focussed therapies ➤ Working with district, borough and city council partners to roll out free leisure passes for all care leavers ➤ Being open to new, light-touch forms of communication to help children and young people know someone is there for them, learning from pandemic ➤ Work with new Integrated Care Systems to highlight needs of CiC and care leavers to be considered in developing new integrated services particularly improving emotional health support 	Annual health checks
	Immunisations
	SDQ ⁵ scores
	No. of care leavers with health passports
	Young people in care recorded as risk of sexual and criminal exploitation

⁵ Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

Outcome 5: Children and young people in care are proud to be who they are and feel a sense of belonging	
Taking action	Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Invite Panel Member to be part of the Virtual School governing body to strengthen links between Corporate Parenting and education ➤ Develop a 'Welcome Pack' for young people in care from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds, providing information on things ranging from local hairdressers/barbers and religious communities to career advice ➤ Celebrate the achievements of BAME and SEND children and young people and showcase diverse role-models ➤ Work with the Virtual School to tackle racist attitudes in school ➤ Adapt surveys and make events such as It's My Life accessible for children and young people with disabilities and empower social workers to encourage participation ➤ Use POET⁶ to hear voices of children and young people with SEND and apply their experiences to help children in care and care leavers with disabilities: http://www.essexlocaloffer.org.uk/yp-poet/ 	A new measure for % BAME children in care placed in foster families of same ethnic background/religion
	% Life Stories completed and measure of how they feel about them
	A new question on identity/feeling included/pride in being yourself in Have your Say

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Work with children to keep their Life Stories up to date, helping them to explore their feelings around placements and their aspirations for the future ➤ Create Later Life Letters (as are done for children who are adopted) for children likely to be in long-term care 	
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Outcome 6: Children and young people in care and leaving care feel happy, confident and secure in school, college, university or training, have improved educational outcomes and high aspirations for the future	
Taking action	Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Children in Care are involved in the Year of Reading, with extra support given to foster carers and residential carers ➤ Streamlining education and social work data collection and reporting to improve PEP process ➤ Continue to implement CPD for schools on trauma and attachment awareness, and improve understanding of other children to reduce bullying ➤ Find work experience opportunities for those who want to go into public sector jobs e.g. police, health, education, social care, fire service 	Have Your Say results to "I enjoy school"
	NEET/EET status of care leavers aged 16 and 17
	GCSE and key stage attainment of Virtual School compared to Essex-wide

⁶ Personal Outcome Evaluation Tool – a survey for children with special educational needs to help improve services

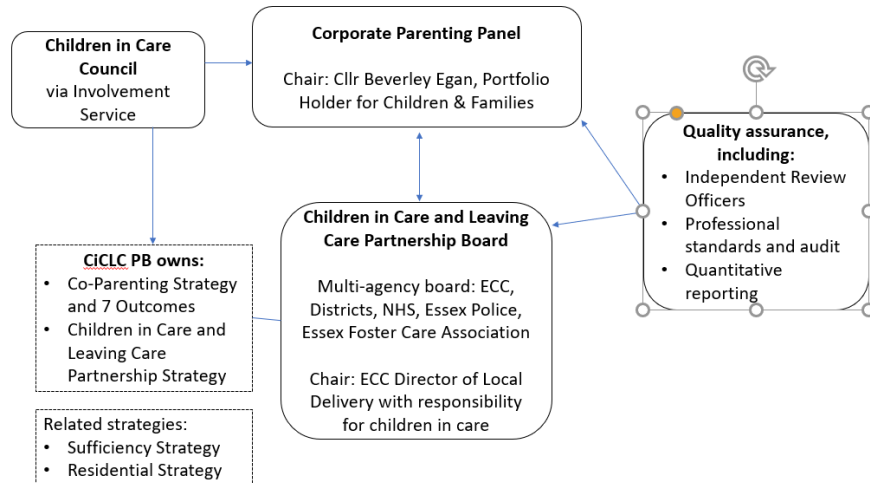
➤ Continue the work of the Virtual School to come up with solutions for schools to reduce exclusions, such as part-time timetables and use of alternative training outside of a school setting	
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Outcome 7: Care leavers feel cared for, settled, connected to others and supported to find jobs and start adult life	
Taking action	Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ We will offer care leavers apprenticeships and employment opportunities in the ECC and beyond, supporting other public sector employers to prioritise and support care leavers into work ➤ Reduce feeling of “postcode lottery” across district, borough and city boundaries - helping with housing, leisure passes, transport information and discounts, starting with mapping the support for care leavers under each council ➤ Recruit a Care Leavers Champion in each district, borough or city council ➤ Create a video by care leavers to explain the challenges they face with housing when they reach 18 and how this impacts them ➤ Explore a new financial support package for care leavers starting employment to avoid falling into debt with housing. Learn from the care leaver financial 	18-25 year olds actively seeking employment
	No. of care leavers employed at ECC
	No. of care leavers in suitable accommodation
	SDQ for care leavers

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ support scheme being introduced in Wales ➤ Formalise Corporate Grandparent (Co-Grandparent) role and explore new initiatives such as help with managing finances, navigating benefits, childcare and role-modelling to improve confidence and capability of new parents ➤ Continue to improve transition between teams at end of care – start preparing for independence earlier, e.g. forward planning for those with SEND coming back into Essex at 18 ➤ Prioritise care leavers and highlight our legal duty to them in wider discussions with district, borough and city councils on housing and planning ➤ Look at how we can increase the rates of Staying Put, e.g. making it financially easier for carers ➤ Promote care leavers as a priority group for any new employment support schemes e.g. with Essex Anchor Networks ➤ Work with adult social care to help bridge the gap between children’s and adult mental health services for care leavers 	
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10. Working together across Essex

Governance



In Essex we have a Corporate Parenting Panel to hold us to account. The Panel includes Elected Members and key partners such as the Essex Foster Care Association and NHS representatives with responsibility for children in care. The Panel is chaired by Cllr Beverley Egan, Cabinet Member for Children and Families. The CiCC are invited to meetings to present their views. Our new Priorities will become new topics for discussion at Panel meetings.

Some of our Panel Members also hold elected positions within Essex's district, borough and city councils, so they can help our partnership work on issues outside of the county council's responsibility such as housing and public transport.

We work with our partners to deliver Our Co-Parenting Strategy through the Children in Care and Leaving Care Partnership Board. We also work

with partners through the Children's Partnership Boards – county-wide and in the four Quadrants of Essex. Through these Boards we can share best practice, raise issues which need a multi-agency approach and help make system-wide changes to support children in care and care leavers, such as sharing effective recruitment and procurement policies.

Feedback from children and young people

This is a live strategy and we need continual feedback on how we are doing. We ask children and young people to hold us to the commitments made in this strategy and will continue to involve them via the Involvement Service, It's My Life festivals, Have your Say surveys, audits and reviews.

We will invite children and young people to contribute to Corporate Parenting Panel meetings and to join discussions with Directors of Local Delivery and other decision-makers to share their insight and ideas. We will also discuss new programmes with young people via the Involvement Service and CiCC, consulting them during the planning stages.



In launching this strategy, we will raise the profile of corporate parenting beyond those who work directly with children. We will promote children in care and care leavers a priority group for any new programmes or schemes across Essex County Council and The Essex Partners Anchor Network⁷

⁷ Anchor institutions are large, stable employers such as NHS, councils, universities and large businesses that have a significant impact on a place, including employing locally and procuring goods and services.

Everyone's Essex

Essex County Council's strategic priorities are set out in our new organisation strategy, 'Everyone's Essex'. Everyone's Essex focuses on four areas where outcomes really matter for the quality of life for all people in Essex:

- Children and families
- The economy
- The environment
- Promoting health, care and wellbeing for all ages.

There are five commitments for children and families to improve:

- Education Outcomes
- Family Resilience and Stability
- Safety
- Levelling up for Families
- Outcomes for Vulnerable Children, including Children in Care, Care Leavers, Children with SEND and children from BAME communities

Everyone's Essex offers many opportunities to improve the lives of children in care and care leavers outside the world of social care and children and families' services, by tackling the causes of poverty and inequality to create a fairer society for everyone by "levelling up".

Levelling Up and tackling poverty

The Bywaters Report⁸ shows a strong link between poverty and child abuse and neglect. The report identifies and discusses evidence about

⁸ Bywaters et al (2016) The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: an evidence review <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/relationship-between-poverty-child-abuse-and-neglect-evidence-review>

the relationship between poverty and child abuse and neglect in the UK, concluding that managing poverty reduces pressure on children's social care. We know that there are more than 123,000 people in Essex, 40,000 of whom are children, that live in areas that are in the 20% most deprived of the whole UK. This is a figure that has doubled since 2007.

Making a significant impact on this figure is a priority for our Levelling Up programme, which will target the places and people most affected by disadvantage to improve their life outcomes. The need to level up services by identifying and replicating the practice in the areas where young people do well is a key recommendation from the 2020 report from Coram Voice⁹

Our Levelling Up Essex White Paper sets out our belief that a person's potential should not be defined at birth, by who their parents are or where they live. Individuals should define their own destiny, and the council and its partners should play a role in helping people do that – putting children in care and care leavers at the heart of this is the Co-Parenting responsibility of all Members, officers and partners.

Our wider work supporting the levelling up programme – including economic development, covid recovery and bringing families up and out of poverty – will be crucial to reducing the number of vulnerable children who need the support of the care system.

This is Everyone's Essex. It is our responsibility as corporate parents to work together across the system in supporting and pushing forward the children and young people in our care and care leavers to get the most out of life. We want them to achieve their aspirations, feel they belong

and be proud to be themselves, just as any parent wants for their children.

"You should be pushing me to achieve. You should be pushing me at every step.... That's the point of being a parent. It's to give everything. As much as you can." [Care Leaver]

⁹ What makes life good? Care leavers' views on their well-being – Coram Voice, 2020

Our Co-Parenting Strategy 2022-27:

How we do Corporate Parenting in Essex

Executive Summary

“I believe that there’s no limits for children in care. There’s no limits for any child, ever... It’s what they get, what they’re given and the love they’re given and the time they’re given, is what makes them amazing” [Care Leaver]

Introduction

At Essex County Council, it is our legal duty to act as Corporate Parents and care for children and young people who are unable to live with their parents or guardians. Established in The Children’s Act 1989, this duty is not just with social workers and professionals who work directly with children and young people, but with all county council staff and elected Members. The Act also places a duty on our partners - including Health, Education and Housing services - to support Children’s Services departments to meet Corporate Parenting responsibilities. We need help from our partners across the Essex system to give our children and young people stability, community and the best start in life.

Our Co-Parenting Strategy

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy has been re-named by children and young people as ‘Our Co-Parenting Strategy’. The new name represents how we work together across all the authorities, with carers and families, to be good parents our children in care and leaving care. The voice and perspectives of children and young people are integral to our Co-Parenting Strategy and we are privileged to have worked with members of our Children in Care Council to develop it.

Our approach

Our overall vision for Children and Families is that we bring the right children into care for the right amount of time. We then support them to maintain relationships with their families and friends and reunite them with their families as safely and as soon as possible. As a result of our approach, Essex has one of the lowest rates of children in care in the UK and we are proud of our Ofsted Outstanding rating in this area. We want to build on this success, learn from children and peers and continue to be better.

Since our last strategy was published in 2017, our achievements include: introducing ‘Life Plans’ (designed with young people to replace Care Plans); the new Connecting and Reuniting Families Team; investment to improve our Fostering Service; an Essex-wide council tax exemption for care leavers; and new dedicated employability and youth advisers to support care leavers into good jobs.

Listening to children and young people

Every child in care is a member Children in Care Council (CiCC) by right. Coming into care is a frightening time and the CiCC provides a network of peer support, welcoming and accepting those who may struggle to find a place in their community. The CiCC is supported by the Involvement Service to understand and represent the views of hundreds of other children and care leavers. Together they meet with decision-makers and Corporate Parenting Panel members. They have been actively involved in the development of our Priorities, Mission, Outcomes and suggested Actions.

Children and young people are all individuals. Our strategy considers the different needs of groups such as Separated Migrant Children and Young People, those with special educational needs and

disabilities, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic children and young people, and different ages and genders. We will continue to do more to help all children and young people in and leaving care to feel included and proud to be themselves.

Our Priorities

Through the feedback from children and young people gathered through the CiCC, the Involvement Service, surveys, audits and insight from professionals across our services and partners we have developed Priorities based around what really matters to children, young people and their families.

1. **Home:** Providing good homes, stable placements and ensuring children and young people feel cared for
2. **Health:** Supporting emotional wellbeing, championing healthy lifestyles and keeping children and young people safe
3. **Self:** Celebrating individuality, championing diversity and inclusion and helping children and young people understand where they come from
4. **Learning:** Helping children and young people learn, have high aspirations, grow as people and enjoy school, college, university and training
5. **Independence:** Helping care leavers achieve independence as successful, happy adults who can feel confident in work and if they become parents themselves

Co-Grandparents

We have worked with care leavers to develop the concept of 'Co-Grandparents' for young people who have children of their own. This means adopting some of the grandparent roles that many new parents benefit from when starting a family. This includes practical and financial advice, support with childcare and emotional support. We can help to build confidence and capability of young parents who may not have had the chance to learn parenting skills from their own family.

Our Mission

We will work together across all aspects of children and young people's lives, so that all children in care and leaving care are happy, loved, safe and able to achieve their aspirations.

Our Outcomes

We want all officers, Elected Members and our partners to ask themselves: **"What can I do in my role to help children and young people in and leaving care?"**

Based on what matters to children, young people and their carers and families, we have seven Outcomes to work towards:

1. The right children are in care, the length of time in care is safely reduced, and families feel involved and supported
2. Children and young people in care, care leavers and families feel listened to, involved and understand what is happening to them
3. Children and young people in care are settled and secure in their placements and feel part of a family
4. Children and young people in care and leaving care are happy, healthy and safe
5. Children and young people in care and leaving care are proud to be who they are and feel a sense of belonging
6. Children and young people in care and leaving care feel happy, confident and secure in school, college, university or training, have improved educational outcomes and high aspirations for the future

7. Care leavers feel cared for, settled, connected to others and supported to find jobs and start adult life

To measure our progress, we will collect feedback on how we are doing from children, young people, families, carers and professionals through surveys and audits, as well as ongoing engagement through the Involvement Service.

Governance and partnerships

Our Corporate Parenting Panel, chaired by Cllr Beverley Egan, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, will hold us to account on achieving our Outcomes.

We will work with our partners through the Children in Care and Leaving Care Partnership Board and the Children's Partnership Boards, county-wide and in the four Quadrants of Essex. Here we can share best practice, raise issues which need a multi-agency approach and help make system-wide changes to support children in care and care leavers, such as sharing effective recruitment and procurement policies.

Some of our Panel Members also hold elected positions within Essex's district, borough and city councils, so they can help us with issues outside of the county council's responsibility such as housing and public transport.

Everyone's Essex

Our new Organisation Strategy 'Everyone's Essex' includes a commitment to improving outcomes for Vulnerable Children, including Children in Care and Care Leavers. Everyone's Essex offers many opportunities to improve the lives of children in care and care leavers outside the world of children and families' services through tackling the causes of poverty and inequality. We want to help create a fairer society for everyone by "Levelling Up".

Central to our Levelling Up agenda is the belief that a person's potential should not be defined at birth, by who their parents are or where they live. The council and our partners should play a role in helping people define their own destiny. As good Co-Parents, we and our partners should put children in care and care leavers at the heart of this agenda.

"You should be pushing me to achieve. You should be pushing me at every step.... That's the point of being a parent. It's to give everything. As much as you can." [Care Leaver]

Report title: Work Programme	
Report to: People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
Report author: Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer	
Date: 14 April 2022	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 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 14 April 2022

Provisional Date	Topic Title	Lead Contact	Purpose and Target Outcomes	Everyone's Essex Commitment	Cross-Committee
14 April 2022	Corporate Parenting Strategy	Cabinet Member and Director Local Delivery (Children and Families)	To consider an early draft of a refreshed strategy	Family Resilience and Stability, and Safety	Not applicable
14 April 2022	Essex Children's Safeguarding Board	Independent Chairman, statutory partners and the Board Manager	To consider the report of the activities and focus of the Board.	Family Resilience and Stability, and Safety	Not applicable
12 May 2022 -TBC	Adult Social Care – follow up and preparation for NHS discussion (see below)	Cabinet Members - Adult Social Care and Health and Children's Services and Early Years /Executive Director, Adult Social Care	To consider current trends, update on previous matters arising, and preparation for discussion with NHS (see below)	Promoting Independence, Healthy Lifestyles	TBC
12 May 2022 -TBC	Carers	Cabinet Member Adult Social Care and Health /Executive Director, Adult Social Care	Introduction to support available for carers	Carers' commitment	Not applicable
12 May 2022 - TBC	Houses for Life	Director Strategy Policy & Integration (People)	See Matters Arising report elsewhere in Agenda pack.	Promoting Independence, Healthy Lifestyles	TBC
June or July 2022	Home Education/Children Missing Education	Cabinet Member Education Excellence, Skills and Training	To consider update and links with County Lines and drug gangs	Education Outcomes	Not applicable
June or July 2022	Development of NHS Integrated Care Systems	NHS Leads - TBC	To consider the priorities of the ICSs.	Promoting Independence, Healthy Lifestyles	With HOSC – host/lead committee TBC

Provisional Date	Topic Title	Lead Contact	Purpose and Target Outcomes	Everyone's Essex Commitment	Cross-Committee
June or July 2022	Essex Safeguarding Adults Board	Independent Chairman and the Board Manager.	To consider the report of the activities and focus of the Board.	Safety	Not applicable
TBC	Education	Cabinet Member Education Excellence, Skills and Training	Portfolio priorities and development of a Lifelong Learning Strategy	Education Outcomes	Not applicable
TBC	Educational Attainment	Cabinet Member Education Excellence, Skills and Training	To consider issues around attainment during and post pandemic.	Education Outcomes	Not applicable
TBC	County Lines and Drug Gangs – follow-up	TBC	Use of funds and the work of the Violence and Vulnerability Unit	Family Resilience and Stability, and Safety	Not applicable
TBC	Domestic Abuse – follow up	Cabinet Member Children's Services and Early Years/ Head of Strategic Commissioning and Policy	1. Update on response to new statutory duties; 2. Update Task and Finish Group recommendations	Family Resilience and Stability, and Safety	Not applicable
TBC	Early Years' and Childcare Strategy – follow up	Cabinet Member Children's Services and Early Years and EYCC Sufficiency and Sustainability Manager	To review progress of new strategy.	Family Resilience and Stability, Education	Not applicable
TBC September/ October	Consultation and development of the new library plan: Everyone's Library Service 2022 - 2026	Deputy Leader & Community, Equality, Partnerships and Performance/ Director of Customer Services/Head of Libraries	Further update six months on from end of public consultation (also see Matters Arising report elsewhere in agenda)	Education Outcomes	TBC

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