

Children's Social Care

The Journey of the Child Annual Report

Report to Members

July 2019

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Introduction

This report highlights activity in Southend Children's Social Care in 2018/19, what difference we have made for children and young people and outlines our priorities moving forward. This is the Third Annual report which covers the full year 2018/19. 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.



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 going forward is to be chaired by the Lead Member for Children's Services, (2018/19 Councillor Helen Boyd, 2019/20 Cllr Anne Jones), 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 2018/19 the Corporate Parenting group has focused on a number of important topics: safeguarding of looked after children, including from criminal exploitation; foster carer recruitment; health needs of looked after children; 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 life and working with Southend Children's Social Care and how the changes made to service delivery have impacted on their lives. This year has focused specifically on outcomes for children and this focus will continue into 2019/20.

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; criminal exploitation and gangs, county line, 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 2019 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 review¹ of local safeguarding children boards to have a different type of safeguarding strategic partnership. In February 2019 a further update was completed.

Extremism and Radicalisation

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

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 embed 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. 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

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

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
- 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.

Significant changes were made in 2016/17 to the structure of Children's statutory Social Care to ensure a more seamless journey for children and their families. Further changes were introduced in the past year to ensure more management capacity to allow for improved oversight and case management. This has been in place for nearly 3 months at the point of writing this report and is at an early stage of embedding, but already we are seeing further improvements to the service provided and oversight.

Financial Performance

Children Social Care is funded through the Council's general fund and the financial spend to budget position in 2018/19 for

Children services and learning was reported throughout 2018/19 to cabinet in the Revenue Budget Monitoring report.

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

The 2018/19 closing spend position to budget for Children Social Care, closed the financial year 2018/19 with a financial overspend pressure of £2.4 mil, 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 2018/19 was £22.9 mil (after approved in year budget adjustments), with a closing net spend position of £25.3 mil.

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 2018/19, and provided additional in year 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 £2.4mil 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. 2019/20 is expected to continue to be a challenging year financially for Children Social Care, but again the Council had responded by agreeing increased funding to support looked after children providing in 2019/20 by providing a further £2mil to invest in front line services permanently, 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 and fees further increased from April 2019 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.

Our Structure – how we deliver our services

Over the past year, there has also been further 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.

We now have smaller teams to allow for a higher level of management oversight and to help improvements to the quality of assessments and plans.

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 offer 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.

Early Help Single Point of Contact

What have we done?

The Early Help Single Point of Contact (SPOC) is a gateway that provides children and families regardless of age, with help as soon as needs present themselves to prevent those needs from escalating and requiring more intensive help and support later on.

During 2018/19 the SPOC received 3410 referrals. The SPOC is accessible at all

times by a dedicated e-mail address and is staffed 5 days per week from 9am to 5pm.

Extensive checks are undertaken on all family members to inform the decision making process carried out by the SPOC manager. Referrers are contacted within 24 hours of making the referral to confirm that the referral has been received and actioned.

The SPOC is co-located with the MASH+ this ensures that professionals from a range of services are working closely to provide the most appropriate level of support.

How well have we done it?

During 2018/19, 99.8% of the referrals received were processed within timescales and sent to the correct destination. Where referrals are returned to the SPOC – they are processed within 24 hours of being returned.

The SPOC were involved in the development of recent improvements to the Early Help module of Liquid Logic in Southend Children's Services. They continue to support further development of systems to support and improve their processes.

What difference has it made?

With such a high percentage of referrals being directed to the most appropriate support and within timescales this helps to ensure the smooth running of Children's Services. This enables young people and families to access the services they require sooner which enhances the lived experience of the children and families.

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.

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.

Early Help Family Support Team:

What have we done?

The Family Support team provides support and services to vulnerable families in Southend. 667 Families were referred for support in 2018/19 and were able to access support at the earliest opportunity.

631 Families closed to the family support team and 73% were reported as a successful intervention. Only 9% of families who have worked with Early Help have been escalated to Social Care for assessment.

327 Adults have been offered a service due to a medium risk DV report enabling vulnerable adults and children to access information and advice without delay.

The community team has offered personalised support to 73 families (October 2018 – March 2019) and continue to offer drop in services at St Luke’s Community Hub, over 1200 people have accessed this drop in support between April 2018 and March 2019.

Over 100 children and their families attended the International Day Festival in June 2018 (picture below) Feedback is positive.



What have we done well?

Families accessing Family support complete an Outcome Star at the beginning and end of intervention. 70% of families self-reported a positive improvement in their situation.

We have run 3 Empowerment Programmes with over 50 participants completing the course.

Feedback from parents is positive:

'I know I am not alone and I am making more effort with my kids and friends' (March 2019)

We have established an effective community support team where help can be accessed without referral. We have re-developed the way we work to ensure families can access support without delay.

What have we achieved?

We are able to offer Early Help services to every family who wants support.

Community support has enabled families and individuals to access support when they need it to solve a particular issue or sustain a change.

Family support is enabling families to make changes to theirs and their children's lives which lead to positive and sustainable changes.

Dedicated practitioners are able to work with family's complex needs and ensure the needs are met at the lowest possible level.

Feedback from families and professionals

Young People have experienced positive changes in their lives:

"I am better at keeping calm; the worker was friendly, supportive and easy going."

Ryan, Feb 2019

Parents have felt supported:

"Practitioner's approach had enabled me to make positive changes for me and my children which will be forever lasting."

Anna, July 2018

Professionals from other organisations have stated:

"It has been a roller coaster ride and it is fantastic that the outcome has been so positive. Thank you to Early Help for helping the family realise the importance that they needed to make these changes themselves."

Primary School, May 2018

Troubled families

To March 2019 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.
- 549 families achieved significant and sustainable progress outcomes to date in Phase 2 (Jan 15 – Mar 2019) and submitted for Payment by Results
- 56 additional families achieved Continuous employment (26 weeks); MHCLG stated this is "above" national average Therefore the total families attracting a Payment by results claim = 605
- 1,922 Families have been attached to Troubled Families Programme against a target of 1480 by 2020. This target has now been met.
- 1,279 family referrals have been received from other Local Authorities, Southend Social Care and Southend Safeguarding (Domestic Abuse). Without the intensive family support many of these will have remained in, or returned to statutory services.

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 1/1/2017 and 31/3/19 there were 1,296 attendances at the 'English class' and the 'Culture & language around the table' group, the former being both an accredited course leading to qualification and one for beginners. In the same time period 658 adults attended the 'Help and Support drop in' which provides housing and financial advice to local people and is supported by Family Mosaic, a new data management system has been recently implemented to improve the way data is captured for the community offer.

Impact:

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.

The Adolescent Intervention and Prevention Team

The Adolescent Intervention and Prevention Team focuses on children who are at contextual risk mostly from child exploitation in its many forms. The team is multi-disciplinary and has a strong Early Help Offer which aims to identify and prevent child exploitation by using a range of

different strategies and interventions. The throughput and feedback from the different activities of the last financial year can be found below:

Street Engagement Deployments:

During the last financial year our Street Engagement Officers undertook **385** street based deployments engaging with **3,997** children and young people in the community.

Impact:

Engaging with young people in their own communities has led to a number of outcomes including:

- Better relationships with children and young people
- Ability to divert young people into positive activities
- Understand first-hand the contextual risks within our communities
- Increased gang and county line intelligence
- Increased visibility of uniformed staff within key locations of the borough.

Operation Red Bull was undertaken on **9** occasions over the last year in conjunction with Essex Police, these were joint operations on key nights of the year running till midnight (GCSE results, Halloween, end of term) to engage with children and young people and ensure that they were safe whilst in the community. This resulted in over **20** litres of alcohol being confiscated, cannabis grinders and knuckle dusters also being removed from children in the community.

Children Missing Education (CME):

The team undertake the safeguarding checks and home visits for children identified as missing education within the borough as part of its statutory functions. Locating children missing from education as early as possible is a key function and local guidelines have been strengthened to ensure that those deemed CME are located as quickly as possible. The team have dealt with **416** referrals for **493** children resulting in the following outcomes:

- **349** children have been found here or passed onto another local authority between 1st April 18- 31st March 2019
- **114** children have been added to the DfE school to school database 1 April 18- 31 March 2019
- **30** children are still being located and are open cases

Operation Red Bull:

Child Sexual Exploitation and Online Protection Workshops:

Awareness workshops have been undertaken to a variety of audiences to help raise awareness and provide education around CSE and online protection; these sessions have been presented to teachers, parents, foster carers and school children amongst others.

- **59** workshops undertaken
- **2,682** people attended

A range of talks are undertaken depending on the audience, there is some feedback from teachers at schools below:

“Thank you for taking the time to speak to the children about internet safety. The children really enjoyed it and I think what was really helpful was being very open and honest with the children. Everybody was engaged in the discussions as evidenced by numerous children in the class participating and contributing their thoughts and ideas. They enjoyed getting a chance to ask questions and all of their comments were valued and answered very well- you provided lots of different contexts so I feel the children really understood the serious topics that were discussed.”

Teacher, Primary School

County Lines/Criminal Exploitation and Knife Crime Awareness:

The team have developed a workshop to be delivered in schools to be educational and raise awareness of knife crime, gangs and county lines. Three separate programmes have been designed to meet the needs of different age groups across both primary and secondary age ranges. These workshops have been named “See the Signs” to tie in with the local county lines publicity campaign.

- **57** workshops undertaken
- **2,148** pupils and teachers

What the teachers say:

“I have to say that I think your sessions with our Year 11 boys have been fabulous. With this in mind, would you be interested in coming in to school to run a session with interested parents?”

Local Grammar School

“I just wanted to let you know, that we are having such positive feedback from the groups you and your team has seen so far. So much so, that I have had requests from other departments for your email. I have had a special request from a teacher who has a very lively group of year 11 boys, but who we feel have little awareness of the dangers that they are putting themselves in. We feel they would really benefit from having your expertise to explain to these boys of the potential harm they are putting themselves

in, outside of school. Do you think this is something you could do? Hard hitting is what we need for these boys.”

Local Academy

Take 3 Parenting:

The Take 3 Parenting course has been delivered twice per term, this is a ten week parenting programme aimed to improved relationships within families and to improve behaviours within the home. Below are some statements from feedback forms from the course and a full evaluation has also been completed for the financial year with more details.

- 6 x 10 week programmes delivered
- 55 parents attended and completed the programme

“I have been given the tools to use, seems to be working for me.”

“I have met some nice people on the course who I hope to stay in touch with. I feel like I have reflected on how I parent and feel things are now a lot better for us as a family.”

“I have found all the strategies very useful especially using the active listening and the ‘I’ statements. These 2 strategies in-particular have brought calmness into the household.”

Non Violent Resistance Parenting Course:

The NVR course was rolled out due to the increased level of referrals regarding child to parent abuse/violence and the course has been very effective in supporting parenting to change behaviours in the home. It was identified that parent’s subject of physical and verbal abuse from the children was having significant impacts on not only the parent’s health but the families’ ability to function; the use of this course has proved successful for a number of parents, some of whom now volunteer on the programme to help other parents.

- 6 x 8 week programmes undertaken
- 83 parents attended the course

Some of the key comments from participants are below:

- “I feel more like a parent”
- “Less physical violence in the home”
- “I went to show willing but realised it works”
- “Have faith, this course works”

Truancy Patrols – Operation Newcastle:

Truancy patrols are undertaken by the team whereby lists of absent/truant pupils are sent to the team and home visits are undertaken to establish the reasons for non-attendance. During these visits and where

appropriate children may be returned to school or the parents are spoken to and educated about the importance of school attendance and reporting absence, relevant referrals are also completed where concerns are identified during the home visits.

- **63** days of truancy operations undertaken
- **424** home visits undertaken
- **9** children returned to school
- **164** parents educated

Missing and Return to Home

Interview:

The team undertake all return to home interviews for Southend residents within the borough and those for Looked after Children placed within the borough.

We no longer record children as absent however are pragmatic when considering offering Return to Home Interviews, for some recorded episodes of very short period's; interviews will not be offered; also some of the interviews undertaken are for multiple episodes which is not reflected in the attached figures as the top 10 most frequent missing children were responsible for 209 (40%) of the missing episodes in this period.

A number of the missing episodes are for unborn or very young children who were often missing with an adult family member and in some of these circumstances it was

not in the best interests for a RHI to take place.

- **511** Reported Missing Episodes in Period
- **196** Individuals reported missing during this period
- **424** Offered a RHI
- **297** Return to Home Interviews undertaken

Casework:

The team manage a caseload of young people on Early Help Plans deemed to be at risk of child exploitation, frequently reported missing or those requiring AIM interventions due to displaying problematic sexual behaviours. Over the last financial year **113** children were referred into the service and opened as cases on Early Help Plans.

The two social workers within the team manage a caseload of children subject to Child In Need/Protection Plans who are identified as being at risk of child exploitation or are frequently reported missing. The team have opened **55** children during this time period and have a current caseload of **44** children.

The ethos of the team is to take referrals direct from the MASH+ or the Early Help Single Front Door and to work with them without transferring the cases or there being transition points. The team use a range of tools and tactics to engage with young

people and often engage with children out the home, in school, in their communities and use positive activities to help divert and engage them.

The children and young people said:

What have we done / how we engage:

“It is a really good thing that I get to go out him out to eat; the team is the best team to work with.”

“Without everyone being involved I would be in a lot of trouble or probably in prison.”

“I have never had a Social Worker that I trust and can have a laugh with, I know that you actually care, thank you for all the things you do.”

What's different about AIP Team?

“I know they report stuff but we understand that – I would do the same if I was worried about someone.”

“Other people talk about how bad you are but they don't – they tell me when my behaviour is unacceptable but they don't moan at me – they're trying to help me.”

I feel like they care what happens to me –

“Don't just see your behaviour; they see why you behave like that”

“Others don't ask why I do it”

What do you like about the team and your workers?

“They know me and can tell when something is wrong without me saying – I like that.”

“I know someone is there.”

“They care about me – ask why you did things because they care what happens to you.”

“I trust them (all YP talked about the importance of trust) – one YP spoke about how you get to a point where you have to take a risk and trust someone to help you stop what you're doing.”

What has changed for you?

“Helped me to get into college/school.”

“I trust them – they are nice to you when most people aren't” - YP described ‘only trusted one person before but I trusted X and X (workers) and now I have trusted some other people.’

One YP described how they used alcohol to manage feeling low or angry but doesn't do that now – “workers gave advice on other things to try – tried it and it worked (music) – I trust what they say.”

“If it hadn't been for my caseworkers help, I wouldn't have made the changes I am proud to have made, and that I would still be stuck in my old lifestyle. I know my Caseworker is always there for me.”

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), Community Rehabilitation Company, 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

In the year April 2018 to March 2019, MARAC received 470 referrals of which 382 progressed to full MARAC and were discussed. The difference between the two figures were cases that were not heard due to either:

1. The case did not meet threshold (very few now)
2. The victim moved out of area
3. The perpetrator was sentenced to an extended period of custody

Of the 382 discussed only 13 were heard outside 14 working days and they were

heard within 21 days. This is down to capacity and an influx on particular weeks.

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 the MARAT will continue to develop their role as a Domestic Abuse specialists to support effective case work for victims and their families.

Edge of Care

The Edge of Care Team has now been in existence for two years and we have four very clear remits for working with children and their families/carers.

- Stabilising foster placements – supporting foster carers and children to ensure they experience high quality, stable, emotionally rewarding placements that meet the needs of the children and foster carers and avoid escalation in crisis, leading to placement breakdown.
- Support families and children to remain at home wherever safe to do so – working with families on the edge of care proceedings in order to enable families/parents to understand what is required of them, make changes, engage with social care but also to ensure that change can be maintained in order to support better outcomes for children in the home.
- Reunification – assess and support children to return to families from local authority care when safe to do so.
- Welfare visits – completing visits and supporting the local authority to either gather evidence of a child's situation prior to proceedings, or support families at difficult times (outside of normal working hours) to ensure that children are safe and families are managing pressure, change and crisis.

From the beginning, Edge of Care have consistently worked hard to achieve a good working relationship with multiple professional networks, social workers, family support resources already in place, fostering agencies and carers, Independent Reviewing Officer's and team managers in order to plan interventions that would best meet the needs of the families we all support in the LA. As such the team has changed some of the remits originally identified in order to incorporate elements of work that have evidenced the best results.

This has meant that we have increased the welfare visits that are undertaken at weekends and evenings. The families may not be necessarily open to Edge of Care however it has been identified and agreed at service manager level that the risks are high for the children remaining in the home, however there has not been effective management of this identified as yet and therefore visits are needed to gather evidence of the child's experiences when services are not in place and therefore reporting back what this is like for the child.

This supports the hopes of the LA to have children and young people becoming looked after in a timely manner and in their best interests. This involves the wishes and feelings of the children and those of their parents as this is always reported in as descriptive a way as possible, concentrating

on the 'day to day lived experiences of children'.

During the period of April 2018 to March 2019 Edge of Care, at the request of Social Care, supported 9 family cases via emergency welfare visits. These family cases came via group manager agreement outside of Panel and did not result in being opened as part of family support offer by Edge of Care. Edge of Care were however, able to offer welfare visits outside of normal working hours. In total there were 156 welfare visits completed by Edge of Care to these 9 families to assist in social care's plan to safeguard.

Edge of Care also completed 118 emergency welfare visits to a total of 12 families prior to agreement at placement panel and allocation. Following these requested welfare visits, and clear discussions around the support that can be provided by Edge of Care to work toward change, these cases were presented at Panel for Edge of Care involvement to be formally agreed and continued work as open cases to support the families for the children to remain at home, as per Edge of Care remit.

Edge of Care offered a further 682 welfare visits out of normal working hours, such as evenings and weekends, to cases allocated within the team.

VIG (Video Interaction Guidance) has been a recognised and effective tool in supporting parents to understand and achieve emotional responses towards their children. Very often it is identified during a psychological assessment that a parent may benefit from the approach and therefore we have been able to deploy this effectively with various parents (particularly with very young children) as an intervention that has had positive results for the children but also the parent's feedback. Regular feedback suggests that this approach is consciously received and understood and parents are able to consider this and change parenting approaches with other children in the family or deploy it effectively with their child more consistently.

Motivational Interviewing (MI) has been offered as a valuable intervention with parents that have mental health issues. Alongside the solution focused work that we complete with all families MI has helped parents consider issues and actions that have been identified for them to commence but they may not see or accept the validity or need for such actions. This approach helps parents particularly re-frame and motivate themselves to success and explore what has held them back and how they could sustain positive changes.

The team consistently offer a Solution Focused approach to work with all families, carers and children. It helps to endorse the

restorative approach committed to by the whole of the LA and seeks out high support high challenge when considering the opposition to change and barriers to committed engagement with families on plans (CP, CIN or LAC) in order to sustain change where other interventions have been unsuccessful.

The Edge of Care team seek to ensure that children, young people and families benefit from stable and meaningful relationships with key workers. Families and children are consistently seen not only as a family group but are also seen alone by workers. Our practice and therefore plans of support are based on understanding each child's day to day lived experience. Parents are encouraged to listen to what the social worker wants to see change and then complete their own actions that would address this, therefore achieving a more productive working environment that can sustain change and therefore enable children to be safer as a result of the help they receive.

The team strive to ensure that all the children we work with have opportunity to complete direct work with their key workers. Their experience is essential to understand, their hopes, dreams, desires and thoughts about what they would like to change is fundamental to the work we do and therefore the plans we put in place.

Since being operational Edge of Care has worked with 189 families on a voluntary basis, there have only been 13 families of these who have either not engaged or not required our service, which equates to a 93% success rate in engaging families positively.

Out of the 118 families referred to Edge of Care for family support, 53 of these cases have resulted through our involvement, to the children remaining in the family home. In a further 13 cases the children were supported to alternative care arrangements in their extended families. It should be noted within this figure that of the 118 families that Edge of Care have worked with, not all of these are currently closed, and continue to receive support from Edge of Care as the families work to make positive and sustained change. To date, there have only been 20 cases which have escalated into children coming into Local Authority care, which would equate to an 87% success rate of supporting families to remain together.

Of the 42 fostering cases referred to Edge of Care for support to stabilise the foster placement, at the point of closure 26 of these placements have been stabilised, with only 10 escalating to residential care. This shows a 76% success rate to date in supporting placements and providing children with an opportunity for continued stability and consistency in their lives.

Comments about Edge of Care:

“The ability of your staff to approach the family in a holistic way and to tirelessly and appropriately balance perceived risk with the abilities and needs of the family has enabled us today to de-plan the two children from Child Protection to CIN status with a clear continued plan of support.”

“I would like to offer my sincere thanks for a successful outcome for these children due to your team’s intervention – along with the consistent and supportive roles of health, schools.”

“I am sure that it will not be all plain sailing with this family due to their ongoing needs – however all professionals concurred that it would no longer be proportionate for these children to remain on a CP plan and for CIN to be implemented.”

“We would like to thank you for helping us and my granddaughter this past year. Especially to K, S and S for the time that came out to help us get through a bad time and also for taking the time to show her how to play guitar! It has been the 1st time anyone has listened to us and that has made a big impact in our lives. It will be sad not to see you anymore K as you’ve been a lifeline to us. Your team does a fantastic job and we thank you for being there for us.”

“Whole experience has helped her find her voice, really happy and encouraged to do the healthy eating course. Feel more confident.”

What did we do well? – “Everything!”

How has Edge of Care Supported you? – “With building a bond between me and J, I feel so much more confident as a mother, with my parenting and in myself. I feel more confident; have a meeting at the jobcentre for hairdressing and nursery placement.”

The social workers employed within the team undertake comprehensive reunification assessments that comprise the Placement with Parent Assessment and regulations, to ensure that when the plan is for a child to return home, there is purposeful work carried out with the family and child in order to ensure that it is safe for the child to return home and that this is supported for a period of time following reunification.

The reunification assessments look at the reasons and circumstances behind a child coming into care and the Parents & the child’s understanding of these concerns and what they need to do to allay concerns or act appropriately in order to safeguard in the future.

Edge of Care has also provided a yearly weekend camping experience for some of the families they work with. This has been

devised with the understanding that not all families are able to have a space away from their day to day lives and it is important to allow for a moment of reflection and celebration in a new environment. Through the camp new experiences are offered, in which it is hoped families can be given the opportunity to see the effectiveness of their skills as a family in practice within this new environment, whilst building positive shared memories together.

The YEGS (Young Experts Group Southend) are a group of looked after children that the Local Authority are proud of and wish to include in any and all plans to develop the experiences children have in our care. The YEGS is a participation group for children in care and therefore has high expectations for our Young Experts to be involved in not only Southend's progress but that of the Eastern Region and Children's Commissioners projects.

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 were 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.

Impact

Between January and December 2018 the team received 87 referrals with 33 of these progressing to conference. Of the 33 cases which have been completed, 10 have deescalated from CIN plan to be closed to social care; 1 has deescalated from Child Protection to close to social care; 4 cases have deescalated from Child Protection to CIN and 1 deescalated from looked after to closure to social care.

Family feedback:

“Thanks for what you have done for us as a family, it means a lot” SW father 15.11.18

“Thank you for helping D and D to talk to each other.” CB Grandmother 28.11.18

“It centred our thinking and helped us to plan our strategy.” JW grandmother 12.11.18

“Thank you so much for giving me the chance to tell my story and even more so, thank you for listening! You’re a super star!”
LM parent following restorative conference
18.3.18

“I felt we were given good clear advice and everybody had a chance to speak. Everyone now understands each other and will be able to move forward to the benefit of all.”
RH step-mother 21.3.18 following restorative conference.

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
- 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 are working closely with Southend Borough Council, Healthy Schools Award, to increase the awareness of young carers in schools across the borough.

At the end of March, we undertook a database update and contacted via letter, or phone call all young carers known to us, we now have 205 young carers ; 9 Primary Young Carers (4.4%) and 196 secondary young carers (95.6%). 98 are male and 107 female.

We were successful in recruiting a full time young carers youth worker in July 2018, this worker continued with the running of young carers programmes

SYC&MORE/COOL/CHIL, developing this work and increasing attendance to the sessions, and undertaking work in schools (as above) to promote young carers information.

Plans for the future:

- Closer working/information sharing with adult social care.
- Work with Healthy Schools Award
- Attend Young Carers Festival, summer 2019.

Youth Offending Service

What we did:

- Used service users self-assessments to tailor intervention
- Included user voice in our QA to inform future practice
- Involved service users in programme/project design
- Listened to service user feedback to understand effectiveness of interventions
- Worked with partners to agree appropriate Out of Court Disposals
- Offered Courts viable alternatives to custody
- Assessed Risk accurately to prevent likelihood of future offending
- Explored viable ETE options and motivated young people to identify and achieve aspirations
- Worked with children's' social care and accommodation providers to access a suitable, safe home
- Listened to victims and ensured their voice was heard
- Repaired the harm caused to victims
- Addressed young people's addictions
- Worked in schools to educate young people on the dangers of substance misuse.

How well have we done?

Performance – Youth Offending Service

| KPI | Target 2018/19 | Figure at 31st March 2019 | RAG |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-----|
| First Time Entrants | <100 | 32 | G |
| Reoffending | <36% | 36% | G |
| Use of Custody | <0.96 per 1000 10-17 year olds | 0.13 | G |
| Engagement in ETE | >80% | 81.0% | G |
| Suitable Accommodation | 100% | 97.6% | G |
| Triage | | 94 | |

Performance – Engagement with Victims

The Youth Offending Service Victim Officer has in the last year worked with 41 victims. 11 of these have taken part in a Restorative Justice (RJ) conference with 1 resulting in a young person undertaking direct reparation to the victim. A further 17 letters of apology were also completed during this period.

Performance - Young Persons Drug and Alcohol Team (YPDAT)

During 2018-19, a total number of 218 young people living in Southend-on-Sea

Borough were referred to Young Persons Drug and Alcohol Team. 80% accessed structured treatment including completion of comprehensive assessment and recovery care plan guided by evidence-based interventions. Successful completion of structured treatment accounted for 65%. Of those 41% achieved positive outcomes and were free from substances upon discharge.

What difference has it made for children?

“My work with Ricardo made me think about what I've been doing and makes me think before I do things because I don't want to go through this again. As a result of the work, I have undertaken a knife free pledge. I understand the seriousness of injury and how likely this is to occur even when not intended. I now understand the risk I would be taking if I carry a knife again.”

“Through my work with Tyler I helped him establish and build a relationship with his father, this led to him obtaining stable accommodation with him out of the area away from negative peers and influences. Tyler has also secured full time employment and significantly reduced his substance use. As a result of all these changes Tyler reports his physical and emotional wellbeing has vastly improved.”

Southend Youth Offending Service [YOS] wanted to improve the way Youth Rehabilitation Orders [YRO] are reviewed and explored utilising community panel members for this. As part of the design phase, it was agreed to involve a young person on an YRO to test this and involve their feedback in its development moving forward.

The young person stated he “love’s the idea of being a pilot”, and he could see the benefits of these reviews for other young people.

The young person’s involvement in the pilot, his feedback, thoughts and experiences helped the YOS to implement a meaningful process. All YRO’s are now being reviewed in this way, ensuring the young person’s voice is heard and the objectives set in the intervention plan takes into account their thoughts, perspectives and adequately meets their needs to secure rehabilitation and re-integration.

Victim’s stories

Victims who have received support from the Youth Offending Service have voiced that they feel safer and better informed about the criminal justice outcome received by their perpetrator. One victim gave feedback after a direct Restorative Justice Intervention stating “..how valuable the RJ meeting was,” and that: “from my point of view it was

another reminder that there is a human side behind the offenders as well.”

A second victim stated on his feedback after a direct Restorative Justice Intervention that he felt the process was a “..good opportunity for offenders to put a face to their crime and understand the impact their behaviour has had.”

YPDAT stories

“I learnt about the risks of drugs and alcohol and other ways to deal with my emotions instead of turning to drugs.”

“I never felt left out; I make the suggestions and setting my own goals. I managed to get back into contact with my family and get myself into employment.”

“I found recovery to be very supportive, how to know the signs and the triggers and how to stay off drugs. I understood lapses and relapses which helped me to stop using drugs.”

The Young Persons Drug and Alcohol Team have been implementing preventative work in schools. In 2018-19, a total of 965 students engaged in drug and alcohol awareness sessions provided by YPDAT. Student evaluation feedback reflected 92% positive response stating they found these sessions informative and relevant to their current experiences.

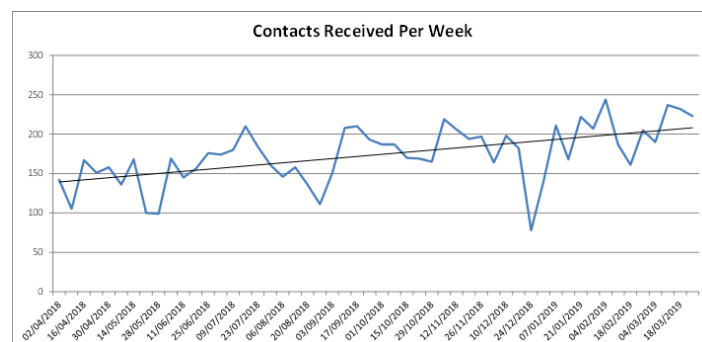
Children's Statutory Social Care

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 2015/16 and 2018/19 have increased significantly (see table below)

| | 15/16 | 16/17 | 17/18 | 18/19 |
|--------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Av weekly contacts | 70 | 89 | 154 | 174 |
| Annual total contacts | 3860 | 5050 | | 9037 |
| Ratio of contacts to referrals | 38.8% | 43.7% | | 30.6% |



The above chart shows an increasing trend during the past year.

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.

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,

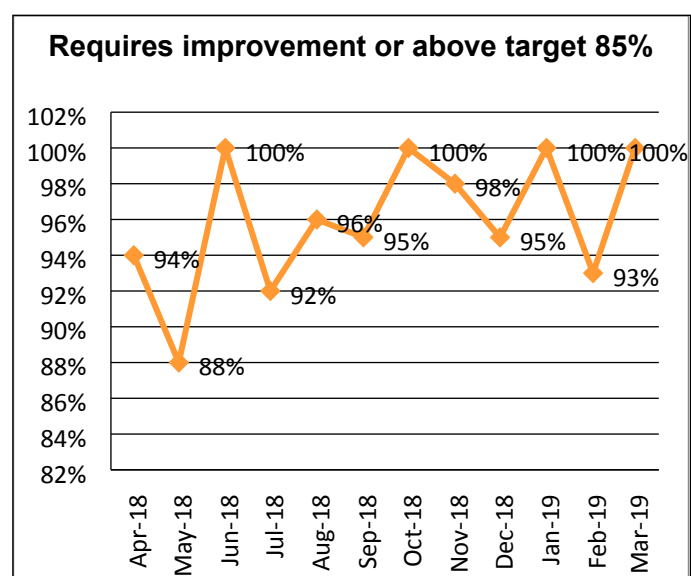
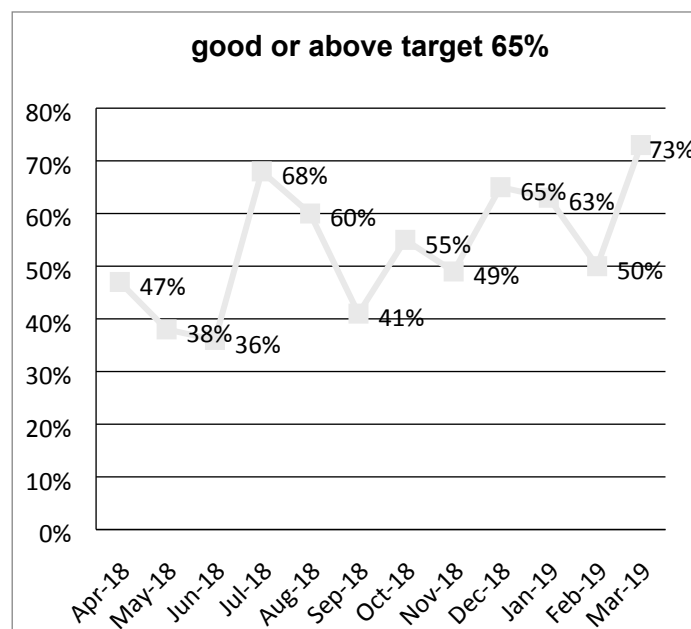
other local authorities, housing providers, solicitors, courts and voluntary sector providers. The service provides advice in both simple and complex situations and also initiates child protection investigations and/or proactive services including admission into care.

The work of the Edge of Care 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 and 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 more stable over the past year. The appointment of a third Team Manager in the past few months has allowed for more robust support and management oversight and it is hoped will continue to support a stable workforce.

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:

| | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 |
|-----------------|---------|---------|-------------------|
| Southend | 16.4% | 24.3% | 24.6% |
| Stat Neighbours | 23% | 23% | Not yet published |
| England | 22% | 22% | Not yet published |

2,626 statutory social work assessments were completed in 2018/19 which is higher than the number completed in the previous year: (2,430 in 2017/18). However, as noted in the table above, the percentage of re-referrals has remained stable over the past 12 months and is slightly higher than the national average.

In 2018/19, 89.5% of assessments were completed within timescale (45 working days) which was an increase from 65.4% recorded for 2017/18. However, we are beginning to see further improved performance and in the first four months of 2019 this percentage increased to 92.78%.

Percentage of assessments completed within 45 working days:

| | 2015/16 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 |
|-----------------|---------|---------|---------|-------------------|
| Southend | 96.4% | 63.8% | 65.4% | 89.5% |
| Stat Neighbours | 76.9% | 80% | 80% | Not yet published |
| National | 83.4% | 83% | 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.

A decision to run a pilot to look at a preferred model of intervention was placed on hold in the autumn of 2018, following a decision to change the management structure of the teams dealing with child in need. The number of managers was increased in Assessment and Intervention from 2 to 3 to ensure more robust decision making and management oversight. Once the changes are fully embedded, consideration will be given to moving forward with the through care pilot.

Child Protection and Support Teams (CPS 1, CPS 2 and CPS 3)

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. As part of the management structure changes, a third CPS team was created to ensure more robust management oversight.

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 (CAP1 and CAP2)

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. As a part of the management structure changes, a second Court and Permanence Team was created.

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 31st March)

| 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|------|------|------|------|
| 189 | 220 | 116 | 171 |

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

| | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 |
|------------------------|---------|---------|-------------------|
| Southend | 56.8 | 30 | 43.72 |
| Stat Neighbour average | 50 | 55 | Not yet published |
| National | 43 | 45 | Not yet published |

As at March 2019, there were 171 children subject of a Child Protection Plan, an increase of 55 from 116 in March 2018 and a rate of 43.72 children per 10,000. This was much higher than in 2018 and more in

line with national averages reported in 2017/18.

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 4.1% at 31 March 2019, from 2.6% at 31 March 2018. This equates to seven children from 2 families 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 | 2018/19 |
|------------------------------------|---------|------------|-------------|
| Under 6 months | 49.5% | 21% (49) | 61.7% (105) |
| 6-12 months | 27.3% | 37.4% (26) | 27% (46) |
| 1-2 years | 20.5% | 34.6% (38) | 7% (12) |
| Over 2 years | 2.7% | 7% (3) | 4.1% (7) |

It is evident that in 2018/19 many children and families moved through child protection interventions in a timely manner and remained for a shorter time on plans than in the previous year with 61.7% of cases being on Child Protection Plans for less than six months, an increase from 21% at the end of 2017/18. The numbers of children subject to CP plans has increased dramatically in 2018/19 from 116 at the end of March 2018 to 170 at the end of March 2019. This increase in demand is being shown across the whole of social care and reports from partners give the same picture of increased demand.

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 15.5% in 2017/18 to 11% in 2018/19. This is much more in line with national figures for previous years and is monitored on a monthly basis with all cases being reviewed.

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 | 2018/ 19 |
|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Southeast | 19% | 29.3% | 15.5% | 11% |

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 proactive 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, **5** households have been formally prohibited from privately fostering following presentation at the Private Fostering Panel. Thus far, none have appealed the decision to prohibit them.

- At the end of March 2019 there were five children known to be in private fostering arrangements in Southend all of whom were over the age of 10. This is an increase of two from March 2018.

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. The most recent prohibition which came into force in May 2019 has resulted in the young person in question becoming Looked After and the opening of her own family for assessment by Children’s Social Care therefore supporting safeguarding of other children within her household.

As part of the Private Fostering Action Plan January 2019 – December 2019, the following actions have been undertaken thus far with more planned across the year:

A one minute guide for private fostering has been produced and disseminated by Southend Borough Councils School Admissions Team to their admission colleague’s forum which includes school admission colleagues across 17 Infant/Primary Schools and 8 Secondary Schools. This is an ideal opportunity to

identify unknown private fostering arrangements. One Minute guide also sent to the Children with Disabilities Team and a piece will feature in the CWDT Newsletter.

The Senior Fostering Worker has delivered a private fostering awareness session to colleagues in the MASH+ Team which is particularly important given that all private fostering referrals will be made via this team and therefore it is crucial that they are able to recognise these referrals and respond in line with our agreed processes. There is evidence that this has been effective as there is increased contact between MASH+ Team and the Senior Fostering Worker.

Regular briefing sessions are held for Student Social Workers placed in Adults and Children's Services and for the NQSW group. Sessions have previously been held to ensure that new entrants to Southend are fully aware of the issues and processes involved in respect of Private Fostering and the first session for 2019 was delivered on 13/03/2019.

Following the discovery of French exchange students staying with host families in Southend, a meeting was 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. A meeting was held on 15 May 2019 with two representatives

working for Jev Langues (non-profit organisation founded by language Teachers). The next step is to establish if and how JEV Langues processes and Southend Borough Councils private fostering processes can be aligned to prevent duplication whilst still adhering to the regulations.

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 2017/18 to an average of 26 weeks in 2017/18. This reduced further in 2018/19 to an average of 25 weeks. The national

average rose 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. Several placement orders have been delayed for many months to give the family a chance, leaving young children in public care for an extended period. These issues have been fully raised with the courts however the expected that improvements in past year with a number of new circuit and district judges being allocated to the Chelmsford courts have not to date been forthcoming. Timescales will continue to be monitored closely.

The pre-proceedings process was introduced in 2008 as the part of the Public Law Outline (PLO) reforms to care proceedings. It has been revised by the Public Law Outline 2014 and the Children and Families Act 2014. There is now a 26-week time limit for the completion of care and supervision proceedings. This places an increased emphasis on pre-proceedings work.

We believe that the majority of children and young people thrive best in their own family environment and help being given at the right time supports this. We aim to identify

concerns about a child early and where possible provide support for the family to address these issues.

Pre-proceedings work is specifically when we are concerned about the welfare of a child, and they are at risk of significant. They are usually cases that are subject to Child Protection Plans and where insufficient progress has been made.

The main area of pre-proceedings is the PLO process. This is where the Local Authority works with parents/carers to see if a plan can be agreed and implemented about what needs to happen to protect the child from harm, so that court proceedings can be avoided.

The pre-proceedings tracker is monitored weekly to identify any drift and delay between the different stages of the PLO process including the completion of the PLO and the process of making an application to the court in a timely fashion.

Should issues be proactively addressed during PLO, 40% of cases are likely to be diverted from court; the other 50% of the cases in court will avoid risk of claims, run more smoothly and finish in court more quickly. It will also help in reducing the cost

of court applications requesting more time to file evidence.

- During 2018/19, pre-proceedings were initiated for 42 children and ended for 13 children and continued to be managed under child protection process which equates to 33.3% of cases diverted from court.
- 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 56 in 2017/18 to 54 in 2018/19.

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 continued to rise in 2017/18. This trend has continued during the past year.

Number of looked after children at 31st

March 2019:

| | 2015/ 16 | 2016/ 17 | 2017/ 18 | 2018/ 19 |
|----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Southend | 262 | 282 | 295 | 308 |

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

| | 2015/ 16 | 2016/ 17 | 2017/ 18 | 2018/1 9 |
|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Southend | 68 | 73 | 76 | 81 |
| Stat neighbours | 66 | 68 | 69 | Not yet published |
| National | 60 | 62 | 64 | |

There has been a significant rise in the number of looked after children over the past 3 years. At the 31 March 2019 Southend was responsible for looking after (i.e. were corporate parents for) 308 children and young people, an increase of 17% compared to the same time in 2015/16 and a 4% increase on 2017/18. 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 31st March:

| Age | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|-------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Under 1 | 34 or 25.9% | 22 or 14.4% | 31 or 25.2% | 23 or 19.7% |
| 1-4 | 30 or 22.9% | 41 or 26.8% | 18 or 14.6% | 26 or 22.2% |
| 5-9 | 24 or 18.3% | 32 or 20.9% | 13 or 10.6% | 16 or 13.7% |
| 10-15 | 33 or 25.2% | 40 or 26.1% | 27 or 22% | 29 or 24.7% |
| 16 and over | 10 or 7.6% | 18 or 11.8% | 34 or 27.6% | 23 or 19.7% |
| Total | 131 | 153 | 123 | 117 |

The number of over 16's and the percentage of this age group within the total number of children entering care has decreased considerably in 2018/19 and the percentage of children aged 1-4 years has increased from 14.6% to 22.2%. There has continued to be unaccompanied asylum seeking males aged over 16 years presenting for services, and in addition we have identified a number of females in this category at high risk of criminal exploitation through the work of the Adolescent Intervention and Protection Team.

The largest increase this past year has been in 1-4yrs which has as previously stated increased from 14.6% to 22.2%. Many of

these were a part of large sibling groups.

The 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 2019.

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

| Age | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|
| Under 1 | 22 | 17 | 25 | 9 |
| 1-4 | 38 | 41 | 29 | 45 |
| 5-9 | 41 | 49 | 55 | 48 |
| 10-15 | 94 | 113 | 115 | 126 |
| 16 and over | 67 | 62 | 71 | 80 |
| Total | 262 | 282 | 295 | 308 |

Ethnicity breakdown of looked after children at 31 March 2019:

| Ethnic | Southend LAC 2018 | Southend LAC 2019 | Total Southend under 18 population |
|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| White British & Other | 84% | 79% | 91.6% |
| Mixed | 4% | 8% | 2.1% |
| Asian or Asian British | 3% | 3% | 3.7% |
| Black or Black British | 6% | 5% | 2.1% |
| Other ethnic group | 3% | 5% | 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.

100 children left care during 2018/19.
Of these:

- 23 (23%) were adopted;
- 8 (8%) were made the subject of a special guardianship order;
- 30 (30%) returned home and
- 39 ceased to be looked after for any other reason (39%) the majority of these turned 18yrs (34).

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, now fully embedded, 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. All cases are considered by the Placement Panel chaired by the Director of children's services.

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 2018 and April 2019, 77 parenting assessments (with 102 adults assessed in total) and 6 siblings assessments were completed within time scales of between 2 (addendum assessments) and 12 weeks, including PAMS assessments, especially designed to support parents with any level of learning disability.

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

The standard of parenting assessments is such that out of the 77 parenting assessments presented to the Court and Independent Reviewing Officers, only in 9 of these the Judge disagreed with the Assessment recommendations. Out of these 9 cases, in 6 of these after subsequent events, the Court changed their decision and followed the Marigold assessment recommendations.

The teaching and intervention elements of the Marigold parenting assessments can contribute significantly to positive outcomes for the family and lead to successful rehabilitation.

Comments from the Courts:

“The evidence of WOC (Senior Practitioner) was very good, balanced and yet very firm.”

“Thank you for the parenting assessment from the Marigold, which I have forwarded onto the Guardian. The Guardian asked me to convey her thanks to the Marigold. She thought it was a really fair and thorough report.”

“Miss B (Senior Practitioner) impressed me as a careful and balanced witness. In my judgement, her parenting assessment was considered and well reasoned.”

Contact services

The Marigold Assessment Plus Service provides contact for looked after children and their birth families as well as holistic, community based parenting assessments based on the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their families (DoS 2000) and a range of parenting programmes which are used to inform parenting assessments or can be commissioned separately as remedial programmes. The team also provides services for children, such as life story work/books, self-esteem/anger management work and wishes and feelings work. In

addition, the service provides sexual risk reduction work; safe sibling work, domestic violence work and mediation with Forensic Therapist, Steve Burr. The service also facilitates the Thames Valley Partners Programme and the Rise Project.

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.

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.

Between April 2018 and April 2019, 185 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.

After each contact session, the Contact Facilitator completes a detailed and factual report of the contact session which is sent to the family's social worker to aid with decision making.

Service user feedback via the Centre's questionnaires has been consistently positive, with parents commenting on the safety of the centre, the choice of toys for all age groups and the staff's helpful approach.

"We attended for contact with our granddaughter...everyone was always very professional but very helpful and kind....."

16/02/19.

In addition, 3 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.

The Centre seeks regular feedback from children as well as parents and children's suggestions and requests for specific toys and games are followed up. We aim to make children and families safe and comfortable and wherever possible and safe will facilitate supervised outings to child centred venues within the community.

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 well.

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.

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.

Impact:

Between April 2018 and April 2019, seven Back Together, Parent-Child Game and Positive Parenting Programmes have been completed. Only one of the seven families had subsequent Social Care intervention.

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, to build up attachment between parents/carers and the children in their care.

Between April 2018 and April 2019, the service has delivered the Principles of Theraplay Programmes to 11 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 April 2018 and April 2019, 63 MIM sessions were completed.

The 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.

This year two groups have been completed, one group with 5 participants and one group with 3.

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 2018 and April 2019, six males and two females were supported in this way.

A specialist part time worker has also supported two parents/carers to manage challenging or sexualised behaviours of children in their care and provided mediation within Special Guardianship proceedings. In addition, the specialist worker has provided training for staff assessing/supervising contact with sex offenders.

Domestic Violence Risk reduction Programme

Our 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 2018 and April 2019, three males benefited from individual sessions with him.

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 2018 and April 2019, 38 books have been completed and direct work took place with 11 children. The Centre recently has also been commissioned to provide later life letters for young people who have been adopted.

"It really helped the boys put more pieces of their early life together. Completed in a very child friendly manner. The boys loved it..."

Foster carer 20/02/19

Look At Me Programme/wishes and feelings.

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

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

Between April 2018 and April 2019 a service was provided for six 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 two children and their carers.

The Rise Project

The Rise Project (based on the Pause 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. Between April 2018 and April 2019, six women have been supported through the programme. The first cohort of women (four in total) completed the project in October 2018 and none of them had another pregnancy in that time. The programme has been monitored and evaluated by Essex University.

“The Rise project team are clearly meeting their service brief. The staff are dedicated and enthusiastic in making a difference to the lives of the women with whom they work.”

Essex University evaluation report, 10/10/18.

Having successfully completed the pilot project, the service aims to expand the project during 2019/20 following the evaluation recommendations.

Counselling

The service has provided a placement for two fourth year student counsellors within the Centre who have provided a counselling

service for six service users during the year. In addition, one of our Children and Families Workers has a level 2 Award in Counselling skills for working with children which is of real benefit for some of the children attending the Contact Centre when possibly contact with their birth parents evokes difficult feelings for them.

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 support 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 educational outcomes achieved in 2018 for Southend looked after children was presented in the Autumn 2018/19, as part of the Virtual School Annual Report.

Special Educational Needs (All LAC)

In the cohort of Looked After Children, as at the end of July 2018, 21% had an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) or Statement of SEN. This is lower than our statistical neighbours 28% and national average of 26.5%.

In addition, a further 25.5% had identified special educational needs supported at school level; SEND Support. This is lower than our statistical neighbours 32% and national average of 29.0%.

In total this means that just under half of the cohort (47%) has additional learning needs.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

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 2018/19 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 2018/19 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.

LAC > 1 Year

Four pupils were included in this cohort. Of these, three achieved a good level of development; 75%, up from 50% last year, based on two pupils.

Key Stage 1

LAC > 1 Year

Five pupils were included in the cohort. Of these, two achieved the expected standard in all of reading, writing and maths (40%, down from 75% last year). Three out of the five children had identified special educational needs supported at school level; SEND support.

SFR information based on 92 LAs who have submitted data reports that Southend is above the regional average (36%) and national average (37%).

Key Stage 2




LAC > 1 Year

10 pupils were included in the cohort. Of these, four achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths (40%, up from 33% last year).

SFR information based on 92 LAs who have submitted data reports that Southend is above the regional average (35%) and national average (35%) in the headline measure.

- In reading, 70% of the cohort achieved the expected standard, significantly up from 33% in 2017
- In writing, 50% of the cohort achieved the expected standard, up from 44% in 2017
- In maths, 60% of the cohort achieved the expected standard, up from 44% in 2017
- In grammar, punctuation and spelling, 60% achieved the expected standard, up from 44% in 2017

Provisional progress scores were positive in reading and maths (reading: +4.00 and maths: +3.50 respectively) but were negative in writing (-0.90). All progress outcomes are improved from 2017 (reading: -1.64, writing: -4.89 & maths: +0.28)

| | Rank (national) | Quartile |
|-------------------|--------------------|---|
| Reading: +4.00 | 6 | 1  |
| Maths: +3.50 | 2 | 1  |
| Writing: -0.90 | 62 | 2  |

Key Stage 4

LAC > 1 Year

28 pupils were included in this cohort. It is important to note that the cohort size increased from 15 in 2017 to 28 in 2018 (almost double).

- 19 pupils achieved at least one GCSE (68%).
- Eight pupils achieved 4-9 in English and Maths (29%, up from 20% in 2017)

% 5-9 English and Maths pass

- Three pupils achieved grades 5-9 in English and Maths, (11%, up from 7% last year)

SFR information based on 92 LAs who have submitted data reports that Southend is above the regional average (8.0%) and national figure (8.0%) in the headline measure.

% Attainment 8 Average Score

- Attainment 8 average score is 20.1%, down from 24.2% in 2017.

Data from the Looked after Children SFR reports that Southend is above our Statistical Neighbour Average 17.1% and National Average figure 18.9% in the headline measure.

% Progress 8 Average Score

- Progress 8 scores is -1.46%, down from -0.62% in 2017.

Data from the Looked after Children SFR reports that Southend is slightly below our Statistical Neighbour Average -1.23% and National Average figure -1.20% in the headline measure.

Attendance

The attendance of Southend Looked After Children is monitored by Welfare Call under contract to Southend Virtual School.

Attendance school for Southend Looked After Children has improved to 94.7% at peak level.

For the last two reporting years, the Virtual School has consistently performed at or above the Virtual School's target rate for attendance (90%).

Absence Rates %

- Absence rates for Southend Looked After Children is 6.3%, from 4.6% in 2017.

Data from the Looked after Children SFR reports that Southend is below our statistical neighbour average 5% and national average figure 4.5% in the headline measure.

Persistent Absence

The national average for persistent absence of Looked After Children has remained steady over recent years from 9% in 2014 to 10% in 2017.

- Persistent absence rates for Southend Looked After Children is 16.5%, from 11.8% in 2017.

To address this, the Virtual School launched a new 'Attendance and Persistent Absence'

Policy in September 2018. The policy outlines staged levels of interventions and clear escalation of protocols around absence to ensure that Looked After Children with attendance concerns are identified early and before persistent absence becomes entrenched.

Exclusions

a. Permanent Exclusion

Southend local authority has a policy of no permanent exclusions for Looked After Children. Schools are expected to contact the Virtual School when Looked After Children are at risk of permanent exclusion, where arrangements are made to review appropriate support for the individual child and school and to investigate how the situation can be managed without the need for permanent exclusion.

b. Fixed term Exclusion

Reducing exclusion from school continues to be a priority for Southend Virtual School. However, despite significant input this remains a challenge against a backdrop of rising exclusions in the general population. Published data on the SFR for the previous two years shows a national increase for exclusion in 2015/16 and 2016/17.

- Fixed Term Exclusion rates for Southend Looked After Children 2017 was 12.8% from 15.1% in 2016.

Data from the Looked after Children SFR reports that Southend is above our statistical neighbour average 14% and below national average figure 11.8% in the headline measure.

SFR exclusion data for 2018 is not yet available.

Fixed Term Exclusion Rates %

| | 2015/16 | 2016/17 |
|-------------------------------|---------|---------|
| Southend-on-Sea | 15.1% | 12.8% |
| Statistical Neighbour Average | 12.2% | 14% |
| National Average | 10.4% | 11.8% |

There has been considerable input from the Virtual School to work with schools to reduce exclusion and provide additional support. The Virtual School is committed to working with all schools, academies, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and other educational establishments to avoid fixed term exclusions, whilst ensuring that the school remains a safe space for the young person, peers and adults alike. For Looked After Children, fixed term exclusions should be used as an absolute 'last resort'.

The Virtual School would like to be made aware of any potential fixed term exclusion before the school makes a decision to exclude to see if any other alternatives could be considered and investigate what support and strategies could be offered.

The Virtual School commissions welfare call to monitor daily attendance of Looked After Children at school, this also includes tracking and recording of fixed term exclusions.

Quality of provision – OFSTED Good and Outstanding Schools

There has been an increase in the percentage of looked after children attending good or outstanding schools. In 2017 this was 69%. In 2018 this had risen to 75.8% and this trajectory continues to move in the right direction towards the target rate of 78%. This has been achieved by developing an effective working partnership with the Admissions Service and creating a more robust process for school placement; including an increase in the number of cases where it has been appropriate to escalate through the various stages of 'direction'.

Pupil Premium Grant (PPG)

Young people are eligible to receive full Pupil Premium of £2,300 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.

Looked After Children Awards Ceremony

The looked after children awards continue to be celebrated on an annual basis. In 2018/19 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 58 young people were nominated for an award in recognition of their hard work and commitment to their education.

Some of the nominations:

"Can I nominate H as he is exceeding all targets for a reception class last year and is working at a level above his age."

"P has had the courage to keep persevering, to put her face in the water and try really hard to swim on her own (without floats, aids etc). She can swim approximately 2m on her own now."

"I'd like to nominate KC for an award – K had a difficult start to this academic year as his 'long term' placement unexpectedly changed. However, with the support of his new carers and school staff (K has 1:1 LSA support for his SEN through his EHCP), K has really turned his behaviour around and is making much better behaviour choices. K has made good progress with his reading; he is regularly reading books at home and has successfully passed Accelerated Reader quizzes linked to these. He has also worked particularly hard on learning his target spellings and times tables. K loves coming to school and is keen to do well."

"N made excellent progress in reading and writing. Her highlight in the last few weeks of term was being able to read a real book (library book) to her peers. N struggled at first with the number but she worked really hard to gain the confidence to work with numbers to 100"

"I would like to nominate AC for his consistent and positive attitude to learning at school"

“We have seen a big improvement in J’s behaviour and managing her emotions. She has matured this year, is thoughtful, protective of younger students, is a good role model to others and has developed good relationships with adults in the school. She undertook work experience in primary and completed all her Key Stage four examinations.”

“L’s behaviour has improved at school. He took responsibility of himself to turn things around when transition to mainstream was at make or break point and is now doing exceptionally well with the transition. He has become a good role model to primary pupils and is now more confident and ready to move on.”

Percentage of 19, 20 and 21 year-olds that are in education, employment and training at March 2019:

| | 2015/ 16 | 2016/ 17 | 2017/ 18 | 2018/ 19 |
|----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Southend | 60% | 52.3% | 40.5% | 41.1% |

There has been slight 0.6% increase in the number of young people successfully engaged in education, training and

employment over the past 12 months.

There is 7.5% of young people where there is currently no data. Although the data is very much similar to the previous year, it is not unusual for there to be a drop in the NEET statistics during the summer and autumn months because this is when young people are signed up for courses that are due to start in September

Higher Education

Southend’s support for care leavers to study at a University level on degree courses remains consistently high. At present Southend is supporting 10 young people to attend University. It is projected that Southend will be supporting a similar amount of young people to attend University for the coming year.

Health of looked after children

The Southend looked after children health service is provided by EPUT 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:

| | 15/16 | 16/17 | 17/18 | 18/19 |
|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Southend | 41.7% | 27.4% | 26.5% | 29% |

Whilst only 29% of young people met this target in 2018/19, when we look at those where the medical was undertaken within 30 working days, the percentage increased dramatically to over 50%

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 2019/20.

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

| | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|---------------|
| Southend | 92.1% | 84.0% | 84.5% | 73.3% |
| Statistical neighbours | | 86% | 85% | Not published |
| National | | 84% | 88% | |

73.3% of children and young people had their review health assessments completed at the end of March 2019, a significant decrease 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.

To ensure that reporting is accurate and up to date in this area, we now have a dedicated administrator to work alongside health to ensure reporting. We expect to see significant improvement in this area in 2019/20.

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

| | 2015/16 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2019 |
|----------|---------|---------|---------|------|
| Southend | 76.4% | 63% | 67.9% | 78% |

78% of children and young people had received the appropriate immunisations for their age in 2019, again reflecting the challenge for looked after children. This however was a significant improvement on the previous year and we expect through our close links with public health for these statistics to improve in the coming year.

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

| | 2015/ 16 | 2016/ 17 | 2017/ 18 | 2018/ 19 |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Southend | 94% | 90% | 74.1% | 63.8% |
| Stat Neighbour rs | | 82% | 87% | N/A |
| National | | 83% | 84% | N/A |

There was a dip in March 2019 due to recording errors, but by the end of April 2019 this had again risen to 75.8%

The LAC health services across the SET economy including provider nurses and designated nurses are experienced specialist nurses and maintain an Essex wide reciprocal arrangement which is quality driven, reflects the views of children, parents and carers, to ensure that any identified health needs of the children are met in a timely manner.

A specialist field of health work, the practitioners meet regularly to drive the LAC health agenda across the health economy which includes training and development to other health practitioners including GP's, Health Visitors, School Nurses and hospital staff. Continuous professional development opportunities are regularly offered to ensure that the skills and knowledge of the specialist nurses are maintained and are current in the specialist field of LAC.

In addition joint working continues with the local authorities in many forms including attending risk management meetings, child care reviews, acute and complex case panels, multi -agency child exploitation meetings and a LAC Health Steering group which is held quarterly.

The Designated LAC Nurses are currently working within a three year strategy for LAC. Four main areas of focus within the strategy are: Quality and Performance, Emotional

health and well- being/mental health, Voice of Children/Young People engagement, Commissioning of services. The areas of focus are aligned to National Institute of Clinical Effectiveness (NICE) section for Looked After Children and current national priorities.



The Looked After Children Specialist Nurses across Southend Essex and Thurrock are experienced qualified practitioners who recognise the difficulties for some of the older young people to engage with health services.

Working in partnership with the Social Workers, carers and other practitioners they will endeavour to try and engage the young people in various ways. This could include arranging to meet young people at a place of their choice, giving them opportunities to be seen on their own and use various methods of communication to

enable and encourage them to seek advice independently from their General Practitioner, local relevant health services and NHS helplines if appropriate.

Confidentiality is an important part for young people to establish trust with those in health, however if a child/young person is considered to be at significant risk then information will be shared and they are advised accordingly. Sharing information is essential when a child is considered to be at risk, however conversely this can increase the risk of disengagement with health professionals and remains a continual challenge.

In addition in parallel with their peers, young people will perceive their health in relation to seeing a Doctor as needed and not as something they need to review regularly. Health professionals however recognise the importance of the yearly review and will actively try to encourage young people to attend. A health passport is shared with older young people whom are within the leaving care team and this includes their own past medical history, family health history if known and consented to share. In addition a full immunisation record is given.

Whilst a statutory requirement, health are unable to impose an assessment of someone who is unwilling to participate.

However many strategies are used before a refusal to attend is accepted, and will include seeking advice from the Carers and Social Worker and attempting to speak to the young person direct.

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 | 2019 |
|----------|-------|------|------|-------|
| Southend | 11.5% | 9.5% | 9.3% | 10.3% |

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 2018/19 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 and with a higher number of older children entering care, however the service worked hard with Edge of Care to support placements which enabled the % to only increase slightly.

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 two to three 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 2018/19 In house fostering services have

been running at between 110% and 130% 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. (*See carer comments in Edge of Care section for impact*). This issue of supply and demand has also shown an increase in external prices (this was addressed under financial performance).

Of the 308 children looked after by Southend at March 2019:

- 221 (71.7%) were placed with foster carers and
- 241 (78.2%) 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, were UASC or were placed for adoption.

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

appropriately being met with clear exit plans in place.

Number of looked after children by placement type as at 31st March 2019:

| Placement Type | Number of looked after children | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------|
| Foster placement (including kinship) | 225 | 73.1% |
| Placed for adoption | 10 | 3.3% |
| Placement with parents | 11 | 3.6% |
| Residential childrens home | 18 | 5.8% |
| Secure unit | 2 | 0.6% |
| Youth offender institution* | 2 | 0.6% |
| Residential school | 5 | 1.6% |
| Semi independent | 35 | 11.4% |
| Foster to adopt | 0 | 0% |
| Total | 308 | 308 |

*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 (73.1%). Southend has a low number of children in residential children's homes with approximately 18 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 19 there were two 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

| Placem ent type | 2015/ 6 avera ge weekl y cost | 2016/ 17 avera ge weekl y cost | 2017/ 18 avera ge weekl y cost | 2018/ 19 avera ge weekl y cost |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| In house foster placem ent | £180 allowa nce per child but avera ge one off fee of £213 | £184 allowa nce per child but avera ge one off fee of £213 | £187 allowa nce per child but avera ge one off fee of £213 | £189 allowa nce per child plus avera ge one off fee of £213 |
| PVI fosterin g placem ent | £700 | £900 | £1000 | £1000 |

| | | | | |
|--|------------|------------|-------|-------|
| Reside ntial and secure placem ents | £3,10 0 | £3,80 0 | £4227 | £5411 |
|--|------------|------------|-------|-------|

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 again risen sharply placing pressure on the external purchasing budget.

A comprehensive recruitment strategy continues to attract more in-house foster carers. In 2018/19 we exceeded the target set in the sufficiency strategy 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, 2017/18 and 2018/19 financial years:

| Look ed after childr en | 2014 /15 | 2015 /16 | 2016 /17 | 2017 /18 | 2018 /19 |
|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Place ment activit y | Outt urn | Outt urn | Outt urn | Outt urn | Outt urn esti mate |
| In hous e foster care | 2,18 3,24 8 | 2,47 6583 | 2,81 6,94 6 | 2,85 0,85 1 | 3,07 2,61 1 |
| PVI foster care | 2,12 9,90 0 | 1,41 2,43 5 | 1,44 7,43 1 | 1,22 8,01 0 | 1,18 7,77 8 |
| Resid ential care | 2,98 0,78 8 | 2,77 6,36 0 | 3,24 4,48 7 | 3,84 0,72 3 | 4,88 2,28 8 |

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.

Eight mainstream households were approved by Southend in the year 2018/19, alongside nine 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. This will be further reviewed in 2019/20 as a part of the Fostering Improvement and Action Plans.

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 five 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; 308 March 19) 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 was extended to Special Guardians two years ago and is now a core element of all SGO support plans. Training includes sessions by the Virtual School and various therapeutic sessions; attachment and self-harm; first aid and behaviour management; safeguarding and understanding risk; Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing; awareness of gangs and drugs. Some training is delivered face to face, but much is now on line at the request of carers. The service will continue to develop its training programme to meet the changing needs and issues in society.

Additional support for looked after children

An independent visitors and advocacy scheme is available in Southend, commissioned through NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service). Between April 2018 and March 2019, 8 young people were matched with an independent visitor. At the

end of the year there were 13 young people referred and waiting for an Independent Visitor.

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. In the past year there were 15 volunteers who expressed an interest but did not progress and three who went through the NYAS safer recruitment process.

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.

Young people comments on the NYAS service

“I’m not sure I could have kept going without you”

“The volunteer looks fantastic”

“Thanks it’s been really helpful”

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

There were 34 referrals for advocacy services during 2018/19 across Essex and Southend, a decrease from 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 2018/19, of referrals received, 85 were from children's social care.

At the end of March 2019 there were 23 looked after children open to EWMHS.

The Children with Disabilities Service

The Children with Disabilities Service is a Children's Social Care resource which offers a 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 compliant with the Children Act 1989, Chronically Sick and Disabled Act, Disability Discrimination Act and the Special educational needs and disability (SEND) Code of Practice. The team 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 14 children placed in statutory care and other residential provision.

The team currently support 129 children and young people and their families.

Age and disability breakdown for cases open to the Children with Disabilities service end of March:

| Age | Number of children March 2018 | Number March 2019 |
|--------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Under 5 | 11 | 16 |
| 5-9 | 21 | 24 |
| 10-15 | 47 | 56 |
| 16+ | 39 | 33 |
| Total | 118 | 129 |

| Type of disability many will show in more than one column | Number of children |
|--|--------------------|
| learning | 36 |
| mobility | 12 |
| incontinence | 5 |
| communication | 12 |
| Hearing | 5 |
| Behaviour | 26 |
| vision | 6 |
| Autism/Aspergers | 48 |

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 2019 there were **137 (125 in 2018)** 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, RE House, Christopher's Cottage and Marvellous Minders.

The Local Authority also financially supports after schools and holiday clubs at Kingsdown and St Christopher's Special School and community based provision, such as Friends and Places and Chris Cross. The community based activities are listed online in the Southend's Children and Families Information Point (SHIP) website. A number of children (60) children are supported by Children with Disabilities from the s17 budget by way of direct services. I.e. the Council receives invoices and pays the providers directly. 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

From March 2018 to March 2019, there were 19 young people who transitioned from children's to adult's services as they reached the age of 18. The Children with

Disabilities carries out six monthly Disabled Persons Assessments (DPA) from age 14 to 18 and Adults Services are made aware of 17 year olds that will transition to their Services. There is a Social Services Worker in the Children with Disabilities team who ensures that referrals are made to Adult Services and joint meetings take place to support families through the difficult period of transition, so it is as smooth as possible.

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:

- Best value
- A needs-led approach
- 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 is a team of Social Workers, Personal Advisors, Team Manager, Service Manager and a Head of Service.

The Leaving Care Team is in place to provide 16 and 17 year olds (including unaccompanied minors) in care, and young people who have left care, the support that they may need to get ready to live independently when they are ready.

From the age of 15 ½ to 18 young people allocated a Social Worker and from the age of 17½ to 21 are allocated a Personal

Advisor who will work alongside the Social Worker to ensure that young people are on the right path to independence. Should young people require additional advice or support (health & well-being, relationships, education & training, employment, accommodation and participation in society) it will be available up until the age of 25.

The Children Act 1989 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 give young people certain rights as a young person leaving care. These laws say that if you have been looked after, the Leaving Care Service must provide you with:

- A Personal Advisor
- A Pathway Plan – which helps to map out your future plans and aspirations which is updated every 6 months
- Regular Contact – to ensure that there is someone there to keep in touch with you
- Make sure that you are ready to move to living independently and the steps you are going to take to do this

Under previous legislation, the Leaving Care Team was only required to provide young people with support until they reach age 21, with that support continuing up to age 25 if a care leaver was engaged in education or training. However, this support was not

available to you if you were a care leaver aged over 21 who was not in education, training or employment.

This duty to provide young people with support has now changed. This means that support is available to young people at any point after the age of 21 up to the age of 25, whether or not engaged in education and training.

The Leaving Care Team will also make sure young people have somewhere suitable to live and help them to get education, training or employment they want/need to prepare them for a successful adult life. The aim is to help young people to be fit and healthy, be safe and enjoy what they are doing and achieve what they want to do in life, contribute to their community, have enough money to live on and to do the things they would wish to do.

Leaving Care Team Aspirations

We hold very high ambitions for young people and are committed to supporting them to:

- to achieve your goals
- to have all the skills to live independently
- to have an apprenticeship
- to study at university

- to be able to make good decisions
- to engage in education, training or employment
- to minimise the frequency of teenage parenting
- to secure, safe, suitable and affordable accommodation

Staying Put arrangements

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

The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced the duty on local authorities in England to facilitate, monitor and support staying put arrangements for fostered young people until they reach the age of 21, where this is what they and their foster carers want, unless the local authority considers

that the staying put arrangement is not consistent with the welfare of the young person.

Southend has been successful in driving forward the use of “staying-put” since 2014. The number of care leavers able to make use of this service has remained fairly stable this year with 16 young people remaining in stable family placements post 18 against 14 in March 18.

Special Guardianship Orders

Since 2015/16 there has been a national increase in the use of Special Guardianship as a long term outcome for children leaving care. This has over the past couple of years become more stable however there remains challenges with some outcomes considered by the courts.

During 2018/19 in Southend, nine children and young people became subject to a Special Guardianship Order a slight increase from eight in the previous year. A Special Guardianship Order (SGO) means that while parental responsibility remains with the parents, a carer (including foster carers) or relative can apply for the child to live with them, and make day to day decisions on behalf of the child. The Special Guardian is given over-riding parental responsibility for the child.

Southend work with all SGO families for three years following an order being granted (where the families agree to support) and where appropriate undertake review needs and financial assessments of families to ensure that wherever possibly they are able to meet the needs of the young person throughout their childhood. The training developed by the specialist worker for SGO in conjunction with the adoption team and Marigold Assessment Plus as a 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 is now well embedded. 61 prospective special guardians have attended the training since March 2017. 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 2018/19 to ensure parenting support and advocacy work where required. In 2017/18 Southend paid £303,556 in SGO/Residence Order allowances to support Southend children.

There has been increasing concern in Southend as to level of disruption or serious concerns raised regarding some SGO placements. Whilst it is not always possible to track the long term outcome of SGO, a research report has this year been completed to review longer term outcomes for special guardianship cases to look at areas of concern or disruption alongside those with a positive outcome for the child and family.

Of the orders made in Southend over the eight year period between 2010 and 2018, we are aware of 11 of the children who have become permanently looked after again following a disruption of the order (12%).

In addition, there have been serious child protection concerns in relation to a number of other children and two returned quickly to the care of their birth parents without social care being informed by the special guardians.

22% (20) of all cases where an SGO was granted in Southend, therefore have subsequently been involved in either Child Protection issues or have returned to LA care.

The information gained in the research undertaken in Southend was presented to the Judiciary and CAFCAS at their annual conference to allow for informed decision making going forward.

Comments from SGO training – pre order

“I wouldn’t change it for the world.....but” is a common sentiment.”

“Thank you for the training, Group Leaders were absolutely fantastic, I felt welcome, relaxed and learned a lot.”

“My eyes were opened to the facts of the child and that they may need a lot more and how I can find help and support.”

“I feel it has made me realise my own pro’s and con’s in which I can now start to process the change.”

Adoption

There continues to be 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). The Alliance has now been joined by Bedford Borough, Norfolk and Thurrock. It is hoped that this will create a larger pool of approved adopters with whom to match children and drive performance and outcomes for children.

Children placed for adoption

In 2018/19 a total of 23 Southend children were adopted a decrease from 38 children adopted in 2017/18. This decrease was partly due to a number of Adoptions being carried over to 2019/20 as a result of court adjournments. In addition, 9 children were made the subject of special guardianship orders, where the parallel plan was adoption.

Number of looked after children who ceased to be looked after who were adopted:

| | 15/16 | 16/17 | 17/18 | 18/19 |
|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Southend | 25 | 28 | 38 | 23 |

Of the 23 children in Southend in 2018/19, 13 were girls and 10 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).

Children's age when the adoption order was granted in 2018/19:

| Age in years | Number of children |
|--------------|--------------------|
| Under 1 | 3 |
| 1-2 | 9 |
| 2-3 | 3 |
| 3+ | 8 |

As at the 31 March 2019, there were 10 children placed with their adoptive family but an adoption order had not yet been granted. 17 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.

Feedback from adopters:

"We originally chose Southend as our adoption agency after friends had recommended the team's personal and helpful approach, and we definitely found that to be the case. The small team has worked really well for us, and have been helpful throughout the adoption process. We would definitely recommend Southend to others considering adoption. "

"The whole Southend adoption team has been amazing. Before we started the process people warned us that it would be long and arduous journey, however we have really enjoyed every aspect of our adoption journey so far. We enjoyed the workshops and the self-reflection on our lives now and in the past. The CAT and STAG groups have proved invaluable in gaining information about life post adoption and we have found the support from fellow adopters brilliant. We would have no hesitation in recommending Southend Adoption team to couples/individuals who were considering adoption. Thank you so much for your help!"

"We found the craft day to be so beneficial. We have said that we think that all adopters should have to attend one of these as it really opens up your eyes to different types of children. From the start we said we wanted a child aged 0-2, however after attending the craft day our view drastically changed. We were taken aback by how we felt about older/harder to place children, it made them seem more real and not just 'paper children' "

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 313 days (2014-17) to 309 days in the latest scorecard. This is well below the national average of 486 days and shows a continuous downward trend. It is expected that average timescales may begin to rise in 2019/20 due to national court delays from adjourned appeals and delays in court dates for final hearings.

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 | Adoption scorecard Outturn 2015/18 |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Southend | 313 days | 309 days |
| Southend's ranked position | 1 st of 149 | 3 rd of 149 |
| England Average | 520 days | 486 days |

Impact:

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 201 days. This shows a continued performance from the previous scorecard.

This ensures that where children in Southend require permanency through adoption they are not delayed allowing them to move into their permanent families quickly.

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 | Adoption scorecard Outturn 2015/18 |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Southend | 107 days | 107 days |
| Southend's ranked position | 4 th of 149 | 8 th of 149 |
| England Average | 220 | 201 |

Recruiting adopters

20 adoptive families were recruited in 2018/19 against 10 in 2017/18. By the 31 March 2019 there were 12 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 22 families attending training in June 18

and February of 2019 and 13 currently under assessment.

Since 2015, Southend has been working jointly with a number of agencies to form a Regional Adoption Alliance (Adopt East). 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.

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 therapeutic 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.

Impact:

Support for post 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.

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 2018/19 over 45 families requested additional post adoption support many of whom continue to engage and access this service. In reality this means over 70 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 £25K in 2018/19 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 306 contact plans for under 18yr olds, 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. A further 66 young people over the age of 18yrs continue to have a service through the letterbox service.

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 continue to prove 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 six 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”. In 2018/19 this group did not run due to not having enough children to attend, however with a number of new families now in Southend with siblings, this will be re-introduced during 2019/20.

Southend continues to be successful in recruiting adopters and often being able to utilise these placements for children through the national register forming a positive funding stream for Southend. This is financially beneficial to Southend Council with over £119,000 income generated in 2018/19. This income helps to offset expenditure which in 2018/19 was £160,000. 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 continued in 2018/19 a reduction in the number of our families taking placements through the national adoption register which had a negative impact on the funding stream during 2018/19. In March 2019, there was a

reduction in the deficit between income and expenditure for inter-agency costs to around £41,000 (£366,000 in 2017/18). So far in 2019/20 the expected budget for children so far placed has an income of £140,000 against an expenditure of only £72,000 which is a positive move forward.

Birth Parent Support Group

Through 2018/19, Southend adoption team continued to run a birth parent drop in which directly supports birth families who have been affected by adoption. The Birth parent drop in 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 2018/19 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. This service remains small but is well embedded in practice and understood across the community.

During 2018/19, Southend adoption team developed further the “Just Right State” with local schools. 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 2018/19 the team continued to support 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. There has been a clear plan set up for 2019/20 based on the needs and wishes of our adoptive families.

The team have continued the 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.

The potential has been recognised 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.

During 2018/19, the VR training has been undertaken with staff and senior managers, up to the Chief Exec. In addition it is now fully embedded as a part of adoption and fostering initial training and within the SGO training for potential special guardians.

There are requests for this to be taken into a number of Southend schools during 2019/20 to train staff across all aspects of school life.

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. During quarter 3 of 2018/19 the service moved to sit within Children's Service Transformation.

The audit 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;

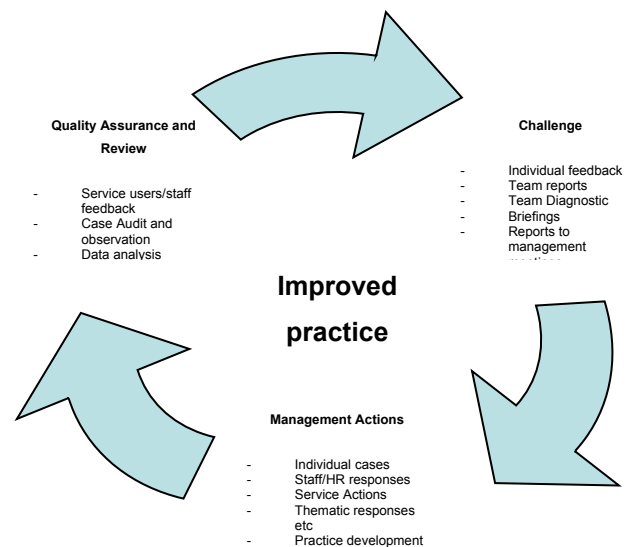
Challenge - these are the internal and external processes and arenas which challenge the service to improve performance and outcomes for children based on the quality assurance and review work.

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 2018/19 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). In addition to the audits undertaken a number of additional audits were undertaken to inform practice reviews. This included a review of MASH+, work with under 1yr olds and a review of AIPT. We also commissioned an external health check which involved reviewing cases. The findings from these reviews resulted in

action plans which have informed the work of the Practice Unit and the development of the Children's Services Strategic Improvement Plan.

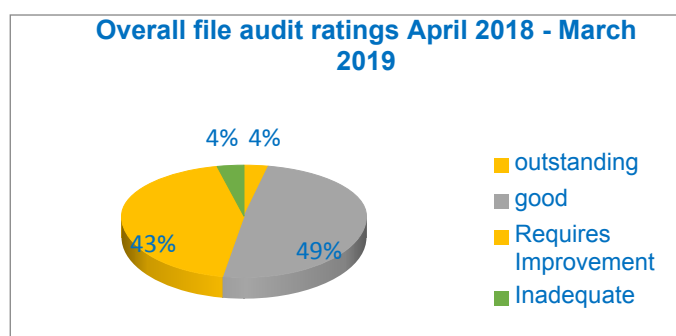
Audits were completed by senior managers within children's services, however of the 211 file audited during the year, the majority were audited by external auditors. The transition around auditing activity continues from predominately external auditors with no contact with social workers and service users, to internal and external auditing alongside social workers and managers. Some audits have included families and young people's views and this is an area for further development over the coming year.

| Overall rating | Number 2018/19 | Percentage 2017/18 | Percentage 2018/19 |
|----------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Outstanding | 8 | 1% | 4% |
| Good | 104 | 29% | 49% |
| Requires Improvement | 91 | 44% | 43% |
| Inadequate | 9 | 26% | 4% |

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.

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 2018/19.

During 2018/19, of the 211 audits undertaken the following was found:



In line with our Restorative Practice approach we are continuing to review and update our approach to audit to ensure that it reflects our current priorities and approach.

There has been significant improvement in practice within contact and referrals. There is evidence of clear decision making with strong rationale. The outcome of this is a prompt response to concerns and a reduction in the level of delay in children being seen and assessments being undertaken, needs are assessed and services and intervention taking place in a more timely way. The impact on children is likely to be reduction of stress if their needs and those of their parents are addressed. There is likely to be a sense of safety when steps are taken to provide safeguarding and protection demonstrated by improved school attendance and better health outcomes and milestones met.

Strong multi agency working within CP processes ensures that children are receiving a holistic support package. Conference reviews are seen as timely and plans are 60% smart, providing a good framework for the work with the family. However, engagement with the child and family, sharing the report and areas such as diversity are still less than 50% rated good. Given this the likely experience for some of the children subject to CP plans will be one

of having things done to them rather than with them. The outcome of this will be families less likely to engage with any services and make the changes required. Their experience being one of criticism done to them, rather than strengths based intervention and co-production and so there is likely to be less positive and sustainable impact. Plans from CP process are not consistently focused on outcomes for the child. Plans and Assessments continue to be key areas for development in 2019/20.

In assessments there has been a substantial shift from predominately requires improvement to this period of reporting being predominately good. The strongest areas in assessments were multi agency working and gathering information. The three areas that were less than 50% good were engaging and sharing with families and diversity. The possible impact of these outcomes is that children and families are likely to feel that the assessment is the property of professionals. The premise of restorative practice is to work with families rather than do to them or for them. There has been over the past 6 months a programme of training around this with staff and an expectation that it embeds as the culture in Southend working with colleagues and families.

With the launch of the assessment guidance, it is expected that we will begin to

see in audit the areas that are still requires improvement being enhanced over the coming year with the support being provided to practitioners from the practice unit, so giving a more positive experience to the child and family through the assessment process.

Since July 2018 there have been no repeat inadequate audits indicating the improvement by managers in following the process to address issues identified in the audit and ensure improvement in subsequent audit rating.

Based on the quality assurance activity during 2018/19 we have developed a plan of activity to address identified areas of practice improvement. The rolling plan supports the strategic improvement plan for Children's Services and aligns with the Transforming Together outcomes.

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 four and eight young people.

The Young Experts Group (YEGS) formed in 2016/17 following a refresh of the LAC Council. The name of the YEGS group was decided by the Young People and they designed the logo and remit that YEGS would follow. It was important to our young people that this was not a name associated with 'care' and they felt it was important that it reflected that they were 'experts of their own experiences'.

There have been many successes including the development of the 'me manual' the social worker profile and re-joining the Go East- Eastern regional participation network which has led to participation in the Children's Commissioner Events, but also participating in audits so that the children and families (in some cases) fed into the auditors review of the case.

There are two allocated workers holding the YEGS meetings, both of whom are family support workers within Edge of Care. As part of the improvement plan and the Local Authority's continued commitment to

children accommodated by the Local Authority the focus for YEGS this year and for the years to come.

The YEGS group started with seven members and workers continue to attempt to encourage as many young people who are looked after in Southend to attend- including meeting with foster carers and helping with transportation. Meetings have been held with all allocated social workers, workers attended team meetings, shared findings from direct work with young people, met with IRO's- to talk about the positive work that YEGS were conducting in terms of top ten tips for social workers. The group have just completed the Top 10 Tips for social workers and IRO's – this work was a combined effort from all Child in Care Council's in the Eastern Region and was led by the Children's Commissioner.

The YEGS also completed a stop motion animation project in which they demonstrated their understanding of services in Southend that support Looked after Children. In some cases these were emotive short films with one discussing the signs of safety they look for when becoming looked after.

The YEGS completed a bake sale in October 2018 in order to raise money for

HARP the homeless charity as this has been a feature in some of their lives. They are now working towards the development of a photo/film exhibition of Young People in Care's 'Day in the Life'. This will be held at the Beecroft Gallery over the summer of 2019 and will display images that symbolise their experiences. This work will be combined with the Voices 2019; Amplifying the Voices of Children in Care and Care Leavers, which is a competition with a 500 word poem, story, spoken word, rap, song lyrics about Growing Up submitted in February 2019.

The current project is to look at the 'Pledge' that is currently in place for all looked after children in Southend. The group have also been invited to be a part of a new police initiative based at the YMCA. This is a Youth Independent Advisory Group which will focus on concerns from our young people in Southend. The purpose is to provide a platform for young people to ask questions and express concerns around policing in Southend.

Given the planned works for the YEGS it is of paramount importance that we continue to work on increasing the attendance and availability of this group to all young people in care. This is the main focus at this time to ensure that the amount of young people taking part in these incentives increases.

Young Persons Participation within CWD and the wider SEND team.

This was an area of consultation in 2017/18. Visits were undertaken 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 2018/19 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.

Approximately 48% of children attended their reviews in person, which is a decrease from approximately 60% 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. For 2019/20, children and young people will also be able to use the Mind of My Own (MOMO) app which was launched in Southend on 10th June 2019.

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.

There were changes in data collection for the period between October 2017 and March 2019, and therefore data is not available for this period, however in April 2019 initial figures indicate that approximately 80% of children were personally consulted by their IRO, and quality assurance audits during 2018/19 rated IRO consultations as Good or Outstanding in 70% of cases.

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 and care plan.

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.

Our NQSW academy encourages students to remain in the authority with the additional support and training offered through the newly developed Practice Unit.

Southend during 2017/18 introduced a clear 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 supports our aims as described in the continued children's services improvement plan: "working to make children's lives better."



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 results in children's services working **with** families rather than **for** them or doing things **to** them.

Restorative practice training was rolled out across all service areas within children's services in the autumn of 2017. The approach has been embedded in practice during 2018/19 and the work continues to ensure that this is a service wide approach and that partner agencies are encouraged to work alongside this approach.

The continued focus on an outcome focussed service is key to developments in 2019/20.

Compliments and Complaints

Children's Social Care monitors compliments received from children and families, external bodies and internally. 22 compliments were received in 2018/19, in comparison to 24 in 2017/18. 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 2018/19 represents a slight increase in the number of complaint-related representations received and the number that progressed 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 2018/19 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 as well as by the young people themselves.

A total of 64 new statutory Children Act complaints, were received in 2018/19; a slight increase from 60 the previous year.

In 2018/19 we continued to focus on early resolution of complaints wherever possible. Of the 64 statutory complaints completed as stage 1 complaints, 5 were progressed to Stage 2. Of the 5 Stage 2 complaints in 2018/19, 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-on-Sea Borough Council's Children's Services and the recognition that Ofsted gave in the JTAI inspection, however we know we have more to do.

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.

2018/19 saw improvements in:

- 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 service is now embedded in practice and has shown very positive outcomes and feedback from families
- Edge of Care continues to develop, is well received by foster carers and has prevented some young people entering the care system, while supporting foster carers to prevent placement breakdown.
- Improvements were seen in educational attainment of looked after children
- Timeliness of visits and ICPC have improved significantly
- Improving management oversight of whether we are making a true difference to the lives of children and their families

We continue to strengthen our governance and our Improvement Board, Improvement Plan and transformation of children's services provides support and challenge to help us drive forward improvements.

Our key message

"Working to make children's lives better":

- Children and families are at the heart of all we do
- Children receive the help they need and are safe
- Children in care are healthy, educated and in stable homes
- We use outstanding practice to deliver a consistent quality service
- Managers inspire, support and lead well

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

Our pledge

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council has made a pledge to the looked after children of the borough.

Called 'Our promise to you' it outlines what children can expect from the Children's Social Services Team. Such as:

- We will visit you at least every six weeks or as agreed at you review meeting.
- We will ask you what you think before we make decisions about you. If we cannot do what you want we will explain why to you.
- We will try to keep brothers and sisters together.
- We will make sure your carers have the right skills and knowledge to keep you happy and healthy.
- We won't move you from placement where you are happy and settled unless there is a very good reason, which we will explain to you.
- We will make sure your school works with us to write your personal education plan and do all we can to make the plan run smoothly.
- We will encourage you to enjoy your spare time in a healthy way and find out what activities you enjoy.
- When you are older we want you to be the best you can be. We want you to continue your education and find a job you enjoy.
- We will make sure you have a passport. If this is not possible, we will explain why.