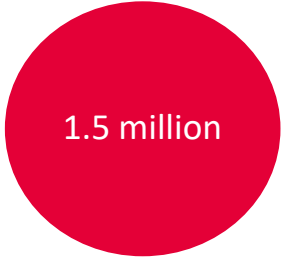


# ECC Member Briefing: Children's Social Care

# Context for Children's Services in Essex



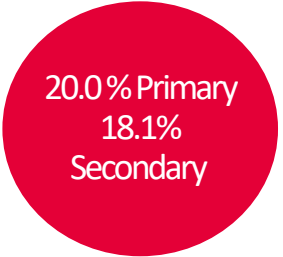
**Population** 2<sup>nd</sup> largest council population in England



**Children and Young People.** 21% of the total population



**Schools** rated good/outstanding by OFSTED



Children and young people **Free school meals**



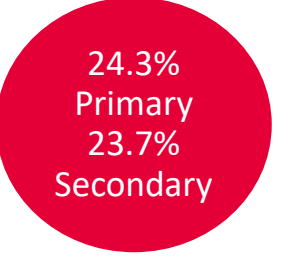
**Schools**



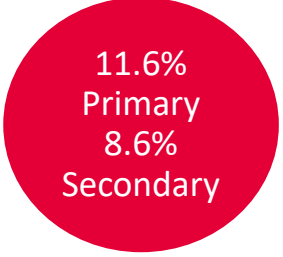
Total number of **EHE** on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025 across Essex



**Quadrant**  
 ● Mid  
 ● North  
 ● South  
 ● West



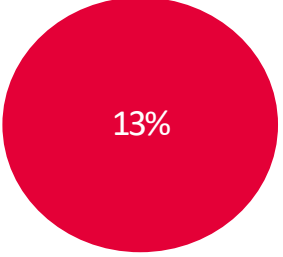
School population from **global majority communities**



**English as an additional language**



**EHCP** represents 4.2% of total pupils in Essex

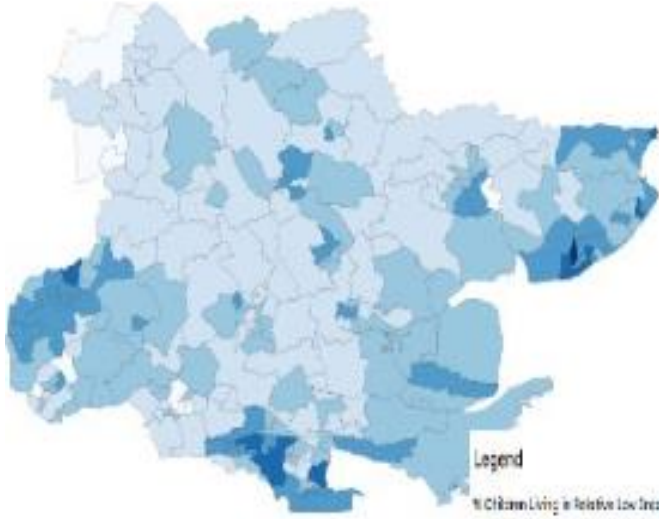


Children estimated to be living in **poverty**



**Additional school places** forecasted to be required by 2031

Children living in **relative low-income families**:



**Legend**  
 % Children Living in Relative Low Income Families, 2021/22  
 ● 0-4%  
 ● 5-10%  
 ● 11-15%  
 ● 16-20%  
 ● 21-25%  
 ● 26%

**Ethnic diversity has increased** – in 2011 ethnic groups other than White British accounted for 9.2% of residents, compared to 14.9% recorded in 2021.

[Map source: Department for Work and Pensions Children in Relative Low Income Families, 2021/22]

# 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. Social Care 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.

Services include:

Commissioned  
community based  
early help

Targeted early help  
for families with  
complex needs

Support for 'children  
in need'

Supporting children  
with disabilities and  
their parents and  
carers

Child Protection and  
Safeguarding

Support and  
accommodation of  
children in care  
including kinship  
care, fostering and  
residential

Support for Care  
Leavers

Youth Justice

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 family networks.** When this cannot be the case, then, following a direction of the courts, children can be taken into care. When this happens, local authorities become their '**corporate parents**' and must act to promote their wellbeing and positive outcomes in the same way as would be expected of any other parent.

# Being a Corporate (or Co-) Parent

The **Children and Social Work Act 2017** says that when a child or young person comes into the care of a council or is a 'care leaver' the council becomes their corporate parent. This means the council should:

- act in their best interests, and promote their physical and mental health and wellbeing
- encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings, and take them into account
- make sure they have access to services
- make sure children and young people are safe, with stable home lives, relationships and education or work
- promote high aspirations and try to secure the best outcomes for them
- prepare them for adulthood and independent living

**All councillors and officers are corporate parents**, including those in district councils. It is therefore **every** councillor's responsibility to make sure that the council is meeting these duties towards children in care and care leavers. Every councillor and officer has **a responsibility to act for those children and young people as a parent would for their own child**. When ever any service is being reviewed or decision being taken that could impact on children in care you should consider *'what if this were my child, would this be good enough for them, if not what will I do about it?'*

In Essex we have adopted the term **'co-parenting'** following consultation with care leavers – they felt this better reflected that fact that lots of people need to work together to help them achieve their best outcomes – everyone must work together to be effective parents.

# Changing nature of Children's Social Care

- The [Children's Social Care National Framework](#) sets out the current role and purpose of children's social care, how it should be delivered and the outcomes that should be achieved.
- **Society's expectations** on children's social care change over time and can be contradictory – social care services are either overly and unduly interventionist or inept at protecting children. The expectation that social care should keep children safe and immediately act to remove them from harm can be in opposition to the principles of the **Children Act 1989** which emphasises parental responsibility and the paramountcy of the family. Ultimate decision making also sits with the courts.
- Societal attitudes to social care are heavily influenced by **media reporting** of high-profile cases of failure in child protection – e.g. Baby P - these cases impact heavily on staff **morale**.
- **Childhood is changing** in nature, and children are subject to **growing external** threats and pressures – increasing and more sophisticated criminal exploitation, online harm, radicalisation, worsening knife crime.
- There are also **enhanced pressures on families** (including growing poverty, worsening mental health, increasing SEND, changes in family make up, weakening of family and community networks) which are impacting on family and parental resilience.
- Overall, this is resulting in **increasing demand** on services and **increasing complexity** in caseloads.

# Safeguarding

It is the responsibility of local authorities and relevant partners to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people under **Section 11 of the Children Act 2004**.

Expectations of how this should be done are set out in [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#).

- **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 experiencing significant harm.
- Effective safeguarding practices across an area, delivered by multi-agency partnerships, should ultimately limit the number of children requiring child protection.
- Risk however cannot be fully removed from systems – we work with **‘safe uncertainty’**.



## Safeguarding Children Boards

Within local authorities **‘Safeguarding Partners’** are legally responsible for the effective operation of safeguarding practice.

These are the Local Authority, the Police, and Health.

The Safeguarding Partners must establish **‘Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements’** to enable co-operation and ensure effectiveness and should ensure the appropriate representation of other agencies (including education) within these.

In Essex, a **Safeguarding Children Board** exists through which these arrangements are discharged. To assist multi-agency working, the [SET Safeguarding Procedures](#) are agreed across Essex, Southend and Thurrock.

Safeguarding Boards are just one of a number of partnership forums through multi-agency responsibilities related to social care and safeguarding are discharged.

# Legislative Duties – key acts:

## Children Act 1989

Provides the legislative framework for child welfare and child protection. Places duties on LAs:

- Identify ‘children in need’ and provide services and support to promote and ensure their welfare
- Make **child protection enquiries** whenever there is reason to think that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer harm
- Safeguard and promote the welfare of **looked after children**

Defines ‘**parental responsibility**’ and sets out the principle that children should, wherever possible, be brought up by their families.

## Children and Families Act 2014

Sets out expectations on LAs and others to safeguard and promote the welfare of **specific vulnerable groups** of children and young people including those with SEND. Establishes the **current SEND system** including Education, Health and Care Plans, Local Offers, and expanding the rights of parents of children with SEND.

## Children Act 2004

The Children Act 2004 responded to learning, primarily from the Victoria Climbié inquiry, and provides legal duties to a range of agencies to **safeguard and promote the welfare of children**.

The Act establishes ‘**Local Safeguarding Children Boards**’ (now called ‘**Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements**’) to coordinate the work of different agencies in safeguarding.

## The Children and Social Work Act 2017

Covers specific provisions for looked after children and care leavers including placing duties on local authorities to:

- Act as **corporate parents**
- Publish **care leaver local offers**
- Appoint **personal advisors** for care leavers
- **Promote educational achievement** of looked after children

# Accountability Framework

Social work must be delivered in accordance with legislation and is subject to an extensive professional, statutory and regulatory oversight regime.....

<b>Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Framework</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One ILACS Inspection approx. every 3 years – covers all areas; can be standard or short depending on previous outcomes</li><li>• Approx. 18 months following an ILACS – 1 x Joint Area Targeted Inspection (thematic multi-agency inspection); or a 1 x Focused Visit (social care only)</li><li>• Annual conversation with Ofsted (requiring annually updated self-evaluation)</li><li>• Monitoring visits as required</li></ul>	<b>Casework Accountability</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Internal audit and performance systems</li><li>• Family Courts</li><li>• Criminal Courts</li><li>• Coronial Court</li><li>• Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (local / national)</li><li>• Professional Standards bodies</li></ul>
<b>SEND Framework</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1 x inspection every 3-5 years; can also be selected for SEND Thematic inspections</li><li>• Monitoring visits as required</li></ul>	
<b>Youth Justice Framework</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conducted by HM Inspectorate of Probation – can be Full Joint Inspections of services causing concern or shorter quality screening with a specific focus</li></ul>	
<b>Social Care Common Inspection Framework</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Applicable to social care providers, e.g. children's homes, fostering agencies, supported accommodation – inspection outcomes can impact on sufficiency of provision available to LAs</li><li>• Most provision is also required to be registered with Ofsted; Ofsted regulate provision to ensure it meets set criteria</li></ul>	
<b>Education Framework</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Applicable to schools and education providers including early years</li></ul>	

# Sufficiency Duty (Children Act 1989)

Local Authorities are under **legal duties to secure sufficient suitable homes for their children in care**. Doing so is a **significant and on-going challenge** and is a **primary driver of cost pressures** on children's services budgets. Local Authorities have 'sufficiency strategies' which generally focus on keeping children out of care, accommodating children wherever possible in less costly forms of care, and expanding the availability of care options in the market or internally.

**Challenges** result from **growing numbers of children in care**, **greater complexity in the needs of children** requiring homes, a national **shortage of specialist accommodation**, issues with **recruitment and retention** of foster carers and other care staff, and the challenges of working in the **private market** where cost is high, and choice is limited.

The **provider market** consists of:

- Internal and external foster carers
- Internal and external residential homes including secure accommodation
- Supported Accommodation / Semi Independent Accommodation (for older children)

Children in care can also live with family members under **kinship** or **special guardianship** arrangements.

Local Authorities must place children to whom care is being provided in accommodation that is **registered and inspected by Ofsted**. Placement in **unregistered provision** is a last resort and should only be very short term, it can however be required due to complexity of need and lack of suitable alternative registered provision. Unregistered provision is significantly costly.

# Statutory Guidance on Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members

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 both children's services and education functions
- **Establish effective systems for discharging functions**
- **Have regard to the rights of the child** in discharging functions 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.

# Policy Landscape – it's complex and extensive!

**Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill**

**Crime and Policing Bill** – knife crime, VAWG, child sexual abuse & exploitation, mandatory reporting

**Sentencing Bill** – offender management, support for victims, reform CJS

**Border, Security, Asylum & Immigration Bill** – reversal of measures in Illegal Migration Act (relevant to SMC)

**Victims & Prisoners Act 24** – co-operation duty re sexual abuse, domestic abuse & serious violence; removal of PR from murderers

**Online Safety Act 23** – new regulatory framework to improve online safety

**Families First Partnership Programme**

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

Focus on **Prevent, Youth Violence, Youth Radicalisation**

**SEND reform** (Schools White Paper in Autumn)

Continued drive on **school standards**; Curriculum Review; new education inspection & accountability framework

**Young Futures Programme** including Hubs

**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 framework for **CWD**

**NHS Ten Year Plan Reform of Mental Health Act**

Reform of **Ofsted & CQC**

Reform of **Youth Justice & secure estate**

**Welfare reform / benefits overhaul;** Get Britain Working White Paper

**Knife crime / safer streets / VAWG**

**Housing standards**, tenants' rights, growth

**Economy & Skills** post-16 pathways

**Neighbourhoods:** 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

**Adult Social Care:** charging reform

**Devolution and LGR**

# Core policy changes

Core national policy changes currently impacting on social care are:

- The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill
- The Families First Partnership Programme
- The Schools White Paper (due soon)
- The national Best Start in Life Strategy
- The NHS Ten Year Plan
- Local Government Reorganisation

# Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill – requirements on LAs

## Social Care

- Expanding the use of 'Family Group Decision Making' to connect family networks
- Establishment 'Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams'
- Strengthened information sharing duties and Single Unique Identifier introduced
- New offence: ill-treatment of 16- & 17-year-olds in registered provision
- Increased flexibility re child employment
- More help for care leavers: 'Staying Close' expanded, development of care leaver local offers
- Publication of 'kinship care' local offers
- Corporate Parenting duties expanded to other bodies
- Measures to help with placement sufficiency: Regional Care Co-operatives to be statutory, stronger national financial regulation of care market; new statutory framework for accommodation of children deprived of liberty
- Restrictions on use of agency workforce

## Education

- Stronger role for LAs over home education – consent required where safeguarding concerns, powers to see children in homes; LAs to maintain not in school registers; streamlining of School Attendance Order processes
- Legal duty to promote educational achievement of all children with social worker and in kinship care
- Legal duty on LAs and schools to co-operate in place planning to meet needs of community
- LA power to object to decisions of Schools Adjudicator re admissions numbers
- Not all new schools need be academies
- Education must participate in Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements

# Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill – requirements on schools

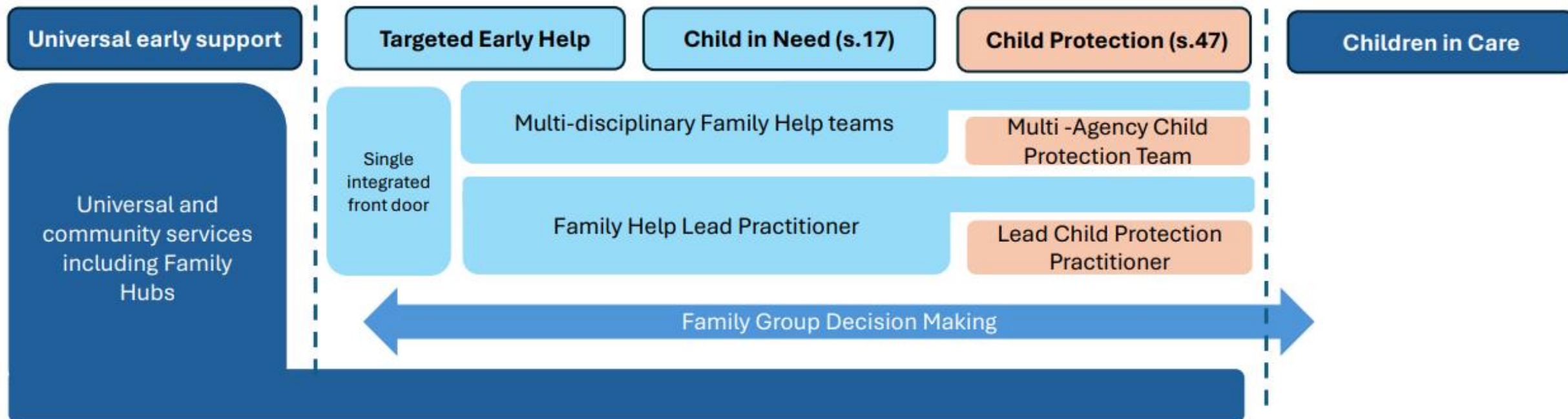
## Schools

- All primaries to provide free breakfast clubs
- Limit to branded uniform
- Enhanced inspection of independent educational establishments
- Broadening of teacher misconduct regulations
- Variety of measures to equalise requirements on maintained schools and academies
- End forced academisation of failing schools

# The Families First Partnership Programme will take a whole-system approach to rebalancing children's social care toward earlier intervention – Family Help is a key element of this ambition

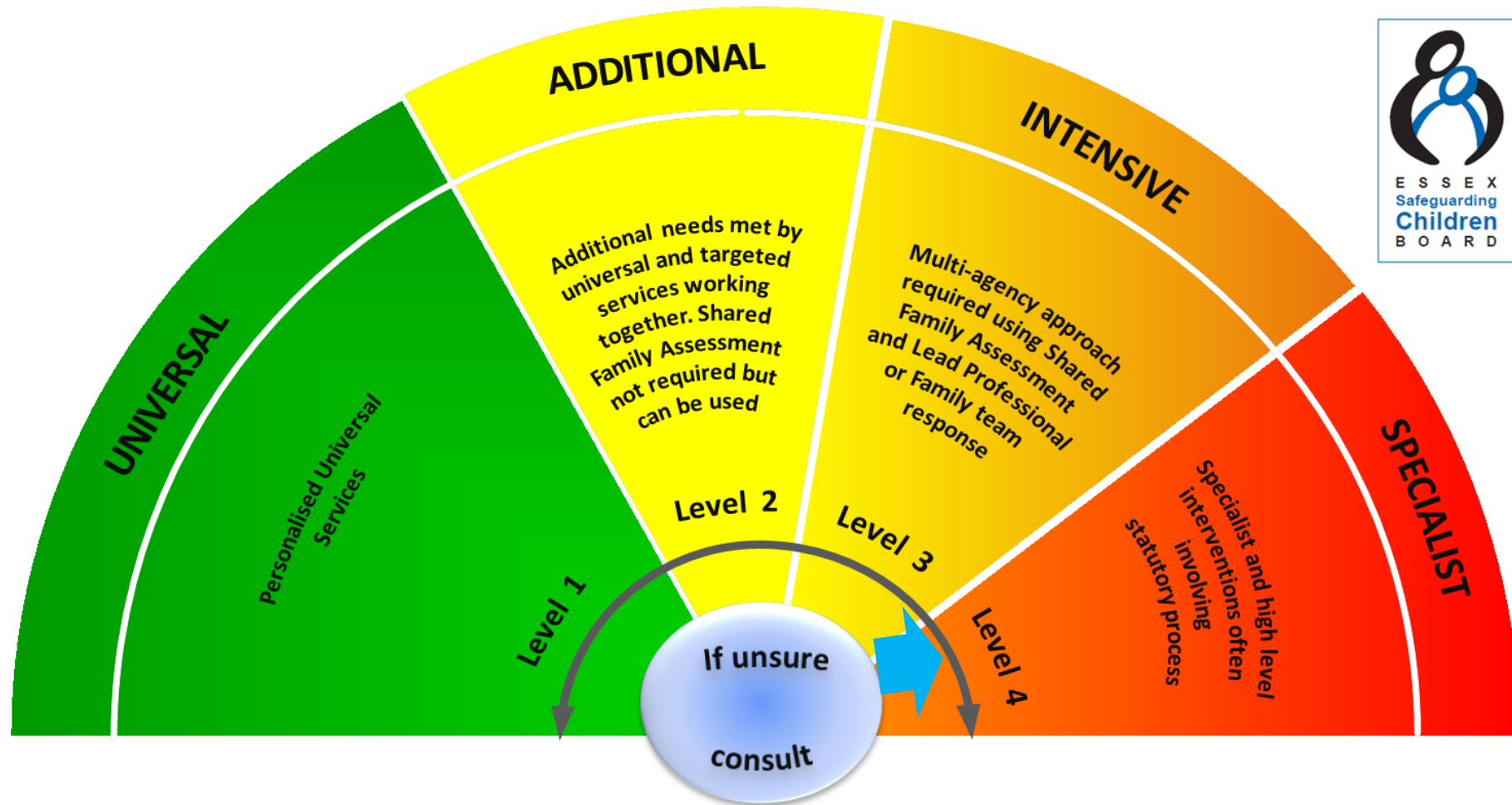
*Locally designed systems that meet the needs of the population with effective, integrated and joined up services with partners*

## An integrated system of Family Help and Multi-Agency Child Protection



Informed by local co-design with children and families, partners, and the community, based on local context, population needs assessments and evidence of best practice.

# Effective Support for Children & Families – “The Windscreen”



# Customer Journey

All local authorities are required to publish their **thresholds** for service provision. In Essex the aim is to ensure children receive **the right help, at the right time from the right service or place to prevent the escalation of need.**

## Universal / Community Based Services

Accessible to all families through community health services, 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 / Supporting Families type 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

# Children and Families Rates per 10,000 by District

	Basildon	Braintree	Brentwood	Castle Point	Chelmsford	Colchester	Epping Forest	Harlow	Maldon	Rochford	Tendring	Uttlesford	Southend	Thurrock
<b>C+F Referrals</b>	203.1	168.6	90.5	137.2	140.1	199.2	115.5	198.1	141	131.3	262.8	82	346.8	406.3
<b>S47s</b>	46.6	62.1	15.1	24.8	48.7	61.8	17.5	34.3	65.3	27.3	72.1	10.3	116.1	105.9
<b>CIN Plans</b>	40.7	55.4	25.3	40.4	40.6	55.9	35.8	53.3	41.4	31.3	57.1	35.4	71.5	97.7
<b>CP Plans</b>	20.9	25.4	10.3	11	18.3	23.1	11.9	25	23.9	10.8	43.9	1	27.4	26.9
<b>CIC Plans</b>	31.9	34.2	9	24.8	30.7	32.1	17.5	49.1	19.1	9.7	57.5	12.3	81.9	63.3

C&F Referrals - Referrals made to the local authority for support / assessment

Section 47s – inquiries of the local authority here there is reason to suspect a child may be at risk of or is suffering harm

CIN Plans – Child in Need Plans - children who are assessed to be needing additional help and support because of risks to their development or health.

Child Protection Plans – Children with a Plan where it is assessed they are at risk of suffering harm

CIC Plans – Children in Care Plans – Plans for Children in Care covering the approach to their care and securing of good outcomes

# Partnership Working

Partnership working is at the heart of effective support for children and young people. The Partnership landscape across Greater Essex is complex. Partnership engagement is sustained and facilitated through (amongst others):

3 Local Safeguarding Children Boards – providing statutory ‘Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements’

Children’s Partnership Boards /  
SEND Partnership Boards /  
Mental Health Partnership Boards  
/ Children in Care Boards

Violence and Vulnerability Units  
/ Partnerships

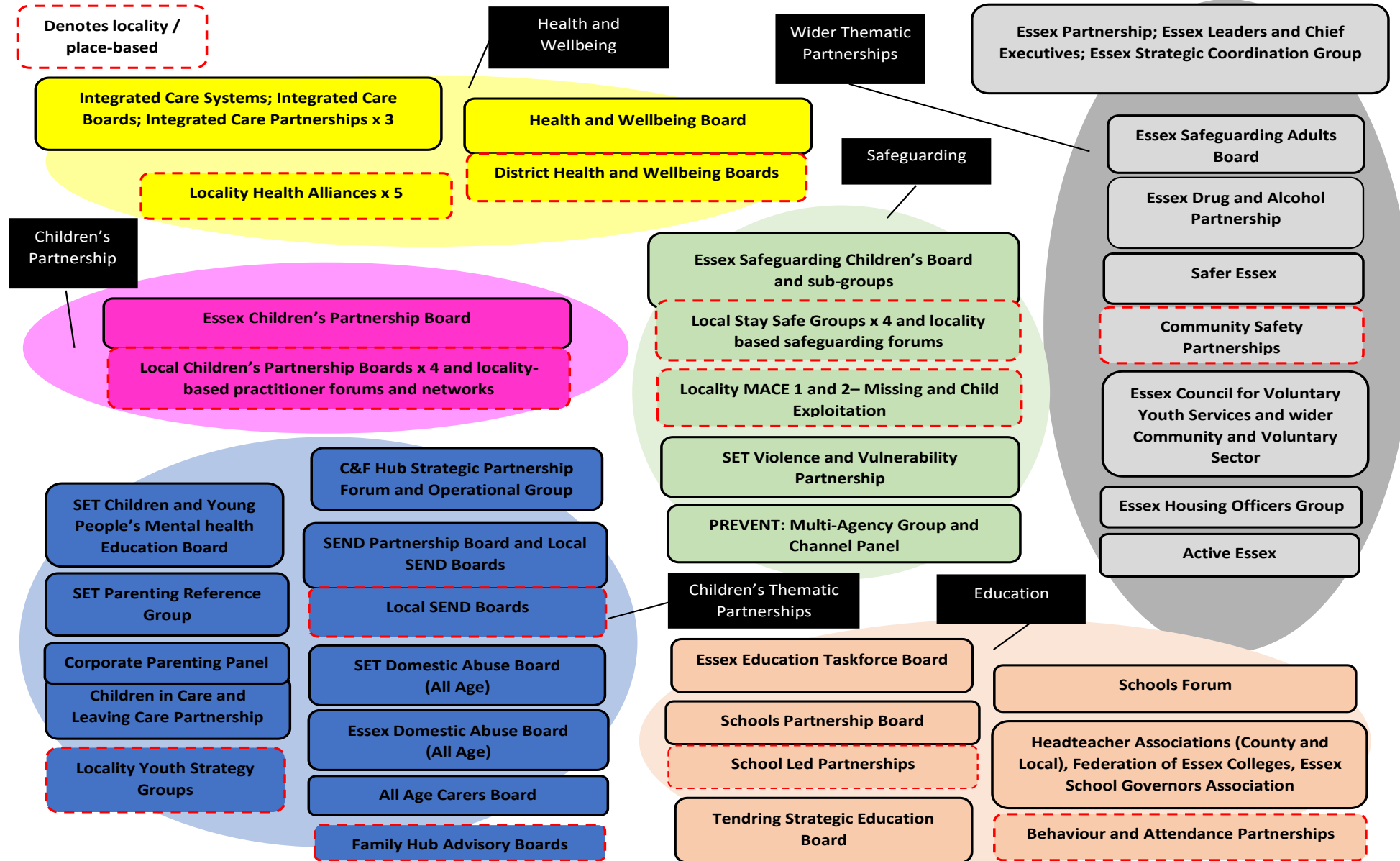
Schools Partnerships

SET Domestic Abuse Board /  
individual LA Domestic Abuse  
Boards

3 x Health and Wellbeing Boards  
/ 3 x Integrated Care  
Partnerships

Across the SET area there are several **joint commissioning arrangements** – for example for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services are commissioned for Southend, Essex and Thurrock. There are also some shared services arrangements, e.g. ECC provides the Emergency Duty Service for Southend.

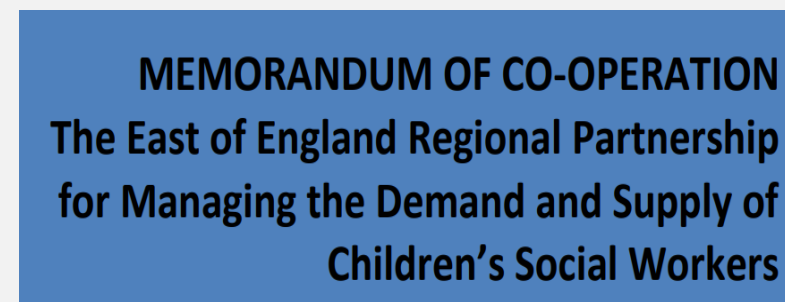
# Partnership Arrangements



- It's complex!
- Partnership working in Essex is generally strong with good engagement
- Education is well-represented on both strategic and local level Safeguarding Boards and the Children's Partnership.
- We advocate for more aligned and effective use of resources in place-based working
- Working across 3 ICBs is challenging. We advocate for a consistent offer across the county for children's health and wellbeing. The creation of a single Essex ICB is welcomed.

# Regional Working

There is a strong commitment across Southend, Essex and Thurrock to maximising on the potential benefits of engaging with other local authorities in the Eastern Region to deliver certain aspects of work and learn from one another. Key initiatives include:



Essex County Council is also a DfE commissioned provider of **Sector Led Improvement Services** – meaning it works alongside other authorities facing challenges to provide tailored support.

# Conditions of success for effective Social Care Services

A unifying use of theoretical models of evidence-based social work practice

Service design which minimises the number of changes to key worker / transfer between teams

Aspirant and system-wide approach to improvement and performance

Relentless focus on recruitment, development and retention

Clearly articulated vision and values

Appropriate practical support including business support, performance, IT, systems

Whole systems approach to strategic planning and service delivery

Small enough teams to allow team managers to know staff and families

Manageable and regularly reviewed workloads

An operational culture of dialogue, reflective thinking, feedback, learning and support

High quality care planning and sufficiency to meet care need

Agility to respond to changing demands

# 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.

# Finance

- We remain a comparatively low spending authority per 10,000.
- For 2025/26 Children and Families is forecast to overspend by £15m despite a significant 21% increase to the baseline budget, the main driver being costs of residential care and the change in our placement mix requiring more external residential placements.
- Predictions indicate the budget will continue to grow by over 50% by 2028/29.
- Within this Medium-Term Resource Strategy (MTRS) Children & Families have £6.8m savings to deliver in 2025/26 through a range of efficiency, productivity and staffing savings. The savings value cumulatively increases to £10.4m in 2026/27.
- Core financial risks within the MTRS are:
  - Delivery of the fostering business case
  - The volatility of Separated Migrant Children costs, and grant funding which does not cover costs
  - Delivery of the internal residential programme
  - Continued growth in remand costs and the uncertainty around the grant funding
  - The sustainability of the Children’s Social Care grant

	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
	Budget	Draft Budget	Draft Budget	Draft Budget	Draft Budget
QUADRANT	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Mid	54.6	60.0	64.6	68.9	74.4
North	48.2	53.8	58.6	62.8	68.4
South	46.3	51.6	56.0	59.9	65.3
West	45.9	48.7	54.0	58.7	65.2
Commissioning	16.3	17.0	15.9	16.0	16.1
Safeguarding	5.4	5.6	5.7	5.8	5.9
Management	(6.2)	3.6	5.4	5.8	5.9
<b>Excluding SC grants</b>	<b>210.6</b>	<b>240.3</b>	<b>260.3</b>	<b>277.9</b>	<b>301.2</b>
Social care grantd	(51.1)	(57.8)	(57.8)	(57.8)	(57.8)
<b>Children &amp; Families Non-DSG</b>	<b>159.5</b>	<b>182.5</b>	<b>202.4</b>	<b>220.1</b>	<b>243.4</b>

# Risks and Issues



Workforce  
recruitment,  
retention and  
capacity



Placement  
sufficiency,  
placement  
market



Growing demand  
and complexity



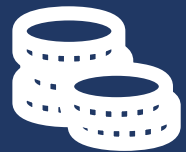
Partnerships  
and Integration



Mental health  
system is under  
strain



Financial  
pressures



Growing  
deprivation and  
family strain



Education and  
SEND system  
not delivering  
for all



External threats to  
CYP – violence,  
exploitation,  
online

# Local Government Reorganisation

## Opportunities

- ✓ Alignment of social care, housing and planning
- ✓ Integration of social care with revenues and benefits, leisure etc – enhancing prevention
- ✓ Enhanced local partnership working, including around schools
- ✓ Opportunities to address drivers of demand through Mayoral Authorities
- ✓ Greater consistency of approach across Essex, Southend and Thurrock
- ✓ Opportunity to improve performance through enforced need to review and change
- ✓ Potential joint commissioning opportunities across Greater Essex

## Risks

- Safeguarding – disruption has impact on safeguarding
- Capacity – lack of capacity to deliver change and BAU
- Workforce – impact on recruitment and retention due to uncertainty
- Loss of economies of scale – impacts on ability to deliver specialist teams, training and development
- Placement market destabilisation
- Impact on partnership working
- Data and systems – failure to safely integrate
- Inspection – disruption causing downgrading in inspection outcomes
- Non-delivery of intended benefits

# Questions?