

# **Appendix 1**

**Children's Social Care**

**The Journey of the Child Annual Report**

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**Report to Members**

**July 2018**

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## **Introduction**

This report highlights activity in Southend Children's Social Care in 2017/18, what difference we have made for children and young people and outlines our priorities moving forward. This is the second Bi-Annual report which covers the full year 2017/18. 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.

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 Children Board.

Whilst we have mechanisms in place to know how we are doing, we also seek support and challenge externally to help us. We have participated in the Eastern Region sector led improvement and peer challenge and been subject of an Ofsted Joint Area Targeted Inspection (JTAI) in March 2018 focusing on CSE and Gangs, which will be discussed further later in this report.

## **Southend Corporate Parenting Group**

There are a number of strategic groups as well such as Success for All Children, the Local Safeguarding Children Board and The Corporate Parenting Group. The role of these boards requires ownership and leadership at the most senior levels. In Southend the Corporate Parenting group is chaired by the Lead Member for Children's Services, (2017/18 Councillor James Courtenay), supported by the Director of Children's Services, John O'Loughlin. The group plays a key strategic role in ensuring that the Council and its partners meet their corporate parenting responsibilities for children who are looked after.

Throughout 2017/18 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 with reports from the virtual school; work of the Improvement Board, Work experience for LAC, work of NYAS and the annual IRO report.

The Corporate Parenting Group has had a particular focus this year on young people and their families understanding better their experiences of working with Southend Children's Social Care and how the changes made to service delivery have impacted on their lives. This year has begun to focus more on outcomes for children and this focus will continue into 2018/19.

*For more information see Corporate Parenting annual report 2017/18*

## **National Context**

Southend continues to contribute to shaping national policy and debate related to Children's Social Care. Senior Leaders are 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 and gangs, children who are electively home educated or not in school, children leaving care and the Regional Adoption programme. Many of these issues are covered in more detail in this report in the relevant sections.

### *Revised 2018 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 and is the basis of the majority of work children's social care do. The revised guidance was published in July 2018, updating the previous versions published in 2013 and 2015 and taking into account the findings of the Wood review<sup>1</sup> of local safeguarding children boards to have a different type of safeguarding strategic partnership.

### *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

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wood-review-of-local-safeguarding-children-board>

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 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.

In March 2018, Southend were involved in a targeted JTAI focusing on Child exploitation including sexual exploitation and gangs.

Following this inspection we received a very positive outcome letter which stated that:-

*"Partner agencies in Southend have a shared commitment to tackling risk to children and young people from sexual and criminal exploitation, gangs and going missing from home, care or school. Inspectors met with staff across the agencies, who are tenacious in their efforts to engage with, and make positive difference for, vulnerable children and young people".*

Key strengths included:-

*“Work in Southend to tackle child sexual and criminal exploitation, gangs and the risks arising from going missing from home, care or school is underpinned by strong working relationships and a shared commitment and drive for continuous improvement”.*

*“Leaders and managers have created a culture across the partnership in which staff feel supported in working flexibly, collaboratively and ‘going the extra mile’ by continuing to work with young people even when they may not at first want to engage with the services they are offered. This tenacity is making a real difference for some highly vulnerable children”.*

This was seen as a very positive move forward in the improvement journey.

*For full report see OFSTED letter dated May 2018<sup>2</sup>*

## **Children’s statutory Social Care in Southend**

Children’s statutory 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 continue to develop 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 with the on-going implementation and embedding the new approach across social care and partners. The leadership team are specifically focused on driving 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
- We work with families at the earliest opportunity to prevent needs from escalating
- We have an honest, open and transparent approach to supporting children and their families
- 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

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<sup>2</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/704962/Southend-on-Sea-jointtargetedareainspectionreport.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/704962/Southend-on-Sea-jointtargetedareainspectionreport.pdf)

- 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

The significant changes made in 2016/17 to the structure of Children's statutory Social Care to ensure a more seamless journey for children and their families has now been in place for over a year. Whilst there have been some positive impact seen within the service, there remain some challenges that the new structure has been unable to resolve. The transformation work being undertaken at present aims to work across the senior management team to ensure that challenges are addressed and further developments lead to improved outcomes for children and families alongside our partners.

## Financial Performance

Children Social Care is funded through the Council's general fund and the financial spend to budget position in 2017/18 for Children services and learning was reported on a monthly basis throughout 2017/18 and included in the published monthly performance report.

Any please note, any costs, relating to the direct educational support of a child is funded through the Dedicated Schools Grant.

As indicated within the monthly performance reports, the 2017/18 closing budget to spend position for Children Social Care, closed the financial year 2017/18 with a financial funding pressure of £1.2m, despite stringent efforts to plan for, and ensure statutory duties were delivered in the most cost effective way possible. The children Social Care Final Net controllable Budget for 2017/18 was £21 mil, with a closing net spend position of £22.2mil.

Children Social Care pressures are being experienced locally and nationally, and are related to an increase in both complexity of cases, as well as increase required in the number of children looked, including the associated cost of looked after care services provided in the external care provision. The Council had responded to this pressure throughout 2017/18, and provided additional in year 2017/18 funding to increase front line social work staffing, additional support to children on the cusp of care and early intervention measures where safe to do so.



The £1.2mil pressure, remained mainly due to cost pressures on external looked after placements costs and increased children numbers requiring externally sourced provision, which was not helped by our current local provision of employed foster carers running at over 115% capacity for most of the year. In line with many local authorities, Children Social Care has also required the assistance of frontline agency social work staff which has increased the cost of funded provision. Further detail about these pressures is provided below, however please note 2018/19 is expected to continue to be a challenging year financially for Children Social Care, but the Council had responded by agreeing increased funding to support looked after children providing in 2018/19 by a further £1.2mil, whilst also facing the requirement to find savings council wide.

The increases in Private, Voluntary and Independent (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 and to assist with recruiting new foster carers. 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, and £4,437 by the end of March 2018. Whilst the number of children supported in this type of placement has remained fairly stable, rising slightly from around 18-23 children.

Expenditure on 18+ semi-independent placements has significantly increased as the level of complexity has increased and the provision of appropriate placements to meet need has become scarcer nationally.

The children in need service has also 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.

#### Our Structure – how we deliver our services

Over the past year, there has also 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.

#### Accessing services (the Front door)

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. In late 2017 Southend moved to a formal MASH + model, involving a more co-ordinated single front door.

The Southend MASH+ team model is a collaborative arrangement between Southend Borough Council Children's services, Essex Police and Health (EPUT are the health organisation providing the staff). The key principle is to develop a multi-agency approach to responding to contacts and referrals to Southend Children's Social Care through co-locating representatives from Children's Social Care, police and Health alongside the existing Early Help Front Door. Governance arrangements are via an Operations Board with membership from key partner agencies and chaired by the Director of Children's Services. It's overall aim is to see an improvement and understanding of threat of harm and risk through timelier information sharing at the section 17 and 47 thresholds. This will lead to improved decision making, as the children's social care manager will have a fuller picture of what is known about that child and their family and consequently enable professionals to provide timely interventions which are proportionate and necessary to mitigate identified risks.

### **Early Help Family Support and Youth Offending Service**

The Early Help Family Support, YOS Service, Integrated Locality and Streets Ahead Services came together under the single line management in October 2015 and was fully integrated in April 2016. Since then the service has grown from strength to strength. All professionals are fully aware of the single front door process and there is very positive feedback as to how it has improved services and with the addition of the MASH+, decisions are made timely ensuring that the family gets the best possible service at the right time. 3100 referrals were received through the single front door during 2017/18, all directed to the right team with 98.6% achieving a desired outcome.

The Early Help service aims to enable all Southend-on-Sea's contributors to early intervention 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 Service in addition to the core principles for children services, have specific principles which underpin the EHFS & YOS service service:-

- Early Help spans a wide spectrum of services, provided by a wide range of agencies to meet a wide range of needs.
- All children, young people and families' needs are met by universal services wherever possible.
- We build resilience and the capacity to achieve by having a joined up approach to families' needs.
- 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*

On the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 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

The Troubled Families Programme is now incorporated into Early Help Family Support Complex Team and supports families with multiple and complex problems. DCLG (now known as the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) last annual report to Parliament set out the scale of these problems – worklessness, uncontrolled debt, abuse and conflict in the home, mental and physical health problems. The Troubled Families programme now also aims to incentivise a re-configuration of services around families and to encourage innovative, multi-agency practice that best fits the local context.

Services are encouraged to come together across organisational boundaries, overcoming operational and cultural barriers to achieve sustainable change for the most disadvantaged families in their communities.

The Troubled Families Grant conditions are to engage with 1480 families (2015-2020), and by working to the Southend Outcome Plan, address all needs of the family providing evidence for Payment by result income generation. In addition to these targets, Southend was required to complete an Early Help Service Transformation Model and Toolkit. The model captures the principles that underpin meaningful system and cultural change. The toolkit supports SBC and partners to assess how we are performing in transforming our services and driving further action. This toolkit and plan were completed in November 2017. Southend are currently Developing/Maturing, with an action plan to drive to Mature by 2019.

Since the start of programme to March 2018 Early Help Family Support have achieved:

- Completed the Service Transformation Maturity Model Self-Assessment Toolkit which aligns to the Children's Improvement Plan and Children's Services Service Transformation.
- **373** families achieved significant and sustainable progress outcomes to date in Phase 2 (Jan 15 – Mar 2018) and submitted for Payment by Results
- **43** additional families achieved Continuous employment (26 weeks); MHCLG stated this is "above" national average Therefore the **total families attracting a Payment by results claim = 416**
- **1552** Families have been attached to Troubled Families Programme against a target of 1480 by 2020. This target has now been met. **631** of these families have been "stepped-down" from Social Care.
- **631** of families worked with during Phase 2 have been "stepped-down" from Social Care. Without the intensive family support many of these will have remained in, or returned to, statutory services.
- **Only 10% (154 families)** have returned to the service for further intervention. However, in recognition of the needs of 'revolving door families' the service employed 2 Sustainability officers and the families that have been supported by these officers have not returned.
- There is a new enhanced community offer which included Cluny Square hub being open for families to easily access practical advice and guidance to prevent escalation and reduce demand on services. Between Jan 2017 – February 18 there were **726** attendances at English classes, this is both an accredited course leading to qualification and one for beginners, **302** adults who attended the Help and Support drop in which provides housing and financial advice to local people and is supported by Family Mosaic.
- We have successfully undergone a Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) spot-check to validate the claims.
- We have recently had a visit from MHCLG who have highlighted Southend as good practice, acknowledging our solid partnership working, practitioner commitment and the community element.

The above figures confirm our focussed work with the families to achieve a better quality of life, and support the need to reduce demand on statutory services.

### Children living with Domestic Abuse

The Southend Multi Agency Risk Assessment Team (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 their roles in 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. The co-location in the Southend Police Station continues to work well and has enabled us to work with the Domestic Abuse Team in Southend Police Station more closely which contributes overall to the effectiveness of safety planning and positive outcomes for children living in those households.

In the year April 2017 to March 2018, MARAC considered 370 cases. Due to a changeover of recording from Care First to Liquid Logic it is not currently possible to pull off data about when cases were heard within the 14 day target however the MARAT manager is confident from manual record keeping that cases are all being heard within 14 working days of the referral. MARAT has become more integrated with social work teams, including the new MASH+ team, and providing specialist resource to discuss cases and a referral route for those that are at high risk. There is a new Perpetrator Group work programme provided via Southend Domestic Abuse Project and facilitated by the Change Project.

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.

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.

### *Child Sexual exploitation*

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) remains a key priority for Children's Services. 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.

100 young people had CSE concerns raised during 2017/18 (104 in 2016/17). At the end of March 2018 there were 66 young people in Southend identified as being at risk of CSE, 20 of these were looked after at the point of identification. At the end of March 2018 77% of children identified at risk of CSE had completed CSE risk assessments and the remainder were in the process of completion.

### *Children missing from home and care*

Ensuring that Children's Services 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 and fully adopted by the Southend LSCB. 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.

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 who go missing from home or care continue to be a considerable concern as missing episodes could be indicators of serious issues at home or placement. This could be an indicator of CSE, and high risk behaviours that could expose them to predatory, exploitative individuals. The missing team is a part of the Integrated Early Help Family Support and Youth Offending Service. The practitioners who carry out the direct work sit within the wider context of the Adolescent Intervention Prevention Team, whose ethos is cemented in building resilience in young people providing a positive relationship with a trusted adult.

The return to home interviews are completed by 2 practitioners. The practice that Southend has developed is to aim to complete these interviews within 3 working days of the young person being found. This involves either initial telephone contact or face to face contact. If a young person is not seen within the first 3 days, the practitioner allocated will aim to see the young person within the next 7 working days. There has been a total of 378 missing episodes over a 6 month period and the majority were contacted successfully within 72 hours.

### *Edge of Care*

A major development over the past 18 months has been that of the Edge of Care Team. The role of Edge of Care (EoC) is to prevent children and young people entering care if it is safe and appropriate to do so. Referrals are made via the Placement Panel, where careful consideration is given to risk and whether the family will engage and make the changes necessary. Edge of Care also support current looked after children foster placements at risk of breaking down. Referrals for these cases are received via the Early Help Front Door. EoC received 22 crisis calls in quarter 1 of 2017/18; 17 in quarter 2 of which 7 were from the fostering service directly. By quarter 3 this had risen to 55 in all, although the rise was

expected due to the Christmas period when the office was shut. In quarter 4 referrals began to be recorded in a new way to give more detail to the work being requested and to include an increasing number of requests out of hours for welfare visits.

Between its introduction in November 2016 to April 2018, **97** cases have been referred to EoC and this number is increasing each week as the benefit is seen across the service.

Between January and March 2018:-

- **147** Requests for emergency visits prior to attendance at placement panel and allocations
- Requests for welfare visits without allocation – **17** emergency welfare visits to support statutory services where case was not an open case to EoC, predominately weekend/late evening work
- **63** duty calls received - Crisis calls from allocated cases

The breakdown of the types of cases referred are as follows:

- 9 child protection and those in pre-proceedings (PLO)
- 23 child protection only
- 8 supervision order and child protection or child in need
- 32 Interim Care Order or Full care Order
- 6 section 20's (voluntary care)
- 19 on Child in Need plans only

The team also have 2 workers in place to undertake reunification assessments to ensure that where possible children/young people return to the care of their birth families in a timely manner. The team follow the NSPCC guidelines and framework for reunification assessment as well as Southend's own policies. There are currently in July 2018, 8 reunifications cases open to the EoC with 2 others pending.

*One foster carer wrote:- "I just wanted to thank edge of care as a team and as individuals. The support that you guys have given me is massive and I can't thank you enough, words can't explain how appreciative I am, when times were at the hardest for me, you as a team and individuals stepped in with no questions asked, whether it be by phone, email and/or even face to face. If it wasn't for the support of edge of care at all hours of the day, I can honestly say I would have walked away from fostering all together".*

*A school wrote:- "It is such a pleasure working with you and the edge of care team and I value the tireless work that you put in behind the scenes with the children and families. L, you have provided above and beyond support to this family and with your continued nurturing attitude the children will get through what is undoubtedly going to be a traumatic time".*



*A practice manager in social care wrote:- “In the process of writing a report for Oct-Dec audits I became aware of a number of cases the EoC are involved with and was delighted to see the quality of their recording of sessions with children and families. These recordings show a clear picture of work undertaken and the impact of it. The descriptive nature of the recordings provide a picture of the child and challenges that they and their family are facing at that time and what work is being undertaken to support them. This helps in the auditing process but more importantly will enable anyone in the future looking at the file to have a clear picture about what has taken place and what effect it had. Well done”.*

*Most importantly a **young person** wrote:- “you have listened to me. You helped me learn how to be safe – watched a video and spoke about it. 5 smiley faces”.*

A short case study of work shows:-

*3 children previously accommodated under and interim care order were referred to EoC for a reunification plan and support. The children returned home and remained under a supervision order for 6 months before de-escalating to child in need.*

*The team managed to support the parents to meet social care expectations and supported the family through the reunification process. The children had support from the EoC workers to help them to express their experiences and ensure that their voices were heard in the process; including their wish to return home and how this continues to work for them.*

*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 complied by circulating every local authority in England with 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 has now been expanded to include children in need and children in need of protection. The service was formally implemented from September 2017 with a focus on cases where there are significant child in need concerns or at ICPC stage. This work is in addition to the previous work undertaken. 2 new practitioners have been recruited and trained with the Family Rights Group to deliver family group conferences and to offer restorative services to make the meetings more successful. The practitioners both have therapeutic backgrounds and offer mediation; work with domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Between September and November 2017 the team received 25 referrals with 20 of these progressing to conference. 85% of the issues initially identified have been achieved during this period and the remainder will be evaluated once the conferences have been fully completed.

*Family feedback has included:-*

*"I felt respected and listened to and was surprised how well and easy us adults can actually communicate".*

*"at first I was very nervous to go into the meeting as I was on my own, but the co-ordinator and her manager were very supportive and her manager stayed with me".*

*Feedback from the young people in the family include:-*

*"We all need to communicate and people need to control anger"*

*"I want to see my mummy more. I want to see mummy more than once a week".*

At a recent Front door team meeting the staff were talking about the reasons why they have less child protection cases and all staff agreed that the work of the Family Engagement Team and Family Group Conferences are allowing the social workers to work more effectively with cases at Child in Need.

### *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.

At the end of March 2018, we had 366 young carers; 18 Primary Young Carers (4.7%) and 368 secondary young carers (95.3%). 189 are male and 197 female. The young carers worker left the department in July 2017 which meant that there was no capacity to engage young carers on specific trips and events in the past year however despite this we continued to offer them access to SYC&MORE/COOL/CHIL which stayed open all year even through school holidays, giving young carers time out from their caring roles.

The team are currently working with 4 schools, who are providing activities for young carers in their schools, these are:- Milton Hall, Prince Avenue, Darlington and Chalkwell Juniors. This work will be further developed over the coming year now that a new young carers worker has been appointed and should soon be in post. Young carers programmes continue to deliver access to Children's University and the last presentation took place in February 2018 with 6 young carers gaining their Bronze certificates.

## Children’s Statutory Social Care

### *First Contact Front Door*

The statutory social care front door is co-located with the Early Help Front Door, which means that 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.

Average weekly contacts to the First Contact (social Care) front door between 2014/15 and 2017/18 have increased significantly (see table below)

	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
Average weekly contacts	55	70	89	154
Annual total contacts		3860	5050	
Ratio of contacts to referrals		38.8%	43.7%	

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.

### 16 and 17 year olds presenting as homeless

In 2017/18 the First Contact service undertook 7 homeless assessments of 16/17 year olds, following which 2 young people were provided with accommodation by the Council, one of them becoming formally a looked after child. 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.

We expect to be better able to formally report on the impact for families in the coming year.

### 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.

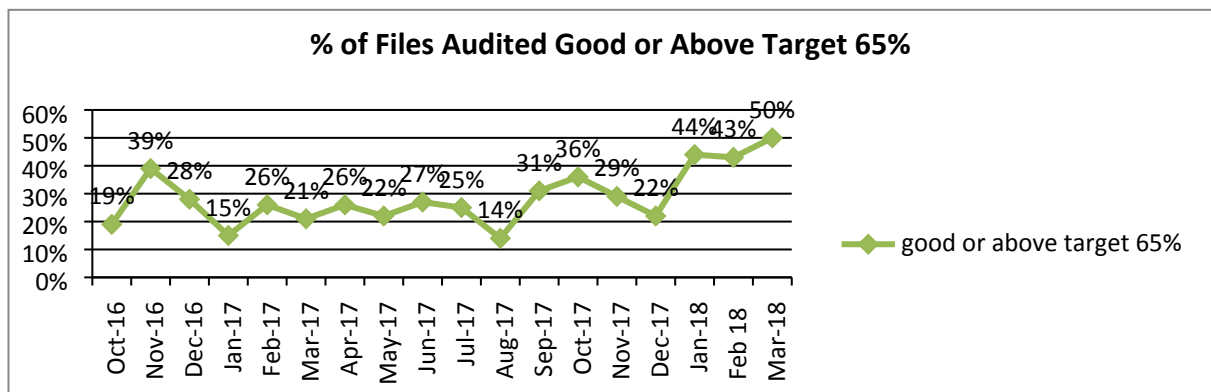
Demand for the service can vary considerably from day to day. On average between 140 calls from Southend are logged each month. Referrals usually require extensive liaison with children and their relatives in addition to a range of other individuals and organisations including friends and neighbours,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

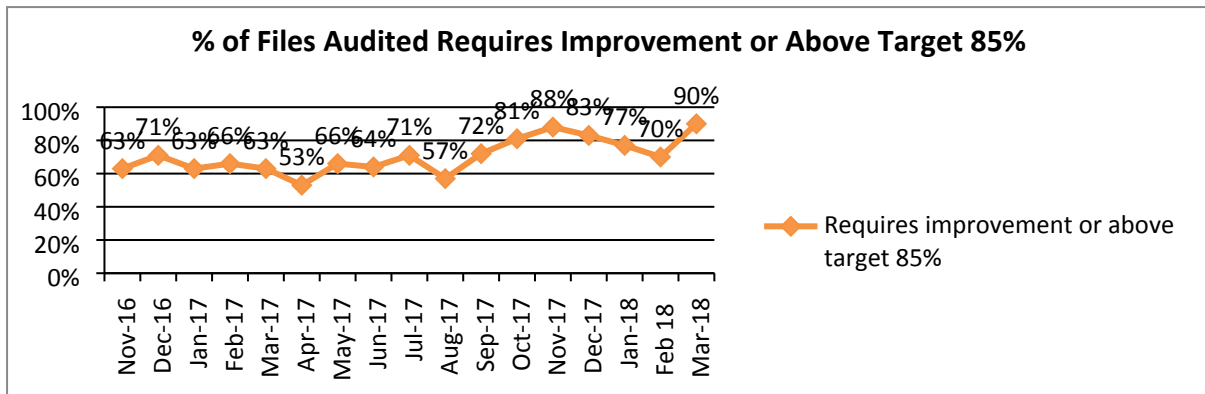
The introduction of the EoC team has helped to support EDT and has reduced some of the crisis calls previously reported to them directly and provided a more local and responsive service availability.

### Assessment & Intervention

The assessment & Intervention team alongside the MASH+ team undertake all statutory Children Act child protection investigations and child in need assessments for new referrals to Children’s Social Care. The workforce has been quite transient over the past year, but in the past six months, the managers in place have enabled a strong base for improvement and it is hoped that with strong management now in place, we will be able to evidence a more stable workforce during 2018/19.

Audit and inspection of the work undertaken through MASH+ and A&I team 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 formation of MASH+. 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.

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

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Southend	19.9%	16.4%	24.3% provisional
Stat Neighbours	23.4%	23%	Not yet published
England	22.3%	22%	Not yet published

2430 statutory social work assessments were completed in 2017/18 which is higher than the number completed in the previous year: 2122 in 2016/17. However, as noted in the table below, the percentage of re-referrals has increased and is slightly higher than the national average.

In 2017/18, 59.9% of assessments were completed within timescale which was an increase from 55.1% recorded for 2016/17. However, we are beginning to see further improved performance and in the first quarter of 2018/19 this percentage increased to 70.4%.

There has also been improvement in the average length of assessment from 45.4 days in 2017/18 (a slight increase on the 41.7 average recorded in 2016/17). Of the 705 assessments completed in the first quarter of 2018/19, 79.8% were completed within 45 working days, also showing significant improvement.

## Percentage of assessments completed within 45 working days

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Southend	96.3%	96.4%	63.8%	65.4%
Stat Neighbours	73.8%	76.9%	80%	Not yet published
National	81.5%	83.4%	83%	Not yet published

## The Children in Need Service

For a number of years, Southend has 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.

Over the next 6 months a decision will be made as to exactly how services will be delivered. It is likely that we will undertake a pilot of the preferred model in the first instance before introducing a new structure more widely across children's social care.

### *Child Protection and Support Teams (CPS 1 and CPS 2)*

These are frontline social work teams that work with vulnerable children and their families that require longer term intervention including children subject of child protection plans and child in need plans. The team will also hold cases that are subject to Public Law Outline (PLO). These are cases that meet the threshold for legal proceedings but the decision is to manage them outside a court arena whilst a plan is being implemented.

Cases are transferred to the team at the point of the first Review Child Protection Conference or at the point where the professional judgement is decided that they need a longer term intervention under a child in need plan. In the latter case this is agreed by service manager. All cases are transferred to the teams at the 'transfer meeting' unless agreed by Service Managers.

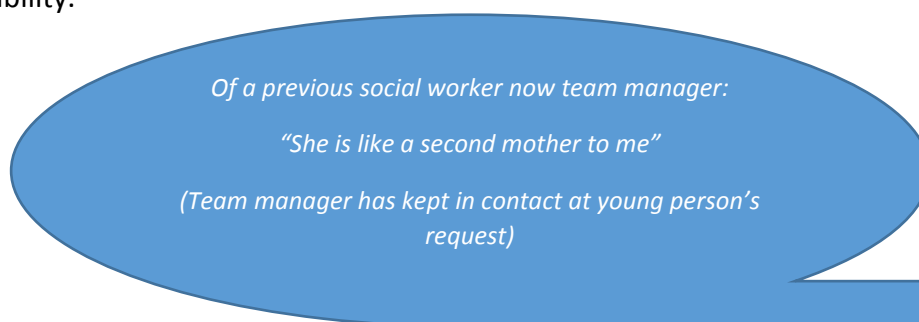
The team will work with families with the aim of reducing risk to the point where a case can be deescalated to Early Help or universal services.

### *Court and Permanence Team (CAP)*

This social work team manages cases in public law proceedings or children who are long term looked after, until they reach the end of school year 10. The team can also receive referrals for under 16 unaccompanied asylum seekers through the MASH+ team.

Cases are transferred to the team in public law proceedings at the Case Management Hearing (this is a hearing in the early stages of court proceedings that aims to agree the timetable for proceedings). This will be managed through the 'transfer meetings' unless agreed by a Service Manager.

The team will work with children in legal proceedings until they become adopted or if at the end of legal proceedings the courts determine that the Local Authority does not require parental responsibility.



### Child Protection Plans

Children deemed at risk of significant harm are presented to a multi-agency initial Child Protection Conference after section 47 child protection enquiries have been completed to determine the need for a Child Protection Plan.

A Child Protection Plan is made if it is agreed that a child is at continuing risk of significant harm or impairment of health and development.

### Number of Child Protection Plans (at 31<sup>st</sup> March)

2016	2017	2018
189	220	116

### Rate of Child Protection Plans per 10,000 (at 31<sup>st</sup> March)



	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Southend	49.2	56.8	30
Stat Neighbour average	53	50	Not available
National	43.1	43	Not available

As at March 2018, there were 116 children subject of a Child Protection Plan, a decrease of 104 from 220 in March 2017 and a rate of 30 children per 10,000. This was much lower than in 2017 and work is currently being completed by the Principle Independent Reviewing Officer to look at the dramatic reduction in this rate and to ensure that the right children are subject of a plan for the right amount of time.

#### 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 was 2.6% at 31 March 2018, from 2.7% at 31 March 2017. This equates to three children and would suggest that the robust monitoring process developed to quality assure planning in all cases is beginning to ensure quality practice.

#### Duration of Child Protection Plans, as at 31 March

Duration of Child Protection Plans	2016/17	2017/18 provisional
Under 3 months	23.6%	11.2%
3-6 months	25.9%	9.8%
6-12 months	27.3%	37.4%
1-2 years	20.5%	34.6%
Over 2 years	2.7%	7%

It is evident that in 2017/18 many children and families whilst moving through child protection interventions in a timely manner did remain longer on plans than in the previous year with 21% of cases remaining on Child Protection Plans for less than six months, a decrease from 49.5% at the end of 2016/17. This is not necessarily a poor outcome as it takes time to ensure that actions on the plan to reduce risk and keep the child safer are implemented. Indeed there is evidence that for some children, especially those suffering from Neglect, a plan of under 3 months may not provide sustainable outcomes. The decrease in the percentage of children on Child Protection Plans for less than 6 months is

likely to be as a result of a number of larger families within a small cohort. 58.4% of children however remained on plans for less than 12 months.

Children becoming subject of 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 of a Child Protection Plan for the second or subsequent time reduced from 29.3% in 2016/17 to 15.5% in 2017/18. This is much more in line with national figures for previous years and if anything is now lower than would be expected which is why work is being undertaken to review the Southend figures.

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	2017/18
Southend	19%	29.3%	15.5%
Statistical neighbours	19%	22%	Not yet published
National	18%	19%	Not yet published

### Private Fostering

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.

Southend has a formal Private Fostering Panel which considers all initial and final assessments in addition to annual reviews 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.
- At the end of March 2018 there were three children known to be in private fostering arrangements in Southend all of whom were over the age of 10. This is a decrease from eight in March 2017. There are positive reasons for the reduction and we monitor these arrangements closely.

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 was again 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.

Following the recent discovery of French exchange students frequently staying with host families in Southend, an initial meeting has been held with Border Control from London Southend Airport to ensure that any young person who would be considered under the private fostering regulations are treated accordingly in line with the regulations. The next stage will be to contact the Language School involved to discuss ways to ensure clarity around length of stay and essential paperwork at the earliest stage including signed paperwork from the parents in relation to private fostering arrangements.

Regular briefing sessions are held for Student Social Workers placed in Adults and Children’s services and for the NQSW group. Further sessions were 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 and will take place again during 2018/19.

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) in 2015 attempts to significantly reduce delay within the family courts and in care proceedings from a national average length for the completion of care proceedings in 2013 of 46 weeks. The expectation following the review is 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 had improved year on year since the changes were implemented in 2015 to an average of 23 weeks in 2016/17. However there was a rise from 23 weeks in quarter 1 of 2017/18 to 30 weeks by the last quarter. This is in line with the national rise to 32 weeks in the same period.

The rise in timescales is due to a number of reasons including being adjourned by the courts due to late applications made by family members and some unusual decision making within the courts. In one case the placement order was delayed for 12 months to give the family a chance, leaving a young child in public care for an extended period. These issues have been fully raised with the courts and it is expected that improvements will be seen in the coming year with a number of new circuit and district judges being allocated to the Chelmsford courts.

Timescales will continue to be monitored closely.

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 and 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.

- During 2017/18, pre-proceedings agreements were initiated for **106** children and ended for **96**. 3 children remain subject to an active pre-proceedings process as at the end of March 2018, 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 decreased from 79 in 2016/17 to 56 in 2017/18.

## 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 increased significantly during 2016/17 and has continued to rise in 2017/18.

### Number of looked after children at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Southend	262	282	295

### Children looked after per 10,000 population aged under 18

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Southend	68	73	76
Stat neighbours	66	68	Not yet published
National	60	62	

There has been a significant rise in the number of looked after children over the past 3 years. At the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 Southend was responsible for looking after (i.e. were corporate parents for) 295 children and young people, an increase of 12% compared to the same time in 2015/16 and a 5% increase on 2016/17. Key to understanding this rise is consideration of the profile, especially the age of looked after children entering care and ages and reasons for leaving care.

Age breakdown of children entering care during the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March,

Age	2016	2017	2018
Under 1	34(25.9%)	22(14.4%)	31 (25.2%)
1-4	30(22.9%)	41(26.8%)	18 (14.6%)
5-9	24(18.3%)	32(20.9%)	13 (10.6%)
10-15	33(25.2%)	40(26.1%)	27 (22%)
16 and over	10(7.6%)	18(11.8%)	34 (27.6%)
Total	131	153	123

The number of over 16's and the percentage of this age group within the total number of children entering care has increased considerably in 2017/18 and the percentage of children aged 5-15 years has decreased from 47.1% to 32.6%. 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 27.6% in 2018. In addition we have identified a number of females in this category at high risk of sexual exploitation through a specific police operation

The largest increase this past year has been in under 1's which has increased from 14.4% to 25.2%. Many of these placements have been mother and baby placements which has been a total change in trend over the past year and has placed considerable pressure on services in this area.

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 2016 and 2018.

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

Age	2016	2017	2018
Under 1	22	17	25
1-4	38	41	29
5-9	41	49	55
10-15	94	113	115
16 and over	67	62	71
Total	262	282	295

## Ethnicity breakdown of looked after children at 31 March 2018

Ethnicity	Southend LAC 2018	Total Southend under 18 population
White British & Other	84%	91.6%
Mixed	4%	2.1%
Asian or Asian British	3%	3.7%
Black or Black British	6%	2.1%
Other ethnic group	3%	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 continues to be a 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 & Stathams'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.

109 children left care during 2017/18. Of these:

- 33 (30%) were adopted;
- 9 (8.2%) were made the subject of a special guardianship order;
- 22 (20.1%) returned home and
- 21 ceased to be looked after for any other reason (19.2%) the majority of these turned 18yrs.

During 2017/18, 31 children either returned home to parents or left care permanently to live with a relative under a Special Guardianship/Child Arrangement Order, compared to 52 in the previous year. This is a significant 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 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. In addition of the 21

who ceased to be looked after for any other reason, a number of these returned home either because they turned 18 or were miscoded on the electronic system.

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

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. As a part of the work undertaken through the Edge of Care team and Marigold Assessment Plus, alongside Fieldwork Services, during 2016/17 work was undertaken to bring together a clear reunification framework. 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 were recruited to drive forward reunification plans alongside Edge of Care and the Marigold Assessment Plus Service.

*For more detail see section on Edge of Care.*

## Marigold Assessment Plus

Marigold Assessment Plus 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.

## 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 2017 and April 2018, **54** parenting assessments and **7** siblings 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 were completed between 8 and 10 weeks and where issues arose during the process, interventions were added to support parents to start to make the

changes necessary for them to parent their children into the future. All assessments were completed within Court directed time scales.

The standard of parenting assessments is such that a considerable amount of compliments have been received from the courts this year with one judge stating that the evidence given by a representative from the Marigold Service changed his original thinking and made him change his mind about the case (10/01/18) and another rating the evidence given by a Marigold Senior Practitioner as *"impressive"* (27/01/18).

### *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. The centre is open six days a week from 8.30 until 18.30 with contact being provided for 10 plus families on Saturdays, and on occasions provides contact supervision on Sundays as required.

Between April 2017 and April 2018, 206 (152 in 2016/17) children between the ages of 0 and 16 living in foster care or with extended family under a Special Guardianship Order were provided with contact sessions ranging from 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.

In addition, 16 children referred by CAFCASS/private solicitors received a contact service where Courts ordered that children residing with one parent should have supervised contact with their non- resident parent, a service paid for by parents and offered on Saturdays only.

Feedback from one of our private service users described the centre and staff as *"fabulous"* and said he had recommended our service to others.

*"Thank you for making our contacts with J and M memorable and fun. A special thank you for Jayne for being a massive comfort to us and taking us through our final few contacts and for being there for our wish you well contact. We appreciate everything the staff and centre have done over these past few months"* (parents' feedback on contact, May 2017).

*"I can't thank you enough for the time you have given to me and thanks to all the staff involved, that made myself and my son so welcome"* (parent 29/3/18)

*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 2017 and April 2018, 6 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.

In 2017/18 the service delivered the Principles of Theraplay programmes to **10** 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 2017 and 2018, **47** MIM sessions were completed. Over the past year the service has continued to act as a core support for Special Guardians, who often struggle in the early stages of placement.

*""Very friendly place, the staff are lovely and very easy to talk to and they don't judge. Every parent should do it because it teaches you so much". (feedback from parent 24/10/17*

### *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 was 1 programme completed within the centre, spanning 12 weeks and supporting 5 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 2017 and April 2018, 5 males and 1 female 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.

A specialist part time worker has also supported 9 parents/carers to manage challenging or sexualised behaviours of children in their care and provided mediation within Special Guardianship proceedings.

Two safe sibling interventions took place to re-integrate children who sexually abused one of their siblings safely within their families.

### *Domestic Violence Risk reduction Programme*

The therapist based part time within the team, works with (step) fathers who are deemed at risk of domestic violence or struggling to communicate positively with children/young people in their care. Between April 2017 and April 2018, 7 males benefitted from individual sessions.

### *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 2017 and April 2018, **31** books were completed and direct work took place with 13 children.

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

*"So I just wanted to say thank you and give you some wonderful feedback. T (child) loves his life story book, it was the right time for him and he is doing very well". (October 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.

In 2017/18 a service was provided for **5** 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 implemented with 2 children and their carers.

### *The Rise Project (based on the Pause Project)*

The Rise Project started in April 2017. Its aim is to reduce recurrent care proceedings by providing a service to parents who have had one or more children permanently removed from their care. The service provides a space for parents to focus on aspects of life other than having and looking after their children, such as obtaining qualifications, employment, housing, voluntary work, good health care and positive links with their local community.

The project allocates a dedicated worker to each parent who assists them with achieving their goals, providing some of the structure, nurture, challenge and engagement that the parents may have missed out on in their own childhoods. The project has been successful in other areas of the country where parents have been assisted to achieve their own potential before embarking on parenthood again. Each parent receives the support for 18 months.

In 2017/18, 5 women have been recruited onto the programme. The programme is monitored and evaluated by Essex University.

### 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 2017 for Southend looked after children at Key Stage 4 was presented in the Autumn of 2017 as part of the Virtual School annual report.

2016/17	4-9 English and Maths	5-9 English and Maths	Cohort
Southend	20.0%	6.7%	15
East of England	17%	7.2%	480
National	17%	7.4%	5010

Southend has improved in 2016/17 in those achieving level 4-9 in English and Maths and is above the performance of East of England and National average. Caution however is required however due to small number in the cohort.

The following tables summarise the percentage achievement for KS2 results for LAC who have achieved the expected standard or better in Reading, Writing and Mathematics for the past 2 years.

KS2 Reading	2015/16	2016/17	Change	cohort
Southend	30%	33.3%	↑ 3	9
East of England	38%	46%	↑ 8	260
National	41%	45%	↑ 4	3010

KS2 Writing	2015/16	2016/17	Change	cohort
Southend	30%	44.4%	↑ 14	9
East of England	43%	43%	→ 0	260
National	46%	47%	↑ 1	3000

KS2 Maths	2015/16	2016/17	Change	cohort
Southend	30%	44.4%	↑ 14	9
East of England	36%	44%	↑ 8	260
National	41%	46%	↑ 5	3000

Attainment in 2016/17 took a noticeable step forwards and although this needs to be viewed with some caution due to the cohort size the improvement is very positive. In 2016/17, Southend was ranked in the top 25% of all local authorities for Attainment 8 and Progress 8.

*For more detail see virtual school annual 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 academic year 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 2017/18 there has been continued increased focus on supporting carers to provide quality educational activities in the home. Carers have continued to be 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.

*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.

**Percentage of looked after children classed as persistent absentees at 31<sup>st</sup> March**

	2016	2017	2018
Southend	15.1%	20%	18.4%

\*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%. In March 2018 this stood at 13.2%.

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 were no permanent exclusions during the 2017/18 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.

Add in a statement for lac awards

In 2017/18 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 55 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 Amy. She has made huge improvements both in her attendance and her attitude towards learning over the past 10 months. She has managed to go from near permanent exclusion to receiving the student of the year award last term! Her attendance is now 100% and her entire outlook and attitude towards school and learning has turned completely around."*

*"I would like to nominate Abbey for being a superb student achieving A\* 3 As and the rest Bs in her GCSEs and securing a place at Southend High School for boys Sixth form! We're all super proud of her."*

*"Faith was recently placed into care, after a horrendous time at her family home from the age of 10 years old to the current. Faith felt pushed out by her Mum and step dad and new baby brother and received some shocking treatment at home. Causing her to seek attention elsewhere and after a tragic incident her attendance gradually fell to below 30% causing her to sofa surf for over a year mixing with extremely unsuitable characters for her age and getting herself into worrying situations. Faith's self-esteem and self-confidence was at an all-time low and there were concerns we would lose her to drink and drugs. Faith has always been a lovely bright young woman with a promising future in Law. However, her academics suffered dramatically and her catching up became an impossible target.*

*However, there was a dramatic and instant improvement when Faith was placed into care. Faith has attended school every day since and also catch up and revision sessions to enable her to catch up with her coursework and raise her grades from D/E's back up to A's/B's. Faith is back on track to attend SHS 6th form with a view to follow her original dream of attending university to pursue a career in Law or stockbroking.*

*I have never seen such a dramatic and positive change in anybody like this before and her IRO officer and I are massively impressed with Faith and where she has come from and is going. So proud of her achievements and resilience she is an extremely worthy winner of every award going!!!!”*

### 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 at March 2018

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Southend	60%	52.3%	40.5%

The numbers of young people successfully engaged in education, employment and training as at March 2018 was 40.5%. There are however 16% of the cohort where data is currently unavailable. The figure for young people not in education, employment or training at March 2018 was 44.1%, an increase on the same point last year and a reduction from figures in September 2017. This is a fairly consistent trend as some young people that signed up for courses in September but who drop out by the end of the summer term and by late autumn were 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 March 18 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

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Southend	41.7%	27.4%	26.5%

Whilst only 26.5% of young people met this target in 2017/18, when we look at those where the medical was undertaken within 25 working days, the percentage increased dramatically to 43.2%

We continue to work closely with our health colleagues to identify barriers to achieving this target and continue to have a clear action plan in place for 2018/19.

% looked after children whose health checks were in time at 31<sup>st</sup> March

	2016	2017	2018
Southend	92.1%	84.0%	84.5%
Statistical neighbours		86%	Not available
National		84%	Not available

84.5% of children and young people had their review health assessments completed at the end of March 2018, a very slight increase from the previous year. This is closely monitored and it is clear that there are currently a high number of older young people who are refusing to attend for formal medicals and where the health team continue to work 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

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Southend	76.4%	63%	67.9%
Stat Neighbours	88%	87%	Not available
National	87%	89%	Not available

67.9% of children and young people had received the appropriate immunisations for their age in 2018, again reflecting the challenge for looked after children. This however was a slight improvement on the previous year.

% of young people who have attended the dentist at end of March

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Southend	94%	90%	74.1%
Stat Neighbours		82%	Not available
National		83%	Not available

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.

The figures reported for 2017/18 are greatly impacted by the migration to LCS where fostering forms are only just now coming on line and it is from these forms where much of this data is gathered. It is expected that these figures will be more accurately reported by the end of the second quarter 2018/19.

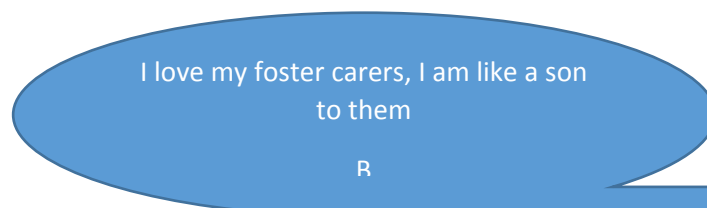
### Placement activity

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

	2016	2017	2018
Southend	11.5%	9.5%	9.3%

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 was expected that the % would 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, however the service worked hard with Edge of Care to support placements which enabled the % to continue to reduce slightly year on year.



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 31<sup>st</sup> March.

	2016	2017	2018
Southend	64.7%	65.6%	Data currently unavailable from LCS
Stat neighbours	69.7%	Not available	
National	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 24 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 2-3 years, 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 2017/18 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 292 children looked after by Southend at March 2018:

- 215(73.6%) were placed with foster carers and
- 78.3% 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.

I would rather be here than anywhere else.

*Regarding his foster placement*

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 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018

Placement Type	Number of looked after children	Percentage
Foster placement (including kinship)	215	73.6%
Placed for adoption	16	5.5%
Placement with parents	6	2.1%
Residential childrens home	21	7.1%
Secure unit	2	0.7%
Youth offender institution*	0	0
Residential school	3	1.2%
Semi independent	27	9.2%
Foster to adopt	2	0.7%
Total	292	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 21 children in such placements at any one time. 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 and has increased over the past 18 months. 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 March 18 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	2017/18 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	£187 allowance per child but average one off fee of £213
PVI fostering placement	£700	£900	£1000
Residential and secure placements	£3,100	£3,800	£4227

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. In 2017/18 we exceeded the target set for recruitment of in house carers, although due to a rise in care numbers, this success was quickly negated.

#### Comparative analysis of actual spend in the 2014/15, 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18 financial years

Looked after children	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Placement activity	Outturn	Outturn	Outturn	Outturn estimate
In house foster care	2,183,248	2,476,583	2,816,946	2,850,851
PVI foster care	2,129,900	1,412,435	1,447,431	1,228,010
Residential care	2,980,788	2,776,360	3,244,487	3,840,723

## 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.

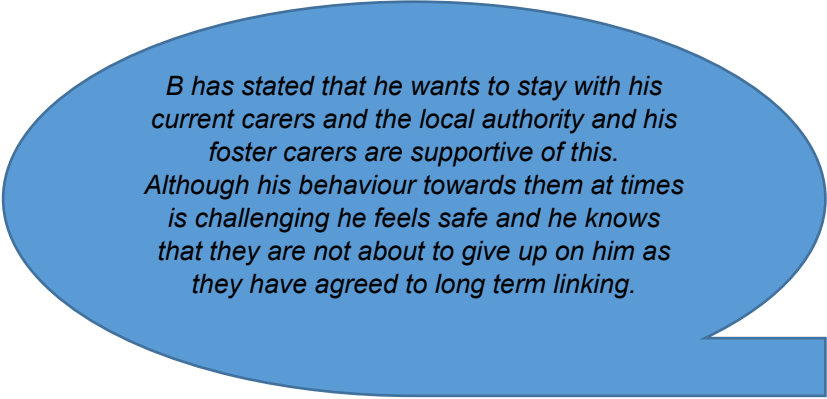
10 mainstream households were approved by Southend in the year 2017/18, alongside 9 kinship (family) carers. In order to meet the challenge of recruiting foster carers, a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy has been developed. This has a number of strands and has been amalgamated with the 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 begin again to rise at the levels that they have over the past 18 months (263 April 16; 282 April 17; 292 March 18) 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.



*B has stated that he wants to stay with his current carers and the local authority and his foster carers are supportive of this. Although his behaviour towards them at times is challenging he feels safe and he knows that they are not about to give up on him as they have agreed to long term linking.*

#### 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 2018, 4 young people were matched with an independent visitor and 3 new referrals were received by the service since March 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 offers 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 **79** referrals for advocacy services during 2017/18, an increase from **68** the previous year. The main theme of these referrals was generally issues regarding placement moves, attendance at LAC reviews for support and pathway planning. 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 2017/18, of referrals received, **54** 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. At the time of writing this report I do not have the 2017/18 report to update this report*

### 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 118 children and young people and their families. Of the 118 children, 30 are female and 88 are male.

#### Age and disability breakdown for cases open to the Children with Disabilities service Mar 18

Age	Number of children
Under 5	11
5-9	21
10-15	47
16+	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>

Type of disability many will show in more than one column	Number of children
learning	36
mobility	12
incontinence	5
communication	11
Hearing	5
Behaviour	13
vision	6
Autism/Aspergers	41

#### 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 2018 there were **125** 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. The leaving care service currently supports 201 (187 previously reported) 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.

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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 dropped significantly this year from 35 young people remaining in stable family placements post 18 against to 14 in March 18. This drop is mostly due a reduction in the cohort of young people aged under 21.

### *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 2017/18, 8 children and young people became subject to a Special Guardianship Order a reduction from 18 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 possible 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 training was well received during the past year allowing family members to reflect on and fully understand the impact of an SGO on them as a family.

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 further developed during 2017/18 to ensure parenting support and advocacy work where required. In 2017/18 Southend paid £339,323 in SGO/Residence Order allowances to support Southend children.

A concerning trend during 2016/17 was the higher disruption rate in SGO placements and the short timeframe where these have occurred. In several cases where disruption took 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 became more evident that many Special Guardians did not envisage the level of disruption to their lives that the making of an order created. It was on this basis that the SGO training was developed and this has helped in the understanding for many prospective special guardians. We continue however to see some disruptions, although the level has reduced during 2017/18.

*“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

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 have continued over the past year to work 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.

### Children placed for adoption

In 2017/18 a total of 38 Southend children were adopted an increase from 28 children adopted in 2016/17. This increase was despite a number of Adoptions being carried over to 2018/19 as a result of court adjournments. At the end of June 2018, 9 children have already been adopted and there are a further 14 children placed for adoption but not yet adopted and a further 33 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	2017/18
Southend	17 (15.7%)	25 (24.3%)	28 (18.3%)	38

Of the 38 children in Southend in 2017/18, 15 were girls and 23 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 2017/18

Age in years	Number of children
Under 1	6
1-2	13
2-3	4
3+	15

As at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, there were 16 children placed with their adoptive family but an adoption order had not yet been granted. 14 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 28 had a potential plan for adoption whilst also having other parallel plans for permanency.

*“Thank you for today Lauren, you held my friend’s hand when I couldn’t. I know it’s your job, but I feel like you have a connection with Jo and so I feel I can trust you to support her in the same way I try”*

*17 July 2018*

*“To Ann, Thank you for helping our family”*

*March 18, an adopted child*

### 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 **313** days (2014-17) in the latest scorecard. This is well below the national average of 520 days and shows a continuous downward trend. It is expected that average timescales may begin to rise in 2018/19 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 2014/17
Southend	313 days
Southend's ranked position	1 <sup>st</sup> of 149
England Average	520 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 107 days against a national average of 220 days. This shows a continued reduction from 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 2014/17
Southend	107 days
Southend's ranked position	4 <sup>th</sup> of 149
England Average	220

### Recruiting adopters

10 adoptive families were recruited in 2017/18. As at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 there were 5 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 30 families attending training in February & June of 2018 and a further 7 currently under assessment.

Since 2015, Southend has been working jointly with a number of agencies to consider forming a Regional Adoption Agency/Alliance (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 a timely way and the team are creative in the way that the matching process is managed to be most effective for individual children. A matching co-ordinator appointed for Adopt East has focused work across the region for the matching of children in a timely manner.

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 over 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 2017/18 over 35 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 2017/18 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.

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. For the parents we continued to run an NVR (non-violent resistance) support group, supported by Partnership projects.

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.

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 started 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 has continued to develop over the past 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 £108,000 income generated in 2017/18. 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 have seen in 2017/18 a dramatic reduction in the number of our families taking placements through the national adoption register which had a negative impact on the funding stream during 2017/18. In March 2018, there was a deficit between income and expenditure for inter-agency costs of around £366,000.

### *Birth Parent Support Group*

Through 2017/18, 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. They have worked closely with the Marigold Pause project for several of these vulnerable young mums. During 2017/18 the team again 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 2017/18, Southend adoption team developed further the “Just Right State”. In addition NVR training has been run with a number of partner agencies to support further the work that is undertaken across the Borough.

In 2017/18 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. In addition there has been a robust post adoption training agenda looking at parenting techniques and strategies; sharing difficult information; health and social media issues.

Most recently the team have started a pilot project with Cornerstone regarding the use of virtual reality. Cornerstone a Voluntary Agency set up by adoptive parents to support adoptive families began to develop this project in 2017. The initial focus was to find a way to support prospective adopters and foster carers to achieve a greater understanding of the actual reality that children known to social may have previously experienced, more than intellectual understanding. The adoption team from Southend were involved in this from the start with the opportunity to meet with the film crews and influence how the films were initially developed.

The VR films have been filmed in 360 to give the full immersive experience which allow parents and carers to understand the impact of trauma and attachment from the child’s perspective. In turn this can elicit a greater degree of insight and empathy.

Through the immersive films individuals can open up worlds never seen before. That of a child in the care system. What they have been through, how this affected them and, more importantly, how the parent, adopter, foster carer, social worker and teacher can see things from the child’s perspective.

The VR films engage with a different part of the brain to the cognitive rational side most function in which means the experience taps in the emotional and physiological parts as well.

As the pilot has begun to develop many Local Authorities have sought to be become involved recognising the potential. In saying this Southend are definitely at the forefront of this pilot.

The potential it has been recognised is vast in terms of training social workers, recruiting foster carers / adopters, supporting schools to gain greater understanding of the roots of presenting behaviours, supporting young people to gain insight into their own history, preventing placement disruption.

The two primary goals in the first instance in Southend are:-

Pilot 1: Improving Stability in Foster Placements



Pilot 2: Reduce time out of classroom and exclusions - we want to help create trauma informed schools that promote inclusion, emotional wellbeing and learning. The hypothesis is that long term academic outcomes can be achieved by recognising that regulating children appropriately will enable them to engage in learning. The starting point is to support teachers to regulate their own behaviour and each other's through greater awareness of the impact of trauma and attachment issues.

This is an exciting pilot which will run during 2018/19.

### *Regional Adoption Agency/Alliance*

Southend continue to work with our partners towards the Adopt East Regional Adoption Alliance (RAA). During 2017 we worked with Hertfordshire, Suffolk, Essex, Luton, Barnardo's and Adoption Plus to form Adopt East.

During 2017/18 the management board have continued to work towards establishing a clear delivery model for the RAA and establishing a budgetary framework within which this will function. Towards the end of 2017, the Directors agreed to change the pathway for the RAA and to form a Regional Adoption Alliance; working closely with partners whilst maintaining individual control of each adoption agency.

There remain some reservations from the DfE about the plans, however at present we continue to move towards much more joint working within the Alliance in the hope that eventually the project will be fully endorsed by the DfE under their regional agenda.

In early 2018/19, the Alliance has been joined by Norfolk and Thurrock Councils.

### 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 and has continued to develop during 2017/18. This Framework starts from a number of key principles and assumptions:

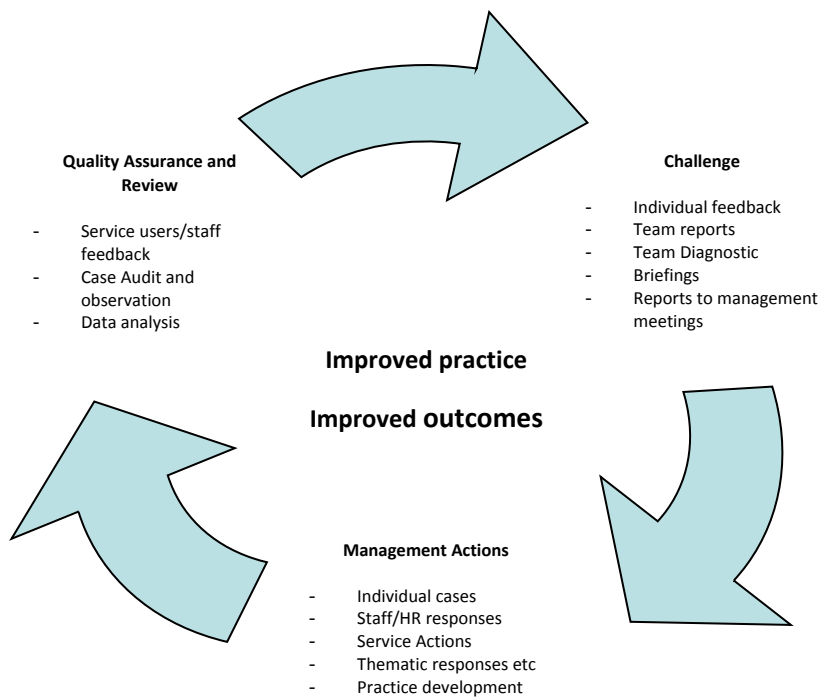
- Southend Children's Services are committed to delivering the very best outcomes for the children it works with;
- Ultimately, the delivery of good outcomes will always take precedence over a focus on process or outputs but all are important in the delivery of children's social care services;
- Outcomes 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 2017/18 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

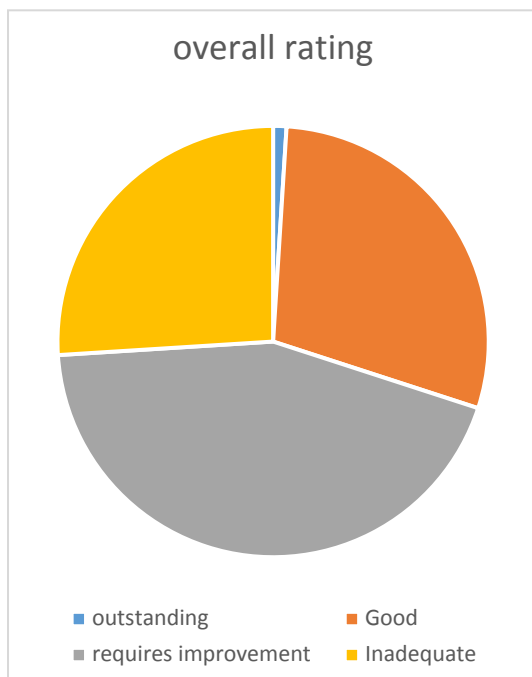
Audits were completed by senior managers within children's services, however of the 271 file audited during the year, the majority were audited by external auditors. The transition around auditing activity is taking place currently from predominately external auditors with no contact with social workers and service users, to managers auditing alongside social workers and families and young people being contacted for their views as a part of the audit process. 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.

The other change made has been that rating critically inadequate is no longer used. A tighter process has been developed around inadequate ratings.

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. This has continued to prove positive in improving practice during 2017/18. Themed audits have focused on Section 47's, referrals, decision making at the front door and under one's.

During 2017/18, of the 271 audits undertaken the following was found:

### Overall judgements on file audit ratings and findings



Overall rating	Number	Percentage
Outstanding	3	1%
Good	79	29%
Requires Improvement	119	44%
Inadequate	70	26%

Conclusion from the past year shows that MASH+ has made a significant improvement around referrals and section 47s and timeliness of strategy meetings. There is sound decision making and management oversight of contacts and referrals. There is still some work to be done between health and social care around monitoring cases of high risk pregnancies from early identification to ensure they are picked up at an earlier stage. Case conference chairs are playing a significant role in ensuring plans are robust and joined up between agencies around planning for unborn babies and children under one. There is good information sharing between agencies and the development of the Adolescent Intervention and Prevention Team has significantly increased the safeguarding of young people at risk of CSE, criminal exploitation and gangs in Southend.

There has been an increase in visits taking place in a timely way and it is important that this time with the family and child is used effectively. The voice of the child and family is not as strong in all areas of practice as it might be and the child's lived experience is often not visible from files although social workers can often talk about it in detail. There is work to be done regarding what is recorded and the standard of recording when it is done. There is still an area for development around direct work with children and families as well as ensuring that all work is recorded and scanned onto the system to help to provide a holistic picture of the child's lived experience. Plans are often SMART and comprehensive from CP and legal processes but not so robust or SMART within the CIN process. Assessment quality is inconsistent and family engagement in assessments and development of plans is limited. Management oversight is inconsistent and supervision is not as regular or reflective, and challenging as it should be. These are all areas of focus during 2018/19.

The premise of restorative practice is to work with families rather than do to them or for them. There is a programme of training around this with staff and an expectation that it becomes the culture in Southend working with colleagues and families.

There has been a focus on the inadequate audits over the last year and this has seen a reduction in the number of files audited inadequate and those being re-audited as inadequate. This will need to continue alongside a greater focus in the next year on files audited requires improvement and activity undertaken to address those to increase the numbers of cases rated good or above. The audit process is also needs to ensure that the child and family's voice is heard whilst being conducted in line with the principles of restorative practice.

*OFSTED stated: A whole-council approach and the additional scrutiny and impetus provided by an improvement board has helped the local authority make progress and maintain its focus on areas of practice that are not consistently good, such as the quality of assessments and plans.*

#### *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.

YEGS meets every fortnight in Civic 2 and is developing a routine of activities, working projects and attending regional and national events.

There are two EOC workers who facilitate the current YEGS group and they link in with the Go East regional working group in order for YEGS to participate in Children's Commissioner Groups, work alongside other Children in Care Council's and planned activities such as the 'Take Over' challenge.

Currently our YEGS are working on a project for the Children's Commissioner developing video's to aid IRO's, Social Workers and other professionals in ways to communicate and work with young people in care. This is due to be shared at a joint meeting the YEGS will attend with other Eastern regions Children in Care Council's and the hope is that this can also be shared with the Corporate Parenting Group in Southend.

The YEGS have previously developed the 'Me Manual' which is a direct work tool that social workers can use in order to communicate with their young people and aims to stop the repetitive nature of a child having to tell their story multiple times to different professionals.

They have also designed the Social Worker Profile – which aims to identify a more 'human' side of social workers to the children they work with.

In addition a stop motion animation that the YEGS worked on last year that talks about their journey in care – This is something that needs to be used as a training tool or uploaded to the intranet for wider sharing to help all professionals working with children to understand some of the feelings and experiences that stay with children when coming into care. The manner in which this is shared has yet to be agreed by the YEGS.

There is currently a small group of young people attending YEGS however there is a plan to increase numbers through opening this group up to children under CP and CIN plans and workers will be re-attending team meetings for all social care staff so that the message is more widely circulated.

The foster care workers in Edge of Care will also be distributing schedules and invites to all foster carers so that these can be given to children coming into their care.

#### *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 are visited and the voice of the child fed back to the Practice Lead.

### *Young Persons Participation within CWD and the wider SEND team.*

This was an area of consultation under development in 2017/18. Visits were 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 the aim was to tap into these current resources. Further discussions with the SEN Adviser, School Improvement took place in 2017/18 so that wider SEN areas could be included.

The special schools now have a physical representation on the Resource Allocation Panel (RAP) to ensure that their voice is heard when decisions are being made and to ensure that cases in most need are flagged at an earlier stage for additional support.

### *Forums for the parents of CP and LAC children in Southend*

Two consultation forums run on a quarterly basis for parents 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.

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.

### *Independent Reviewing Service*

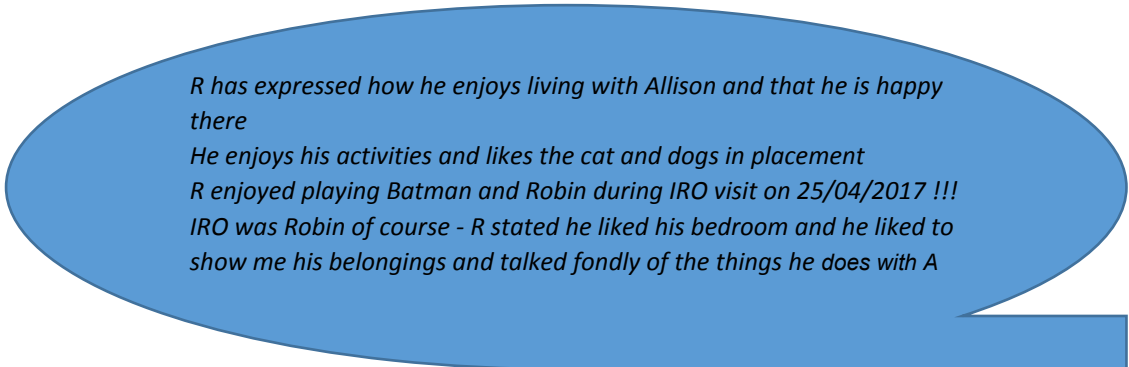
Participation of children in their review meetings is essential to ensure that children are able to have their say in plans for their lives. Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) must ensure that the views of children are known before care plan decisions can be made.

Figures are not available for the full year 2017 -2018, however, between April 2017 and September 2017 approximately 60% of children attended their reviews in person, which is an increase on 43% 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.

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. 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 2016/2017, 62.5% of children were personally consulted by their IRO. In 2017/2018 there were changes in how this data is collected however audit outcomes indicate that between

November 2017 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 audits rated IRO consultations as Good or Outstanding in 87% of cases.



*R has expressed how he enjoys living with Allison and that he is happy there  
He enjoys his activities and likes the cat and dogs in placement  
R enjoyed playing Batman and Robin during IRO visit on 25/04/2017 !!!  
IRO was Robin of course - R stated he liked his bedroom and he liked to show me his belongings and talked fondly of the things he does with A*

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.

#### Supporting and Developing our Workforce

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 2017/18 began to introduce 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 training has been rolled out across all service areas within children's services since the autumn of 2017. Most staff have now been trained in its use and the new approach will be embedded during 2018/19.

## Compliments and Complaints

Children's Social Care monitors compliments received from children and families, external bodies and internally. 24 compliments were received in 2017/18, in comparison to 20 in 2016/17. 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 2017/18 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 2017/18 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 60 new statutory Children Act complaints, were received in 2017/18; a reduction from 89 the previous year.

In 2017/18 we continued to focus on early resolution of complaints wherever possible. Of the 60 statutory complaints completed as stage 1 complaints, 4 were progressed to Stage 2. Of 4 Stage 2 complaints in 2017/18, 2 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.

## Summary of success and challenge going forward

We are proud of the work we are doing in Southend children's services and the recognition that Ofsted gave in the JTAI inspection, however we know we have more to do.

2017/18 saw improvements across Children's Services in a number of areas:

- Adoption performance continued to be high. Timescales for the key adoption indicators in the most recent adoption scorecard were some of the best in the country.
- Ensuring timely care planning for our children has been very positive
- The Family Group Conference Pilot has shown very positive outcomes and feedback from families and will now become a permanent feature in Southend
- Edge of Care has been well received by Foster Carers and has had proven outcomes of preventing some young people entering the care system and supporting foster carers to prevent placement breakdown.
- The results from the JTAI showed a positive move forward both for Social Care and work across the partnership.
- Improvements were seen in educational attainment of looked after children

We know that all too often the life chances of children receiving social care services, especially looked after children and care leavers, are inhibited through their circumstances and we are clear that we will not accept this for our children in Southend. Our ambition is to do all that we can to ensure that their wellbeing and growth is of the highest priority and that they will have every opportunity to achieve the very best that they can in all aspects of their development.

We are strengthening our governance and our Improvement Board, Improvement Plan and transformation of children's services will provide support and challenge to help us drive forward improvements. Over the coming year our key drivers to change are to:

- Deliver an updated Improvement Plan, linked to Southend 2050
- Move forward the transformation of children's services
- Embed restorative practice across the Council
- Ensure positive impact and outcome from our intervention with families

Critically, these drivers will help us to improve outcomes for children and young people and their families in Southend.

I'm used to people coming in and out of my life and not caring about me at all but I know Rod does, alongside his family, his daughter Lisa has done a lot for me as well, even when I kept her up 2 nights in a row when Rod was away she still continued to support and listen to me.

I would be in tears if I had to leave them.

LS