



**Success for all**



## Southend Children's Services Improvement Plan



**V.4 August 2016**

aspiration | achievement | inclusion | participation | excellence

## Foreword

Our aim for all children in Southend is that they achieve good outcomes, and exceed their goals, wherever they live in the borough, whichever school they attend, however long they have lived in Southend. We believe this should be irrespective of a child's circumstances, ability or additional needs. This improvement plan will support us to be successful in reaching our aim.

The Ofsted inspection of services for children in need of help and protection and for looked after children in May 2016 gave an overall judgement that Children's Services require improvement to be good. Although the inspection team recognised that some services were well led and provide good quality and effective support for children, and our adoption performance and experiences of care leavers were judged to be good, the overall judgement was a reflection on a need to deliver consistently high quality practice to meet the needs of children, young people and families. Our aim is for all children in Southend to reach good outcomes and this plan will support us to achieve this.

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council acknowledges the recommendations made by Ofsted and having consulted with partners this plan sets out the steps we will take to improve services for children. The plan supports continuous improvement across the service by building on areas of strength. It has been developed in consultation with partners, practitioners and wider staff at all levels of Southend-on-Sea Borough Council. We expect that our improvements will be recognised during our next regulatory inspection.

We are however more ambitious than to limit our response to the welcomed recommendations from Ofsted. The work of the whole of children's services will therefore be underpinned by a unified model of practice, and way of being, that will lead to continuous improvement. The service experienced by children, young people and families will be more responsive to their needs, will support them to decide what support they need, to determine when they need it and how it should be delivered. We know that regardless of the professional qualification of a practitioner, it is the quality of their relationship and the purposefulness of their work that makes a difference to children and families. We want to support this. We will work with our communities and our partners to reduce the need for statutory intervention within Southend by further building on local capacity to meet need at the earliest possible time.

Each of the 12 recommendations has associated overarching actions; these actions are in turn underpinned by a number of milestone actions which are contained within our detailed Improvement Plan. The overarching actions and associated recommendations are grouped into four overarching themes; Practice and Culture, Continuous Improvement, Responsive Intervention (right time in the right place) and Leadership, Management and Governance. This links the recommendations and plans to the outcomes we want to achieve for children, young people and families:



**Our aim is simple - Success for all**



Practice and culture is the theme which contains the actions we have taken, or will be taking, that relate to the quality of practice and intervention. The actions focus on our intervention during the journey of the child and the impact on outcomes. The actions relating to our model of practice and intervention are contained within this theme.

Continuous improvement is the theme where the actions we will be taking to ensure ourselves that improvement is made quickly and consistently across the service. There is a strong emphasis on increasing the breadth and impact of quality assurance processes within these actions.

Responsive Intervention (right place, right time) is the theme which links a range of actions which will mean children and families experience timely intervention from the area of service best placed to meet their needs. How we ensure that the application of thresholds is consistent and does not prevent timely intervention and response sits within the actions linked to this theme.

All of the action taken under the first three themes will be supported by the actions contained within **Leadership, Management and Governance**. These actions will lead to strong scrutiny, leadership and challenge to progress of the plan, and the outcomes for children, young people and families from senior leaders and members.

This plan aligns with the Children and Young People’s Plan particularly in relation to keeping children and young people safe and protected from harm, and supporting vulnerable children and adults.

*Improving outcomes for vulnerable children remains a key priority  
for Southend-on-Sea Borough Council and Partners*



There are 12 recommendations within the Ofsted inspection report:

<b>Recommendation 1</b>	Improve the quality of management oversight and decision making at all levels to ensure that children experience good-quality assessment and care planning to meet their needs in a timely way.
<b>Recommendation 2</b>	Ensure that the results of quality assurance work and independent reviews are analysed, reported and monitored in a way which makes explicit to staff and managers the impact of practice on children and the improvement that is required to deliver good-quality services.
<b>Recommendation 3</b>	Ensure visits to children are undertaken in line with their plans, and take appropriate action when this is not the case.
<b>Recommendation 4</b>	Ensure that thresholds are applied consistently, so that decisions relating to contacts and referrals to children’s social care are appropriate, and that these are well informed by appropriate checks with other agencies.
<b>Recommendation 5</b>	Ensure that children become looked after without unnecessary delay, when this is what they need, and improve the monitoring of this process.
<b>Recommendation 6</b>	Ensure that children receive on-going help and support as children in need until this is no longer required.
<b>Recommendation 7</b>	Ensure that child protection investigations are consistently completed within timescales that are in line with statutory guidance, so that children receive the services that they need as soon as they can.
<b>Recommendation 8</b>	Strengthen step-down arrangements between statutory and early help services to ensure that decisions to step down are appropriate and that children receive an effective continuum of support.
<b>Recommendation 9</b>	Strengthen the quality and oversight of assessments and plans for children in need of help and protection, including children affected by domestic violence.
<b>Recommendation 10</b>	Ensure that arrangements for children placed at home with parents under a care order are suitable, and that appropriate action is being taken to secure permanence for these children.
<b>Recommendation 11</b>	Ensure that information presented to elected members provides enough detail of performance, quality assurance or other independent reviews to give them a full picture of the quality of the frontline practice that children experience.
<b>Recommendation 12</b>	Develop and improve the consultation with, and participation of, children and young people in respect of informing service development and monitoring service quality.



The recommendations and associated actions are cross cutting and will therefore be aligned to several overarching themes and are detailed below.

## Theme A: Practice and Culture

Ofsted Recommendation	Overarching Action
<b>Recommendation 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Audit the decisions made to take no further action on contacts to make sure children are receiving the intervention they need.</li> <li>■ Make sure all people making decisions at key points in a child’s journey are supported to make the right decisions consistently across children’s services.</li> <li>■ A dedicated Practice Lead will support social workers and managers to improve how they work with families to support better outcomes</li> <li>■ Implement a model of practice across children’s services which will mean we work with families in a way which is consistently responsive, which gives families greater power and reduces the need for statutory intervention.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Practitioners understand how the findings in audits relate to the experiences of children, young people and families.</li> <li>■ Provide team level diagnostic so all practitioners understand how the performance of the team relates to the experiences of children, young people and families.</li> <li>■ Participation lead will work with service users to make sure we are measuring what makes a difference to them in our audit activity</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Review the structure of Fieldwork Services to ensure practitioners are able to spend enough time with children and families to build trusting relationships and to improve performance in the area of statutory visits.</li> <li>■ Review whether technological solutions can support practitioners to spend more time completing direct work with families while capturing this work on the electronic case management system.</li> <li>■ Monitoring of statutory visits to have an increased impact on performance</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Make sure all people making decisions at key points in a child’s journey are supported to make the right decisions consistently across children’s services.</li> <li>■ Audit the decisions made to take no further action on contacts to make sure children are receiving the intervention they need.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Review how, and where, children in need receive assessment, help and support to ensure they receive it in a timely and responsive manner</li> <li>■ Ensure practitioners in children’s services are fully aware of the range of services for children in need so this can inform their practice.</li> </ul>



<b>Recommendation 9</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Improve the quality of assessments so that children and families receive responsive support for as long as is required.</li> <li>■ Improve practice relating to domestic abuse to reduce the impact of domestic abuse upon children, young people and families</li> <li>■ Improve planning for children in need and in need of protection so that children's need for help and protection is addressed as quickly as possible and their level of need reduces as quickly as possible.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 10</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Ensure children placed at home are well supported and the support is regularly reviewed.</li> </ul>

## Theme B: Continuous Improvement

Ofsted Recommendation	Overarching Action
<b>Recommendation 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Quality Assurance Framework to be revised to include all decision making in relation to contacts, referrals and case closures in Fieldwork Services. This will ensure the right decisions are made consistently so that children, young people and families receive a timely response from the right service area.</li> <li>■ Audit the decisions made to take no further action on contacts to make sure children are receiving the intervention they need.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Continue to report audit activity annually and 6 monthly. The reports will make more explicit the link between the audit findings and the experience of children and families in order to support practitioners across children's services to improve the experiences of children and families.</li> <li>■ Ensure the link audit findings are clearly, and successfully, used to drive forward improvements in practice.</li> <li>■ Practitioners understand how the findings in audits relate to the experiences of children, young people and families.</li> <li>■ Provide team level diagnostic so all practitioners understand how the performance of the team relates to the experiences of children, young people and families.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Reports to Initial Child Protection Conferences support strong decision making which effects change.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Quality Assure the step-down process to ensure children and families are receiving the support they require.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 9</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Improve the quality of assessments so that children and families receive responsive support for as long as is required.</li> <li>■ Improve practice relating to domestic abuse to reduce the impact of domestic abuse upon children, young people and families</li> <li>■ Improve planning for children in need and in need of protection so that children's need for help and protection is addressed as quickly as possible and their level of need reduces as quickly as possible.</li> </ul>



## Theme C: Responsive Intervention (right time, right place)

Ofsted Recommendation	Overarching Action
<b>Recommendation 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Audit the decisions made to take no further action on contacts to make sure children are receiving the intervention they need.</li> <li>■ Make sure all people making decisions at key points in a child’s journey are supported to make the right decisions consistently across children’s services.</li> <li>■ Implement a model of practice across children’s services which will mean we work with families in a way which is consistently responsive, which gives families greater power and reduces the need for statutory intervention.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Review the structure of Fieldwork Services to ensure practitioners are able to spend enough time with children and families to build trusting relationships and to improve performance in the area of statutory visits.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Social Workers and Managers are given support and training so that children who need to move into the pre-proceedings arena do so promptly.</li> <li>■ Child Protection Conference Chairs ensure children subject to plans do not experience delay in pre-proceedings work being progressed.</li> <li>■ Ensure that any delay in pre-proceedings work is addressed promptly to prevent children experiencing harm when alternative action could be taken.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Review how, and where, children in need receive assessment, help and support to ensure they receive it in a timely and responsive manner</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Change process so that children do not experience delays in decision making and planning to address risk and harm as part of the section 47 processes.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Ensure the step-down process results in children and families receiving the level of support they require.</li> <li>■ Quality Assure the step-down process to ensure children and families are receiving the support they require.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 9</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Improve the quality of assessments so that children and families receive responsive support for as long as is required.</li> <li>■ Improve practice relating to domestic abuse to reduce the impact of domestic abuse upon children, young people and families</li> <li>■ Improve planning for children in need and in need of protection so that children’s need for help and protection is addressed as quickly as possible and their level of need reduces as quickly as possible.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 12</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Looked after children and care leavers exert greater influence on service delivery.</li> <li>■ Children in need of help and protection inform service delivery.</li> <li>■ Parents inform service delivery.</li> </ul>



## Theme D: Management, Leadership and Governance

Ofsted Recommendation	Overarching Action
<b>Recommendation 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Give assurance that current performance measures are robust and accurate and will ensure we are able to know the impact of practice upon children, young people and families.</li> <li>■ Improvement board and partnership governance boards to receive a robust suite of information to support scrutiny.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Provide team level diagnostic so all practitioners understand how the performance of the team relates to the experiences of children, young people and families.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Monitoring of statutory visits to have an increased impact on performance</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 11</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Improvement Board to offer scrutiny and challenge so that progress towards improving outcomes for children is swift.</li> <li>■ Increase capacity for Members to offer scrutiny to progress improvements and to ensure members have the information they need to offer challenge to officers.</li> <li>■ The lead Member for children and learning to have a regular quality assurance and performance pack to give them a full picture of the quality of frontline practice experienced by children.</li> </ul>



# Structure of Improvement Plan

**Part one** of this document details the progress achieved to date.

**Part two** of this document groups the overarching priority action timeline.

**Part three** of this document is the governance structure for the implementation plan.

**Appendix 1** to this document presents the detailed improvement plan which includes key milestones attributed to each action. This detailed plan also includes additional actions identified by the Local Authority which although based on the Ofsted inspection report, do not relate to the specific recommendations within the report. It also includes an overview of risk to the implementation of the improvement plan.



## Part One: Progress achieved to date

The following actions were taken while the inspection was underway or shortly afterwards. These actions have been taken to address areas of greatest priority in order to improve the experience of children, young people and families:

- The findings of the inspection were shared with practitioners and managers at Director led briefings on the day of the publication of the report. This enabled teams to begin to discuss what immediate steps they would take to improve the experience of children, young people and families;
- Consultation events with managers and practitioners across children's services took place during August. The consultation has informed the improvement plan and means that we all know what we need to focus on to make improvements for children, young people and families.
- Social Workers and managers have been clearly advised of expectations relating to how long it should take to conduct a section 47 enquiry. This means children do not have to wait for a multi-agency child protection plan to be put in place to meet their need for protection once it has been decided this is what is needed;
- We commissioned external audits of contacts which are deemed No Further Action (NFA). The learning from the audits is supporting improvements in the consistency of decision making for children, young people and families who are in need of help and protection;
- Additional temporary management capacity has been put in place to support consistency of decision making at the point the public and partners make contact
- With children's social care. This means children and families receive a consistent, timely, response from children's services when they are in need of help and protection.
- In addition to the immediate focus on constituency of decision making and timescales for Section 47 enquiries we have focused on the statutory home visits being undertaken on time. This will mean children, young people and families will find it easier to build and maintain trusting relationships with their social workers and the plans in place to meet their need for help or protection will progress.
- A Children's Improvement board, chaired by the Chief Executive, with a membership of the lead member for children and learning and 2 additional members, DCS, Head of Children's Services and an independent senior leader will meet bi-monthly to scrutinise progress against the plan. Additional scrutiny and challenge from members will be offered by a sub-group of the Scrutiny Committee for the Department for People. The first meetings will be held in October 2016.
- The step-down process from children's social care to Early Help and Family Support has been clarified. The access point into children's social care is now co-located with that of early help services. This means there is no wrong 'front door' for anyone who thinks a child, young person or family needs additional help, support or protection to access. It supports consistent decision making and intervention from the right team at the right time.
- We have employed a Practice Lead who will help social workers and managers to improve their practice across all the areas identified in the inspection. This will improve the experience for children, young people and families;



- We have increased the capacity within the participation and engagement service which will mean we can support children and young people to design how services are delivered.
- We have decided that the work of children’s services will be underpinned by a shared set of principles and ways of working. This Southend Way for Children and Families will mean that families will work with confident practitioners who will support them to identify and achieve their goals.

*Our work is centred on the following principles:  
Aspiration, Achievement, Participation, and Excellence*



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## Part Two: Priority Timeline

This section highlights the timescale for the completion of overarching actions, which underpin the detailed plan in Appendix 1 and the achievement of anticipated outcomes over a 24 month period.

Date commenced	Rec. No.	Overarching Action	Expected Outcome achieved by
September 2016	1	Audit the decisions made to take no further action on contacts to make sure children are receiving the intervention they need.	December 2016
		Make sure all people making decisions at key points in a child's journey are supported to make the right decision consistently across children's services	
		Audit the decision made to take no further action on contacts to make sure children are receiving the intervention they need.	
		Give assurance that current performance measures are robust and accurate which will ensure we are able to know the impact of practice upon children, young people and families.	
		Improvement board and partnership governance structure to receive a robust suite of information to support scrutiny.	
	3	Monthly report on visits to CSMT and Improvement Board to scrutinise improvements in practice.	
	7	Change process so that children do not experience delays in decision making and planning to address risk and harm during the section 47 process.	
December 2016	8	Ensure the step-down process results in children and families receiving the level of support they require.	March 2017
		Expectations of recording of step-down process to be clarified with practitioners.	
December 2016		Quality Assurance Framework to be revised to include all decision making in relation to contacts, referrals and case closures in Fieldwork Services. This will ensure the right decisions are made consistently so that children, young people and families receive a timely response from the right service area.	



Date commenced	Rec. No.	Overarching Action	Expected Outcome achieved by
December 2016	2	Provide team level diagnostic so all practitioners understand how the performance of the team relates to the experience of children, young people and families.	March 2017
	2	Ensure audit findings are clearly and successfully used to drive forward improvements in practice is evidenced.	
	6	Ensure practitioners are fully aware of the range of services for children in need.	
	8	Quality assure the step-down process to ensure children and families are receiving the support they require.	
	9	Quality of assessment and plans to be included in the quality assurance framework to support continuous improvement.	
		Quality assurance framework to include cases where domestic abuse is a feature.	
	10	Team manager and IRO to review all cases where children are placed at home with parents.	
	11	Improvement Board to be created to monitor progress of the improvement plan, to include Lead Member for Children and Learning.	
		Improvement board and partnership governance structure to receive a robust suite of information to support scrutiny.	
March 2017	5	Ensure that any delay in pre-proceedings work is addressed promptly to prevent children experiencing harm when alternative action could be taken.	
	7	Reports to initial child protection conferences support strong decision making which effects change.	
December 2017	1	A dedicated practice lead will support social workers and managers to improve how they work with families to support better outcomes.	June 2017
	2	Continue to report audit activity annually and 6 monthly. The reports will make more explicit the link between the audit findings and the experience of children and families in order to support practitioners across children’s services to improve the experiences of children and families.	
	6	Review how, and where, children in need receive assessment, help and support to ensure they receive it in a timely and responsive manner	



Date commenced	Rec. No.	Overarching Action	Expected Outcome achieved by
December 2017	8	A dedicated practice lead will support social workers and practitioners to improve how they work with families to support better outcomes	June 2017
March 2017	8	Quality assure the step-down process to ensure children and families are receiving the support they require.	September 2017
	9	Improve the quality of assessments so that children and families receive the level of support they require.	
	12	Establish a refreshed children in care council in form of a young experts group to shape service delivery	
	2	Ensure practitioners understand how the findings of audit relate to the experiences of children, young people and families	September 2017
	2	Participation lead to work with service users to make sure we are measuring what makes a difference to them in our audit activity.	
June 2017	1	Ensure children in need of help and protection are able to influence service design and delivery.	June 2018
	1	Implement a model of practice across children's services which will mean we work with families in a way which is consistently responsive, which gives families greater power and reduces the need for statutory intervention.	



# Part Three: Governance Structure

## Summary

- Improvement Board (IB) and Scrutiny Panel to oversee the implementation of Southend’s Improvement Plan;
- Both the IB and SP will meet bi-monthly which ensures that an improvement meeting is taking place every month;
- Children’s Services Management Team (CSMT) will monitor the detailed action plan (Monthly) and report risk/progress to the Improvement Board;
- The Head of Children’s Services will be accountable for delivery of the plan and as a member of the Improvement Board will call action owners in as required.

## Improvement Board – membership will be made up of eight representatives:

- Chief Executive
- Independent Expert – TBC
- Portfolio holder – Children’s Services
- Leader of the Council
- Opposition spokesman
- Corporate Director for People
- Chair – LSCB
- Head of Children’s Services (and Chair of CSMT)

Frequency of the Improvement Board will be bi-monthly.

## Scrutiny Panel - will provide additional challenge to the implementation of the plan and will be made up of members of scrutiny and key members of Improvement Board:

- Chair of Scrutiny
- Vice Chair of Scrutiny
- Three additional Scrutiny Members (TBC)
- Corporate Director for People (IB member)
- Portfolio holder – Children’s Services (IB member)
- Head of Children’s Services (IB Member)

Frequency of the Improvement Board will be bi-monthly.

