

Briefing for New Members: Children and Families

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Helen Lincoln, Executive Director Children, Families and Education
Nicky O'Shaughnessy, Director of Local Delivery North

What is Children's Social Care

- **Children's Social Care exists to support children, young people and families, to protect them by intervening decisively when they are at risk of harm, and to provide care for those who need it so that they grow up and thrive with safety, stability and love.**
- The Children and Families Function has a **universal** focus on improving outcomes for all children and young people *and* a **targeted** focus on providing help and support to families who are struggling and whose children are at risk of poor outcomes.
- Local authorities are responsible for assessing needs and arranging appropriate support or care for families, children and young people.
- The goal is to **support children and young people to live safely within their families and wider family networks.**
- When this cannot be the case, then, following a direction of the courts, children can be taken into local authority care.

The **Children's Social Care National Framework** is a national document setting out the outcomes social care should achieve. It says these are:

- 1) Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need
- 2) Children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes
- 3) Children and young people are supported by their family network
- 4) Children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes

Range of services



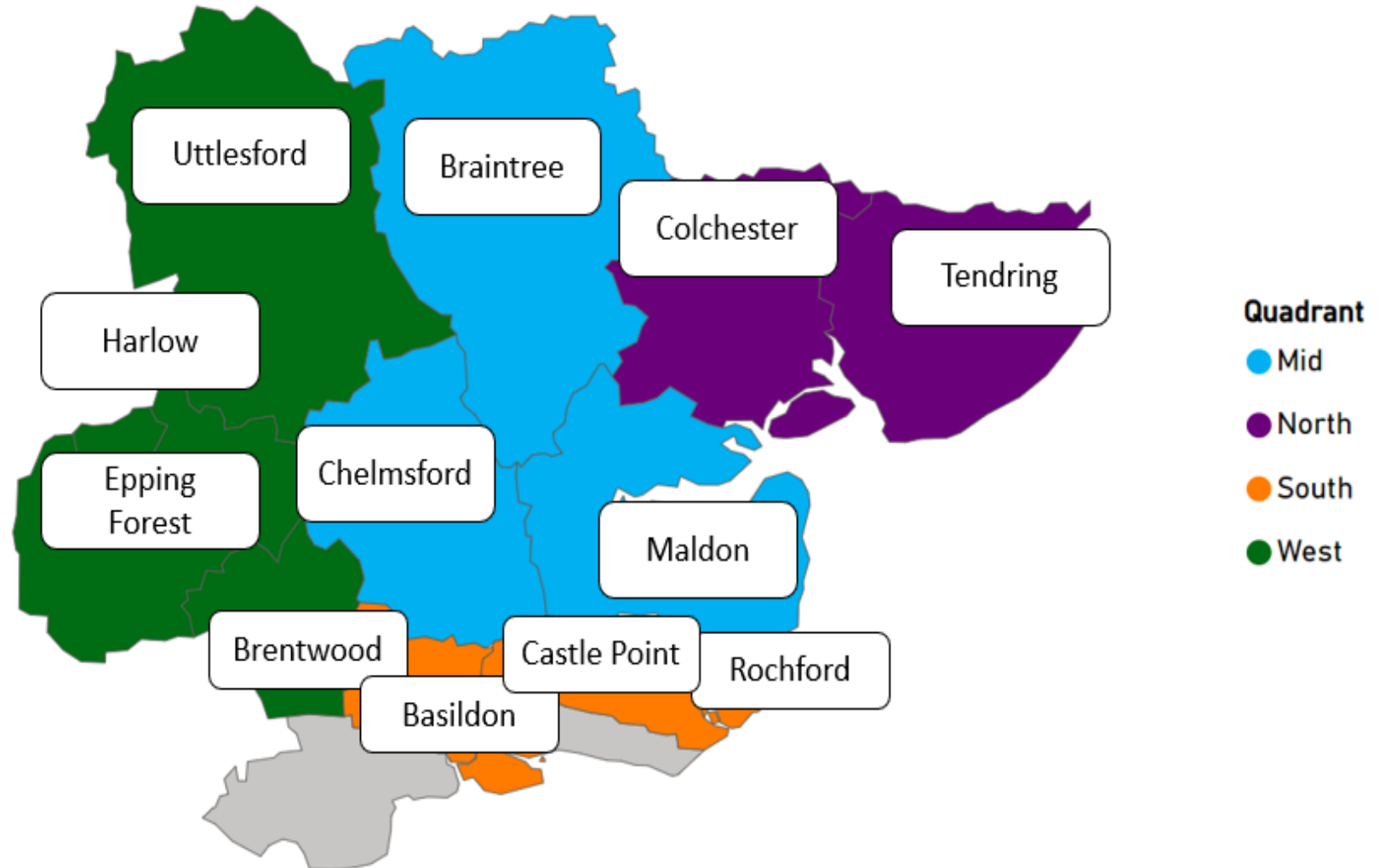
Children are defined as people aged **0-18 years**, however we also have responsibilities to **unborn children** and for young people up to the age of **25** if they have special educational needs or disabilities or they are a care leaver.

Quadrant Model

Children's Services operates through a **four locality (quadrant) model**.

There is a **Lead Director of Local Delivery** for each quadrant. They provide Operational Leadership and form part of the overall Functional Leadership Team (FLT).

Social work teams are quadrant based but there are also other teams that operate county-wide.



Children and Families – Senior Leadership Team



**Helen Lincoln, Executive
Director Children, Families and
Education**



**Nicky O'Shaughnessy,
Director of Local Delivery,
North (currently seconded
as Lead Director for Social
Care Reform and LGR)**



**Tina McElligott, Director
Local Delivery, West**



**Paul Secker,
Director of
Safeguarding**



**Gaye Cole, Director Local
Delivery, Mid**

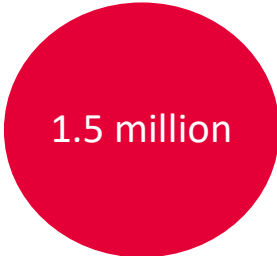


**Michelle Hayden-
Pepper, Director
Local Delivery,
South**



**Chris Martin,
Director of
Strategic
Commissioning
and Policy**

Context for Children's Services in Essex



Population 2nd largest council population in England



Children and Young People. 21% of the total population



Schools & Early Years Settings



Schools rated good/outstanding by OFSTED



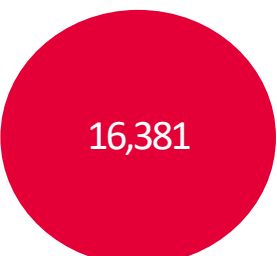
Additional school places forecasted to be required by 2033



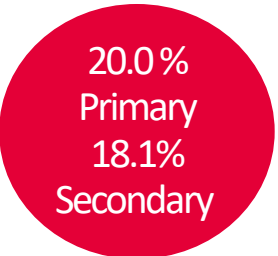
Children in our Care and care leavers



Children who are currently subject to child protection plans



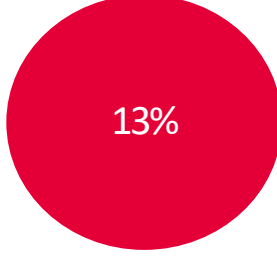
Essex children and young people with an **Education, Health & Care Plan for SEND**



Children and young people on **Free school meals**



Electively Home Educated children

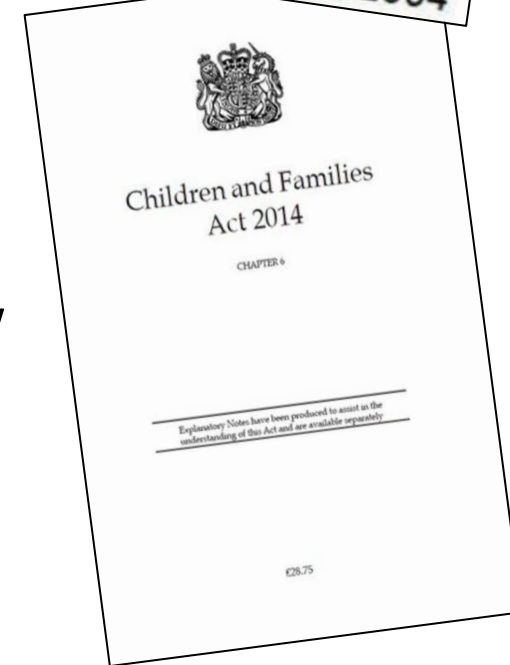
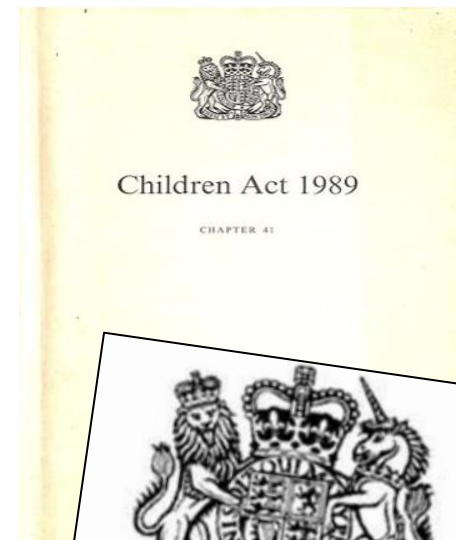


Children estimated to be living in **poverty**

- A large and growing population
- Affluence alongside deprivation
- About 6000 cases open to children Social Work services everyday
- Demand and caseload complexity is increasing
- Educational performance is generally good, but attainment gaps remain between certain groups
- Levels of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are growing
- An increasingly complex partnership landscape

Key legislative duties

- **The Children Act 1989** – *the core legislative framework for child protection* – local authorities must support and identify ‘children in need’ and make enquiries and act when children are at risk of harm.
- **The Children Act 2004** – responded to learning from the Victoria Climbié inquiry, introduced the concept of ‘*safeguarding*’ to legislation and new *multi-agency governance* arrangements for safeguarding and child protection
- **The Children and Families Act 2014** – *introduced the current SEND system*, which the Government is now reforming
- **The Children and Social Work Act 2017** – focuses on local authority responsibilities for *children in care and care leavers* including establishing local authorities as ‘*Corporate Parents*’
- **The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026** – requires local authorities to set up new ‘*Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams*’ and provides a range of new legal duties around *children not in school and care leavers*



Key documents

National:

- **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026** – core statutory guidance document setting out the *safeguarding responsibilities of local authorities and their partners*
- **Children’s Social Care National Framework** – sets national direction on the *purpose, principles, outcomes and enablers of children’s social care*
- **Ofsted Framework for Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services** – outlines how Ofsted make a judgement on whether a local authority is providing *good quality services for vulnerable children*

Local:

- **The SET Procedures** (The Southend, Essex and Thurrock Safeguarding Procedures) – sets local expectations on how agencies should *work together to protect children* aligned to the national ‘Working Together’
- **The Effective Support for Children and Families in Essex** – this sets out our *thresholds* for accessing different types and levels of services



The policy landscape – it's complex!

Crime and Policing Bill

Victims and Courts Bill

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026

Victims & Prisoners Act 2024

Online Safety Act 2023

Mental Health Act 2025

Sentencing Act 2026

Border, Security, Asylum & Immigration Act 2025

Families First
Partnership
Programme

Sexual abuse:
implementation IICSA /
Casey Review: Grooming
Inquiry; VAGW Strategy

Focus on Prevent,
Youth Violence,
Youth
Radicalisation,
Southport

Schools
White Paper
and SEND
reform

Reform of
Fostering
and
Adoption
Support

Reform of
Youth Justice
& secure
estate

Young
Futures
Programme
including
Hubs

Reform
of Ofsted
& CQC

Early Years: Best
Start in Life
Strategy: Childcare;
Best Start Hubs; EY
Education

National
Child
Poverty
Strategy

National Youth
Strategy &
investment in
youth provision

Review of
legal
frameworks:
CWD &
Kinship

NHS Ten
Year Plan

Safer
Digital
Futures

School standards;
Curriculum Review; new
education inspection &
accountability
framework

Regionalis
ation

Welfare
reform /
benefits
overhaul;
Get Britain
Working
White Paper

Crime &
Safety
Knife crime /
safer streets /
VAWG /
Policing
White Paper

Housing
standards,
tenants'
rights,
growth

Economy
& Skills
post-16
pathways

Neighbour
hoods:
Pride in
Place
Strategy

Tech and AI in
public services
/ growing
awareness of
tech & impact
of online world

Courts:
reform of
family &
criminal;
Sentencing
Review

Asylum:
Strengthening of
borders, crack
down on illegal
immigration, limits
to legal routes

Adult
Social
Care:
charging
reform

Devolution and LGR

Governance



- **Children's Services have strict internal and external governance and regulation.**
- We are **regularly inspected** – there are large scale full inspections and a variety of thematic inspections which we can be subject to – *we are due a full inspection of our social care and youth justice services within the next year*
- All **social care providers**, e.g. children's homes (including our own homes) are separately regulated and inspected
- All social workers must be **qualified and registered** and adhere to **professional standards**
- We have an internal '**Quality of Practice Framework**' including performance reporting, auditing and thematic reviews
- The **Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB)** provides our 'Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements' – we are legally required to have these in place. The ESCB supports **effective partnership working and** undertakes various activities to **ensure and improve the effectiveness** of safeguarding – including annual audits of agency safeguarding arrangements.
- We are subject to **member scrutiny**



Director and Lead Member Accountabilities

Every Local Authority must appoint a **Director of Children's Services (DCS)** who has statutory professional responsibility for the delivery of social care and education services in accordance with relevant legislation.

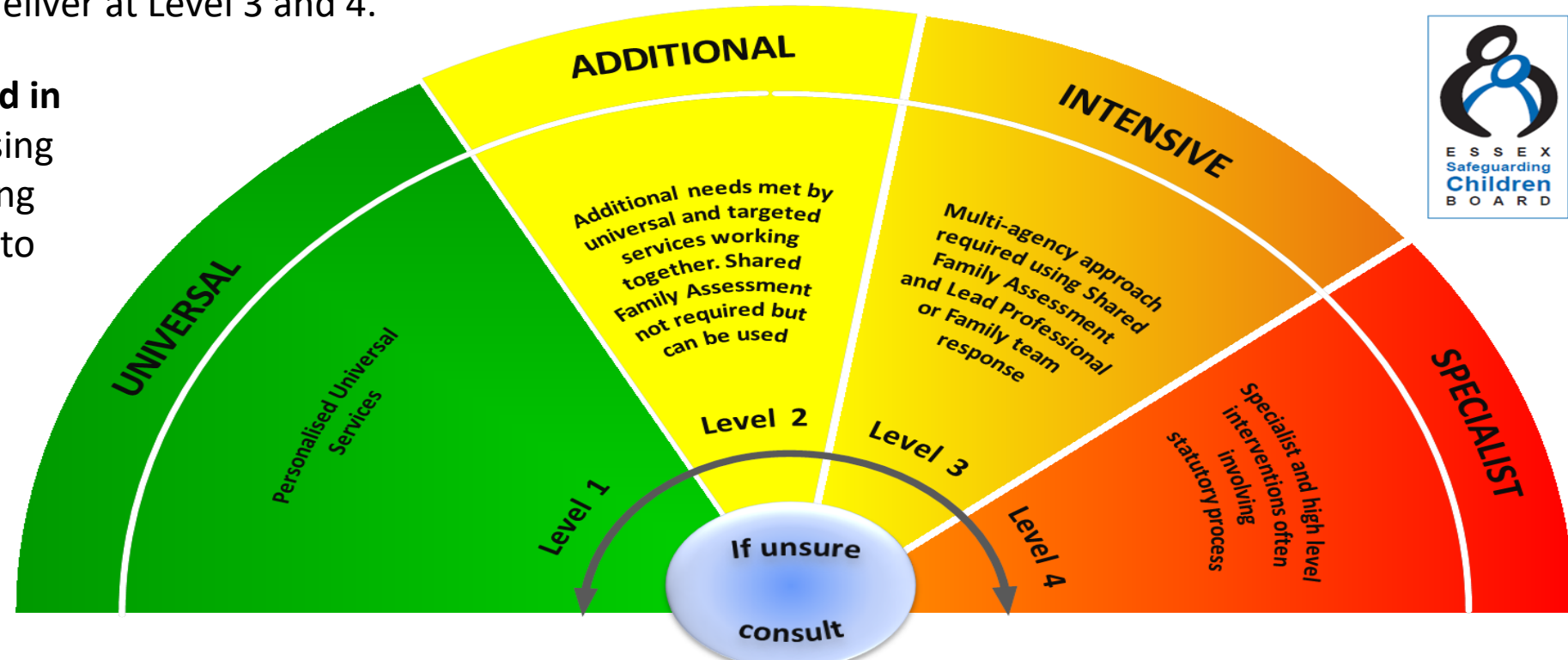
The DCS must:

- **Secure the provision of services necessary to address the needs of all children and young people, including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, and their families and carers**
- **Work with partners to improve the outcomes and wellbeing** of children and young people
- Take responsibility for the **performance** of children's services and education functions
- Establish **effective systems** for discharging functions
- Have regard to the **rights of the child** and ensure children and young people are **involved** in the development and delivery of services

Every Local Authority must also have a **Lead Member for Children's Services** who has statutory **political responsibility for the leadership, strategy and effectiveness** of children's services and education. The Lead member must provide **effective oversight** of the discharge of local authority functions, strong strategic leadership, and support and challenge to the DCS.

How do we deliver services: the Effective Support Windscreen

- We aim to ensure children and young people receive **the right help, at the right time, from the right service and in the right place to prevent the escalation of their needs.**
- We provide support early in the development or identification of a problem to stop it getting worse.
- Not all issues require social care; families should mostly be helped through accessing support in their communities.
- The **Essex Effective Support windscreen** conceptualises our thresholds for support across four different levels of service provision. Children's Services deliver at Level 3 and 4.
- We always aim to work **with and in partnership** with families, focusing on their strengths and supporting them to identify the 'solutions' to their problems.



A journey through services for children and families

Universal / Community Based Services

Accessible to all families through community health services, the voluntary sector, 'Family Hubs' etc
e.g. GPs, schools, leisure services, health visitors

Additional Support / Early Help / Family Help

Provided to families who need extra support on top of universal provision to improve their resilience and prevent the need for further intervention. Can be delivered by individual services or by different agencies working together in a coordinated manner. **e.g. commissioned parenting support, short breaks for disabled children, targeted youth work**

Intensive Support / Targeted Help

Provided to families where 'early help' and 'additional support' has not led to improvements. Generally provided through a coordinated multi-agency approach seeking to avoid the need for statutory intervention.
e.g. 'Family Solutions Teams'

Specialist and statutory services

Support provided to families with significant need / safeguarding concerns where, despite all other efforts to assist at lower levels of intervention, concerns remain about safety, welfare or development. Provided by social care in accordance with legal frameworks.
e.g. child in need, child protection plans, children in care, youth justice



Working in Partnership

Partnership working is at the heart of effective support for children and young people.

All agencies have responsibilities to safeguard and promote children's welfare, and the Police and Health have specific legal duties to facilitate effective safeguarding practice in the area alongside the local authority.

The partnership landscape across Essex is complex and engagement is coordinated and sustained through a network of different general and thematic partnerships at both county and local level.



Health and Wellbeing

- Integrated Care Systems; Integrated Care Boards; Integrated Care Partnerships x 3
- Health and Wellbeing Board
- District and Wellbeing Boards
- Locality Health Alliances x 5



Children's Partnership

- Essex Children's Partnership Board
- Local Children's Partnership Board x4; and Locality Based Practitioner Forums and Networks



Children's Thematic Partnership

- SET Children and Young People's Mental Health Education Board
- SET Parenting Reference Group
- Corporate Parenting Panel
- Children in Care and Leaving Care Partnership
- Locality Youth Strategy Groups
- C&F Hub Strategic Partnership Forum and Operational Group
- SEND Partnership Board and Local SEND Boards
- Local SEND Boards
- SET Domestic Abuse Board (All Age)
- Essex Domestic Abuse Board (All Age)
- All Age Carers Board
- Family Hub Advisory Boards



Wider Thematic Partnerships

- Essex Partnership; Essex Leaders and Chief Executives; Essex Strategic Coordination Group
- Essex Safeguarding Audits Board
- Essex Drug and Alcohol Partnership
- Safer Essex
- Community Safety Partnerships
- Essex County Council for Voluntary Youth Service and Wider Community and Voluntary Sector
- Essex Housing Officers Group
- Active Essex



Safeguarding

- Essex Safeguarding Children's Board and Sub-Groups
- Local Stay Safe Grups x 4 and Locally based Safeguarding Forums
- Locality MACE 1 and 2 - Missing and Child Exploitation
- SET Violence and Vulnerability Partnership
- PREVENT: Multi Agency Group and Channel Panel



Education

- Essex Education Taskforce Board
- Schools Partnership Board
- Schools Led Partnership
- Tending Strategic Education Board
- Schools Forum
- Headteachers Associations (County and Local); Federation of Essex Colleges; Essex School Governors Association

Different types of abuse and harm

- The four main types of abuse and harm are categorised as: **emotional, sexual, physical, and neglect.**
- In addition, children can also experience the following issues. Our understanding of the complexity of these issues, and their impact on child and young people is continually expanding.
 - **Social media and online abuse**
 - **Risk in the Community** – *this is a term describing threats children and young people face outside of their home and family, e.g. gangs, serious violence, exploitation and online harm*
 - **Domestic abuse** – *children living in homes where there is domestic abuse are victims even if they don't directly see or experience it*
 - **Criminal exploitation**
 - **Sexual exploitation**
 - **Radicalisation**
 - **Abuse linked to 'honour', faith or culture** – *e.g. forced marriage*
 - **Abuse resulting from parental substance misuse** – *which can also impact unborn babies*
 - **Self-harm and suicide attempts linked to poor emotional wellbeing and mental health**

Safeguarding

- **Safeguarding is a proactive approach that aims to prevent harm and promote welfare.**
 - **Child Protection is a specific reactive process that takes place when a child is at risk of or is experiencing significant harm.**
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- Child Protection has traditionally looked at what was happening within families or extended families; the focus was on responding to individual children who had been abused or neglected or those who were considered to be at risk of abuse or neglect
 - The concept of safeguarding evolved over time following learning from different high profile national cases of child deaths; this resulted in a growing realisation of the importance of protecting children from maltreatment through establishing wider systems that seek to promote their wellbeing and limit any threats which may harm them.
 - *Effective safeguarding should ultimately result in less need for child protection although risk cannot be eliminated entirely.*

What does safeguarding entail

Effective safeguarding is wide ranging and includes:

- **Safe recruitment** processes
- Systems for dealing with any **allegations** against professionals, carers and volunteers
- **Training** programmes for all staff working with children and families
- Effective systems **information-sharing** between agencies and to support them to **work together**.
- Being **child / whole family focused**
- **Listening to what children and young people say** and **asking them what they think**
- Ensuring children and young people feel **safe and well-cared for in all environments** – at home, at school, in their communities, at sports and leisure activities, when out and about, and online – this includes ensuring they are safe from bullying, youth crime, exploitation, domestic abuse, the impacts of substance misuse and mental health

How members may become involved in children's services

- ✓ All Councillors carry a **general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children** and should exercise their powers to support the local authority to develop effective service provision in this area
- ✓ **You may see / become involved in negative publicity** about the Social Care services
- ✓ **Constituents may approach you**, they may be distressed, they may make complaints about services, about the way they may have been treated, about the decisions made by Social Care and Partner Agencies; they may in some instances be justified, in others they may not
- ✓ **Constituents may complain** that their child has been 'taken away'; they may be a grandparent struggling to have contact/access to their grandchild; they may be concerned about their child's mental health and feel not enough is being done
- ✓ **You are likely to receive queries from constituents and will want to make Members Enquiries** - though there are constraints on what personal and detailed information can be shared by the Council with Members
- ✓ Through **Overview and Scrutiny Committees** – you should question whether we are delivering effectively and improving outcomes for children

Children in Care

Children in the care of the locality authority will mainly be:

- Children who are '**accommodated**' under a **voluntary agreement** with parents (known as 'Section 20', Children Act 1989), this could be to support families during temporary periods of crisis or instability, and there would be an intention to support parents and have the child return home
- Children who are subject to a '**Care Order**' (by order of a court under Section 31, Children Act 1989), where there are very significant concerns for safety, or where after an extended period of support it has been deemed by the local authority that parents are unable to secure the safety and welfare of the child



Most children and young people are in care under a Care Order (nationally and locally) – meaning they have *experienced significant levels of trauma and disadvantage*.

The intention will always be to seek to **reunite** children with their birth families if safe to do so, and to care for children in family-based settings (e.g. with foster carers or within their wider family networks) whenever possible.

What is corporate parenting / co-parenting?

When children are in care local authorities are legally required to act as their **'corporate parent'**. This means doing for children in care / care leavers all the things that we expect any parent to do for their child:

- ✓ Acting in their best interests, and promoting safety, physical and mental health and wellbeing
- ✓ Encouraging them to express their views, wishes and feelings, and taking them into account
- ✓ Helping them to make the best use of services provided by the local authority and partners
- ✓ Promoting high aspirations, and seeking to secure the best outcomes
- ✓ Helping them have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- ✓ Preparing them for adulthood and independent living

In Essex, following engagement with children and young people in care and care leavers we call Corporate Parenting **'Co-Parenting' as the young people felt this was less 'business-like' and better captured the idea of lots of people working together to support them.**

Co-parenting responsibilities of *all* Members

- ✓ To be aware of your corporate parenting role and shared responsibility for ensuring the needs of children are met
- ✓ To be aware of the profile and needs of children in care in the authority area – *take up opportunities offered to get to know our young people*
- ✓ To consider the impact of all council decisions on children in care and care leavers – always think ‘*what if this were my child?*’, ‘*would this be good enough for my child?*’
- ✓ To receive information about quality of care and services for children in care and care leavers – *challenge and question this*
- ✓ To ensure action is being taken to address any shortcomings
- ✓ To consistently champion the needs of children in care and care leavers in their area – in all arenas and forums – *support and promote local initiatives, e.g. development of work experience opportunities and housing initiatives; encourage organisations to become ‘Fostering Friendly’*

Consider signing the ‘Co-Parenting Pledge’ to show your support and commitment

Youth Justice

Local Authorities are responsible for **Youth Justice Services** for children and young people who are **at risk of offending or who have offended**.

The aim is to **reduce offending and reoffending**, contributing to safer communities and fewer victims. Support provided includes:

- Early help to those identified at risk of offending
- Out of court disposals
- Attending court and supporting court orders
- Bail packages
- Maintaining contact with young people who are detained
- Restorative Justice



Young people can be **remanded by the courts into local authority accommodation** and when this is the case they become 'children in care'.

In line with national policy, Youth Justice Services take a '**child first approach**', which means putting children at the heart of service provision, seeing the whole child, identifying/tackling the influences on offending and identifying/promoting the influences that help them to move to pro-social, positive behaviour.

What do Children's Services cost?

- **£241.5m** - 26/27 controllable budget for Children and Families.
- Of which **£138.7m** will be spent on **1,247** Children in Care placements and **£89m** on staffing.
- **£10,000** – average cost per week for a residential placement.
- **£2m** – Capital budget for adaptations and ECC residential homes.
- **£12m** - Children's Risk Reserve established specifically for Children in Care costs.
- **£337.2m** – Budget expected to grow to **(40%)** from 26/27 to 29/30.
- Children & Families have **£8m** savings to deliver in 26/27 through a range of efficiency, productivity, procurement and staffing savings.

Children in Care placement costs are our biggest financial challenge. A wide-ranging work programme is in place to address this however the main drivers of cost are national and outside of our control.

Key issues and challenges

Workforce recruitment,
retention, capacity
(including foster carers)

Growing demand and
complexity

Mental health system
under strain

Market stability and
sustainability

Partnerships and
Integration

Financial pressures

Education that works for all

Growing pressures in SEND

Continuing to deliver while
planning for LGR

Questions

