

Appendix 1

Children's Social Care

The Journey of the Child

Bi-Annual report to Members

October 2017

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Introduction

This report highlights activity in Southend Children's Social Care in 2016/17 and outlines our priorities moving forward. Reporting to members to date has been through a number of individual reports and the aim of this report is to begin to bring together various reports to show the journey of the child and their family in a more holistic way. Reports will in future be provided in January and July each year. This report incorporates updates on all service areas and includes our six monthly adoption report, annual looked after children report, quarterly fostering report and annual private fostering report.

Elected councillors have a crucial role to play in setting the strategic direction of Council services and in determining policy and priorities for the local community. All elected councillors share a responsibility to safeguard children and young people within the borough. This includes a corporate parenting responsibility towards the children the Council looks after. Councillors champion the cause of looked after children and care leavers when carrying out their duties, keeping themselves apprised of important national issues and developments in policy and practice.

Recent reports, including "No good options: Report of the inquiry into children's social care in England" (March 2017) and Improving Social Care Services (2016) highlight the need to develop frameworks to drive practice improvement and for this to be effective, challenge to Children's Services by elected councillors is vital. In 2015, the Casey report stated that *"Challenge means setting aspirational targets, knowing how far to stretch the organisation, asking searching questions, drilling down into information and data, ensuring targets are kept to and agreed actions implemented"*.

This report is produced to support councillors in discharging their responsibilities towards children and families in Southend. The report will be tabled for discussion at the Corporate Parenting group, Cabinet, Full Council, People Scrutiny Committee and the Southend Local Safeguarding Board.

Southend Corporate Parenting Group

The role of Corporate Parenting requires ownership and leadership at the most senior levels. In Southend the Corporate Parenting group is chaired by the Director of Children's Services, John O'Loughlin and the Lead Member for Children's Services, Councillor James Courtenay. The group plays a key strategic role in ensuring that the Council and its partners meet their corporate parenting responsibilities.

Throughout 2016/17 the Corporate Parenting group has focused on a number of important topics: safeguarding of looked after children, including from child sexual exploitation; foster carer recruitment; educational attainment of looked after children; the work of the Foster Family Community and the work of the Improvement Board.

The Corporate Parenting Group has had a particular focus this year on hearing from young people and their families about their experiences of working with Southend Children's Social Care and how the changes made to service delivery have impacted on their lives.

For more information see Corporate Parenting annual report 2016/17

National Context

Southend continues to contribute to shaping national policy and debate related to Children's Social Care. Senior Leaders are regular members of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS). The ADCS is the national leadership association in England for statutory directors of children's services and other children's services professionals in leadership roles.

Key topics that continue to receive attention nationally include the cumulative impact of welfare reform on children and families; child sexual exploitation, children leaving care and the Regional Adoption programme. Many of these issues are covered in more detail in this report.

Adoption

There has been a drive over the past two years to move towards Regional Adoption Agencies, to widen adoption recruitment; improve support for adopters and to place more children with adoptive families within shorter timescales. This has been driven by the DfE in conjunction with the Adoption leadership Board, a national board with a remit to drive significant improvements in the national adoption system of England. Southend are members of the Eastern Region Adoption Board. The Regional Adoption Board brings together Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies and adopters, with the purpose of creating more opportunities for children within the region, to have timely access to secure permanent homes and to provide children with the best possible life chances.

In addition, Southend are working closely with Essex, Hertfordshire, Suffolk, Luton and Adoption plus and Barnardo's (Voluntary adoption agencies) and Adopter Voice to form a Regional Adoption Alliance (Adopt East). It is hoped that this will create a larger pool of approved adopters with whom to match children. The Education & Adoption Act 2016 gives the Government the power to force 'failing' authorities to take action to merge services

Further information about adoption in Southend is included on page 56

Troubled Families Programme

On the 1st April 2015 the Expanded Troubled Families Programme was launched nationally; the Expanded Programme increases reach to children living in families across the age range who are in need of help through a broad range of criteria including domestic violence, parents or children with health needs, including mental health. The programme continues the existing criteria for parents and children involved in anti-social behaviour, school attendance and young people and adults who are out of work. The Troubled Families

Programme was initially named “Streets Ahead”, however as part of the service transformation when services were integrated in April 2016, this programme was incorporated into the Early Help offer.

Information about Troubled Families programme in Southend is included on page 9.

Revised 2017 Working Together to Safeguard Children Guidance

Working Together to Safeguard Children is the key statutory guidance for professionals working with children in England. It sets out how organisations and individuals should work together and how practitioners should conduct the assessment of children. The guidance was revised in February 2017, updating the previous versions published in 2013 and 2015.

The new version is not a major review but adds a definition of child sexual exploitation.

Extremism and Radicalisation

In the working together to Safeguard children 2015 guidance local authorities were required to establish channel panels from April 2015 to assess the extent to which identified individuals are vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism and to arrange support to those individuals identified as high risk. Panels must include the local authority and the chief officer of the local police. Southend’s Channel Panel has been in place since autumn 2015, in line with the Council’s Prevent strategy.

OFSTED Joint Targeted Area Inspection Framework

In September 2013, Ofsted launched the single inspection framework (SIF) for the inspection of services for children in need and protection, children looked after and care leavers. A number of thematic inspections were run alongside the SIF inspection programme.

In January 2016 updated inspection framework and guidance was published for Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAI). This framework was further updated in August 2016 & April 2017.

JTAIs are carried out under section 20 of the Children Act 2004. They are an inspection of multi-agency arrangements for:

- the response to all forms of child abuse, neglect and exploitation at the point of identification
- the quality and impact of assessment, planning and decision making in response to notifications and referrals
- protecting children and young people at risk of a specific type (or types) of harm, or the support and care of children looked after and/or care leavers (evaluated through a deep dive investigation into the experiences of these children)

- the leadership and management of this work
- The effectiveness of the LSCB in relation to this work.

Inspectors will evaluate children's experiences against the full range of the criteria, looking for strengths, areas for development and examples of innovative and effective practice. Inspections have continued under the existing Single Inspection Framework whilst the new framework is evaluated through several pilot inspections.

Children's Social Care in Southend

Children's Social Care works with families to support safe and effective parenting where, without the support, the welfare and safety of a child would be compromised. The aim of Southend is to help families to help themselves and to always work with families at the right level at the right time, promoting early help services. The core focus of the service is child protection, supporting families where children are on the edge of care, securing positive long term life chances for children permanently looked after by the Council and supporting care leavers.

Southend are currently developing a clear model of practice for Southend based on a restorative approach, to ensure that we can improve the lives of children and families cost effectively and intervene with families at the right time and at the right level. Southend's leadership team are working pro-actively towards implementing and embedding the new approach across social care and partners. The leadership team are specifically recruited to drive forward improvement; balance risk and have an ability to manage the complex issues that this brings.

Whilst we continue to develop our ways of working, there are some key principles and beliefs that continue to underpin our approach. These include:

- That children are best cared for within their families wherever this can be safely achieved
- That in investing in providing services that are able to promote change within families is more effective and efficient in general than removing children and placing them in alternative care
- The restorative approach of working with families ('doing with' rather than 'doing to') is more likely to be effective in sustaining long term change than more directive interventions
- That in most cases decisions about interventions should be made by those who understand the child and families/carers best, which will normally be the practitioners who are working with them. However, responsibility for decisions that have life-long implications for the child (for example the decision to remove a child from the care of their family) should always be held by senior managers
- That social work is a skilled and highly responsible task and that to perform well, practitioners need to feel well supported within their work setting and to have

opportunities for regular supervision and reflection on their interventions with others

- That having a multi-agency perspective on a situation enhances assessments and helps to mitigate risk by ensuring that alternative viewpoints are explored

Over the past year, significant changes have been made to the structure of Children's Social Care to ensure a more seamless journey for children and their families. These changes are at this stage too recent to be able to fully evaluate their impact for those families with whom we are working.

Financial Performance

Over the last 3 financial years Children Social Care has contributed £3m to reduce on going budgeted revenue expenditure through planned efficiency savings in service delivery. Whilst recognising this saving contribution to the budget- as referenced in the Budget Setting Cabinet reports for 2017/18 – January and February 2017. Due to the volatility of Children Social Care pressures both nationally and locally, a children Social Care earmarked reserve of £2M was approved. The Children Social Care Budget for 2016/17 closed the financial year with a £0.65M overspend compared to funding levels, and after the required use of the £0.5M drawdown from the Children Social Care reserve.

As part of the budget setting process for 2017/18, £1.2M of savings were agreed and put forward. As financial pressures emerged during 2016/17 with increased looked after children numbers, the Children Social Care department has opened the 2017/18 financial year with considerable financial pressures. Due to the size of these financial pressures, it is likely there will be a requirement to draw down further from the children social care reserve in order to minimize pressures on budgeted funding in 2017/18.

Children Social Care- Direct Expenditure and Income	Gross £M	Income £M	Net £M
2017/18 Latest Budget	22.0	3.5	18.5
2016/17 Actual	23.4	3.3	20.1
2015/16 Actual	22.5	3.0	19.5

Children Social Care Budgeted Savings	£M
2017/18	1.2
2016/17	1.0
2015/16	0.8

The increase in PVI commissioning costs has been driven by an increase in care numbers and a consequent rise in the number of relatively more expensive independent fostering and residential placements required in the past 18 months. Alongside this, due to reduced capacity nationally within the private sector and a national increase in demand, we have seen an unprecedented rise in external costs for many of these placements.

Southend has supported a fee paid fostering team in-house for a number of years. This was fully reviewed and updated in 2015 to allow more carers to become fee paid in line with private agencies. Whilst this has increased the unit cost of an in-house carer, it remains significantly less expensive than private provision.

Expenditure on residential and secure placements has increased due to an increase in average cost from £3,183 per week in February 2016 to £3,809 per week in July 2017, while the number of children supported in this type of placement has remained fairly stable, rising slightly from around 18-21 children.

The children in need service has experienced a pressure on its Section 17 budget for the past few years, mainly resulting from increased accommodation costs and providing support to families with No Recourse to Public Funds

Service Area Trends

Over the past year, there has been significant changes to the structure of children's services teams and their responsibilities within the overall structure. These changes have been made in line with our vision of being able to provide the right service, to the right child, at the right time. This joined up approach enables proportionate and timely decisions about the type and level of services children need and facilitates timely access to resources.

In April 2016 the two front doors (Early Help and Family Support and the statutory First Contact team) co-located to help to drive forward the above vision. Since then a review has been undertaken with staff and partners into Child in Need Services and the Staged Model of Intervention, for the delivery of children's services. The results of this review should be agreed and implemented by the end of 2017.

Early Help Family Support and Youth Offending Service

After The Early Help Family Support and YOS Service, Integrated Locality and Streets Ahead Services came together under the single line management in October 2015 and fully integrated in April 2016 the service has grown from strength to strength. In the first financial year (2016/17), 2918 referrals were received through the Single Front Door with 96% of these being directed to the appropriate team and 95% achieving a desired outcome.

The service aims to enable all Southend-on-Sea's contributors to Early Help to: act before the needs of children and families escalate; focus on achieving priority outcomes for those

children, young people and families who need it the most; give every child the opportunity to reach their full potential; and to have flexible services that provide the right support, at the right time and at the right level.

Building on existing best practice and processes, it provides:

- A single, integrated system and 'front door' for the identification, referral, assessment, and monitoring of Early Help.
- A core offer to schools, early year's settings and GPs to support them to fulfil their statutory duties with regard to Early Help.

The Early Help Family Support & YOS Team is underpinned by the following principles:-

- Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and vulnerable adults is the responsibility of us all.
- Early Help spans a wide spectrum of services, provided by a wide range of agencies to meet a wide range of needs.
- We work with families at the earliest opportunity to prevent needs from escalating.
- All children, young people and families' needs are met by universal services wherever possible.
- Families are encouraged and supported to identify their own issues and solutions.
- We build resilience and the capacity to achieve by having a joined up approach to families' needs.
- We improve the identification of children in need and in need of protection through increased understanding of the impact of an adult's needs on a child's life.
- We have an honest, open and transparent approach to supporting children and their families.
- We operate a multi-agency/disciplinary approach to both assessment and intervention.
- A traded service to provide additional Early Help support to individual schools, particularly with regard to improving school attendance.
- A specialist whole family support service to meet complex needs.
- An offer of support and guidance to all providers of Early Help services to children and young people.

Troubled Families Programme

The Troubled Families Programme was initially named "Streets Ahead", however as part of the service transformation when services were integrated in April 2016, this programme was incorporated into the Early Help offer.

The Troubled Families programme initially intended to change the repeating generational patterns of poor parenting, abuse, violence, drug use, anti-social behaviour and crime in the most troubled families in the UK. Troubled families are defined as those that have problems and cause problems to the community around them, putting high costs on the public sector. The aim is to provide partnership support via a dedicated key worker to enable families to turn around and in particular to:

- get children back into school
- reduce youth crime and anti-social behaviour
- put adults on a path back to work
- reduce the high costs these families place on the public sector each year

Due to outstanding success of the Southend Troubled Families service in Phase 1, particularly achieved in 2014-15, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) accepted us as an early Starter in Phase 2, funded for five years, giving more than 1,480 families the opportunity for support and a better quality of life. The DCLG broadened the selection criteria to now meet 6 key issues; adult and youth Crime/Anti-social Behaviour (ASB), Education attendance/behaviours, Unemployment, Domestic Abuse, Children who need help and Health.

Furthermore, EHFS in the community is (Southend-on-Sea Borough Council's Troubled Families service) is an innovative approach to family work, providing opportunities for families to access resources in their communities.

The programme supports positive change and also prevents families who are on the periphery of the EHFS criteria needing intensive intervention by working with communities to strengthen communication, co-operation and take up of services. Evidence suggests that families who live in flourishing communities experience improved emotional health & wellbeing which reduces long term dependency on services. Our community workers ensure that projects are sustainable and delivered with the involvement of the local community and Streets Ahead families with their aim being to empower, up-skill and foster community cohesion and family resilience, not to create unrealistic expectations or dependency.

This allows for most family issues to be addressed and early help to be provided, preventing later issues and producing cost savings for all partner agencies.

Phase 2:

During Phase 2 we have been able to generate income via Payment by Results outcomes as follows:

216 Significant and Sustained Progress

21 Adults went into continuous employment (over 26 weeks)

From its commencement to end of March 2017 there have been 736 cases opened to Troubled Families element of Early Help.

There were a total of 1010 outcomes achieved during 2016/17

Domestic Abuse

The Southend MARAT is a multi-agency team, established in June 2016, which seeks to transform how high risk domestic abuse (DA) is responded to within Southend through partnership working. The team includes representatives from social care, health, police and Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) services and works alongside representatives from National Probation service (NPS), CRS, housing, substance misuse and domestic abuse support projects.

Prior to the team being set up, all high risk incidents of DA in Southend were managed via the Essex Community MARACs. However, due to volume of cases, there were significant delays which resulted in many of the action plans produced by a MARAC being ineffective, as life had moved on for the victim and the family by the time a plan to reduce risk levels had been agreed.

The Southend MARAT process does not change the expectations of all agencies in Southend in relation to safeguarding children and adults; each agency continues to follow their safeguarding procedures and take necessary action on high risk DA cases to ensure there is no delay in offering interventions to protect and support the children and adults involved.

Partner agencies make a referral to MARAT when there has been a high risk incident of DA. This is often via a Police referral but other partners can also refer when a disclosure of a high risk incident is made to them directly – this should be assessed using the DASH risk assessment tool. The Southend MARAT will

- Research the information known about the family within their agency
- Share information together that is proportionate and relevant to the incident,
- Support the formation of a safety and action plan to reduce risk and seek to protect the victim, children, vulnerable adults and family members and also members of the community.

The aim is for all victims to have an action plan agreed at a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) within 14 working days of the referral to the MARAT. By working collaboratively and sharing appropriate information, the Southend MARAT can improve timely risk identification and safety planning for victims and their families, which is co-ordinated via the multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC). These are held weekly.

The Southend MARAT representatives and key partners (listed above) attend the weekly multi-agency conference (the MARAC). In addition, where other key agencies or individuals are working with a victim and family they may be invited to attend a MARAC when the safety and action plan for that victim is being discussed and agreed.

In the first 9 months of the process, MARAC considered 449 cases. In the first 6 months 55% of referrals were heard within 14 working days. Since January 2017, however, this has much improved with 95.5% being heard within 14 working days. In the first 5 months of 2017/18 a further 177 referrals were received in to the Southend MARAT. Evaluation of the impact of

the service evidences that social work staff have become more able to effectively and confidently engage perpetrators and support victims. The skill and knowledge base of social workers undertaking statutory assessments in families where domestic violence is a serious issue has been strengthened and this has helped to reduce the number of repeat domestic violence incidents in families. The co-location in the Southend Police Station has promoted timely decision making in respect of managing risk related to domestic violence and facilitated early access to support and preventative measures which contributes overall to the effectiveness of safety planning and positive outcomes for children living in those households.

The MARAT has undertaken training in PREVENT and in Honour Based Abuse and having developed the relevant processes, is now taking referrals for both of these areas of concern.

Child Sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) remains a key priority for Children's Social Care. In the past 2 years there has been significant work undertaken to increase the understanding of the profile of CSE in Southend and to prevent, identify and tackle the problem. 2016/17 saw a move to new classifications in accordance with the revised CSE risk assessment tool, making the identification of risk easier to achieve and taking into account the presence of a perpetrator.

104 young people had CSE concerns raised during 2016/17. Overall at the end of March 2017 there were 76 young people in Southend identified as being at risk of CSE, 19 of these were looked after at the point of identification. Considerable work has been undertaken over the past year to clarify the links between CSE and missing and the increased risk that this poses for Southend children.

At the end of March 2017 92.1% of children identified at risk of CSE had completed CSE risk assessments and the remainder were in process of completion.

Children missing from home and care

Ensuring that Children's Social Care and partner agencies provide the most appropriate safeguarding response for children who go missing from home and care remains a priority in Southend.

In 2015 The Southend, Essex & Thurrock (SET) Procedures were updated and a protocol for children missing from school, home and care was developed. The Southend LSCB has fully adopted these procedures. The protocol focuses upon raising awareness and increasing accountability amongst partner agencies, prevention of missing episodes and reducing repeat missing episodes through collaborative multi-agency working.

Southend have a small team of workers who undertake Independent Return Home interviews with children who have recently returned after being missing from home or care. This is in line with statutory guidance published by the DfE in 2014. These visits help to identify associated risks such as child sexual exploitation and themes within the Southend

area such as gang activity and patterns of missing episodes for those who regularly go missing.

Southend Children's Services track all children missing from home or care to promote a robust response. The Group Manager for Placements & Resources provides the Director for Children's Services with regular updates on all children missing from care. Those at highest risk are referred for Risk Management Meetings, where a multi-agency approach to managing the risk is taken and where clear action plans are developed to identify potential interventions to reduce risk.

Children missing from home and care

	May 16	Jun 16	July 16	Aug 16	Sept 16	Oct 16	Nov 16	Dec 16	Jan 17	Feb 17	Mar 17	Apr 17
Number of episodes	84	82	68	58	71	67	62	51	42	49	45	25
Number of children	54	46	36	34	35	34	38	31	23	37	33	21

Number of missing episodes by Children's Social Care Episode

	May 16	Jun 16	July 16	Aug 16	Sept 16	Oct 16	Nov 16	Dec 16	Jan 17	Feb 17	Mar 17	Apr 17
LAC	28	20	34	22	28	34	26	21	16	19	22	9
CPP	6	4	3	2	12	5	4	4	9	2	4	1
LAC/ CPP	9	7	1	2	2	1	1	2	0	0	3	2
CIN	9	17	14	8	16	10	12	8	1	6	0	2
Early Help	27	22	13	16	11	13	11	13	16	22	15	9
Other LA	5	12	3	8	2	4	8	3	0	0	1	2

Looked after children missing by placement type

	May 16	Jun 16	July 16	Aug 16	Sept 16	Oct 16	Nov 16	Dec 16	Jan 17	Feb 17	Mar 17	Apr 17
Foster Placement	8	9	6	7	10	15	12	7	9	6	18	10
Supported Residential	4	3	8	7	8	8	10	6	6	5	5	1
Children's home	25	15	21	10	12	12	5	10	1	8	2	0

Since the 1st April 2017, 76.3% of young people were contacted within 3 days of being found following a missing episode. Those deemed at highest risk are being closely tracked with additional safety and risk plans running alongside any care plans to ensure a structure and measured approach to the risk associated with both missing and CSE.

Looked after children from other local authorities placed in Southend

In 2015 the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) led on the development of a national resource with information about services for looked after children in every local authority in the country. Southend's letter was circulated to every local authority in England informing them of Southend's offer to looked after children from other areas placed in our Borough. As well as this information that is provided to social workers when children from other areas are placed in Southend, the Virtual School and health services work closely together to ensure that all young people in Southend have their needs met in the best way possible.

Family Group Conferencing (FGC)

FGC is a core component of restorative approaches. It is a decision making approach based on a well-developed model which involves the extended family in making plans for children. Despite national variations most FGC adhere to themes such as taking and sharing responsibility for solutions, culturally competent practice, empowerment and private family time.

During 2016/17 FGC was delivered within Fieldwork Services. There was limited capacity and the approach was only being used with families where care proceedings were issued or likely to be issued. Within the model the use of FGC will be expanded to include children in need and children in need of protection. The service will be formally implemented from September 2017 with a focus on cases where there are significant child in need concerns or at ICPC stage. This is additional to our on-going FGC activity within Fieldwork and EHFSS.

Young Carers

Young Carers are children and young people under 18 who provide regular or ongoing care and emotional support to a family member who is physically or mentally ill, disabled or misuses substances.

A young carer may do some or all of the following:

- Practical tasks, such as cooking, housework and shopping
- Physical care, such as lifting, helping a parent on stairs or with physiotherapy
- Personal care, such as dressing, washing, helping with toileting needs
- Managing the family budget, collecting benefits and prescriptions
- Administering medication
- Looking after or 'parenting' younger siblings
- Emotional support and/or
- Interpreting, due to a hearing or speech impediment or because English is not the family's first language.

A young carer becomes vulnerable when the level of care giving and responsibility to the person in need of care becomes excessive or inappropriate for that child, impacting on his or her emotional or physical well-being or educational achievement and life chances.

Our priority for young carers in Southend-on Sea is to ensure that they are safeguarded from inappropriate caring and that they are able to enjoy and achieve in line with their peers and to have time away from their caring role. .

All young carers referrals now come through the EHFS &YOS Single front door, ensuring the family and the young carers have the appropriate support, The young carers worker continues to work with various other organisations, schools, health professionals, and teams within the EHFS&YOS, we have supported the development of Young Carers groups in Milton Hall School and Prince Avenue School.

Working closely with the data team we have improved our database and now have an up to date and current system with 345 Young Carers; 24 Primary Young Carers (7%) and 321 Secondary Young Carers (93%). 167 Male young carers and 178 female young carers.

Young Carers trips/events have taken place in the current year, which have included Bowling, Cooking Workshops to Waitrose; Tropical Wings, Colchester Zoo, all young carers who attend our programmes have had the opportunity to take part in these events. 3 older young carers also had the opportunity to have a week away during the summer with the Cirdain Trust Sailing group, with the LAC programme. The young carers attending SYC&MORE and COOL continue to work on their Children's University passports with over 20 of them having achieved to a Bronze/Silver standard and attended a graduation ceremony.

First Contact Front Door

Co-located with the Early Help Front Door is the statutory social care front door. By being co-located referrals to either front door can be discussed quickly to ensure that the needs of the child and family are met in the most appropriate way, ensuring safeguarding of all children. This ensures children are quickly allocated resources to meet their needs or safeguard their welfare, working to a principle of right service, first time.

The table below outlines the average weekly contacts to Children's Social Care between 2015/16 and 2017/18 at this point. This data solely reflects contacts to the First Contact front Door.

Average weekly contacts to Southend Children's Social Care

2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
55	70	89

The volume of average weekly contacts received has increased year on year from 55 in 2014/15 to 89 in 2016/17. In the first four months of 2017/18 we have seen a drop to an average of 61 contacts per week, which seems to evidence the impact of the front door changes embedding and partners beginning to understand the changes.

The co-located front doors continue to support understanding and awareness of the Southend framework of intervention across the partnership.

The First contact Front Door aims to ensure that only those children meeting thresholds for statutory assessments are progressed as referrals to Children's Social Care. The ratio of contacts to assessment referrals in 2016/17 was 43.7% (5,050 contacts were received in 2016/17 and 2,209 assessments were started in 2016/17) compared with 38.8% in 2015/16 (3,860 contacts were received in 2015/16 and 1,499 assessments were started in 2015/16).

16 and 17 year olds

In 2016/17 the First Contact service undertook 12 homeless assessments of 16/17 year olds, following which 3 young people were provided with accommodation by the Council. The remaining young people either returned home or were supported to live with wider family members or friends. This has been achieved with the support of the Edge of Care Team through a strong focus on restorative practice to help in the reparation of family relationships when teenagers are facing exclusion from the family home and family life and by facilitating access to parenting support at the point of referral as well as close working with the Southend Housing Team to ensure joint assessments.

In the coming year we will be formally introducing a Family Group Conference service to support practitioners in this work.

It remains our strong belief that children and young people achieve better outcomes when they remain living within their families. In addition to the Family group Conference Service, in 2017/18 Southend will conclude the work being undertaken in a formal reunification process for children looked after which will work jointly across the Fieldwork Teams; fostering; Edge of Care, Volunteering Matters and the Marigold Assessment Plus Service to ensure that where a young person can safely return home, this is done both in a timely manner and with strong support services in place to achieve stability in families, thereby reducing the risk of the young person re-entering care.

Out of hours Social Work Service

The Out Of Hours Social Work Service, or Emergency Duty Team (EDT), forms part of a 24 hour and seamless front line child protection service delivered to Southend children and their families. The service is commissioned through Essex County Council and meets the local authorities out of hours statutory social care responsibilities in safeguarding the welfare of children.

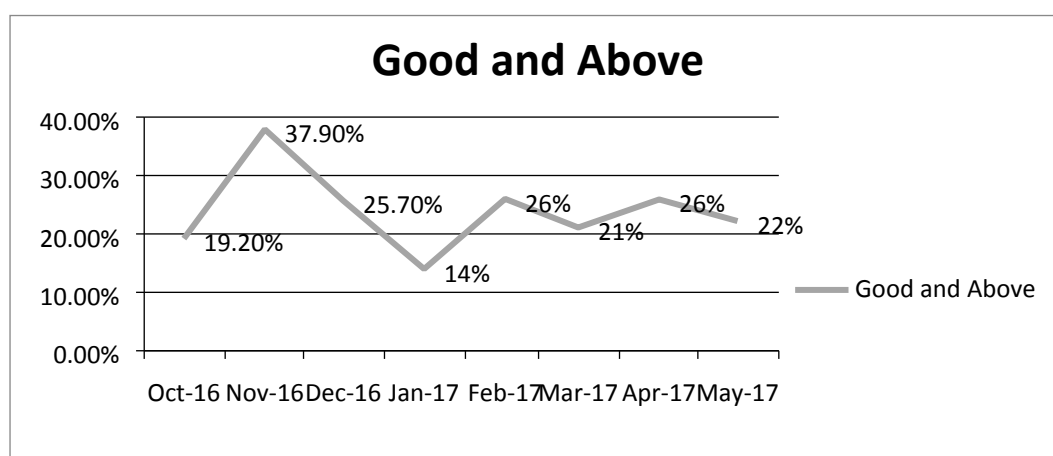
Demand for the service can vary considerably from day to day. On average between 140 calls from Southend are logged each month. Referrals usually require extensive liaison with children and their relatives in addition to a range of other individuals and organisations

including friends and neighbours, foster carers, residential establishments, police, hospitals, other local authorities, housing providers, solicitors, courts and voluntary sector providers. The service provides advice in both simple and complex situations and also initiates child protection investigations and/or proactive services including admission into care.

Assessment & Intervention

The assessment & Intervention team alongside the Front Door team undertake all statutory Children Act child protection investigations and child in need assessments for new referrals to Children's Social Care. The service has struggled over the past year with changes in management, however there are now two strong managers in place offering consistent and strong leadership. The workforce has been quite transient over the past year, but it is hoped that with strong management now in place, over the next six months we will be able to evidence a more stable workforce.

Audit and inspection have consistently evidenced those cases deemed Requires Improvement as quite stable however those rated Good and Above have proven more volatile on a month by month basis.



There has been good feedback from partner agencies regarding the co-located front door and the static duty team. Partners have felt that they have been able to begin to develop stronger relationships with the duty team and feel able to discuss referrals and more easily access the service best able to respond to the identified need.

2012 statutory social work assessments were completed in 2016/17 which is higher than the number completed in the previous year: 1458 in 2015/16. However, as noted in the table below, the percentage of re-referrals has decreased and remains slightly lower than the

national average. Southend's lower than average repeat referral ratio is indicative of consistently high quality assessments and timely access to appropriate support.

The higher volume of children requiring statutory assessments can be partly attributed to improved information sharing at the front door achieved with the development of the co-located front door. The increase in assessment numbers will remain subject to monitoring and analysis.

Percentage of re-referrals within 12 months of a previous referral

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Southend	21.4%	19.9%	16.4%
Stat Neighbours	25.7%	23.4%	Not yet published
England	24.0%	22.3%	Not yet published

In 2016/17, 55.11% were completed within timescale which was a decrease from 93.6% recorded for 2015/16. In the first half of 2017/18 this percentage has increased to around 57.78%. The average length of assessment in 2016/17 was 41.7 days which is an increase on the 27.6 average recorded in 2015/16. For the period 1st April 2017 to the 31st August 2017 the average length in days to complete an assessment was 47.8 days.

Percentage of assessments held within 45 working days

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	01/04/2017-31/08/2017
Southend	96.3%	96.4%	63.8%	62.8%
Stat Neighbours	73.8%	76.9%	Not yet published	Not yet published
National	81.5%	83.4%	Not yet published	Not yet published

The Children in Need Service

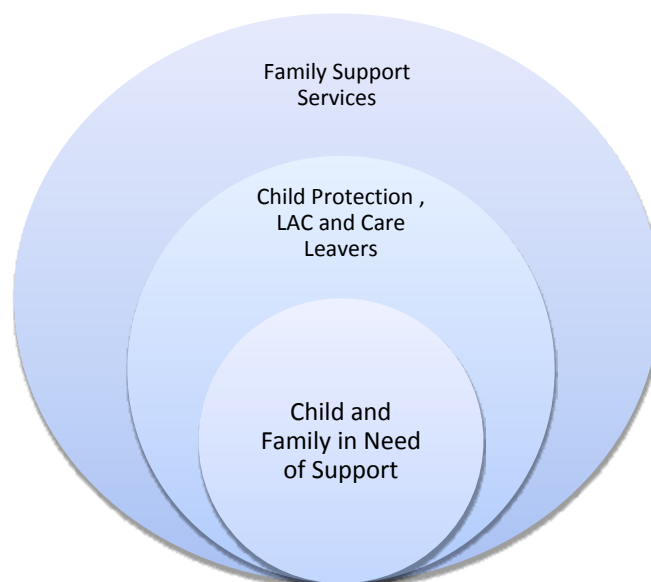
Southend has for a number of years worked with a staged model of intervention across early help and child in need, with children and families deemed to be at the highest risk being supported through child in need procedures.

We have reviewed how we deliver services to children assessed to be in need under Section 17 Children Act 1989 so that we can meet need at the earliest possible opportunity, reduce escalation of need and reduce the amount of time families need to access direct service

provision from SBC children's services. The model of delivering services in the future will be underpinned by restorative practice and will improve the experience of children and families.

We know that if the anxieties and concerns held in the professional networks are listened to and partner agencies feel supported, then they will be more confident about working with complex families and holding a level of risk within a CIN/family support process. Some partner agencies described feeling their professional judgement is not being valued and listened to anymore and that, when they raise concerns or challenge decisions, they are not heard or discussed but simply 'shut down' with a reference to thresholds or process. We believe that the move to a more collaborative way of working, underpinned by a restorative approach, could have a significant positive impact on working together in the best interests of children and families.

The planned changes would move Southend from the current 4 tiered model of intervention to a circular model. This depicts children and families being placed at the centre of services surrounded by the range of family support, child protection, LAC and Care Leavers services. A version of this model is presented, as follows (figure 1):



The implementation of 'The Southend Model' is overseen by a project board and formal 'go live' is expected to around January 2018.

Child Protection Plans

Children deemed at risk of significant harm are presented to an initial Child Protection Conference to determine the need for a Child Protection Plan.

A Child Protection Plan is made following a multi-agency Child Protection Conference and assessment that a child is at continuing risk of significant harm or impairment of health and development.

Number of Child Protection Plans (at 31st March)

2015	2016	2017
184	189	220

Rate of Child Protection Plans per 10,000 (at 31st March)

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Southend	48.1	49.2	56.8
Stat Neighbour average	53.0	53	50
National	42.9	43.1	43

As at March 2017, there were 220 children subject to a Child Protection Plan, an increase of 31 from 189 in March 2016. The rate of Child Protection Plans in Southend in March 2017 was 67.9 children per 10,000. This was much higher than in 2016. As at July 2017, this figure had dropped to 42.9 per 10,000 (159 children).

Duration of Child Protection Plans

Monitoring of Child Protection Plans lasting two years or more is used to indicate the effectiveness of the Child Protection Plan in eliminating or significantly reducing the risk of significant harm. The percentage of children subject to Plans for more than 2 years has decreased over the last year to 2.7% at 31 March 2017, from 4% at 31 March 2016. As a result of the increase in Child Protection Plans over previous years a robust monitoring process has been developed to quality assure planning in all cases and this has resulted in a significant drop in the number of children subject to child protection plans for more than 2 years. At July 2017 the figure had increased slightly to 3.8% (6 children within 3 families).

Duration of Child Protection Plans, as at 31 March

Duration of Child Protection Plans	2015/16	2016/17
Under 3 months	24%	23.6%
3-6 months	30%	25.9%
6-12 months	21%	27.3%
1-2 years	21%	20.5%
Over 2 years	4%	2.7%

It is evident that in 2016/17 many children and families were moving through child protection interventions in a timely manner with 49.5% of cases remaining on Child Protection Plans for less than six months, a slight decrease from 54% at the end of 2015/16. The decrease in the percentage of children on Child Protection Plans for less than 6 months is likely to be as a result of an increase in the number of children becoming subject to Child Protection Plans during the first six months of the year including a number of larger families. This indicator will continue to be monitored closely.

Children becoming subject to a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time

This measure indicates whether a Child Protection Plan was successful in effectively reducing risks over time in comparison to the necessity for a further Child Protection Plan. In practice, this is determined by work undertaken with parents and children through the plan, the quality of the assessment of risks of significant harm, and the provision and accessibility of any support services subsequent to the child protection plan. For this performance indicator, a low score is generally seen as indicative of good performance.

The number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan for the second or subsequent time increased from 19 % in 2015/16 to 29.3% in 2016/17. The national average for this indicator has steadily increased over the last three years, however the large Southend increase is being closely monitored.

Percentage of children who became the subject of a child protection plan during the year ending 31 March who became the subject of a plan for a second or subsequent time

	2015/16	2016/17
Southend	19%	29.3%
Statistical neighbours	19%	22%
National	18%	19%

Private Fostering Update

A child under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) who is cared for, or proposed to be cared for, and provided with accommodation by someone other than a parent, person with parental responsibility or close relative for 28 days or more is described as being privately fostered. A private foster carer may be a friend of the family, the parent of a friend of the child or someone previously unknown to the child's family who is willing to privately foster a child. They may also be from extended family such as a cousin or great-aunt.

Local authorities do not approve private foster carers in the same way as general foster carers, but are required to assess and say whether or not they agree and accept a private fostering arrangement to ensure that the welfare of privately fostered children is being safeguarded

and promoted. To fulfil this duty local authorities must take a pro-active approach in partnership with other agencies and other key professionals in raising public awareness of requirements regarding notifications of private fostering arrangements.

Overview of activity April 2016 to August 2017.

At the end of March 2017 there were 8 children known to be in private fostering arrangements in Southend. This was a slight increase from 6 in March 2016. Of these, 2 were new arrangements which started in 2016/17. The majority of these children were born in the UK (6-8). Since April 2017, there have been a further 3 notifications of new placements and 3 placements have ceased.

Total number of children whose private fostering arrangement began between 1st April 2016 and 31st July 2017, by age

Age (at 31st July 2017)	Number of children
Under 1	0
1-4	0
5-9	0
10-15	8
Total	8

Southend has a formal Private Fostering Panel which considers all initial and final assessments in addition to annual reports where required. Statutory checks are completed in line with the checks which are undertaken for any local authority foster carer. This panel ensure quality assurance and safeguarding issues are followed. All privately fostered children in Southend are deemed to be “Children in Need” and as such have an allocated children’s social worker and a formal child in need plan. Since 2013, 4 households have been formally prohibited from privately fostering following presentation at the Private Fostering Panel.

Due to intelligence gathering amongst agencies, prohibitions offer a layer of protection for other young people not just the privately fostered child. Should an individual who has been prohibited allow another young person to reside in their care, this will remain a criminal offence and allow the police to act swiftly and accordingly.

Private Fostering has been included in September 2017’s “The weekly newsletter” which is posted on the Southend Learning Network and is a high profile document for schools. This is also distributed internally to those who work with schools and therefore hits a higher target audience.

Regular briefing sessions are held for Student Social Workers placed in Adults and Children’s services and for the NQSW group. Further sessions will be held in the Autumn of 2017 to ensure that new entrants to Southend are fully aware of the issues and processes involved in respect of Private Fostering.

Bi-Annual reports are presented to the Southend local safeguarding board to monitor both compliance and the multi-agency approach to safeguarding these vulnerable children and young people.

The Family courts

The Family Justice Review Report (FJR) was published in 2015 in an attempt to significantly reduce delay within the family courts and in care proceedings. In June 2013 when the review was first commissioned, the national average length for the completion of care proceedings was 46 weeks. As a result of the FJR, the expectation was that all care proceedings should be completed within 26 weeks. In exceptional circumstances, cases can be extended for a further 8 weeks.

The duration of court proceedings in Southend has improved year on year since the changes were implemented in 2015 and averaged 23 weeks over the 4 quarters of 2016/17.

"The Social Worker was excellent. The judge stated that in evidence that she was one of the best Social workers she had ever come across and she could not have done more for the family. She stated that she had gone above and beyond."

This was reported by the Judge in her judgment in respect of a CWD case, May 2017

The public law outline (PLO) is a process that all local authorities have to follow in their conduct of care proceedings. The current PLO accommodates the changes brought in following the Family Justice Review. It puts a much greater emphasis on pre-proceedings work.

For care proceedings to run smoothly and efficiently, it is essential that as much work as possible is done in the preliminary stages before care proceedings are issued. The family courts expect that a Family PLO meeting must have been held prior to issuing care proceedings. The role of this meeting is becoming increasingly important in care proceedings. Prospective family members who may be considered as an alternative long-term carer for a child must be identified at the earliest possible stage to ensure assessments commence in a timely manner.

Data shows that during 2016/17, pre-proceedings agreements were initiated for 106 children and 96 ended. 14 children remain subject to an active pre-proceedings process as at the end of August 2017, an improvement from 37 at the end of March 2017.

Recent data received from CAFCASS (the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) shows that the number of court applications in Southend has increased from 70 in 2015/16 to 79 in 2016/17. In the first 6 months of 2017/18, 23 further applications were made.

Overview of care population

One of our key principles is that children are best cared for within their families wherever this can be safely achieved. We are always striving to improve practice in respect of care planning to ensure that we can say confidently which children need to come into care and identify which children's outcomes will be improved by entering the care system. We continue to have higher numbers of children in care per 10,000 population under 18 years of age than our statistical neighbours (other local authorities with similar profiles). This rate remained consistent between 2014/5 and 2015/16, but has increased significantly during 2016/17.

Children looked after per 10,000 population aged under 18

	2015/16	2016/17
Southend	68	73.34
Stat neighbours	66.4	68
National	60	62

Number of looked after children at 31st March 2017

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Southend	229	262	282

As at the 31st March 2017 Southend was responsible for looking after 282 children and young people, an increase of 18.8% compared to the same time in 2014/15. At the point of writing this report, those number have increased further to 291 an overall increase in that period of 21%. There has been a significant rise in the number of looked after children over the past 3 years, from 229 in 2015 to the current figure of 291. Key to understanding this rise is consideration of the profile of looked after children, including the age of children entering care and ages and reasons for leaving care.

Age breakdown of children entering care during the year ending 31st March,

Age	2015	2016	2017
Under 1	22(24.4%)	34(25.9%)	22(14.37%)
1-4	18 (20%)	30(22.9%)	41(26.79%)
5-9	11(12.2%)	24(18.3%)	32(20.91%)
10-15	17(18.9%)	33(25.2%)	40(26.14%)
16 and over	22(24.4%)	10(7.6%)	18(11.76%)
Total	90	131	153

The number of over 16's and the percentage of this age group within the total number of children entering care has reduced considerably since 2015. The percentage of children aged 5-15 years has however increased from 31.1% to 47.05%. There has been a recent trend in unaccompanied asylum seeking males aged over 17 years presenting for services, which has led to an increase in those over the age of 16 years rising from 7.6% in 2016 to 11.76% in 2017, however this is still a large reduction since 2015, down by 12.64%.

The table below includes an age breakdown of the total number of looked after children at year end which also illustrates the impact on the total number of looked after children between 2015 and 2017.

Age breakdown of total number of looked after children, at year ending 31 March

Age	2015	2016	2017
Under 1	19	22	17
1-4	30	38	41
5-9	30	41	49
10-15	90	94	113
16 and over	60	67	62
Total	229	262	282

Ethnicity breakdown of looked after children at 31 March 2017

Ethnicity	Southend LAC 2017	Total Southend under 18 population
White British & Other	88%	91.6%
Mixed	2.5%	2.1%
Asian or Asian British	2.8%	3.7%
Black or Black British	1.8%	2.1%
Other ethnic group	4.9%	0.5%

(Total under 18 population ethnicity breakdown from Southend 2011 census return)

When compared to the percentage ethnicity breakdown of the Southend population taken from the 2011 census, there is a clear disproportionality in the ethnic representation of the

looked after children population compared to the general population. Much research has been undertaken about disproportionality in the ethnicity of looked after children in the care system in England compared to the general population. Owen & Statham's report on Disproportionality in Child Welfare (2009) is widely referenced in relation to this issue and shows that children from black and mixed ethnic backgrounds are usually over-represented in the care system and in the children in needs statistics in England, with children from Asian backgrounds usually under-represented. Southend's population follows this national pattern, but also has under representation of children from white backgrounds.

The number of children leaving care during 2016/17 was 137. Of these, 29 (21%) were adopted; 14 (10.2%) were made the subject of a special guardianship order; 33 (24%) turned 18 and 38 (27.7%) returned home.

Returning home to family

During 2016/17, 52 children either returned home to parents or left care permanently to live with a relative under a Special Guardianship/Child Arrangement Order, against 50 in the previous year. This is a slight decrease but can be accounted for by an increase in the number of young people turning 18, several of whom returned home but do not show in the figures as they ceased to be looked after on their 18th birthday.

A child will usually return home as a result of changes that the family have made, either as a result of intervention by Children's Social Care or by the family making alternative arrangements for example by the making of a Special Guardianship Order/Child Arrangement Order. Positive changes may not always be sustained by families despite the support put in place, so if children are referred back again to Children's Social Care, any previous looked after child episodes are considered as a part of the assessment (as are prior Child Protection Plans) and any management decisions made would need to ensure children are not left in neglectful or abusive environments.

Reunification framework

As a part of the work undertaken through the Edge of Care team and Marigold Assessment Plus, alongside Fieldwork Services, during 2016/17 work has been on-going to bring together a clear reunification framework. As stated earlier in this report, one of our key principles is that children are best cared for within their families wherever this can be safely achieved. The reunification framework identifies the key stages in the process of assessing, deciding, and supporting (with interventions) a child or young person to return to the care of their parents or family members where there have previously been risks or concerns about the care that they are able to offer.

This process begins with the identification of a potential for reunification. The framework identifies the likely triggers that will initiate a conversation about whether there is a possibility of reunification, or taking steps towards reunification for a child. We are always

aware that risks change as a young person gets older and positive changes are often made in families over time.

However, it is proposed that reunification is only one part of a much broader approach that will facilitate improved outcomes for children, providing a commitment to strengthening family relationships for all looked after children whether there is a prospect of reunification or not. There is a continuum of parental/family involvement ranging from improving the quality of a very small amount of contact, to increasing opportunities for increased/unsupervised/staying contact, to returning home part time basis and then reunification. It is believed that the above approach will facilitate both improved outcomes for children as well as proactively working with families to create opportunities for reunification, rather than awaiting for 'triggers' to be evident. It is important that services that support this are accessible in a timely way.

The process is based around the NSPCC model for reunification (Wilkins M. and Farmer E. (2015) Reunification: an evidence-informed framework for return home practice. London: NSPCC & Wilkins M. (2015) How to implement the reunification practice framework: a checklist for local authorities. London: NSPCC) and also using the Return Home from Care Report (DfE 2015).

Where it is decided that now is not the right time to initiate an assessment for reunification, there will always be consideration of what work can be undertaken to strengthen the relationships for a LAC child with their family, with a view to considering the appropriateness of reunification to birth family at a later stage in their life.

During 2017/18, a small number of staff will be recruited to drive forward reunification plans alongside Edge of Care and the Marigold Assessment Plus Service. In future reporting, we will be able to evidence the impact of the new service on the lives of young people and their families.

Marigold Assessment Plus

This is the overarching term for a range of services that includes Contact Services, Parenting Assessment and Support Services; The Rise Project, Targeted Family Support Services such as Theraplay and MIM's assessments, alongside a range of other family support services. The service offers a high quality assessment and support service, complementing the core social work and early help offer and additionally providing targeted support for families where their children are looked after or within Child Protection (CP) and Public Law Outline (PLO) processes.

Families may first be referred to the service for assessed contact, which then may move to a parenting assessment, with or without a support programme (reducing the tendency for these programmes to be requested as a recommendation of the assessment and causing further delay for the child) and then, depending on the outcome of the assessment, move onto a Back Together Programme, supported contact or life story work.

A Polish family, who came to UK in 2008. The three primary age children were subject to Child Protection plan for neglect and physical abuse. The mother suffered with a genetic syndrome meaning she had no intellectual impairment but limited emotional understanding. Birth father had a physical impairment. The children were removed and placed into foster care. The family were referred to Marigold Assessment + service for a parenting assessment. Interviews and parenting observations took place supported with a translator. The mother had suffered with post-natal depression and subsequent depressive episodes but was unable to access help because of the language barrier. One of the children also had a disability but the parents could not access benefits again due to the language barriers. A parenting assessment helped the family to access appropriate mental health services for depression and provided a teaching element for appropriate nutrition, and support was given to access benefits for the child with a disability. Marigold also supported the parents in attending English lessons. Reunification was recommended and a back together programme implemented, including frequent visits to the home and a theraplay programme. The children returned home and the family have not come back to local authority's notice.

Parenting Assessment & PAMS assessments

The service integrates for families the assessment, intervention and supervision elements of parenting assessments. Staff in the different areas of the service work together to ensure that information is collated, and that parenting assessments give a holistic view of a family's abilities and potential for development and change.

Within the service there are three senior practitioners, who lead on parenting assessments, assisted by the Children & Family workers who have expertise in various areas such as Theraplay.

Between April 2016 and April 2017, 63 parenting assessments were completed within time scales of between 2 (addendum assessments) and 12 weeks, including PAMS compliant assessments, specially designed to support parents with any level of learning disability.

The majority of assessments are completed between 8 and 10 weeks and where issues arise during the process, interventions are added to support parents to start to make the changes necessary for them to parent their children into the future. All assessments are completed within Court directed time scales.

The standard of parenting assessments is such that a considerable amount of compliments were received from the courts during the year.

Contact services

The Marigold Assessment Plus Service provides contact for looked after children and their birth families. The integration of contact and assessment services reduce delay, ensuring that court deadlines are met, with services streamlined and making sense to service users and stakeholders.

Between April 2016 and April 2017, 152 children between the ages of 0 and 16 living in foster care were provided with contact sessions of between two hours twice a week, once a month or school holidays only, either at the Centre or out in the community, and supported by highly trained and qualified contact facilitators. Life story work and positive parenting is incorporated in contact where appropriate. Assessed contact may move to supported contact where reunification is the plan or where children in foster care have on going contact with their birth families.

The Allan Cole Contact Centre received its enhanced accreditation in December 2013 as the first local authority to be accredited by the National Association for Child Contact Centres. This allows the centre to offer a contact service for families within private court proceedings with referrals being made via Solicitors, CAFCAS and other local authorities.

“The Marigold Centre has been really supportive, contact has been goodthey’ve been excellent” (parent during LAC forum October 2016)

“Dear staff.. Just sending this post card to thank you for everything... thank you for never judging me, thank you for supporting me and specially thank you for making my 2 hours a day with my baby away better. I have no words to express how real you are all to me and my family. Thank you”

Back Together Programmes including positive parenting (based on the Triple P enhanced Positive Parenting Programme), including Parent-Child Game interventions

Where a decision has been made that a child can safely return home after a period of time in foster care, research indicates that a programme of robust support is helpful with this transition, through rebuilding attachment and support parents in resuming their parenting roles. Theraplay and the Triple P based positive parenting programme forms part of the

support offered to families. The service works closely with other support teams in preventing further family breakdown and this will be extended during 2017/18 to inform and support the formal reunification service.

David and Ward (2012) found that parents participating in the Triple P based positive parenting programmes made significant improvements in the management of problematic situations.

This programme can also be implemented as part of contact sessions to enhance the quality of contact between looked after children and their parents. The Parent-Child game intervention is particularly effective in helping parents to manage their children's behaviour and develop a more nurturing relationship.

Between April 2016 and April 2017, 10 Back Together and Positive Parenting Programmes were completed successfully, with no further separations for the families who benefited from these programmes.

Marschack Intervention Method and Theraplay

Davies and Ward (2012) reporting on the outcomes of Interaction Guiding (an intervention based on the same principles as Theraplay) state that "A significant decrease in disrupted communication was found between mothers and infants in the interaction guidance group".

The intervention can be offered to birth parents, as well as foster carers/adoptive parents, Special Guardians to build up attachment between parents/carers and the children in their care.

Between April 2016 and April 2017 the service delivered the Principles of Theraplay programmes to 7 families with many of the parents/carers reporting a real improvement in their bond with the children.

Theraplay assessment of attachment sessions (MIM) are also used to inform parenting assessments and between 2016 and 2017, 72 MIM sessions were completed. Over the past year the service has developed as a core support for Special Guardians, who often struggle in the early stages of placement.

"We are grateful for the excellent support offered by the Allan Cole Centre. "(Special Guardian April 2016)

"Both C and H enjoyed it immensely ...and our house has slowly become a more harmonious place since then... it is bringing about an overall change; so thanks very much" (Special Guardian 28/7/16)

Thames Valley Partners Programme

This is a programme which runs for female partners of men attending the Sex Offender Treatment Programme, who may in some capacity have children in their care who are potentially at risk. Within this programme, 'partner' is defined as being in a current or recent relationship. The group is also appropriate for women who have been in a relationship with men where there has been an allegation of sexual abuse against a child that could make their children vulnerable to sexual harm. The term partner can also apply to women who have relationships with the men, such as mother or sister, who would benefit from information and support to keep children safe and to reduce the risk of men re-offending against children in the future.

The group aims to:

- Assist in making and maintaining informed decisions about their relationship with the offender and their children's safety.
- Assist partners who remain in a relationship with an offender
- In protecting children from sexual abuse by him or another offender
- In contributing to the offenders' new life plan, including monitoring the relapse prevention plan and supporting him in a positive future lifestyle
- Assisting partners who choose not to remain in a relationship with the offender in protecting themselves and their children against any other sex offender
- Help the partners to understand and deal with the effects of their partners' abuse on themselves; the child and the family as a whole.

In the past year there have been 2 programmes completed within the centre, each spanning 18 weeks and supporting 9 women.

Sexual Risk Reduction Programme/ Sexual Risk Consultations

In addition to the above programme, this programme and associated consultations, work with young offenders to both assess future risk and to support in a change in lifestyle and behaviour.

Between April 2016 and April 2017, 4 males have worked with specialist staff allowing for better informed decision making about the safety of an offender living with their families as well as supporting reunification of families where sexual risk was a factor in separation of juvenile offenders.

Life story work/books

Every child who is placed for adoption and many who are in long foster care are provided with a life story book to help them to make sense of their past as they grow up. For younger children this is a book completed which gives clear information about the child's birth family and their journey through care. For older children, the book will be completed jointly with

the child to help them to understand why they are in care and unable to return to the care of their birth family.

Between April 2016 and April 2017, 41 books were completed and direct work took place with 11 children.

"You have done an amazing job; very age appropriate" (adoptive parent about child life story book) April 2017)

Look At Me Programme/wishes and feelings.

This programme (LAMP) is designed to help children who are showing behavioural difficulties with their carers/parents. The children referred often have unresolved feelings of grief and anger about their past and/or current situation.

The programme aims to support the child to express his/her feelings and to provide the child with strategies to cope with overwhelming feelings without having to resort to behaviours which create difficulties.

Between April 2016 and April 2017 a service was provided for 7 children.

Just Right State

To build on the above some of the staff has been trained to run the "Just Right State". This is a programme designed to support children to self-regulate their behaviour and has in the past year been run jointly with our education and adoption partners. A group for five children and their carers took place in August 2016 and one child and their carer were offered an individual programme because of the complexity of the child's needs.

The Rise Project (based on the Pause Project)

The Rise Project. This is a project for women who have had 2 or more children removed and who are caught in a cycle of short interval pregnancies and subsequent care proceedings. The project is based on similar services provided by other authorities (Hackney, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire) and apart from reducing the cost of recurrent care proceedings achieves a break in the cycle of deprivation and child abuse. Women are supported to use long term reversible contraception and have the benefit of a dedicated support worker to help them make them make positive changes in their lives before embarking on parenthood again.

In early 2017 the team met with Pamela Cox, Professor of Sociology and Danny Taggart, Psychologist, from Essex University about the Rise project. Both were impressed with the project and commented on the unique nature of the Southend service. They will be helping

with the 12 months evaluation of the project, create further hubs and workshops and support the team in further funding requests. This will enable us to formally evaluate the impact of the project for the mother's involved.

Educational attainment of looked after children and young people

The Virtual School for looked after children works with children and young people from early years to the age of 18. It prioritises the individual learning or training needs of a child or young people in care, identifies the skills necessary for participation in an education, training or work environment and supports young people to acquire and adapt these skills for learning and for life. The Virtual School have developed and closely monitored the Personal Education Plans for all looked after children to ensure that the actions identified drive forward these priorities.

The educational outcomes for looked after children in Southend rely on established integrated partnership working between the Virtual School, social workers, schools and carers. This is supported by the provision of additional targeted support together with the understanding of how the day to day realities of being in care can affect a young person's capacity to learn and participate.

A breakdown of the educational data for summer 2016 for Southend looked after children at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 was presented in the Autumn of 2016 as part of the Virtual School annual report. Attainment figures for summer 2017 were not available at the point of completion of this report.

Early years

Children in reception class are assessed in the Early Stage Foundation stage. Schools report this data to the Department for education but they are not a part of the national indicator set for looked after children. In order to track the educational progress and attainment of our youngest children, the Early Years Team collects data in a number of areas. The children are judged against the criteria of emerging expectations, meeting expectations and exceeding expectations. The area in which data will be collected in 2017/18 will be:

- Personal social and emotional development
- Physical development
- Communication and language
- Maths
- Literacy

The Early Years Team ensure that the children's identified needs are being appropriately supported using the early years pupil premium and raise any issues directly with the Virtual School.

During 2016/17 there was an increased focus on supporting carers to provide quality educational activities in the home. Carers have been supported with resources and home visits with a particular focus on early reading skills.

The fostering service and social workers for the children have been actively ensuring that when appropriate, children are accessing the 15 hours of free nursery that they are entitled to. This is a valuable additional resource that supports the holistic education of the child.

Key Stage 2

Pupils in year 6 receive support from the Virtual School according to need. Pupils are identified for additional teaching support according to their academic level.

All Looked After Children 2015/16 academic year:

14 pupils were included in the cohort for all looked after children at KS2. Southend pupils were the below the national average in all subjects.

- In reading, 21.4% achieved the expected standard in the tests, compared to 40.8% nationally
- In writing teacher assessments, 21.4% of the cohort achieved the expected standard, against 45.9% nationally
- In the maths tests, 21.4% achieved the expected standard in the tests, compared to 41.9% nationally.
- In grammar, punctuation and spelling 28.6% of Southend's LAC achieved the expected standard, compared to 44.3% nationally.
- In the combined reading, writing and maths measure, 14.3% of the cohort achieved the expected standard in all 3 subjects, compared to 25.7% nationally.
- In terms of pupil progress, on average, LAC pupils in Southend had negative progress scores in reading, writing and maths meaning that they made less progress than the national average for pupils with similar prior attainment. Southend's scores were not deemed statistically significant due to the small size of the cohort – therefore we cannot say with certainty that the results were below the national average.

LAC Greater than 12 months

Looking at pupils who were looked after for at least 12 months as at 31st March, the cohort reduces to 10 in Southend. Southend's results were below the national average in all subjects for attainment. The outcomes were also below the published figures for all statistical and regional neighbours in each subject. However, the progress outcomes were more positive, although the results were not deemed to be statistically significant.

- In reading, 30% of the cohort achieved the expected standard compared to 41% nationally. In writing, 30% of the cohort achieved the expected standard compared to 45.7% nationally.

- In maths, 30% of the cohort achieved the expected standard compared to 41% nationally.
- In grammar, punctuation and spelling 30% of Southend's LAC achieved the expected standard, compared to 43.7% nationally.
- In the combined reading, writing and maths measure, 20% of the cohort achieved the expected standard in all 3 subjects, compared to 25.1% nationally. This was in line with our regional neighbours in Essex and Norfolk but below the other published figures for our statistical and regional neighbours.
- LAC pupils made positive progress in reading with an average score of +0.8. This was higher than all but one of our statistical neighbours and above the national average for LAC pupils (-0.5). The writing progress score was -0.5, indicating negative progress on average, but above the national average of -1. Pupils also made positive progress in maths with a score of +0.6, the highest of all our statistical and regional neighbours.

All pupils are offered support for transition to secondary school. Links with designated teachers are made before the children transition to their new school and wherever possible a member of the Virtual School will attend their first Personal education Planning (PEP) meeting.

Key Stage 4

Pupils in key Stage 4 are offered additional support in line with need including where required additional one to one tutoring in maths and English in both years 10 and 11. Their progress is monitored throughout by the Virtual Head Teacher who provides individual targeted support for the young people ensuring clear and effective communication between schools, carers and any other relevant professionals.

The Virtual school ensures that all pupils have access to a laptop to support them with their studies and the Virtual School carefully monitors progress towards a young person's GCSE targets. In 2016/17 and the current 2017/18 there have been a high number of students in the cohort with significant learning issues and subject to an EHCP which has impacted significantly on achievement.

The Virtual School has looked carefully at the cohort to identify how long they have been looked after; the stability of placement; school attendance prior to becoming looked after and identified special needs to ensure that attainment is in line with expectations given individual situations and that young people are encouraged to strive towards stretch targets.

All year 11 pupils receive support to identify appropriate pathways once statutory schooling has ended, and when necessary, are accompanied to college open days and interviews by a member of the Virtual School where appropriate and wherever possible by their carers.

2 new headline measures were introduced in 2016: Attainment 8 and Progress 8.

- designed to encourage schools to offer a broad and balanced curriculum with a focus on an academic core at key stage 4
- reward schools for the teaching of all their pupils, measuring performance across 8 qualifications
- Every increase in every grade a pupil achieves will attract additional points in the performance tables
- Progress 8 is now the main accountability measure for schools, replacing the old 5+ A*-C measure.
- Progress 8 is calculated for individual pupils solely in order to calculate a school's Progress 8 score

The DfE state that schools should continue to focus on which qualifications are most suitable for individual pupils, as the grades pupils achieve will help them reach their goals for the next stage of their education or training.

All Looked After Children

30 pupils were in Southend's cohort for all looked after children at KS4 in 2016. 14 of these pupils had special educational needs. 4 pupils had more than 8 placement moves whilst in care. Southend performed in line with the national average for LAC in terms of attainment, but the progress outcomes were below national. However, 2 of the cohort did make positive progress compared to the national average for all pupils with similar prior attainment.

- In the Attainment 8 measure, Southend's cohort achieved an average score of 20.0, compared to the national average of 20.9 for LAC pupils.
- In the Progress 8 measure, Southend's score of -1.81 indicates that on average, Southend's LAC pupils made less progress than their peers who had similar prior attainment. This is also true nationally where the figure was slightly above Southend's (-1.46). Southend's results were statistically significant.
- 10% of the cohort achieved A*-C in English and Maths, compared to 15.9% nationally.
- 10% also achieved 5 or more A*-C including English and Maths (the old headline measure at KS4), compared to 12.1% nationally.

LAC Greater than 12 months

Looking at pupils who were looked after for at least 12 months as at 31st March, the cohort reduces to 21 in Southend. 10 of these pupils had special educational needs. Southend performed well in terms of attainment but not in the progress measure.

- In the Attainment 8 measure, Southend's cohort achieved an average score of 23.8, above the national average of 22.8 for LAC pupils. Southend was ranked 57th in the

country in this measure. This was also above the average for our statistical and regional neighbours.

- In the Progress 8 measure, Southend's score of -1.69 indicates than on average, Southend's LAC pupils made less progress (over 1.5 grades lower) than their peers who had similar prior attainment. This is also true nationally for LAC pupils, where the figure was above Southend's (-1.14). Southend's results were statistically significant and the lowest of all our statistical neighbours.
- 14.3% of the cohort achieved A*-C in English and Maths, compared to 17.5% nationally.
- 14.3% also achieved 5 or more A*-C including English and Maths (the old headline measure at KS4), compared to 13.6% nationally.
- 85.7% of the cohort achieved any qualification, above the national average of 77.1%.

Attendance and exclusions

The results published for the last academic year shows a slight increase on the previous year in the percentage of looked after children classed as persistent absentees to 19%. This figure is higher than the average for our statistical neighbours and the national average published for the previous year.(2016/17 not yet available)

Percentage of looked after children classed as persistent absentees at 31st March

	2016	2017
Southend	15.1%	19%
Stat neighbours	7.1%	Not yet published
National	4.9%	

*A low percentage represents better performance

The Virtual School have implemented the monitoring of attendance through Welfare Call. The focus is to engage foster carers and schools to identify issues before they become a problem and implement a plan to support future improved attendance.

The percentage of young people who have had fixed term exclusions has decreased by 1.8% in the 2016/17 academic year, to 13.8%.

Pupils who received more than one exclusion have all been supported by the Virtual School. Alternative education provision has been provided through agencies such as Figure of Eight to minimise the disruption to their education and Edge of Care have offered significant support to foster care placements which often struggle when a young person is at home during term time on a full time basis for any length of time.

There have been no permanent exclusions during the 2016/17 academic year.

Pupil Premium

Young people are eligible to receive full Pupil Premium of £1,900 per year from their first day in care and the Virtual Headteacher is responsible for ensuring that this is distributed and used in line with a robust educational support plan. Use of this includes a range of interventions including maths and literacy additional support programmes, tutoring, additional equipment and books and counselling.

The Virtual School was also able in both 2016/17 and again in 2017/18 to provide GCSE revision guides for all young people taking their exams to support their final year academic success.

Looked After children awards

The looked after children awards continue to be celebrated on an annual basis.

In 2016/17 the awards took place to celebrate the achievements of Southend's looked after children and care leavers. Children and young people were nominated for a range of reasons including improved performance at school, achievements in specific areas of the curriculum and having a positive attitude in spite of difficulties like changing school or placement.

Care leavers were recognised for outstanding performance and effort including academic success at University.

A total of 43 young people were nominated for an award in recognition of their hard work and commitment to their education.

Examples of some of the nominations:

"I would like to nominate Jamie for a LAC Award. Jamie has worked hard to conquer his emotional and social issues with his peers and continues to work extremely hard in lessons and is currently having transitional lessons in S Band with the hope he will make the move across permanently from the Achievement pathway he is currently placed in. Jamie has willingly and diligently worked with his mentors who have offered him lots of support and interventions to help him manage and regulate himself appropriately allowing him to form positive relationships with his peers. Academically Jamie is on target or above in most subject area's."

"I would once again like to nominate FC for the LAC awards – he has managed year 6 with excellent academic progress – exceeding expectations and managing transition to secondary school very well. His resilience has been excellent over the change in setting and leaving primary school – I hope that he has started at Secondary school successfully and will continue with this success."

"I have another young person who has made exceptional progress since going into a residential school. He is non-verbal and his communication has improved vastly. Also his willingness to engage in academic work has progressed enormously."

Education, employment and training

The virtual school supports young people, alongside the 16+ service, who have left statutory care at the age of 18, into education, employment and training opportunities.

The consistent support offered has again resulted in a low number of young people who are NEET (not in education, employment or training).

The number of young people without any qualifications has decreased. At September 2017, 121 (61.4%) of care leavers were in education; 18 (9.1%) were in training; 23 (11.7%) were in employment and 8 (4.1%) were on apprenticeships.

Percentage of 19, 20 and 21 yr olds that are in Education, employment and training

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Southend	57%	60%	52.3%
Stat Neighbours	46.9%	50.9%	49%
National	48%	49%	50%

The numbers of young people successfully engaged in education, employment and training as at March 2017 was 52.3%. This has increased in September 2017 to 86.3%. The figure for young people not in education, employment or training at September 2017 was 14.2% a reduction on the same point last year. This is a fairly consistent trend as some young people that have signed up for courses in September may drop out by the end of the summer term and will by late autumn be deemed NEET.

Higher education

Southend's performance has been consistently strong for a number of years with 5.6% of care leavers enrolled on degree courses.

Southend continues to successfully support young people to attend university and at September 2017 there were 11 young people attending University.

Health of looked after children

The Southend looked after children health service is provided by North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT) and Southend University Foundation Trust Hospital. They are commissioned to provide: all statutory health entitlements in a timely manner; an up to date health care plan for all looked after children, designed in partnership with the child where appropriate; and a range of health based interventions, health promotion, advice and information are offered to looked after children and their carers.

Southend Hospital is commissioned to provide initial health assessments for children and young people coming into care.

Looked after children and young people have the same health risks and concerns as their peers. However, they are known to have a higher vulnerability as they often enter into care with unidentified health issues as a result of receiving poorer parenting, histories of abuse or neglect, having an unknown health history and higher levels of social mobility. Therefore they have poorer long term health outcomes than their peers. The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) reported in 2013 that about 60% of children and young people who are looked after in England are reported to have emotional and mental health problems and a higher proportion experience poor health, educational and social outcomes after leaving care.

It is a requirement for children and young people coming into care to have an initial health assessment within 20 days of becoming looked after and subsequent review health assessments every 6 months up to the age of 5yrs then annually thereafter.

% of children whose initial health assessment was within 20 working days of them becoming looked after at the end of March

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Southend	44.2%	41.7%	27.4%

Whilst only 29.1% of young people met this target in 2016/17, when we look at those where the medical was undertaken within 25 working days, the percentage increased dramatically to 44.1%

We continue to work closely with our health colleagues to identify barriers to achieving this target and have a clear action plan in place for 2017/18. At the end of July 2017 the % achieved within 20 working days had increased to 48.7% however the figure for July only was 66.6% showing a gradual improvement.

% looked after children whose health checks were in time at 31st March

	2015	2016	2017
Southend	90.6%	92.1%	84.0%
Stat neighbours	91.2%	89.6%	

National	89.7%	90%	
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78.7% of children and young people had their review health assessments completed at the end of July 2017, a decrease from the previous year. This is however closely monitored and it is clear that there are currently a high number of older young people (18) who are refusing to attend for formal medicals and where the health team are looking at better ways to engage these young people. Southend also has a high number of young people placed for adoption outside of the Borough and due to reliance on external health authorities to undertake this work and provide details once complete, these medical often take additional time to be undertaken and received.

Concerted efforts have been made by the health team and social care to work collaboratively to improve performance on this indicator. There will as stated above also be a small number of young people who do not attend or refuse a health assessment. The looked after nurse follows up all non-attendance and attempts to arrange further appointments at venues convenient for the young person.

% of young people whose immunisations are up to date at end March

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Southend	74.1%	76.4%	63%
Stat Neighbours	87%	88%	Not yet available
National	88%	87%	Not yet available

65.9% of children and young people had received the appropriate immunisations for their age in 2017, again reflecting the challenge for looked after children. By the end of August 2017 this had dropped slightly to 62.4%, however this is due to the number of young people placed for adoption where medical reporting is delayed due to reliance on external health authorities. Many young people who enter care have not received the relevant immunisation programme and take time to establish this once entering care. Work is ongoing to improve the immunisation uptake both those looked after and more generally across Southend.

The looked after children health team co-ordinates the health needs of looked after children, providing a clear framework through universal and targeted services for children and young people to promote optimal health and wellbeing. Comprehensive initial health assessments and developmental reviews provide opportunities to identify and address any developmental delays.

Where particular health needs are identified the child or young person may be supported by the looked after children health team or where necessary referred on to specialist services. An SDQ (Strength and difficulties questionnaire) is completed on all looked after children over the age of 7 years to assess their emotional wellbeing status. Where at any stage emotional needs are identified, these are referred to the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental

Health service (EWMHS previously CAMHS) for more specialist clinical assessment and intervention.

Placement activity

The indicators in this section are important measures of the stability of care that a child has experienced. On the whole, stability of placement and care is associated with better outcomes for children. Proper assessment of the child's needs and a sufficient choice of placements to meet the varied and specific needs of different children are essential if appropriate stable placements are to be achieved. Inappropriate placements tend to break down and lead to more frequent moves for a young person.

% of looked after children with three or more placements in one year at end of March

	2015	2016	2017
Southend	13.2%	11.5%	9.5%
Stat neighbours	10.8%	10.8%	Not available
National	10%	10%	

For this indicator a lower score is indicative of good performance. Performance in Southend is in line when compared to statistical neighbours and the national average. The criteria for this indicator has changed over the past few years. Previously when a child returned from a missing episode this was classified as a new placement, even if a child returned to the same placement. These are no longer included in this indicator. The percentage of looked after children with three or more placements in one year has remained fairly stable over the past few years. It is expected that the % may increase slightly during 2017/18 due to the high numbers of children being placed for adoption and where the making of an adoption order is being delayed through changes in the level of court challenge.

Percentage of looked after children aged under 16 looked after continuously for at least 2 ½ years who have been living in the same placement for at least 2 years (or placed for adoption and their adoptive placement together with their previous placement lasting for at least 2 years) as at 31st March.

	2015	2016	2017
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Southend	58%	64.7%	65.6%
Stat neighbours	69.7%	69.7%	Not available
National	68%	68%	

For this performance indicator a higher score is indicative of good performance. Instability for children is associated with poor outcomes, often disrupting children's education, their access to services and threatening friendships established in a previous placement or prior to entering care. It is important that placements are sufficiently matched to children's needs, are of sufficient quality, and are well supported, if placement breakdown is to be prevented.

Southend's record has remained fairly stable over the past few years at around 70% and is similar to our statistical neighbours and against national figures. Most placement moves have been carefully planned, with most children then remaining in placement for at least 12 months. This provides evidence of well thought through care planning and good support for placements. Southend has over the past 18 months had a large number of young people turn 16 years who no longer count within this indicator, but do however remain in their long term stable placement.

Placement location and type

There are many reasons why some looked after children are placed away from Southend. Whilst availability of placements is a factor, some young people need to live out of area to help to keep them safe from harm or from dangerous influences closer to home. Others may need specialist care that is not available locally, or may be placed further afield but with family kinship carers.

Over the past 18 months, there has developed a national shortage of placements both fostering and residential which has led to challenges locally to ensure that placements are well matched. For most of 2017 In house fostering services have been running at around 118% capacity, which leads to pressures within fostering families. The support of the Edge of Care Team has been invaluable to carers during what has been a challenging time.

Foster carers feedback:

'Edge of Care taught me how to de-escalate situations. YP would not still be in my care without Edge of Care team'

'Edge of Care has been a revelation for us with our young person. We needed support and it was never at a convenient time. We need people who can work with our young person and us as at the same time and protect the placement and that's exactly what Edge of Care do. The fact they are available at all hours is a total life saver for us and makes us feel valued and not alone. We felt no-one understood how hard it was and we're frequently at the point of giving up. Now that is not going to happen as Edge of Care are there to protect the

placement from breaking down. This can only be a good thing as these young people need stability and a secure base.'

Young People's feedback of the work of the Edge of Care Team:

"Thank you for picking me up and being on time. You are such good listeners and I like how you talk to me like I am a person not just a kid"

"You always listen to me and try to understand how I am feeling. It would be better if you could sort out school for me a bit more and get school to listen to me"

"I don't like having lots of different people with me"

"Thank you for supporting me no matter what"

"It's excellent, because they take you out as I haven't been going to school. You get to meet new people. It's better than other services I have worked with in the past as they spend time with you, make it more fun, and actually talk about what's going on for you.'

This issue of supply and demand has also shown an increase in external prices (this was addressed under financial performance).

Of the 286 children looked after by Southend at March 2017, 187(66.4%) were placed with in house carers and 82.5% were placed less than 20 miles from their home. The majority of those children in placements classified as 'at a distance' were placed in Essex or local authorities bordering Essex or were placed for adoption.

It is recognised that children placed away from their home area may need additional support and the quality and impact of care and support that they receive is carefully planned and closely monitored. Where young people in any form of residential care, the placements are monitored through the multi-agency Acute and Complex Placement Panel to ensure that their health, including mental health, education and care need are appropriately being met with clear exit plans in place.

Number of looked after children by placement type as at 31st July 2017

Placement Type	Number of looked after children
Foster placement (including kinship)	215 (73.6%)
Placed for adoption	22 (7.5%)
Placement with parents	9 (3.1%)
Residential childrens home	13 (4.5%)
Secure unit	2 (0.7%)
Youth offender institution*	0
Residential school	2 (0.7%)
Semi independent	27 (9.2%)

Foster to adopt	2 (0.7%)
Total	292

*Since December 2012 all young people remanded to custody automatically become looked after children (under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012)

The vast majority of looked after children are in foster placements (73.6%). Southend has a low number of children in residential children's homes with approximately 15 children in such placements at any one time. This is in line with the use of this type of placement over recent years. The use of residential placements is linked to the number of older young people coming into care, some with very concerning behaviour who struggle to adapt to living in an alternative family environment and for whom it is very difficult to find the right accommodation. Southend makes a conscious decision to only use residential care where we cannot offer a placement in a family setting or where to do so would not be in the best interests identified for the young person. Where a residential placement is considered the 'best fit' for a young person, the service aims to move them on as soon as possible through careful care planning with a long term ambition for family life (at home or within a foster placement). The use of residential placements is constantly scrutinised and monitored both by senior managers and as stated earlier through the multi-agency acute and complex placement panel.

At the end of July 2017 there were 2 young people placed in welfare secure accommodation. Both had very complex needs and were placed in secure accommodation for their own safety and to reduce the risk of absconding; CSE and gang activity. During this time the service continually plans for their next placement to match their complex needs.

Placement costs

Placement type	2015/6 average weekly cost	2016/17 average weekly cost
In house foster placement	£180 allowance per child but average one off fee of £213	£184 allowance per child but average one off fee of £213
PVI fostering placement	£700	£900
Residential and secure placements	£3,100	£3,800

The table above shows the difference in the average weekly costs in payments for in-house foster placements, independent foster placements and residential and secure placements. The figure for in house includes the average fees and allowances paid to in house foster carers, compared to the payments made to external agencies for placements. Costs over the past year for new external placements have risen sharply placing pressure on the external purchasing budget. A comprehensive recruitment strategy has been developed to attract more in-house foster carers.

Comparative analysis of actual spend in the 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17 financial years

Looked after children	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Placement activity	Outturn	Outturn	Outturn
In house foster care	2,183,248	2,476,583	2,816,946
PVI foster care	2,129,900	1,412,435	1,447,431
Residential care	2,980,788	2,776,360	3,244,487

Foster carer recruitment

Southend has continued to be able to rely heavily on in house fostering provision against PVI (private, voluntary and independent) provision. Financial restraints mean that there is growing pressure to continue to recruit more in house carers which, as well as having significant financial benefit also facilitates better coordination of support to children.

14 mainstream households were approved by Southend in the year 2016/17, alongside 10 kinship (family) carers. In the first 5 months of 2017/18 a further 7 general carers have been approved alongside 3 kinship carers.

In order to meet the challenge of recruiting foster carers, a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy has been developed. This has a number of strands and has been amalgamated with the Southend adoption recruitment programme. Southend's fees and allowances structure was reviewed in 2015 which enabled more carers to move into a fee paid status, to match and challenge private agencies who traditionally have paid much higher fees than local authorities. Whilst there remains a discrepancy between the two, it has allowed Southend to begin to compete in the market place.

The marketing strategy to recruit foster carers is continuing to develop, with improved usage of social media, targeted recruitment campaigns and drop-in sessions supported by existing foster carers and members of the fostering service. Our marketing officer continues to gain feedback from applicants as to the recruitment activity and it is positive that many say that they have approached Southend through word of mouth. The support over the past year of the edge of care team has been cited as a positive reason in a number of cases where word of mouth has been the vehicle.

A further successful avenue over the past two years has been in gaining carers from the independent sector through our campaigns and particularly through word of mouth. Local authorities were able when care numbers were stable, to begin to use less and less PVI carers which further encouraged a move to the local authority, Southend does however

need to continue to support at a high level if we are going to prevent carers from moving away from the local authority in the future to the private sector, now that the demand for PVI placements is nationally beginning again to increase.

The Corporate Parenting Group monitors fostering recruitment closely and detailed information is regularly presented to the group. From sufficiency research locally, Southend needs to increase its core number of carers by at least 5 households annually if we are to begin to increase the number of young people able to remain in-house. If however care numbers continue to rise at the levels that they have over the past 18 months (263 April 16; 282 April 17; 294 July 17) then we will need to increase our core numbers by nearer to 10-15 carers annually just to stand still. This remains a real challenge.

Southend's extensive foster carer training is highly valued by in-house carers and this has been extended to Special Guardians over the past year. Training includes sessions by the Virtual School and various therapeutic sessions; attachment and self-harm; first aid and behaviour management; safeguarding and understanding risk; Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing; awareness of gangs and drugs. Some training is delivered face to face, but much is now on line at the request of carers. The service will continue to develop its training programme to meet the changing needs and issues in society.

Additional support for looked after children

An independent visitors and advocacy scheme is available in Southend, commissioned through NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service). At the end of March 2017, 4 young people were matched with an independent visitor and 3 new referrals were received by the service since January 2017.

The independent visitor service recruits volunteers who befriend, support and advise looked after children and young people. A careful matching process takes place to understand the interests of the young people and the independent visitor so that both the young person and independent visitor may share a hobby sport or interest. The project provides induction, training and supervision for the volunteers.

Social workers refer the young person to the service when they think a young person would benefit from developing a supportive relationship with an independent person. The service is explained to young people and it is the young person who makes the final decision about whether they would like to be matched with an independent visitor. The matter is raised by the independent reviewing officer at all looked after reviews where it is felt that such a service could benefit the young person.

Independent visitors usually have contact with a young person at least once a month including telephone calls; text message conversations and face to face contact.

"I'm not sure I could have kept going with this without you"

"The volunteer looks fantastic"

"Thanks it's been really helpful"

Young people comments on the NYAS service

Many of the young people currently matched with an independent visitor are teenagers. Most matches last a few years and usually come to a natural end point as young people get older and lead more independent lives themselves.

The NYAS service also offices and advocacy service for looked after children, where it is felt that maybe they are struggling to have their views and wishes heard.

There were 68 referrals for advocacy services during 2016/17. The main theme of these referrals was generally issues regarding placement moves, however in the last quarter of 2016/17 this shifted slightly to requests for support to attend the young person's Lac review. All referrals were picked up by NYAS within 24 hours and contact made with the young person within 72 hours.

Clinical Services

Southend Children's Social Care receives clinical services through the Emotional Welfare and Mental Health Service (EWMHS, previously CAMHS) which is provided through North east London Foundation Trust and is jointly commissioned with Essex and Thurrock.

The clinical service operates on an outreach basis in order to promote accessibility for families, and in the year 2016/17, of 1111 referrals received, 43 were identified as being looked after children in Southend and 37 subject to Child Protection Plans.

During 2016/17 there were some key developments with the children and young people emotional well-being and mental health services, such as the development of the community eating disorder service, the review of the Suicide Prevention Toolkit for the Health and Wellbeing Boards and an increase in access to services with extended working times up to 9pm daily.

At the end of March 2017, 631 children and young people completed treatment, 26.94% in under 4 weeks; 20.13% in 4-8 weeks; 19.81% in 8-12 weeks and 33.12% in over 12 weeks. All children and young people presenting at A&E were assessed within 4 hours.

Information from the Success for All Children Group annual report for April 16 to March 17

The Children with disabilities Service

The Children with disabilities Service is a Children's Social Care resource which offers a universal/plus targeted service for all children with disabilities who require additional support. The service focuses on providing the additional support required by families with disabled children and is based on the criteria of SEND provision and works closely with our partners in health and education to ensure a full wrap around service for some of our most vulnerable children and their families. The team also has a small number of children placed in statutory care and other residential provision.

The team currently support 122 children and young people and their families. Of the 122 children, 42 are female and 80 are male.

Age and disability breakdown for cases open to the Children with Disabilities service Aug 17

Age	Number of children
Under 5	10
5-9	27
10-15	54
16+	31
Total	122

Type of disability	Number of children
Multiple	52
Autism/Asperger's	28
Hearing	2
Learning	5
Mobility	1
None	14
Other DDA	20
Total	122

Personalised budgets

Personalisation, which is about giving service users choice and control over their lives, particularly in how their needs are met, is an approach that continues to gain popularity as many families choose to take on more control over their lives and the opportunity to choose their own provision to meet family circumstances when it best suits them.

The Children and Family Act 2014 advocates the use of personal budgets, which means that rather than receiving services like accommodation and personal care, disabled people are supported to be able to plan and spend their budget as they choose. This gives families more control over how they use their budget to buy the service that makes sense to them at times that benefit them.

At the end of March 2017 there were 143 children receiving direct payments through Southend.

Short Breaks

Short breaks are defined as any service or activity outside of school hours which gives the family of a disabled child or young person a break from their caring responsibilities, and gives the disabled child or young person an enjoyable experience. Eligible provision therefore includes both targeted and specialist provision and mainstream activities outside school hours, for example holiday play schemes, after school clubs or one to one outreach support. Southend currently commissions around eight short break providers including providers such as Eco Wings and Marvellous Minds.

Excluding those families who access short break provision through direct payment, there are an additional 50 children who access the Short Breaks provision. Where families use their direct payments to access short break provision, they will usually seek support from the children with disabilities team to help to tailor packages to meet their child's specific needs.

Transition

During 2016/17 17 young people transitioned from children's to adult's services as they reached the age of 18. The Children with Disabilities team ensures that referrals are made to Adult Services as early as possible and joint meetings take place to ensure that the transition period is as smooth as possible for families and the young person involved.

If a young person is not likely to be eligible for support from Adult Services then the Children with disabilities team will link the family with transition health services to provide other support.

Special Educational needs

The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced significant changes to the special educational needs system that came into effect from September 2014, replacing educational statements with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The team have worked closely with the SEN service to ensure a smooth transition and ensure an integrated approach for disability and special educational needs, where social care relates directly to special educational needs.

Acute and Complex Placement Panel

The aim of the Acute and Complex Placement Panel (ACPP) is to ensure that children with very complex needs, their families, and the universal services they access have the necessary support to, wherever possible, maintain their care at home and their education in the community. If it is not possible to maintain care at home, to ensure that children and young people presented to panel are provided with the opportunity to remain within their community, supported by creative and flexible multi-agency packages of support which will address their care, educational, health and leisure needs.

The panels' strategic function is also to monitor local services and identify gaps in provision in order to inform the development of a range of local provision that is geared to meeting the needs of children and young people. For example:

- a. Consider outcomes of Disruption Meetings
- b. Investigate and report on quality concerns
- c. Report on external placement activity
- d. Initiate strategic discussion

If children and young people are unable to stay within their local community and if it is not possible for them to be placed within a family setting, in some cases they may require a time-limited experience of support within a residential environment or school. Wherever possible these placements should enable young people to maintain links with their community, friends and family networks. The panel ensures that placements, wherever possible, are planned rather than made in crisis, and to avoid crisis decisions which may have long term negative outcomes. It aims to make full use of the monitoring and review of placements, in tandem with Looked after Reviews and Annual Reviews of EHCP plans, in order to ensure

- e. Best value
- f. A needs-led approach
- g. A focus on outcomes

The ACPP also ensures that young people, either with disabilities or who are Looked After, who will require an ongoing service into adulthood, are reviewed and brought to the attention of the responsible agencies in a timely fashion (at age 14)

The ACPP meets on a monthly basis and includes Social Care; Continuing Health; Commissioners from Individual Placements; EWMHS; Virtual School and SEN.

Leaving Care Services

The Leaving Care service ensures that young people are supported to develop independent living skills, offered career advice and training and educational opportunities, and supported to reach their full potential in all aspects of their life. The local authority keeps in touch with care leavers until they are aged 21, or to the age of 25 and beyond if they are engaged in a full-time course of education, for the duration of the course or have a disability. (In 2018 this will rise to 25 for all young people).

The leaving care service currently supports 187 young people. They provide support to care leavers working closely with colleagues in other service areas to ensure a good transition at the age of 18, when a child's "looked after" care status ends. Leaving care support in Southend is provided by a mixture of qualified social workers and personal advisors, ensuring that young people receive a high quality professional service.

An information leaflet for care leavers regarding financial entitlements and other useful information was developed in 2014/15 in collaboration with young people from Southend.

The leaving care grant remains at £1500 to help young people purchase required items for their permanent home, including white goods and furniture when they eventually move on to full independence.

Housing is a significant issue for care leavers and the Leaving Care Service has been active with commissioners to ensure that young people are accommodated in a suitable provision. A young person's Pathway Plan enables the key-work support to be tailored to the needs of the individual young person.

Staying Put arrangements

When a young person reaches the age of 18, they are no longer considered to be "looked after". Foster carers play an important part in ensuring that young people are prepared for the move to independent living if this is what they choose, or by continuing to support them after the age of 18 through schemes such as Staying Put, where a young person's foster placement can be extended beyond their 18th birthday. The transition to adulthood is complex for all young people, and staying put arrangements enable young people to experience a transition from care to independence and adulthood that is more similar to that which most young people experience, and is based on need and not on age alone.

The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced the duty on local authorities in England to facilitate, monitor and support staying put arrangements for fostered young people until they reach the age of 21, where this is what they and their foster carers want, unless the local authority considers that the staying put arrangement is not consistent with the welfare of the young person.

Southend has been successful in driving forward the use of "staying-put" since 2014. The number of care leavers able to make use of this service has continued to rise with currently 35 young people remaining in stable family placements post 18 against only 15 in 2014. Changes to the local authority responsibilities in 2018 will show the age for staying put rising to 25 across the board. This does place a further increasing financial burden on the local authority which will only rise further with the age increase in 2018, but has a positive impact for our looked after children and a sense of security for many as they reach 18. Staying put to date costs around £400K per annum.

Special Guardianship Orders

The percentage of looked after children exiting care to a special guardianship order increased by 1% in the eastern region between 2014 and 2015, but remained generally static in 2016. In 2015/16 within the region, four out of eleven local authorities had a higher proportion of children exiting care via a special guardianship order including Southend. In 2015/16, 19% of children left care through the special guardianship route. During 2016/17, 18 children and young people became subject to a Special Guardianship Order the same as in the previous year. A Special Guardianship Order (SGO) means that while parental responsibility remains with the parents, a carer (including foster carers) or relative can apply for the child to live with

them, and make day to day decisions on behalf of the child. The Special Guardian is given over-riding parental responsibility for the child.

Southend work with all SGO families for three years following an order being granted (where the families agree to support) and where appropriate undertake review needs and financial assessments of families to ensure that wherever possibly they are able to meet the needs of the young person throughout their childhood. During 2016/17 the specialist worker for SGO in conjunction with the adoption team and Marigold Assessment Plus set up a new preparation training day for prospective special guardians to help them to take stock of the impact on them and their families of a Special Guardianship Order. In addition training for staff was completed in respect of the assessment process; support plans and highlighting the key areas of pressure for families involved.

The Southend SGO panel continues to act as a quality assurance panel, advising the local authority on final care planning options. SGO support in Southend continues to develop. The SGO support group continues to thrive, within which training and advice has been available to anyone in Southend holding an SGO. Proactive support is offered where placements are seen to be under pressure and close links with Marigold Assessment Plus have been forged during 2016/17 to ensure parenting support and advocacy work where required. In 2016/17 Southend paid £372,767 in SGO/Residence Order allowances to support Southend children.

A concerning trend during 2016/17 has been the higher disruption rate in SGO placements and the short timeframe where these have occurred. In several cases where disruption has taken place, concerns were raised as a part of the assessment process, however despite this, court orders were granted in favour of the special guardian. It has become more evident that many Special Guardians did not envisage the level of disruption to their lives that the making of an order created.

"I wouldn't change it for the world.....but" is a common sentiment

"I should be the naughty nanny but instead I am having to be the strict parent whilst my daughter is able to be 'the fun parent'. I have totally lost my role"

"My friends are starting to enjoy their lives; going out; going on holiday and I am having to sort out school uniform"

"I don't want to start to resent her....but"

"What if I can't do this"

"Thank you for the support group. It helped me to realise that I am not alone in how I feel and there is help out there".

Comments from special guardians

Work is on-going with partners and the judiciary to review the use of Special Guardianship to attempt to reduce the level of disruption and ensure that orders are only granted where it is in the child's best interest to do so.

Adoption

Children placed for adoption

In 2016/17 a total of 28 Southend children were adopted an increase from 25 children adopted in 2015/16. This increase was despite a number of Adoptions being carried over to 2017/18 as a result of court adjournments. At the end of July 2017 (4 months into the New Year) 9 children have already been adopted and there are a further 23 children placed for adoption but not yet adopted and a further 23 children where the primary plan is adoption and we are either currently family finding or awaiting court agreement to the plan.

Number (and percentage) of looked after children who ceased to be looked after who were adopted.

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Southend	17 (15.7%)	25 (24.3%)	28 (18.3%)
Stat neighbours		15.5%	
National average		15%	

Of the 28 children in Southend in 2016/17, 12 were girls and 16 were boys. An age breakdown is included below of the children's age at the time of the adoption order being granted (this will be different from the age when the children were placed with their adopters).

Age breakdown of children's age at the time of the adoption order being granted in 2016/17

Age in years	Number of children
Under 1	10
1-2	8
2-3	6
3+	5

As at the 31st July 2017, there were 23 children placed with their adoptive family but an adoption order had not yet been granted. 23 children had a formal plan for adoption but had not yet been placed with an adoptive family, where either family finding is on-going or

we are awaiting the courts ratification of the plan. A further 20 had a potential plan for adoption whilst also having other parallel plans for permanency.

"I Just wanted to voice my appreciation of the support your team offers. As a family we do need help and I believe that my two have been able to learn and grow with the teams support.

Thank you for your liaison with Prince Avenue, my hope is that this can really begin to benefit the children from a place of understanding.

Unluckily for you, we cannot afford to holiday every half term, so we will be there!"

Adopter

26th October 2016

Post adoption Just Right State and Residential weekend

Adoption scorecard

The adoption scorecard aims to show how swiftly children are placed for adoption in each local authority. The local authorities' performance is measured against key indicators which are applied to the number of children who have been adopted over a period of three years. As the numbers of children adopted each year in Southend remains relatively small, one child's journey through the system can have a large impact on the average figures for a number of years.

The average time between a child entering care and moving in with an adoptive family has continued to decrease in Southend from an average of 505 days (2011-14) to 386 days (2013-16) in the latest scorecard. This is well below the national average of 558 days and shows a continuous downward trend. It is expected that average timescales will begin to rise in 2017/18 due to national court delays from adjourned appeals.

Whilst we will continue to work to reduce the average time between a child entering care and moving in with an adoptive family, our approach will always be to take the necessary time to find the right families for our children.

Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (3 year average)

	Adoption Scorecard Outturn 2013/16
Southend	386 days
Southend's ranked position	4 th of 149
England Average	558 days

Southend continues to do significantly better than the national average in the time taken to match a child to an adoptive family once a court decision is received with an average of 120 days against a national average of 226 days. This shows a continued reduction from 144 days in the previous scorecard.

Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (3 year average)

	Adoption Scorecard Outturn 2013/16
Southend	120 days
Southend's ranked position	8 th of 149
England Average	226

Recruiting adopters

14 adoptive families were recruited in 2016/17. In the first 5 months of 2017 a further 3 Families have been approved. As at the 31st July 2017 there were 11 Families approved but not yet matched or linked with children. All other families currently being supported by the adoption team have either had children placed with them or are linked to children and are waiting for the placement to be approved at panel.

Recruiting the right adopters for children remains a challenge for all local authorities and the situation in Southend is no different. Considerable work has been undertaken to attract prospective adopters to Southend which has proven very successful of late, with 13 families at the end of July 17 attending training in September and a further 9 currently under assessment. In addition there are a further 10 families attending a forthcoming information event.

Since 2015, Southend has been working jointly with a number of agencies to consider forming a Regional Adoption Agency (Adopt East – more information later). There has been increased activity through this group which includes local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies to ensure the best recruitment across the region of prospective adopters. Our profiles of children have been developed considerably and are well designed, up to date and use good quality dvd's and professional photographs. Responses to requests for information about children are made in timely way and the team are creative in the way that the matching process is managed to be most effective for individual children.

Support for adoption is currently mostly delivered in house by a highly trained team. Services are brought in and funded through the adoption support fund where needed. Given the size of Southend, decisions for support are able to progress in a timely manner and decisions made into services to be provided without any delay. Due to this, Southend has had no adoption disruptions for nearly 10 years.

Adoption support

Adoption support was brought back in house several years ago and since that time has developed greatly in speed and quality of the offer. Support for adoptive families is a major event in the life of a child and it has lifelong implications for all of the parties involved. The adoption team recognises that all parties may need support at different stages of the adoption journey.

The adoption service provides support to adoptive parents, their children and birth family members to enable them to remain in touch after an adoption order is granted. The letterbox administrator supports a regular indirect exchange of information between birth families and adopters. The team also provides support to help to maintain direct contact arrangements for adopted children and their birth relatives where this is in the child's interests.

Financial reviews are provided to families in regard to adoption allowance/support payments provided by the service, and adoptive families' needs are assessed when there is a change in circumstances. Ongoing therapeutic support is provided for adoptive families before and after the adoption order has been granted and the team will intervene whenever necessary to prevent the disruption of an adoption. The service works alongside the Marigold Assessment Plus to undertake life story work, offers support to adopted adults to access their records and works as part of intermediary services with birth families and adopted adults.

Adoption support is generally provided within the team and therefore is undertaken by staff who have already developed a strong relationship with the adoptive families; the service is diverse in the services offered and support is developed on an individual basis to meet the very individual needs of each child and their family.

Southend adoption team continue to run two post adoption groups. One is a post approval group, for all approved adopters who have not yet been linked with a child. This allows the team to offer ongoing training and to share profiles of children at an early stage. The Southend post adoption group continues to go from strength to strength and is very much adopter led with training and speakers as requested. The post adoption group continues to allow the team the opportunity to identify stresses within certain placements at an earlier stage and to pick up and undertake direct work with the family before a placement disrupts.

Where preschool children are placed for adoption in Southend families are encouraged to attend SPARKLES. SPARKLES is a group in which adopters are shown and encouraged to play with their own child using theraplay techniques, a therapeutic approach that promotes the development of attachment relationships. SPARKLES has added benefits for adopters who have often gone on to develop supportive relationships and networks.

The need for families to be supported post placement continues to be on the increase as families seek to re-parent children impacted by the trauma experienced in their early childhoods.

In addition to Southend's on-going sparkles group and adopter training programme during 2016/17 over 30 families requested additional post adoption support many of whom continue to engage and access this service. In reality this means over 60 children are receiving on-going support. This has continued to increase with more children being brought into Southend and families seeing the impact of the support offered.

The Southend adoption team have continued to optimise access to the government Adoption Support Fund Scheme accessing over £48K in 2016/17 despite reduction in availability within the fund. Of this funding additional services are purchased but a significant proportion funds the skilled work the Adoption Team itself is able to provide.

In addition to this 14 families participated in a preventative therapeutic programme which was launched at the adoption residential weekend in October 2016, again funded through the grant.

Recognising that most adoptive families will require additional support at different times throughout their child's own journey in this project the Adoption Team is seeking to be proactive and preventative before major crisis occur aiming to minimise the risk of any disruption. This year's therapeutic residential project was ambitious as it grew in size with over 50 adults and children attending, and captured those families with younger children. The weekend offered a range of therapeutic activities including 'The Just Right State' course, therapeutic drama workshops, creative play as well as a range of physical activities from adventure courses to fire building. For the families as a whole there were mindfulness workshops and a family disco which was engaging and fun. The wide ranges of activities available were aimed to develop confidence, self-esteem and capacity to connect and engage with others. Something we know is often a challenge for adopted children.

For the parents we launched a NVR (non-violent resistance) support group, supported by Partnership projects.

Children commented:

"I loved the weekend because it was super fun and I made new friends"

"I used to be scared of heights until I did the high ropes, I got to do things I have not done before"

"I liked making a den and everyone was really friendly"

"I loved it all, it's way better than normal weekends"

"I want to come back again!"

Parents Commented:

"It was reassuring to hear that other families experience the same issues and emotions"

"the NVR course was very intuitive, I can't wait to learn more"

"time with other adoptive families was just awesome"

"I did not know what to expect but felt comfortable to share our journey, the highs and lows and picked up a lot of hints and tips – thank you"

October 2016

The letterbox contact system continues to develop, currently supporting approximately 250 contact plans, in several cases including direct contact arrangements.

As young people are themselves approaching maturity it is recognised that the need for them to consider how their own history integrates with their experience of adoption is more prominent. The Southend adoption team seek to support adopted young adults who have been adopted. Before a young person reaches the age of 18, there is a review of the information exchange and direct contact made with the adoptive parents and young person. The numbers of young people reaching 18 is beginning to rapidly grow due to the increase in adoptive placements made over the past few years. It is recognised that just because a young person is reaching the age of 18 they may not be at a point in their lives where they wish to trace their birth family or request access to their adoption files. The team believe however that it is important that they know what services are available to them as young adults. In 2016 the adoption team directly supported four individuals to access their adoption files and facilitated contact between two adopted young adults and birth family members.

Southend Adoption Service recognises that when a child joins an adoptive family it is not only the immediate family that are impacted, but also their extended families and networks. The team regularly hold information sharing evenings for this group, to raise their awareness of the challenges adoption can bring and to explore practical support they may in turn be able to offer. The groups are well attended and have already proven a great success in supporting placements where difficulties arise and allows the team to tap into the extended support with training to give them the understanding to help. Where families have large support networks or where a child being placed brings additional complexities individual events for families are arranged.

Southend adoption service recognises it can be a challenging and difficult time for existing children within a family who are approved to adopt to wait for a child to be placed in their family. In July 2016 the team ran a group for 6 children aged between 6-8 years. The group gave the children an opportunity to share their feelings, ask any questions, make new friends and generally have fun together. Theraplay activities were introduced, which the children will be able to play with their new sibling, and help them to understand the importance of these simple games. The feedback from the children was very positive and is a group which the children have asked continue for both themselves and for new children in the same position. The children wanted this group to be called the "super Sibling Group". This will continue to develop over the next 12 months.

Southend continues to be successful in recruiting adopters and often being able to utilize these placements for children through the national register forming a positive funding stream for Southend. This is financially beneficial to Southend Council with over £382,000 income generated in 2016/17. This income helps to offset expenditure and over the past few years has exceeded expenditure considerably. It does however have an impact on the level of post adoption support required. Due to the ongoing development of the Regional Adoption Agency Programme, Southend are beginning to see a reduction in the number of families taking

placements through the national adoption register which is likely to have a negative impact on the funding stream during 2017/18. In August 2017, there is currently an expected deficit between income and expenditure for inter-agency costs of around £406,000.

Birth Parent Support Group

Through 2016, Southend adoption team continued to run a birth parent support group which directly supports birth families who have been affected by adoption. The Birth parent group continues to meet on a monthly basis in a local community centre. Evidence has shown that the quantity and quality of letters received has continued to improve and has allowed some children to receive contact with birth families that they otherwise would have missed. The group seeks to offer birth parents a nurturing experience, eg they are offered warm drinks and toast and in turn they present as less defensive and more open to receiving support.

The group is advertised in local community areas to ensure that as many families as possible can be supported. The team have supported several young mums through a second pregnancy and have been able to continue to support several very vulnerable parents, post adoption. During 2016/17 the team successfully engaged with some birth parents who previously had no on-going contact with the Department, allowing their adopted children to receive information about their birth families and therefore to begin to really make sense of their backgrounds.

During 2016/17, Southend adoption team developed further joint projects with education regarding the “Just Right State” ensuring that a number of teachers across the Borough are now trained to run the programme. In addition NVR training has been run with a number of partner agencies to support further the work that is undertaken across the Borough. Several programmes were initiated in local schools where children both adopted, in foster care and some placed with their birth families joined together in the just right programme. Schools saw a real benefit in this for the children concerned. In 2016/17, the adoption team joined with Marigold assessment Plus to run similar programmes with the fostering service for foster carers and their foster children.

In 2016/17 the team developed further Mindfulness Meditation Training. This course recognises that in order to manage the continuous challenge of being parents the parents themselves need to be valued and develop strategies

Regional Adoption Alliance

Southend continue to work with our partners towards the Adopt East Regional Adoption Alliance (RAA). We are working currently with Hertfordshire, Suffolk, Essex, Luton, Barnardo's and Adoption Plus to form Adopt East.

During 2016/17 the management board have worked towards establishing a clear delivery model for the RAA and establishing a budgetary framework within which this will function. It was intended that this would follow a shared service model however practical issues arose

leading to a decision that a hosted model would likely work more efficiently across such a large area. There continue to be challenges in the developing of the RAA, not least in respect of IT issues and it clear at this stage that there are likely to be huge financial implications for each agency. Whilst at this stage no final decisions have been made, the DCS group have asked that an enhanced consortium model is considered alongside the hosted model so that a final decision can be made in October 2017. The two main areas which remain at the forefront for each DCS is that any model must be able to show improved performance and outcomes for our children at no additional cost. Whilst the RAA has benefitted from considerable financial support from the DfE in the developmental stage, at present, funding ceases in March 2018 at it is expected that at that stage the RAA will be in a position to become self-funding.

Quality Assurance Framework

Children's social care is a complex system and we use many tools to understand learning opportunities, themes and trends within the service to enable the service to continue to adapt and change to new demands. This ensures that we are a responsive and learning service. The Southend Quality Assurance Framework was updated in October 2016. This Framework starts from a number of key principles and assumptions:

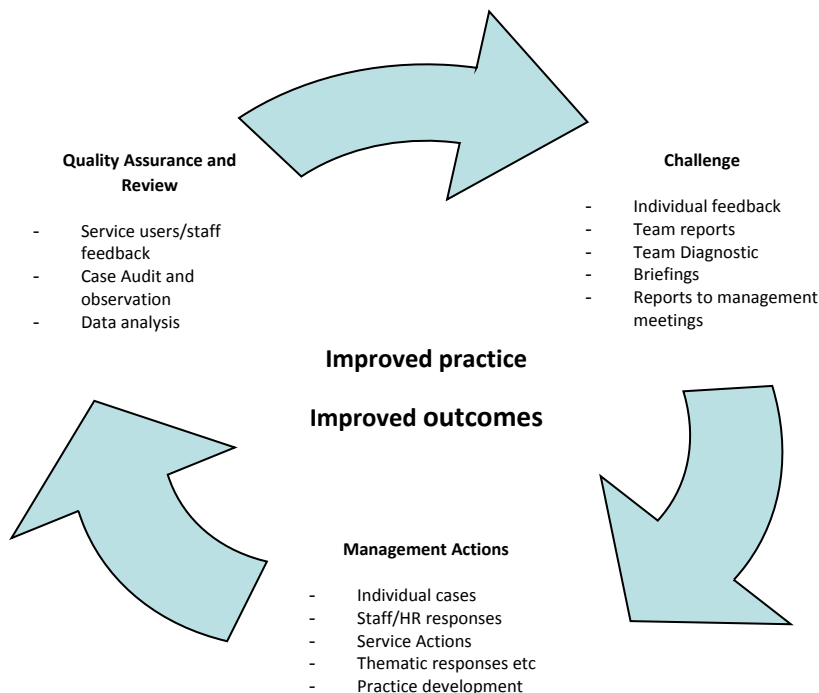
- Southend Children's Services are committed to delivering the very best outcomes for the children it works with;
- Ultimately, the delivery of good outcomes will always take precedence over a focus on process or outputs but all are important in the delivery of children's social care services;
- Outcomes for vulnerable children can always be improved upon and no service ever performs perfectly - social care services require a constantly questioning and interrogative approach to ensure their continuing safety and effectiveness;
- Ensuring an ever-improving quality of all we do is the responsibility of all staff but the prime responsibility will always rest with those who deliver front line services to children and their families;
- Safe and effective services depend on the existence of a healthy tension in the system between those charged with the delivery of services and those who have a scrutinising and oversight role. Managing the tension is part of the role of senior managers who need to ensure a balance is maintained between support and challenge and is always driven by the best outcomes for children.

An effective approach to performance and quality assurance must be characterised by four separate but related strands - quality assurance and review, challenge, management action and practice development:

- Quality Assurance and Review - those are the elements of the service designed to review and measure the extent to which the practice is successful, that work is meeting agreed standards and that children are being kept safe within the system and their welfare being promoted;

- Challenge - these are the internal and external processes and arenas which challenge the service to improve performance and outcomes for children based on the quality assurance and review work;
- Management Action and Practice / Practice Development - these are actions taken both to respond to deficits identified through the quality assurance, review and challenge processes and to ensure that performance improvement activities are constantly refocused to deliver the required changes. These set in place those elements which if properly embedded are designed to improve performance.

The Quality Assurance Framework sets out the quality assurance and review arrangements for the service and identifies how this is used to challenge the service and how this is linked to management actions and practice development with the overall aim to improve practice and improve outcomes for children. The service is committed to a model continual improvement (see below)



Management and audit oversight

The audit programme for 2016/17 ensured that a number of activities took place within the Quality Assurance Framework to measure and review the progress of delivery of Children's Services linked to the Children Services Improvement Plan (CSIP). The quality assurance activities that have taken place to achieve this are:

- monthly file audits
- team development periods
- practice week observations

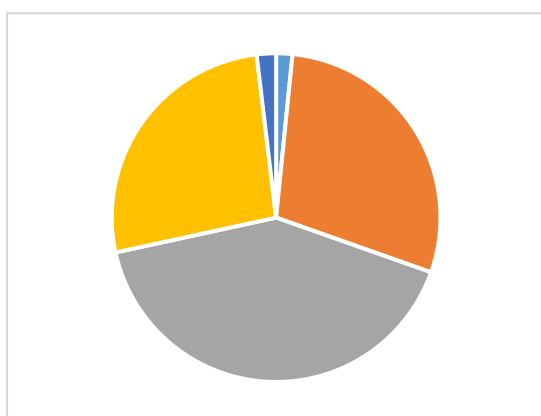
- observations by the practice lead and an external consultant social worker
- informal and formal involvement by the practice lead, with frontline staff and management over the last year
- Participation of young people and families

Audits were completed by senior managers within children's services, however of the 313 file audited during the year, the majority were audited by external auditors. There has been an increased focus on themed audits completed within each service area. Trends identified are used to inform themes for future audits and case review days/training days and actions arising from the audits are incorporated into the Children's Social Care Improvement Plan to drive forward service improvement.

As a part of on-going organisational learning, during 2016/17, a Practice Lead was appointed to play a lead role in the quality assurance framework, challenging and supporting practice including mentoring; observing practice, identifying themes and trends and supporting a change in practice to address issues identified, by targeted training through team development periods and one to one support where required.

During 2016/17, of the 313 audits undertaken the following was found:

Overall judgements on file audit ratings and findings



Overall rating	Number	Percentage
Outstanding	5	1.6%
Good	90	28.8%
Requires Improvement	129	41.2%
Inadequate	83	26.5%
Not Applicable	6	1.9%

In the audit framework targets are set for overall file audit ratings as below:

- Good or above 65%
- Requires Improvement or above 85%

These targets have not been reached.

A key overall message is that there is inconsistency in practice and too many cases are still inadequate or requires improvement. There were particular concerns about the level of inconsistent practice in relation to the performance within the First Contact team and in work with Child in Need cases. Some specific issues include that there is a need to: ensure consistent management oversight on files; assessments being consistently of a high standard; plans consistently being SMART; that there are no delays especially in pre-proceedings work

and; that all child protection investigations were in timely manner. The period was also characterised by increased demand post OFSTED and high caseloads and structural changes.

It should be noted that the inconsistency does include some excellent practice demonstrated by staff and managers as well as some areas of concern. There has been evidence of outstanding and very good practice both in team and individual observations. The majority of staff say they feel supported by their managers and they remain resolute in the desire to provide an outstanding service for children and their families in Southend.

There has been significant activity to address the concerns including: a focus on recruitment and retention of staff and reducing caseloads; additional staffing; compulsory training in relation to assessment and decisions making; development of new services e.g. edge of care; structural and process changes to support good practice.

Consultation with and participation of young people and their families

The views of children and families using our services are collected in a variety of ways and there are a number of mechanisms in place to ensure that children are supported to represent their views. Children's social care commissions an independent advocacy service, National youth Advocacy service (NYAS), to work with children and young people to ensure they are able to communicate their wishes effectively to practitioners and managers and within the reviewing process.

LAC Councils – Currently one group of between 4 and 8 young people.

During 2016 the young people involved in the lac council decided that they wished to call the group YEGS – Young Experts Group. This group have been looking at ways in which they can influence change to the practice of social workers and other professionals they have involvement with and thus improve experiences of young people in care in Southend.

The group continues to develop the following:-

- Me Manual's – A booklet Template that can be given to all young people (age dependant of ability) that can be filled in by the child to talk about what is important to them, what they like, dislike, feel and think that they would like to complete with social workers when they complete visits. This manual should be shared with new social workers before meeting the child, to avoid being asked to repeat information many times.
- Social Worker Profile – A small card that tells a child about their new social worker, Likes, dislikes interests and a picture.
- Information Pack – Available to all children, irrespective of age, coming into care that will give them information about their rights, important information about reviews, contact, social workers, IRO's, PEP'S, Medical's, a video about care experiences from other LAC, a **membership card and lanyard** (very important to young people) Access

to a padlet (webpage for ideas) membership to the YEGS, a me manual and other important information.

- Stop Motion Animation Project – A variety of films that talk about children's experiences of care, social workers and other social care interventions. This can be used for Social Worker, foster carers, IRO and other professionals within Southend training.
- Overhaul the Pledge and Promise to Children in Southend – Redesign. This new design will incorporate the stop motion animations already designed and produced by the YEGS.
- Questionnaires – Are we keeping our pledge? Pink and Yellow questionnaires – re-design; ask other questions, endorsed by the YEGS, Reviewing officers survey.

Audit Visits and Young People's views.

Young People's voices – Southend's participation lead ensures that random home visits are completed to young people to gain their views about various themes focused on within audits, enabling them to say how they feel they have been treated and what has been good and bad about their social care involvement. 20% of all audited cases each month will be visited and the voice of the child will be fed back to the Practice Lead.

Wider Forums for Young People on CP and CIN plans or have had involvement from social care.

A steering group has been developed with the wider professional network around Young People known to social care.

This steering group is made up of CSE leads; Youth offending; Education: - Seabrook, Shoebury High; Housing Providers; Stanier House and YMCA, Edge of Care Team; Young Carers Group; Young Persons Drug and Alcohol Team (YPDAT); Early Intervention Officers and social care (16+, CM Teams and FCT).

Vulnerable Young People have been identified and so far 18 young people have agreed to participate in a forum in 2017/18 for developing risk assessments, interventions designed to include the young people, safe areas recognised by children, and ways in which to work with those young people that they would like.

Young Persons Participation within CWD and the wider SEND team.

This is an area of consultation under development in 2017/18. Visits have been arranged to the four main specialist schools, St Christopher's, St Nicolas's, Lancaster and Kingsdown. These schools currently offer wider participation groups and parents advisory sessions and it is intended to tap into these current resources. Further discussions with the SEN Adviser, School Improvement is taking place in 2017/18 so that wider SEN areas can also be included.

A specialist plan will be developed with support from the children with disabilities team to ensure that young people with specific communication difficulties will still have an opportunity to engage wherever possible.

Forums for the parents of CP and LAC children in Southend

Two consultation forums run on a quarterly basis for parents of child of children looked after by Southend and those subject to child protection procedures. These are led jointly between the Placement & Resources Teams and Volunteering Matters. Issues raised are fed back to practitioners and managers. Feedback is then given at following meetings to evidence the impact on service delivery and therefore the impact for children and their families.

At the first CP forum, parents expressed a concern that they did not feel prepared for an initial child protection conference (ICPC). Volunteering Matters took this challenge on board and trained a small number of volunteers who will visit families prior to ICPC when requested, to ensure that the families understand the process and feel empowered to share their wishes and views. These volunteers will also attend the ICPC with the family if requested to do so.

Feedback from the group has been positive

Themes arising from these meetings are around clear communication; sharing information and reports in a timely manner; clear explanation about the processes involved and where to gain independent advocacy services.

Children's Take-over days have taken place in Southend for the past couple of years which has been positively received by those who took part.

Independent Reviewing Service

Participation of children in their review meetings is essential to ensure that children are able to have their say in plans for their lives. Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) must ensure that the views of children are known before care plan decisions can be made.

100% of children (aged 4 and over) participated in their reviews during 2016/17. Approximately 43% of children attended their reviews in person, which is a slight decrease on the previous year. The remaining children contributed to their meeting either by completing a consultation form or by giving their views to the IRO, their advocate, or other person they identify to speak on their behalf. From April 2017- July 2017, 100% of children (aged 4 and over) participated in their reviews and 62% of children attended their reviews in person.

The IRO Handbook makes it an expectation that the IROs to speak with the child privately before their first LAC review and thereafter as part of the process. In 2016/2017, 62.5% of children were personally consulted by their IRO (compared with 88.7% in 2015/16).

The expectation that IROs speak with children is well embedded for reviews, however, there is still a challenge for IROs speaking with children before their first review meeting when they become looked after. In 2016/17 IRO's met privately with 38.5% of children before their first LAC review, a slight decrease from the previous year. This will be an area of focus for 2017/18.

Where children are not able to communicate their views verbally to their IRO, their IRO will visit them and use observations or other means of communication to form a view of the child's response to their placement.

Children and young people were asked what difference has their IRO made to their life. They said:

She does lots and is nice and always asks me what I want and checks out if I am happy and I am. I am ok cos I like it where I am. I got nothing else to say.

She just makes sure everyone does what they say and I am safe and that's good. She makes me happy

Workforce development

The provision of high quality services for families and the delivery of improved outcomes for children and young people can only be maintained and improved upon through the continued efforts of a committed and skilled workforce. Children's Social Care is proud of the standard of recruited staff and the culture of learning which has developed. The continued recruitment of high quality qualified social workers has become a challenge over recent years and this is an area closely monitored and extensive work is being undertaken to ensure that Southend remains at the forefront of practice and development to encourage the best applicants to its service.

There is an aim within Children's Social Care to, as far as possible, 'grow our own' social care workforce, providing a clear progression route, if staff wish to progress within the organisation.

Southend during 2016/17 and 2017/18 is introducing a new model of practice, using the Restorative Practice Model. The model of practice for children's services has been developed to improve the experience of children and families who have contact with the service. It forms part of the response to the findings of Ofsted in April 2016 and is contained in the children's services improvement plan. It supports our aim as described in the improvement plan:

Our aim for all children in Southend is that they achieve good outcomes, and exceed their goals, wherever they live in the borough, whichever school they attend and however long

they have lived in Southend. We believe this should be irrespective of a child's circumstances, ability or additional needs

The model's reach is the whole of children's services; statutory social work services, early help services, family support services and the youth offending service.

Restorative practice is an approach which is being used successfully in Leeds and supported them in moving from a service judged as Inadequate to one which is Good. The approach is one of high support and high challenge. It places responsibility for determining need and finding solutions with families, with support from practitioners. Using a restorative approach will result in children's services working **with** families rather than **for** them or doing things **to** them.

Restorative practice will be implemented across all service areas within children's services in the autumn of 2017.

Compliments and Complaints

Children's Social Care monitors compliments received from children and families, external bodies and internally. 20 compliments were received in 2016/17, in comparison to 65 in 2015/16. These compliments are utilised to identify excellence in practice, promote achievements and share learning from good practice across Children's Social Care.

Children's Social Care has a statutory duty to respond to complaints regarding services offered to children and families under the Children's Act 1989. Children Act complaints are an opportunity to learn about what is not working within the service and to implement change and improve practice. Those received in 2016/17 represents an increase in both the number of complaint-related representations received and the percentage that did not progress to become formal complaints. Reasons for representations not being pursued as formal complaints include the issue was resolved through early intervention, the issue was outside of statutory remits and timescales, or the complainant no longer wished to pursue the matter.

The major of complaints in 2016/17 came from parents or guardians. There has been a year on year decrease in complaints made by advocates on behalf of children or young people.

A total of 89 new Children Act complaints, were received in 2016/17

In 2016/17 we continued to focus on early resolution of complaints wherever possible. Of 89 completed stage 1 complaints 5 were progressed to Stage 2. Of 5 Stage 2 complaints in 2016/17, 3 progressed to Stage 3.

Lessons learnt from complaints are shared with managers and staff which shows positive impact with the low numbers progressing to stage 2.