



SCRUTINY REPORT

OCTOBER 2021 - MARCH 2023

Essex Safeguarding Children Board

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Foreword from the Independent Chair

I am delighted to introduce the annual report of the Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB) for 2021-23. After the introduction of the new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements in September 2019, the three Statutory Safeguarding Partners (Police, Clinical Commissioning Groups, and the Council's Children's Social Care) worked effectively 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 without doubt further strengthened the partnership, leaving strong foundations for future joint working. In the current reporting period, the partnership has continued to work extremely well together, responding to new and evolving challenges. There has been very careful consideration of the impact of restructure within the NHS, and Health colleagues have provided regular updates on the prioritisation of children's safeguarding during this time of change.

The partnership continues to deal with a significant number of cases requiring a review, and again has responded well. Although there have been some delays in extracting the learning from some of 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. Stay Safe Chairs and Vice Chairs now meet regularly with the Chairs of the ESCB Sub-Committees, in order to improve and enhance communication.

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 is also monitoring national proposals such as those in the draft Working Together 2023, in order to monitor the change in expectations, and to ensure that the already effective partnership in Essex implements the changes required, while maintaining and further developing the strengths of the current partnership, and

local safeguarding practice. 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

Section 1 The Partnership

Essex Contextual Information

Estimated population of 1.5 million people	2 nd largest county in England by population size
Children and young people make up 21% of our population (315,000)	3.6% of the school population is supported with an Education and Health Care Plan
Around 61,000 children are taught in Essex's 228 maintained schools and 160,000 are taught in 322 Academies	91% of schools are judged as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted
13% of our children are estimated to be living in Relative Low Income households, and this rises to 25% in some locality areas	Just over 19% of children at primary school and nearly 17% at secondary school access free school meals
85.1% of the population is White/ British	7 of the top 10 other languages used in Essex are of European origin. English as an additional language is used by 10.7% at Primary age and 8% at Secondary age

Partnership Arrangements

We continue to have strong collaborative relationships, at strategic, managerial and operational levels. There are understandably different perspectives/ thoughts about practice at times, but it is always how we resolve any such differences which is important; there are minimal escalations of differences as the partnership is mature enough to have the conversations and reach agreements or meaningful ways forward.

Our 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 five organisations who are jointly responsible by law for the partnership arrangements for keeping children safe:

- Essex County Council
- Essex Police
- Three Integrated Care Boards covering the county of Essex

We continue to have a wide range of partners represented on the Executive including representatives from education, key health providers, the voluntary sector, probation, and the district, cities and borough councils. The Essex County Council Lead Member for Children's Services also attends the Executive.

Independent Chair

The role of the Independent Chair is to provide both support and challenge to the system, chairing the Statutory Partners, ESCB Executive and the joint Sub-Committee Chairs and Stay Safe Chairs meetings. The Chair scrutinises the efficacy and impact of the ESCB's multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and in so doing seeks assurance that these arrangements effectively safeguard and promote the welfare of Essex's Children and Young People.



How the work of the ESCB is conducted

Structure of the partnership

The statutory partners meet on a bi-monthly basis and the Executive on a quarterly basis, we have a number of Sub-Committees that support the work of the ESCB, all Sub-Committees are strongly focused on improving practice and ensuring emphasis on learning. Through the multi-agency geographically based Stay Safe Groups we hope to ensure that there is a feedback loop on safeguarding practice across the partnership and the front line.

There are a number of additional workstreams across Southend, Essex and Thurrock (Strategic Child Death Overview Committee, SET Procedures working group, SET Child Exploitation and Missing Group, the Sexual Abuse Strategic Partnership, Sexual Violence Scrutiny Panel, Strategic SET Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Board).

There has of course been the significant change with the introduction of the three Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) which we are currently working through, which additionally means we are working alongside four other Local Authorities (Hertfordshire, Suffolk, Thurrock and Southend).

Governance

The three Statutory Safeguarding Partners work together to ensure they have joint and equal responsibility and accountability for safeguarding children across Essex. The statutory partners worked together and quickly established tri-partite funding arrangements for the Board.

Scrutiny

The ESCB has an Independent Chair / Facilitator, who is an experienced Chair and former Director of Children's Services. He also provides independent scrutiny. We believe the best scrutiny of our safeguarding activities come from children and young people themselves - we gather rich information as to what children and young people (both in care and not in care) think about our services and what their own concerns are around being safe.

The partnership is assured via agency audit activity and inspections that thresholds are applied appropriately and provide an effective response to the safeguarding of children and young people. ESCB intend to undertake further work in being able to evidence the effectiveness of the wider safeguarding system through the voices of children and young people.

Scrutiny activity includes undertaking multi-agency auditing activity to support and develop quality frontline practice. These activities help us explore areas of practice which are under-developed or when the multi-agency intervention appears to have struggled to ensure children and young people are safer. The reflective element of this work creates the space to encourage analysis and problem solving to develop a set of recommendations and action planning.

Our assurance and scrutiny activities include:

- Section 11 Audits which are undertaken in partnership with the safeguarding children partnerships in Southend and Thurrock
- Multi-Agency Thematic Audits
- Section 175/157 (Schools) Audits
- Multi-Agency Case Audits
- Evaluation of the ESCB Learning and Development offer
- Oversight by the Performance Audit and Quality Assurance Sub-Committee of the activities of the partnership.

Summary of ESCB work October 2021-March 2023

The Statutory Partners and wider partnership contribute to the ESCB through developing initiatives and discussions in relation to a wide range of topics, below are some examples:

- Southend Essex and Thurrock Thematic Review of babies who have died through Sudden Unexpected Death in Infants (SUDIs), a multi-agency working group has developed a thinking tool to support the multi-agency workforce to facilitate non-judgemental discussion with families about their choice of sleeping environment.
- Young people who have sadly killed themselves.
- The recent and current pressures in relation to beds for children needing inpatient psychiatric admission and placement pressures for children looked after has inevitably led to more multi-agency conversations in respect of some of our most challenging and vulnerable young people.

Non-accidental injuries

In October 2022, Southend, Essex and Thurrock children's partnerships/boards worked together to run a virtual conference focused on non-accidental injuries as this was an area of practice that had been identified as needing to be improved across multi-agency

working and collaboration. The SET Protocol on the management of suspicious injuries and bruising in children had been launched in May 2022 and so this was an opportunity to raise awareness of the protocol and reflect on our multi-agency working.

A total of 402 people attended the conference, speakers included a local paediatrician, a tertiary hospital paediatrician and the author of a national review into non-accidental injuries in under 1s.

Feedback from delegates showed that delegates felt more confident in identifying, responding to and challenging decisions by other agencies post conference.

One thing I thought about as a health visitor is the importance of record keeping, body mapping birth marks and being curious and asking the questions (HCRG)

The importance of multi-agency working again just stood out, it takes more than one person to piece the puzzle together! Always reflect on what the child's lived experience is likely to be within their home (Social Care)

The use of our language. Perhaps alongside professional curiosity, describe to practitioners that it is ok to be interested in a service users' life, experience, history. Just reframing how we think of an assessment (HCRG)

To challenge other agencies if you are confident something 'is not quite right' and to escalate further, don't feel that as they may be senior to you, that you are not necessarily right (NELFT)

Following the conference, the multi-agency working group has continued to work together to produce resources to support ongoing learning and development opportunities in relation to non-accidental injuries.

In addition to the conference and learning and development resources there has also been a SET multi-agency working group reviewing practice in relation to hospital emergency departments and liaison with police and social care when there are potential non-accidental injuries. Work in this group has focused on practice and it was agreed that we needed a clear process to bring together a small group of the relevant professionals if incidents occurred and it was identified that practice could be improved.

Young people who have sadly killed themselves

In addition to the local safeguarding practice reviews that have been undertaken in relation to young people who have killed themselves, the partnership is supporting a second Thematic Review in respect of teenage suicide, focusing on all the young people who died through suicide between 2018-2022. This was an update to a similar exercise that was undertaken in 2017/18.

Sharing the learning from reviews and evidencing impact of the learning

As part of sharing the recommendations from the Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, we re-started a programme of author briefings following publication of a review, they are online briefings where the author shares information about the case and focuses on the learning and recommendations. In this review period, we have held two briefings a total of 198 delegates attended the briefings, and 95 of those asked for copies of the presentations so that they could share the learning with colleagues in their agencies. ESCB are now undertaking a follow up evaluation with all those who requested the presentation.

One of the key ways ESCB communicates across the partnership is through the monthly bulletin, in October 2021 the average open rate was 24%, by March 2023 it averaged 30% this demonstrates greater engagement from our audience and is above industry standards.

To understand the impact of ESCB reviews on the partnership and practice development, we have changed our approach to monitoring the recommendations from reviews and are now asking agencies to provide evidence of the impact of the learning from reviews rather than provide us with their actions plans and update as to whether these had been completed. We feel that this approach helps us understand how the learning is making a direct difference to practice and intervention with children and their families.

There is a new section on the ESCB website where the support team are adding a range of resources on themes from reviews so that we can offer different ways of learning [Working Together Better \(learning from reviews\) section topics include voice of the child, social media and online safety and think family.](#)

Since the Working Together Better pages went live in July 2022 there have been 1140 views of the pages. The voice of the child is the most popular with almost 700 of the views.

- Voice of the child video had 226 views on YouTube.
- Anti-Racist Practice had 245 podcast downloads.
- Think Family had 590 podcast downloads and 803 YouTube views.

In late 2022, the ESCB invited the Service Manager for Anti-Racist Practice within Children's Social Care to partner with us to produce a podcast on the subject of Adulthood following the publication of the Hackney CSPR Report re Child Q. Our podcast was launched in March 2023 in response to the learning identified and brings this subject to the attention of the partnership workforce, to further develop this work ESCB have planned webinars on anti-racist practice and the Essex County Council Anti-Racist Practice Service Manager will be presenting at Stay Safe Groups.

Effective Support for Children and Families in Essex

The partnership has worked together to try and ensure children and families get the right support, at the right level, at the right time, this will be supported going forward by a multi-agency working group reviewing our current guidance and bringing it in line with current practice.

Risk in the Community - Essex response to contextual safeguarding

An example of the output from one of our Sub-Committees: The work of the ESCB Child Exploitation and Missing Sub-Committee has supported shaping the response to child exploitation and missing across the partnership. The Sub-Committee has also taken a role in the launch of the new Risk in the Community pathway (launched in November 2022) outlining and contributing to the response for those children who are at risk of exploitation ensuring there is clarity across the partnership of everyone's role and responsibility. The Sub-Committee has created a governance structure for MACE (Missing and Child Exploitation) to ensure oversight, impact and outcomes of MACE. A MACE co-ordinator was appointed in December 2022 through funding from the Violence and Vulnerability unit. The ESCB contributes to funding the Child Exploitation Project Manager who drives this work forward. There are now Risk in the Community practitioners in each of the quadrants supporting the multi-agency partnership to work with those young people who are being exploited or are considered high risk of being exploited.

ESCB continue to run half termly campaigns on online safety and in line with National Child Exploitation Awareness Day in March, in 2023 a series of [lunchtime webinars were delivered](#).

ESCB work with a range of agencies such as British Transport Police, Essex Police, youth service, voluntary organisations and rail operators to run Operation Henderson twice a year, the campaign aims to raise awareness of the vulnerability of young people to exploitation and abuse at stations and transport networks in parts of Essex. The day of action is supported by additional Every Contact Counts training, which is exploitation training aimed at anyone in a public facing role including door staff, security staff and CCTV operators.

Essex County Council have a well established process and team for return home interview which are called missing chats.

Stay Safe Groups

Stay Safe Groups have become a crucial layer in the safeguarding partnership and operate as a Sub-Committee of the ESCB. They bring together managers from across the partnership who may have roles in operational practice, strategic oversight or both to discuss subjects arising from the ESCB Executive, local matters and issues arising, best practice and communication. They feed back to the Executive any issues emerging which are considered to be sensitive and or serious and where a steer from the Executive may be required.

The ESCB has also had focused discussions about:

- The Care Review proposals and the Essex response to the proposals
- Ukrainian Families
- Online Harms, and what it is like to be growing up as a teenager in 2023

Impact of Covid

The impact of Covid-19 continues to be felt across the safeguarding system, although there were no further lockdowns in this reporting period the whole system was continuing the recovery from Covid and this remains evident across the system. Whilst some parts of the system quickly resumed normal service, with some maintaining it all through the pandemic, other parts are reviewing what the service offer looks like going forward. Recruitment and retention across the safeguarding system has been highlighted as a challenge.

Joint work with other Boards in Essex

Essex Safeguarding Adults Board

The ESCB are undertaking two pieces of work jointly with the Essex Safeguarding Adult Board; Transitional Safeguarding and Think Family. It is hoped that both pieces of work will improve the experience for children and their families as they encounter different services across the partnership. Transitional Safeguarding focuses on young people who are identified as experiencing exploitation and as they turn 18 their access to adult services, as the risks do not diminish because they are now an adult. A Think

Family approach is being discussed for development in which children and their families who have care and/ or protection needs for both the children and adults in the household will receive a more coordinated response as the professionals across agencies will work with greater collaboration and with increased communication to ensure that the needs of children do not go unrecognised when living with adult problems such as poor mental health.

In terms of the Board's philosophy, we are agreed that wherever possible our practice is relationship and strengths based, and that the child is at the heart of everything we do. We see ourselves as a collaborative learning partnership, communicating effectively with each other and with partners taking ownership and responsibility for our safeguarding practice.

ESCB has a joint Learning and Development Sub-Committee with the children, adults and domestic abuse boards/partnerships across Southend, Essex and Thurrock, the key focus of this Sub-Committee is to look at common themes from the range of reviews that are undertaken and look at where we can collaborate to increase knowledge, understanding and confidence across the workforce.

ESCB have received funds from the Violence and Vulnerability Unit each year to support workforce development, this has enabled us to offer multi-agency learning and development opportunities to introduce how to work in a trauma informed way and to offer a series of webinars.



The ESCB Support Team

The support team staffing has remained stable since the last annual report with the exception that the previous manager left, and our Practice Development Manager has stepped up into the role. We are actively recruiting to the Practice Development Manager post.

The ESCB support team has a reach across the partnership through attendance at a variety of forums organised by partner agencies. This includes:

- ESCB support team link with the community and voluntary sector through Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services (ECVYS) the CEO of ECVYS is a member of the Executive Board and the Business Manager attends their quarterly cluster meetings to give updates on the work of the Board. An ECVYS representative attends each of the Stay Safe Groups, ESCB contribute to the bi-monthly newsletter ECVYS sent to all their members. ESCB offer ECVYS members a discount on fee paying training courses.
- ESCB support team have recently started to actively engage with the Children's Partnership Board in addition the Business Manager meets with the lead for the Children's Partnership Board every two months to discuss areas of joint interest.
- ESCB and ESAB statutory partners meet every six months to discuss issues across both boards. The Business Managers of the two teams meet every two months to discuss areas of joint interest.

Finance and Budget

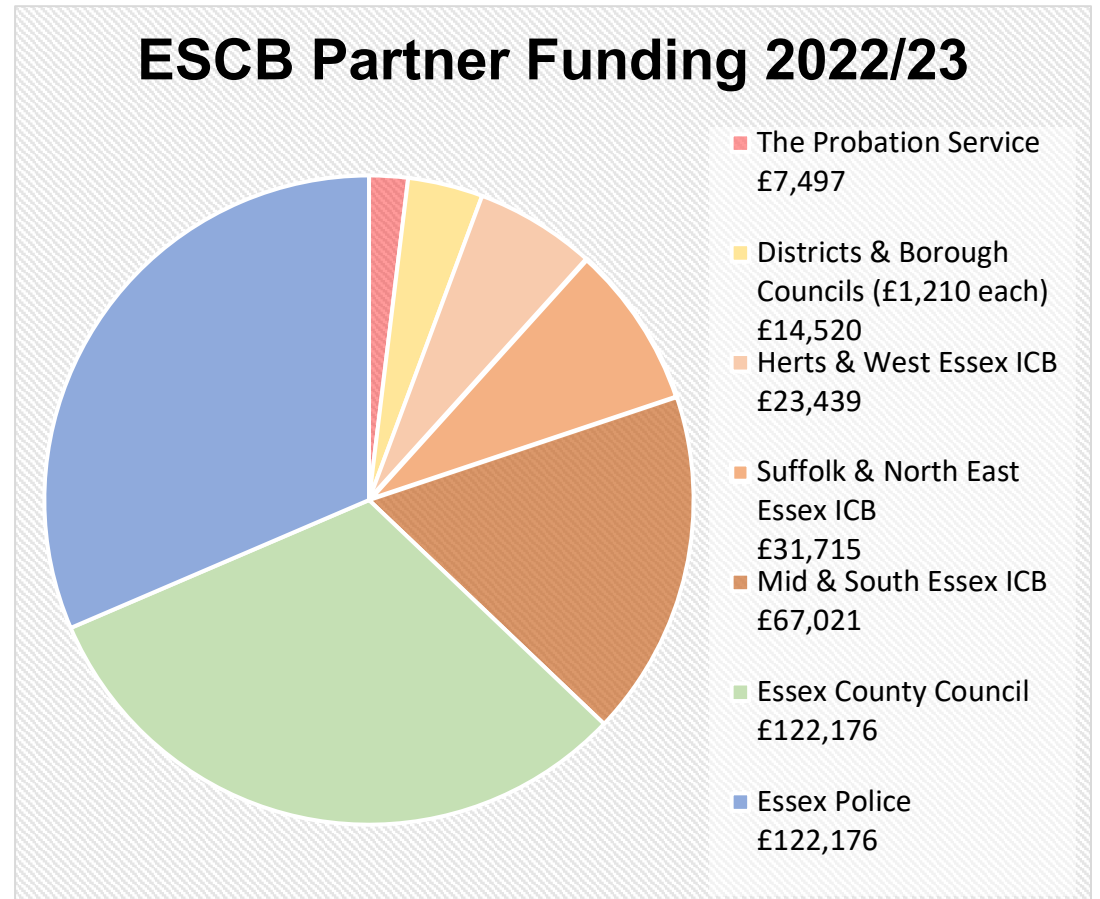
Funding for the ESCB is split equally between the three Statutory Partners with some additional contributions coming from the Probation Service and the Cities, Districts and Borough Councils. There was a phased and staggered approach to the contributions from Health and the Police increasing and from 2022-23, the funding has reached the equal footing previously agreed.

In addition to the actual financial contributions made by Partners, we must also recognise those colleagues from the partnership who give freely their time for many of the functions of the ESCB including:

- Learning and Development
- Chairing/ co-chairing and participation within Sub-Committees and Stay Safe Groups
- Task and Finish groups
- Test and Learn initiatives
- Authoring reports

Other than the staffing cost of the ESCB support team, the next largest cost incurred by the ESCB is in relation to securing the services of the Independent Lead Reviewers who are used for the CSPRs or alternative learning events. However, this cost is kept low as the administration and collation of information is managed within the support team.

The ESCB continues to hold a reserve of budget not used in previous years and therefore holds a contingency should costs of reviews substantially increase.



Section 2 Agency Contributions

Key Level Data

Safeguarding Area	20-21	21-22	22-23	Narrative / Comment
Number of requests for support progressed to referrals by Children's Services	7720	6887	6586	These figures account only for those Requests for Support progressed to referral by Children's Social Care. This is against a backdrop of Requests for Support having increased.
Conversion rate of referrals leading to an assessment	6417	6118	5922	The conversion of referrals resulting in assessment has been increasing and has moved from 83% to 89% over the last 3 years. The numbers of children being assessed has been falling, but the messages coming from practitioners is that the complexity of children and families needs has increased.
Number of Child in Need Plans	1546	1498	1587	The number of children with an open children in need plan has not varied much over the last three years and seems relatively stable. (end of year figures)
Number of Child Protection Plans	598	633	688	The number of children with a child protection plan has fluctuated but increased over the last three years; this may be attributable to the complexity of family living which is being felt across the system.
Number of Children Looked After	1080	1118	1164	The number of children looked after has increased but the increase seems to be largely due to the increased need for provision for Separated Migrant Children, this is a cohort of children and young people where there are no other options to avoid care as would be found for the child population of Essex. For example, the Divisional Based Intervention Teams (DBIT) who focus on repair of relationships using Solution Focused practice to support children and young people to stay within their families.

Safeguarding Area	20-21	21-22	22-23	Narrative / Comment
Number of Separated Migrant Children within our Looked After population	101	136	166	
Number of Young Carers' assessments	757	674	1124* incomplete data	The Young Carers Service has been delivered by the Youth Service since April 2018. The young carers service model started to have an immediate effect in latter part of 2018 and has continued to grow since. *Incomplete data-due to different timeframes for data capture
Numbers of Children Missing from Education	566	493	477	The number of children missing from education has seen some improvement since the height of the pandemic. This may be because more children and young people are now Electively Home Educated.
Numbers of Children who are Electively Home Educated	2413	2556	2926	The number of children and young people being electively home educated has continued to increase. This may be due to increased anxiety and emotional wellbeing during the pandemic not subsiding as life returned to 'normal'.

Reviews

In April 2021, there were eight ongoing Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, and since then four of these have been published, three delayed by ongoing criminal proceedings and one in which publication has not yet been agreed upon. Of the four reviews published, three were in response to young people who had sadly taken their own lives and the other in which a child was fatally injured accidentally.

In the last 18 months we have received nine referrals as well as being involved in a review which the London Borough of Havering have agreed to take on and which we are financially contributing to. Of these referrals, three are progressing to Child Safeguarding

Practice Reviews, six are progressing through other learning and development routes as the Rapid Reviews were able to extract enough learning through the sharing of information and analysis and one referral was not progressed as it was felt the single agency review being undertaken was sufficient to learn from events surrounding that child.

The themes of the referrals to us for Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews are dominated by non-accidental injuries to children (seven), and this is followed by five young people who have either attempted to, or taken their own lives. There were two children who experienced severe neglect which impaired their health significantly and four other children who died where aspects of neglect were a potential feature.

Inspection and Grading

Children's Social Care

Essex Children's Social Care was deemed Outstanding in the last Ofsted inspection of November 2018. This achievement was widely celebrated, and the organisation is very proud of this attainment, it was 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. Subsequent to this review period, Essex Children's Social Care were inspected by Ofsted (ILACS) in June 2023. The outcome of the Inspection was that Essex has been judged as Outstanding in all five domains of the Inspection (and were the first Local Authority in England to receive this judgement). The report states:

“Strong and stable leadership, well-established governance systems, clear strategic aims and effective partnership arrangements are the cornerstones on which good practice is flourishing and children's experiences are being improved. Children's needs are at the heart of decision-making and the whole workforce is unrelenting in its commitment, passion and determination to achieve even better progress for children.”

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, both were rated as Good in all categories following their last Ofsted inspections in October 2022 and February 2023 (respectively).

Essex Police

Essex Police were subject to a Her Majesty Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services of police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy inspection in 2022 and the results of which were published in October 2022. It rated the force adequate for protecting Vulnerable People, adding that 'whilst the force understood the nature and scale of vulnerability, the force needed to do more to maintain and improve the wellbeing of staff involved in protecting vulnerable people, in particular children'. The Force Performance Board is continuing to work through the recommendations from the report.

Health

Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspections have been undertaken for some of the health providers across Essex during the year with close working with the ICB's for support and assurance on any action plans resulting from the inspection.

The [Health and Care Act 2022](#) also gave powers to CQC to assess whether integrated care systems are meeting the needs of their local populations. We expect these new powers to start in April 2024. They will enable CQC to understand how integrated care systems are working to tackle health inequalities and improve outcomes for people.

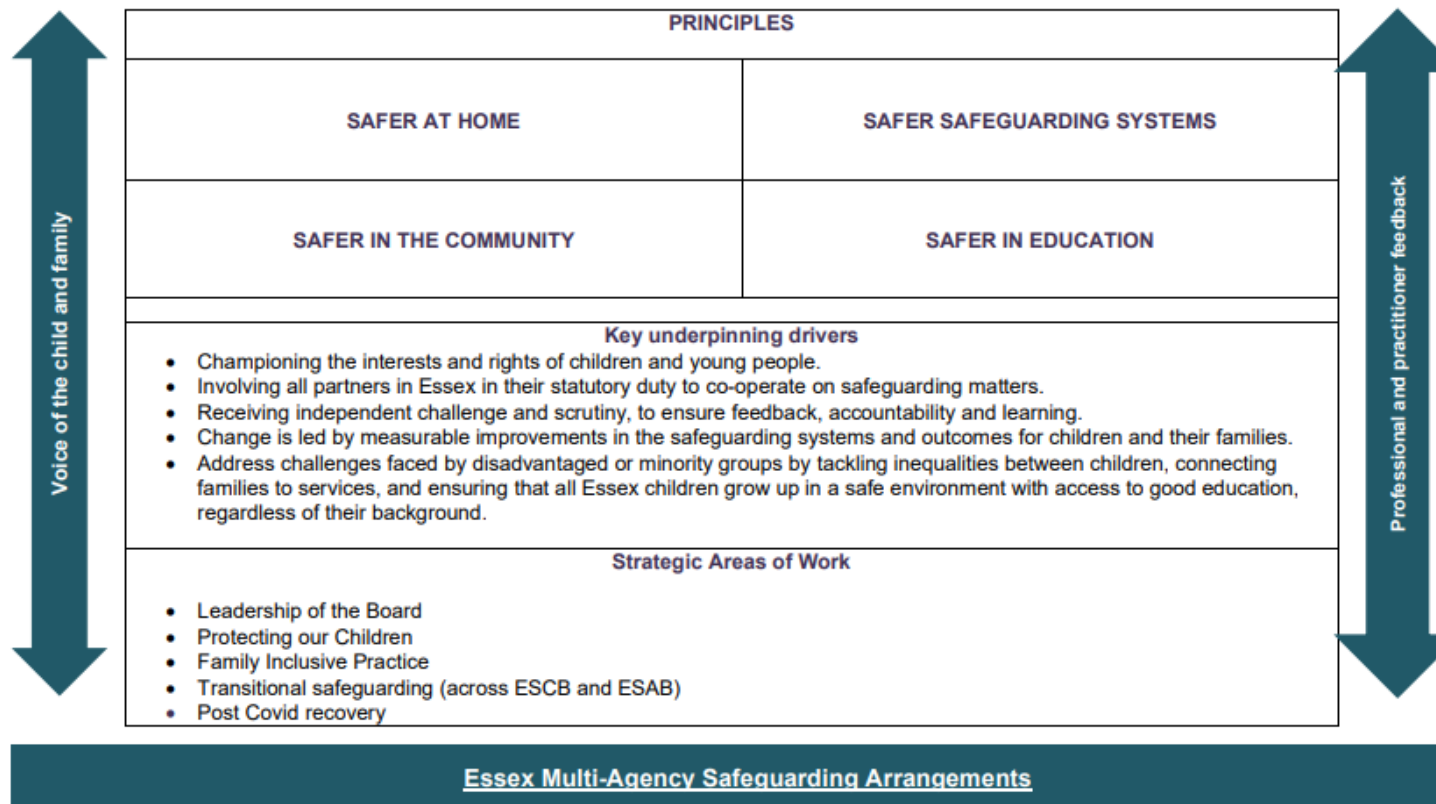


Section 3 ESCB Business Plan Priorities

Business Plan Priorities

Essex Safeguarding Children Board – Business Plan 2022 - 2027

Responsibility for the monitoring of the Business Plan lies with the Statutory Partners via the ESCB Executive supported by the sub-committees and four quadrant-based Stay Safe Groups.



Children's Social Care

What areas of partnership working have had the greatest impact on your organisation during this timeframe?

Effective partnership arrangements continue to support safeguarding work across Essex. Children's Social Care receive good responses to requests for information, achieve good communication between practitioners, have good attendance from professionals at meetings both at a strategic and operational level.

There has been an increase in the offer of multi-agency learning and development opportunities during the period of this report. These were already available from the ESCB, but increasingly training commissioned by Children's Social Care ESCA (Essex Social Care Academy) has been made available to either the statutory partners or the wider partnership. Other organisations across the partnership are also extending offers of learning and development opportunities to other organisations. When training is undertaken across a multi-disciplinary forum, the conversations are enriched and more productive as people can share a range of views from a range of agency agendas and perspectives. This collaboration is further supported by the multi-agency thematic audits and case audits which bring groups of practitioners together as well as the Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and other reflective review processes.

How does the learning and development offer available via the ESCB support your staff to safeguard children?

The learning and development offer available contains a core offer which supports professionals to understand their role within the partnership in relation to safeguarding. Further training, materials and podcasts are produced which focus on either a particular need that has been identified within the partnership or in response to events which have occurred at a national or regional level.

The learning and development offer assists practitioners Continuing Professional Development and practice as it is of a high calibre, relevant and targeted.

How does your organisation embed the learning from safeguarding reviews?

Learning is cascaded through the workforce, and targeted work to address specific recommendations will then be agreed and progressed.

Briefing sessions are provided via the Stay Safe Groups and used to have small group conversations within teams across the workforce.

A lot of work has happened within this review period to develop the management teams understanding and confidence when involved in Safeguarding Reviews and a series of events has delivered learning about the review process, what it means to be

involved and what the intended outcomes of these are. This includes presentation at 'Polishing Our Practice' events (internal training offer on a range of subjects held over the course of a dedicated week of learning and development opportunities), a dedicated session at an Extended Manager's Meeting and a 'Drop-In' session with the Executive Director.

Please supply examples of evidence of embedding the learning from safeguarding reviews.

This can be seen in a number of different activities, including the updating of training packages to include reference to our local reviews to illustrate the learning on the specific package i.e. disguised compliance and those cases where this might have been a theme identified.

Workstreams have been set up to work towards practice change i.e. Think Family and Child In Need transfer processes; even though these workstreams have not yet concluded, there has been practice change evident as teams are aware of the work and working to the guiding principles of the Child In Need transfer document which has been drawn up.

Workstreams on targeted subjects have also adopted activities to improve on practice and learning from reviews. This can be seen in the work of the Mental Health workstream which is working towards improved understanding of Mental Health Act responsibilities for children's services.

How does working as a partner within the ESCB support your agency in safeguarding children and what is the impact for children and families?

This improves collaboration, communication and joint responsibility for safeguarding. This reduces friction points and ensures that agencies understand the context of decision making within their partners and allows for dialogue and negotiation if there is disagreement.

It has helped the Partnership to identify and shape priorities by understanding the trends and themes emerging across our community.

Local practice is improved through networking, information sharing, and joint contributions of effort.

Serious incidents are quickly identified and shared across the partnership bringing together significant partners to discuss and agree next steps jointly. This was particularly evidenced in Operation Haiti which required a vast amount of resource across three local authority areas to identify and support a number of children and young people as potential victims of abuse.

Essex County Council has recruited an Anti-Racist Practice Service Manager who is supporting the Children's Social Care workforce to further develop their anti-racist practice, including an Anti-Racist Practice Strategy, practice conversations and numerous learning and development opportunities. She is also supporting the wider partnership to think about anti-racist practice through the podcast developed with ESCB and through multi-agency forums such as Stay Safe.

If you have a member on an ESCB Sub-Committee, how does this support your agency in safeguarding children and what is the impact for children and families?

Children's social care is represented on all Sub-Committees and each of the Stay Safe Groups, this includes playing key roles in chairing and vice chairing the various Sub-Committees and Stay Safe Groups.

We are creating processes for the cross referencing and overlap of MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements), MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) and MACE (Missing and Child Exploitation) which was learning from a Domestic Homicide Review in relation to a young person who had been open to MACE. We also have begun working on a substance misuse guidance and strategy following a recommendation from a Child Safeguarding Practice Review.

The Integrated Care Boards (ICBs)

What areas of partnership working have had the greatest impact on your organisation during this timeframe?

Partnership meetings and collaborative working provides good communication which is key for safeguarding children and their families and is the cornerstone for good practices. The ICBs and wider health economy are represented on all ESCB Sub-Committees, Stay Safe Groups, Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, multi-agency reviews and learning events through agreed representatives from the safeguarding clinical network and individual providers. These bring different organisations together regularly and are a fundamental part of the safeguarding children processes. The meetings attended are well organised and promote good partnership working, provide safeguarding assurances, identify risks and gaps in practice and promote improving practices and outcomes for children across Essex.

Sharing of learning from CSPRs – as organisations we ensure information is shared across the service from management to frontline staff and encourage attendance at multi-agency learning and development opportunities.

Audits – partaking in multi-agency audits.

ESCB bulletin – sharing updates and training opportunities by disseminating to all staff.

How does the learning and development available via the ESCB support your staff to safeguard children?

- The training is always of a good quality, current, wide ranging, relevant to area and staffing need and is always evaluated to ensure appreciation and value.
- Supports the development and improvement of staff, practice and targeted to improve outcomes.
- Supports staffs' health and well-being.
- Sharing 'Lessons Learned' to improve practice and outcomes for children and their families.
- Supports the understanding of safeguarding legislation and highlights the potential indicators of abuse of children and vulnerable individuals.
- Highlights what action to take if there is a safeguarding concern or allegation.
- Improves the individual's level of awareness.

How does your organisation embed the learning from safeguarding reviews?

- Learning is disseminated to the leadership team which is then filtered down to the practitioners.
- Learning is shared in clinical and safeguarding supervision and safeguarding supervisor updates.
- Learning can also be shared via the Safeguarding Advice Service with complex case discussions or line management decisions.
- The Safeguarding Team provide training where the learning is shared.
- Training packages are updated in line with the information shared from the partnership.
- Shared through team meetings.
- Staff are encouraged to attend multi agency training and practitioner events.
- Staff are encouraged to attend when there is shared learning on 'Lessons Learned' which supports development and not blame.

Please supply examples of evidence of embedding the learning from safeguarding reviews.

- The Safeguarding Team update training to incorporate the lessons learnt.
- Learning is shared within safeguarding supervision.

- Clinical effectiveness team training provided multi agency training and discussed a CSPR.
- Practice has changed after CSPR e.g. information sharing promoted - when changes in risk assessments are identified, this is shared with children social care and staff have been encouraged to seek further training on Mental Capacity Act.

How does working as a partner within the ESCB support your agency in safeguarding children and what is the impact for children and families?

- Supports the health economy to get a clear understanding of the risk and concerns that are happening locally and nationally.
- Brings partner organisations together for effective working, reduces working in isolation and improves communication.
- Working together helps to identify common themes and trends and a joint action plan are put in place to address these.
- The sharing of knowledge and concerns helps improve practice jointly, professional networking and improving the quality of care we provide to children and their families.
- Promptly identifies, shares, and responds to risk or serious incidences.
- Strengthens communication between organisations which improves collaborative working, safeguarding children and their families.
- Supports escalation and encourages discussion with different agencies as needed with complex cases.

If you have a member on an ESCB Sub-Committee, how does this support your agency in safeguarding children and what is the impact for children and families?

- Information shared is up to date and can be used to put a targeted plan in place to support the child and their family.
- It strengthens communication between organisations which improves safeguarding practices for children and their families.
- Timeframes are added to ensure the case is managed quickly and appropriately and to avoid drift which would have a negative impact on the child, family, and organisation.
- Information can be shared and discussed within a large group of multi-disciplinary professionals - the sharing of knowledge, complex cases and risk helps improve practice, professional working and improving the care we provide.
- Additional support is gained from exploring different perspectives from other agencies which improves the outcomes for the child and family.

Essex Police

How does the work of the Sub-Committees support your agency in safeguarding children and what is the impact for children and families?

Provision of learning and information sharing; access to partners for dissemination of information outwards.

The Partnership Detective Inspectors for the relevant geographical area attend Child Safeguarding Practice Review panels learning is identified and shared internally through the Professionalism Board. They also support the multi-agency case audits (MACAs) to provide a forensic review of the effectiveness of multi-agency working in relation to a single case using bespoke audit tools and approaches to support this practice evaluation activity. Once this activity is completed, involved professionals/agencies come together at a MACA discussion to share observations drawn from their related audit activity and to hear the reflections of their partner agencies and learn from each other.

The Strategic Vulnerability Centre oversees force wide implementation of recommendations for all attended boards.

How does the ESCB learning and development offer support your staff to safeguard children?

Well communicated through Sub-Committee representatives and shared widely across organisation internally to offer spaces on courses and access to training.

Essex Police / Social Care joint training events coordinated for late 2023 and early 2024 by Essex Police and ESCB to better protect children by working together.

How does your organisation embed the learning from safeguarding reviews and evidence the impact of this?

Use of force tracker for the learning and recommendations from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, Domestic Homicide Reviews and Safeguarding Adult Reviews which are allocated to named owners who are required to provide monthly updates. Governance through the Strategic Vulnerability Centre.



What areas of partnership working have had the greatest impact on your organisation during this reporting period (October 2021- March 2023)

Children's Social Care liaison, including Operation Ask and Operation Encompass data sharing, non-accidental injuries working group, Youth Offending Service, working with Synergy Essex and Crown Prosecution Service.

Referrals from Police to Social Care have been transferred to an online system for better data analytics, enabling better proactive safeguarding of vulnerable children. A new Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation dashboard is used proactively to identify vulnerable children and engage with social care and health at earlier opportunities.

Independent Sexual Violence Advisors referral rates remain strong (600 more compared to 2019), with co-location at Basildon and Colchester and Chelmsford, joint community engagement and supporting the victims feedback panel – capturing the victims voice for organisational learning.

With Crown Prosecution Service the Early Advice protocol has been recognised as best practice by College of Policing, improving timeliness of investigations by involving lawyers early on to agree joint action plans and proportionate lines of enquiry, with dedicated Case Progression Clinics set up for cases over 12 months old. This partnership working has enabled us to increase solved outcomes significantly over that period and conviction rates.

Operation Haiti – This was a complex investigation where multi-agency working came to the fore allowing for the investigation to be progressed and victims supported in tandem between both the statutory and charitable sectors. It was declared a complex and organised abuse investigation under the SET procedures from a very early stage and this was the foundation of some exceptional joint working with multiple joint visits across the three authorities and also out of force utilising their Social Care referral processes. All three authorities with their associated Education departments assisted with the investigation and identifying the victims. Follow up work by Synergy and The Children’s Society ensured that the continuing needs of the victims were met. The investigation has been acknowledged with the Police Federation Investigation of the Year Award to be given later in 2023. In September 2023 the defendant was sentenced to 21yrs with an extended period of six years.

Section 4 Learning and Improvement

ESCB Multi-Agency Learning and Development

- ESCB offer a range of multi-agency learning and development opportunities, from core safeguarding children training at level 1, 2 and 3, (level 3 is safeguarding lead training) through to specific topic learning. During 2022-23 ESCB offered 80 learning and development opportunities to over 1700 people. The highest number of delegates at ESCB learning and development sessions are from the community and voluntary sector, this is really positive and demonstrates our work in partnership with Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services.
- ESCB works with our counterparts in Southend and Thurrock to offer webinars funded through the Violence and Vulnerability Unit, these webinars cover topics such as online safety, criminal exploitation, understanding gangs and adolescent brain development. ESCB also uses funding from the Violence and Vulnerability Unit to offer free courses to the multi-agency workforce on working in a trauma informed way.
- ESCB works with ECC Commissioning to offer training on reducing parental conflict through funding from the Department of Work and Pensions.
- Through the ECC Team Around the Family Support Officers ESCB offer training on early help and having difficult conversations with families, this supports the multi-agency workforce to support families at the earliest opportunity.
- ESCB worked in partnership with the UK Safer Internet Centre to offer an online safety live briefing, this is a new partnership that we will look at continuing to develop.

Examples of feedback

'The training has given me the knowledge, tools and understanding to be able to identify potential abuse and how to deal with this appropriately. I have followed policies and procedures and raised several safeguarding concerns following the training.'

'Demonstrated the importance of taking action and therefore led me to ensure that our policy and procedures are accessible to all our volunteers, with easy to follow procedures.'

'Since doing the training, I made a referral for one family to social care for safeguarding reasons. The training highlighted the need for professional curiosity and for more multiagency working, which I have been doing more of.'

Safeguarding Audits

In 2022, the ESCB collated the partnerships response to the Section 11 Audit. There were very high levels of confidence across the partnership regarding safeguarding activity and the areas for the least confidence were in embedding policy, followed by service development and early help and interagency working, although the majority of responses remained partially met. We have begun to discuss with SET colleagues the questions for the 2023 Section 11 Audit to make some changes and develop our Section 11 process to ensure an annual update from agencies in regard to their action plans.

The Section 175/ 157 Audit has taken place for Education and closed in the Spring term 2023, issuing this had been delayed due to COVID. There was a return rate of 83.3% and the data is currently being collated and plans have been made to work with education colleagues to analyse the results to report on in the near future.

Other priority areas for the ESCB – 2022/2023

Keeping Children Safe in Education:

- 90% of Essex Schools are good / outstanding
- Very challenging 18 months for all schools post-pandemic
- Significant increase in mental health issues for young people
- Extensive Designated Safeguarding Lead training
- Everyone's invited / sexually harmful behaviours - variety of materials have been made available for educational settings; Education Safeguarding Lead has led on training / workshops etc

Keeping Safe in the Community:

- Operation Henderson – young people on trains/taxis
- Operation Makesafe – focusing on raising awareness of exploitation in hotels, bed and breakfasts etc
- Operation Innerste - missing Separated Migrant Children

Young Peoples' Emotional and Mental Health

- Significant increase in number of young people with eating disorders /mental health issues
- Significant increase in young people attending A&E
- Increase in working with vulnerable young people with mental health issues in schools
- Thematic Review of Teenage Suicide in 2018 – second Thematic Review of 22 young people has just commenced
- All age Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Mental Health Conference in July for schools

Challenges

- Refugee Families, Essex has seen a number of fixed sites for both Afghan Resettlement scheme and Refugee schemes. This has placed pressure on resources locally whilst providing a level of stability for these families fleeing terror and violence.
- Transition to Integrated Care Boards in Health saw the dissolution of the Clinical Commissioning Groups and the formation of the three ICBs across the Essex local authority footprint.
- Post Pandemic Recovery, all partners talk about both the complexity of the families that require support and safeguarding and the emotional and physical toll being felt within staff groups post pandemic. This pressure is being felt in all frontline services. One partner described this as feeling like the system has long COVID. Health and Education have faced a number of challenges caused by the industrial action of their staff. Agencies have worked hard to plan for and mitigate the impact on safeguarding services.
- Cost of Living Crisis, this is adding increased pressure directly to families in our communities and also to our own staff. Initially, Children's Social Care experienced a series of referrals based on families not being able to afford the essentials of heat and food. ECC worked on a communication to agencies to provide up to date information as to where families could be signposted for additional support which did not need a safeguarding response.
- There has been a sharp rise in the children being electively home educated (EHE) since the pandemic and the number of Children Missing Education rose sharply in the first year of the Pandemic but has reduced each year since. This has not quite returned to the pre-pandemic levels. We are concerned about these cohorts of children and young people due to their 'invisibility' to services.
- Difficulty in sourcing appropriate placements for young people

Impact

Children and Young People's views

Essex Violence and Vulnerability Unit commissioned ECVYS to undertake its youth voices listening project for the fourth year running in 2023. This is a SET wide project and 1563 young people from age 10 to 25 were involved from 73 youth clubs and settings across the SET area.

Young people through this project have told us that half of them were worried about being exploited by gangs. About two thirds feel safe when out with friends locally, they are worried about the rise in youth violence and fighting and their top concern was knife crime. Young people have consistently said that they want more social spaces, more sports activities available and a variety of affordable activities when asked about what activities they would like to see more of. The top three things they feel would make them feel safer are more police, more or better street lighting and CCTV and security.



Out of Court Disposals

The Out of Court Disposal (OCD) panel is a multi-agency panel that aims to divert children from future involvement in the Criminal Justice System, acting in the best interests of the child, victims, and the Criminal Justice System as a whole. It makes recommendations in respect of children who have made full admissions to committing low and medium level offences.

Full consideration is given to each child's individual situation and as such, not every child will require intervention from the Youth Offending Service or require an onward referral to other agencies. The panel takes a proportionate approach before considering disposal and will additionally consider the needs and circumstances as well as any existing networks of support reducing the likelihood of further offending. Where the panel considers there to be a need for support from services external to Youth Offending

Service, the panel will utilise the expertise within partner agencies, including Police, Essex Youth Service, and The Children's Society.

The Essex Police Youth Justice Team (YJT) will seek to divert young people to an alternative disposal where it appears unnecessary for them to receive a formal out of court disposal (Community Resolution, Community Resolution Plus, Youth Caution or Youth Conditional Caution). This may include young people who are already open to other services (such as Children's Social Care, Family Solutions, CAMHS) with existing plans in place. Any recommendations for diversion made by the YJT will be emailed to the investigating officer and their Sergeant to review and authorise.

Restorative justice (RJ) will be considered in all cases discussed at panel and will become an element of any Out of Court disposal whenever it is considered appropriate to do so, based upon the wishes and feelings of the victim and the young person.

'Everything was Helpful. I love how we spoke as we did certain Activities which made it easier to Understand and more Fun.' Words from a Young Person who was supported by a CR+'

Restorative Justice

Case Study - Both Mike* and Liam* are teenagers who attend the same school. In October 2021, whilst at school Liam has deliberately tripped Mike over which has resulted in Mike falling onto the floor. Mike sustained a broken forearm requiring metal plates to be put into his arm. The police officer investigating the incident said that this was an unprovoked incident. Mike and Liam are in separate year groups and did not know each other before the incident.

Initial meetings

Essex Restorative and Mediation Service facilitators, met with both families separately to discuss what happened and the reasons both boys would like to take part in a restorative process. Mike was purposefully tripped by Liam (whom he didn't know at all) Immediately after falling, Mike knew something was wrong and looked at his arm. Mike began to cry and was taken to pastoral care where an ambulance was called. He had to undergo an operation to have a metal plate and two pins placed into his arm. Mike explained that he really appreciated the work that the Police put in and was glad the perpetrator was identified. The fact that he doesn't know the person who hurt him caused a significant grievance for him. Mike wanted to take part in a restorative process because he wanted an apology but also, he wanted to have an opportunity to explain to the harmer the impact of his actions. He

said he would prefer to meet with Liam in person so that he can show him the true impact and make sure something like this will not happen ever again, not to him and not to any other student. Mike said he is ready to forgive Liam for his actions.

The facilitators met with Liam and his foster carers to discuss the referral made and their willingness to take part in the process. Liam told them what happened on the day from his point of view. He was in the corridor between lessons, and he saw another student running in his direction (but not toward him). Liam thought it would be funny to stick his leg out to trip the student up, so this is what he did. Liam was completely unaware that the student may have been upset about being tripped up and did not stop to check on the student before carrying on to his next lesson. It was only later on when he learned that the student had broken his arm, which caused Liam to feel really bad. Liam was suspended as result of the incident. Liam explained that he apologised to Mike already and they have spoken to each other. Liam said he would be more than happy to meet with Mike.

Restorative Justice meeting

Both boys met nine months after the incident accompanied by their parents. The conversation wasn't easy but both Mike and Liam understood they needed it in order to move forward and finally, close this chapter once and for all. Liam apologised once again for what happened. Mike not only acknowledged the apology and accepted it but also understood that Liam's actions were a prank gone horribly wrong and he did not intend to break his arm. Both had an opportunity to be heard, listen to what the other person had to say and learn from the incident. At the end of the meeting, the boys voluntarily shook hands as a sign of moving on.

Follow Up

The facilitators followed up with the boys a few days later. Mike felt the meeting went really well, allowing him to get everything he wanted out of the meeting. What makes our process great is facilitator's impartiality – they weren't there to judge or point fingers at anyone. In his feedback, Liam mentioned that due to being able to feel safe, he thought the meeting went extremely well and was something he needed in order to forgive himself for what he did.

Mike and Liam's story is another example of how restorative process can repair the harm that has been caused. Sometime harmers feel so much guilt over what happened, they forget to forgive themselves for what happened and the only person who can help them towards forgiving themselves is the victim.

Impact – children in care

86% of care leavers feel their PA helps them build networks with friends, family and other people in the community.

81% of children in care feel their social worker takes an interest in them.

74% of children in care feel they understand the plan to see family and friends.

It's My Life - You said, we did

You said...	...We did
You told us that the Festive season can be really challenging for care leavers...	...so we ensure every care leaver in Essex gets a care leavers pack in December.
You told us that your identity and culture is important to you...	...so we have developed our Proud To Be Me group and young people have developed an anti-racist thinking tool to help address racism to be used across the partnership.
You described an increase in anxiety and worry since the pandemic...	...so we give training to foster carers to help them support you and your feelings, and to give you the right care.

From the Children in Care Conference keynote speech:

<https://youtu.be/VRAX5j6VSuo>

Essex held its first ever Children in Care Council Conference in November 2022. It was a great success both for those professionals attending but also for the young people who delivered workshops and keynote speeches.

One young person said: *'They really never realised that so many people would turn up to the conference, it made them realise that people care, it made them feel emotional'*.

Conclusion

Within this report, we have evidenced the great deal of work that is being undertaken by the ESCB and the partnership for the betterment of local safeguarding practice. It is only right that we acknowledge the hard work of the various agencies and their skilled staff who deliver these services. Practitioners across the partnership and agencies are passionate, committed and dedicated to the children, young people and their families of Essex. We thank them for their work and how this contributes to the overall function of the ESCB.

Priorities for next 12 months

- Neglect – to continue the work identified in the Multi-Agency Thematic Audit and progress action plans already identified.
- Elective Home Education – to develop an improved understanding of the reasons why more children are continuing to access their education at home post pandemic and how these ‘invisible’ children can be better identified and seen by the partnership.
- Children Missing Education and how this links to Risk in the Community and what opportunities there are to actively maintain these children in education.
- Review of the Effective Support document – this work however will be dependent on awaiting the outcomes of a number of government updates including Working Together and progression of the consultation ‘Stable homes, built on love’.
- The emotional wellbeing and mental health of young people.
- How the system is supporting our neurodiverse young people and their families.
- Young people on reduced education provision or not in education - potentially increases the risk of harm in the community
- National inquiry (Lampard Inquiry) into adult and child deaths in mental health institutions.
- Risk in the Community-extra-familial harms, online exploitation, county lines and drug-related activities.