

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023- 2024



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# FOREWORD FROM THE INDEPENDENT CHAIR/FACILITATOR

I am delighted to introduce the annual report of the Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB) for 2023-24. The three Statutory Safeguarding Partners in Essex have continued to work together effectively to fully implement and deliver joint and equal accountability for safeguarding children in Essex. Throughout this period, the partners have continued to work together effectively, ensuring that children are safeguarded as effectively as possible. There has been a great deal of work done to review and further improve the quality and appropriateness of requests for support to children's social care, with increased joint ownership of these arrangements across the partnership. New Strategic and Operation partnership boards will be established to take this forward, along with updating the ESCB Effective Support for Children and Families in Essex Guidance.

The partnership has continued to work closely with the Essex Safeguarding Adults Board on issues of mutual interest, in particular Transitional Safeguarding, and Whole Family Approach. Progress has been made on both, with further plans being delivered over the next year.

The partnership continues to deal with a significant number of cases requiring a review, and again has responded well. Although there have been some delays in extracting the learning from some of these reviews, often for reasons beyond the partnership's control, good progress has been made. One of the priorities for the partnership going forward is to reduce the number of reviews, to free up more time to invest in implementing the learning from reviews. This is consistent with the approach taken by the National Panel.

Given the size of Essex, there is a crucial role for the four quadrant based Stay Safe Groups, where local managers ensure effective practice and excellent working relationships. The Stay Safe Groups continue to be led locally by the Statutory Partner representatives. Stay Safe Chairs and Vice Chairs meet regularly with the Chairs of the ESCB Sub-Committees, to improve communication and cross working.

The partnership is also working on implementation of Working Together 2023, to ensure that the already effective partnership in Essex implements the changes required, while maintaining and further developing the strengths of the current partnership, and local safeguarding practice. The partnership and the safeguarding system across Essex has performed very well during this period and is in a very strong position to continue to do so.



David Archibald

# ESSEX CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

- ▶ Estimated population of 1.5 million people
- ▶ 2nd largest county in England by population size
- ▶ Around 59,104 children are taught in Essex's **216 maintained schools** and 165,486 are taught in **340 Academies**



## 9 OUT OF 10 SCHOOLS ARE JUDGED AS GOOD OR OUTSTANDING BY OFSTED

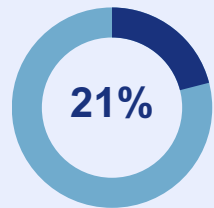


## Education and Health Care Plan

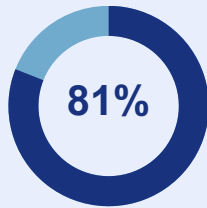
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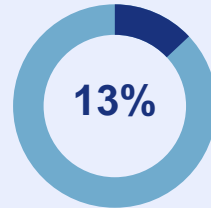
4.2% of the school population is supported with an Education and Health Care Plan



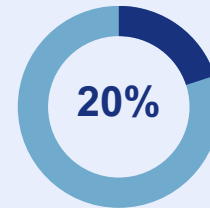
Children and young people make up 21% of our population (315,000)



85.1% of the population is **White/ British**



13% of our children are estimated to be living in **Relative Low Income households**, and this rises to 25% in some locality areas



Just over 20% of children at primary school and 18.1% at secondary school access **free school meals**

7 of the top 10 other languages used in Essex are of European origin.

**English as an additional language** is used by **11.6%** at Primary age and **8.7%** at Secondary age





# MULTI-AGENCY SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS AND WORKING TOGETHER 2023

This annual report covers the period from April 2023-March 2024 therefore it only touches briefly on the new requirements for a yearly report, future reports will address the new requirements fully. The updated Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements will be published in December 2024 in line with the requirements in Working Together 2023.

The Independent Chair/Facilitator role in Essex has a key function in relation to scrutiny, this will be strengthened to meet the scrutiny functions as set out in Working Together 2023. They will continue to support the Board to improve evidencing the impact of the partnership.

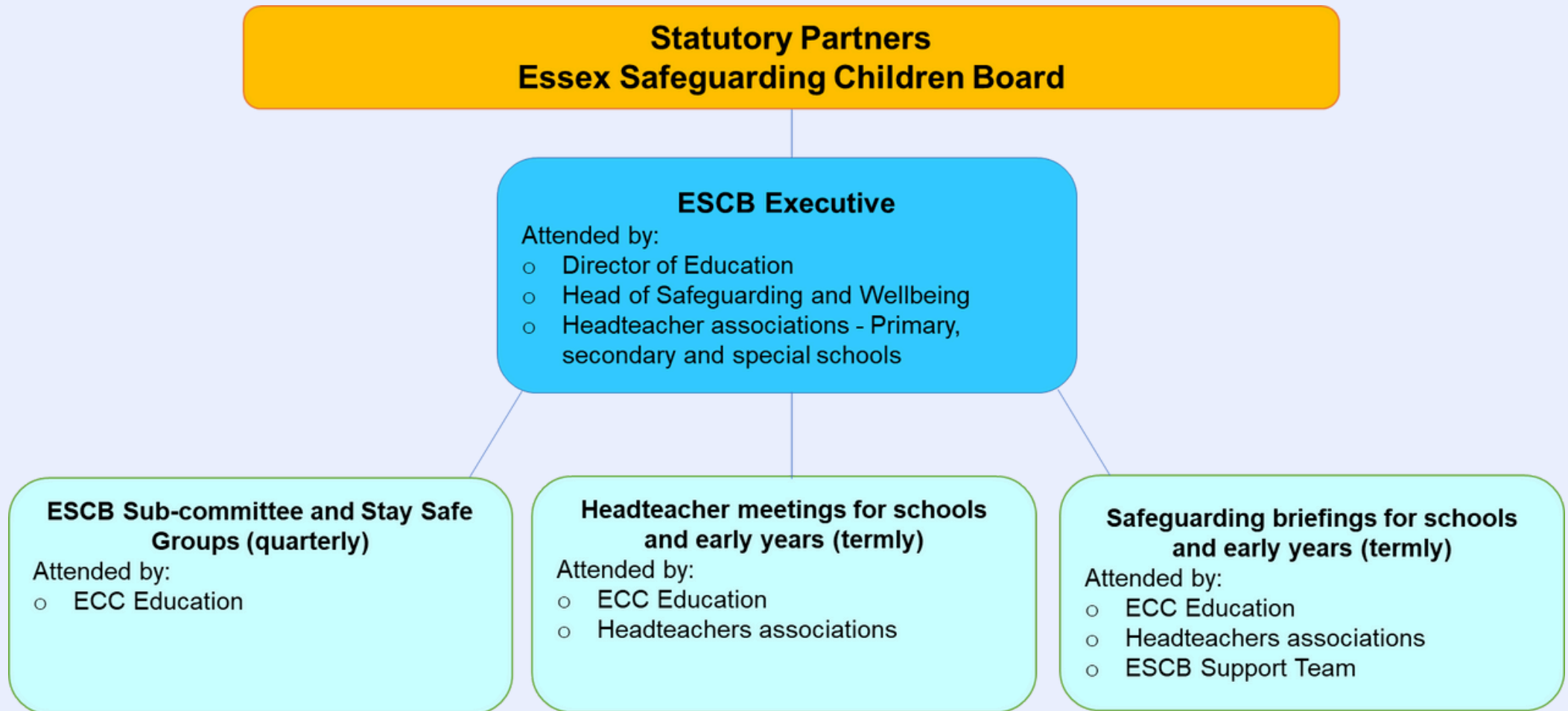
The Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSPs) have been agreed, they will meet on an annual basis with the first meeting planned for December 2024 where they will agree the updated Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements in advance of publication.

The current statutory partners will be the delegated safeguarding partners and will continue to work collaboratively to ensure effective safeguarding children arrangements across Essex.

The Essex Safeguarding Children Board is in a strong position in relation to multi-agency learning and development as there is a well established comprehensive multi-agency learning and development offer in place.

# EDUCATION REPRESENTATION

The partnership in Essex already has good representation from and relationships with education, this includes schools, early years settings, independent schools, alternative providers and colleges. Given the number of education settings across Essex we use a representation model to achieve this. The diagram below shows the model used in Essex.



# STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

As part of the implementation of Working Together 2023 the Statutory Partners are reviewing the governance arrangements. They are agreed that the current structure of regular Statutory Partner meetings, quarterly Executive meetings (which is the wider partnership), Sub-committees and Stay Safe Groups structure is effective. An ongoing challenge is ensuring the flow of information across the partnership, this relies on every member of the partnership playing their part in cascading information and receiving feedback within their organisations.

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

A wide range of partners are represented on the Executive including representatives from key health providers, the voluntary sector, probation, and the district, city and borough councils. The Essex County Council Lead Member for Children's Services also attends the Executive.

## **Stay Safe Groups**

Stay Safe Groups are a crucial layer in the safeguarding partnership, they are geographically based sub-committees of the ESCB. They bring together safeguarding leads from the local area who may have roles in operational practice, strategic oversight, or both, to discuss subjects arising from the ESCB Executive, local matters and issues arising, best practice and communication. They feed back to the Executive, through the ESCB Support team report, any emerging issues or risks in safeguarding practice, examples of good practice/multi-agency working locally and any local challenges that need support from senior leaders to resolve. A challenge for the partnership is ensuring there is two-way communication between the Executive and the Stay Safe Groups. The statutory partners continue to be committed to ensuring delegated representatives lead the Stay Safe Groups.

The Practice Development Manager provides a significant amount of support to the Stay Safe Groups, this has been crucial this year as chair roles have rotated as agreed.

# SCRUTINY

The ESCB currently has an Independent Chair / Facilitator, who provides independent scrutiny. We believe the best scrutiny of our safeguarding activities come from children and young people themselves - we gather rich information as to what children and young people (both in care and not in care) think about our services and what their own concerns are around being safe. As highlighted in last years' report a challenge for the Board is how we collate this and use it to influence the work of the Board.

The section 11 audit highlighted voice of the child as an area for development across the partnership, findings are discussed in the section 11 audit commentary below.

The partnership is assured via agency audit activity and inspections that thresholds are applied appropriately and provide an effective response to the safeguarding of children and young people.

Our assurance and scrutiny activities include:

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

We continue to have strong collaborative relationships, at strategic, managerial and operational levels. Our collaborative approach extends to working closely with Southend and Thurrock Safeguarding Partnerships as well as others across the Eastern region and nationally.

## SECTION 11 AUDITS

Section 11 is a self-assessment audit undertaken on a two yearly cycle in partnership with Southend and Thurrock local safeguarding children partnerships. Thirty-three agencies were sent audits, twenty-six audits were returned in total and included in the analysis, three agencies returned a generic audit as they cover a number of local authority areas, their responses were included where possible. Two further audits were returned after the deadline for returns and five agencies did not respond to the request to complete an audit.

Southend led a peer review of the returned audits for those agencies that work across the three local authority areas, they provided feedback on behalf of all three partnerships/boards to those agencies.

As part of the ongoing assurance process Southend, Essex and Thurrock will be requesting that agencies provide an update to the Board/partnerships a year into the cycle to evidence how they are maintaining their safeguarding standards. This will be the first time we have conducted a follow up to the Section 11 Audit part way through the audit cycle. Essex has twelve district, borough and city councils, eleven of which returned the audit, there was a wide range of responses. Essex Safeguarding Adults Board also undertook a safeguarding audit in this cycle. ESCB and ESAB will invite all city, borough and district councils to a workshop later in the year to peer review their audits. This will be an excellent opportunity to talk about wider safeguarding practice issues for district, borough and city councils.



The Section 11 Audit requires agencies to score themselves across nine broad areas. The returns are analysed to identify where the challenges for the partnership are in relation to safeguarding practice. The majority of agencies scored themselves highly across all areas of the audit, the areas that were identified as areas of challenge were:

- Early help and multi-agency working, this section had strong responses in two statements but there was less confidence in staff understanding the criteria for assessing level of risk and potential harm to children and making timely referrals and professional disagreements and staff knowing where to find the procedures for escalating concerns.
  - The statutory partners have been leading discussions in relation to ensuring children and families get the right level of support at the right time and the re-write of the effective support guidance.
  - Learning from reviews in Essex has highlighted professional disagreements and escalations as an area of practice for improvement. The partnership needs to undertake further work to understand the barriers to challenging decisions and escalating concerns.
- The section on implementing policy, service development and emerging issues were the least well scored across all agencies. These sections had the highest number of not applicable responses across the audit, the two areas within implementing policy that were less well scored and most not applicable were; mental capacity act and the over 16s and ensuring that commissioned and contracted services have good safeguarding standards in place, and this is checked as part of the scheduled contract monitoring.
- The other area that scored less well across all agencies is how the wishes and feelings of children and families influence service delivery and development, child and family voice is often an area for development that is identified through reviews in Essex, as it is nationally, however some of the low scoring may also be linked to the interpretation of the statement.



# SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION SETTINGS SAFEGUARDING AUDITS - S157/175

The schools safeguarding audit is undertaken by ECC Education Safeguarding Team on behalf of ESCB, it was sent to a total of 693 settings across Essex this includes primary, secondary and special schools, colleges, pupil referral units and independent schools. There was a 95% return rate which was an increase on previous years. Nil returns were followed up on, and these appeared to be in the main where there had been a change of leadership during the academic year.

Strong areas of practice:

- Pre-appointment checks in place.
- Designated Safeguarding Lead and Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead in place at appropriate level and they ensure all statutory requirements are met.
- There is an effective child protection policy in place that is reviewed annually and easily accessible to all.
- Managing allegations against members of the workforce – this was encouraging, as training for settings had been offered.
- Quality of record-keeping – this was positive, as much work has been done with settings to improve reporting and recording processes.

There were also areas for further development:

- Recording incidents of hate crime (this had already been recognised as a potential issue, in that it was felt there was probably no consistent recording of incidents across settings). The Education Safeguarding Team is currently working on a guidance document to support settings with this and have been working closely with Essex Police to deliver training and raise awareness.
- Pupil voice – further work will be done with settings to increase their work around this.
- Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) - Essex has been rolling out trauma perceptive practice training using a train the trainer model, so lower scores in this area may be linked to the train the trainer not yet having received training or that it has not yet been rolled out across the school.

## EARLY YEARS SETTINGS AUDITS

Work with Early Years settings is not yet fully developed. However, an increasing number of settings are engaging with Essex County Council Education Safeguarding team, the materials and the training. In addition, the team undertook a safeguarding survey with Early Years settings earlier this year – 336 responses were received, the vast majority indicating that settings were compliant and using the ECC resources. This is helpful, as one of the strengths in terms of safeguarding in education settings in Essex, is the consistent approach across all settings, and increased engagement across Early Years settings will enhance that. This focus on Early Years will continue, and the introduction of ECC delivered Level 3 safeguarding children training next year will further strengthen it.

**436 responses were received, the vast majority indicating that settings were compliant and using the ECC resources**



# MULTI-AGENCY AUDIT ACTIVITY

ESCB commission the Professional Standards and Audit Service within the Essex County Council Quality Assurance Service to lead on the multi-agency audit activity.

**Multi-agency thematic audits (MATA)** - there is an established group of multi-agency audit co-ordinators who are the key contacts for this work. The focus of the multi-agency thematic audit was neglect so work in 2023-24 has focused on finalising the recommendations, signing off the report and starting to disseminate the findings across the partnership.

Multi-agency thematic audit co-ordinators have been tasked with presenting the findings from the neglect audit back to their organisations, examples of this are:

- The learning and recommendations have been presented to all Stay Safe Groups and discussions on working with neglect have then taken place.
- The 0-19 service in Essex (provided by HCRG Care Group) have developed a home environment assessment tool that they have been using within their own workforce for some time and they have been sharing it with other organisations in Essex upon request.
- The learning and recommendations have been presented to all schools and early years settings who attended the summer term safeguarding forums.

With the conclusion of the neglect MATA, work will be starting on a domestic abuse multi-agency thematic audit in 2024-25. There is a smaller focused multi-agency audit being undertaken on children and young people in inpatient mental health units in relation to discharge planning and transitions, the final report is due to be ready by the end of July 2024.

In addition to the multi-agency thematic audits, the Professional Standards and Audit Service facilitate multi-agency case audits over the course of the year, during this reporting period there have been two. The case audits bring the practitioners and managers from the agencies who worked with the family together to discuss what went well, what could be different and any learning that can then be shared across the wider partnership.

Key practice themes from the single case audits were:

- Neglect
- Substance misuse including alcohol
- Non-accidental injuries-recognition and response
- Male carers/new partners in the household

**Examples of impact:**

- The learning from the neglect multi-agency thematic audit and a child safeguarding practice review will lead to the development of an ESCB working group that will focus on the multi-agency learning and recommendations in relation to neglect.
- One health provider has reviewed their 'was not brought' policy to ensure all staff move away from did not attend and are working with paediatricians to consider the impact on the child when there is a missed appointment.
- Multi-agency case audits were used to develop the case study for a non-accidental injuries e-learning package that will be launched in the new financial year.
- The core ESCB Level 2 training has reference to a case study from a multi-agency case audit.
- A presentation on the case is developed after the audit and this is shared with all involved agencies for them to share the learning within their teams. An action plan from each case audit is developed and the delegates are asked to feedback. The ESCB support team are looking at more effective ways for all audit and review learning to be brought together as there are many similar themes.

# MULTI-AGENCY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Over 2023-2024 ESCB has offered and worked in partnership with others to offer **111 learning and development opportunities** and a total of **2506 delegates attended**. ESCB courses are delivered through commissioned providers, local practitioners/services and child safeguarding practice review authors.

A wide range of learning and development opportunities are offered to the workforce across Essex including core safeguarding training at level 1,2 and 3 through to more specific topics such as child protection conference training, foetal alcohol syndrome awareness, early help and team around the family and trauma awareness training.

Two learning from reviews author briefings were held following the publication of reviews in the previous year, a total of 103 delegates attended. All those attending the session are given the opportunity to request the PowerPoint presentation so that they can then deliver a session on the learning from reviews with their colleagues, ESCB then follow up three months afterwards to request feedback on the session delivered and any changes to practice, this is in addition to following up on recommendations in the reports.

# LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS

## **Non-accidental injuries**

The non-accidental injuries working group continued to meet and have developed a non-accidental injuries training programme, the session is co-delivered by ESCB, health, police and social care with the option for attendees to request a copy of the training package to take away and deliver within their organisations. Two sessions were delivered to 91 delegates and 21 of those delegates requested the package. All those that requested the package will be contacted as part of the evaluation process to establish whether they have delivered the session, to how many, any feedback on the package or impact of the training. An e-learning package using content from the two sessions is currently being developed and will be made available to all through the partnership e learning platform.

The Southend, Essex and Thurrock Management of Suspicious Unexplained Injuries and Bruising in Children multi-agency protocol will be reviewed in May 2024 to ensure it is in line with current practice.

## **Level 1 e-learning package updated**

The level 1 e-learning package has been updated, it is free for anyone working or volunteering in Essex, the new package was launched in January 2024 and since then 644 people have completed it.

## **Getting to know your partners**

Learning from reviews in Essex has highlighted that practitioners do not always understand the roles and responsibilities of the other agencies that they are working with, so ESCB has set up a 'Getting to know your partners' session. These sessions are run for one hour each month with different agencies presenting at each of the sessions. To date Police, HCRG, ICBs and Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services have presented to a total of 114 delegates. After each session, each delegate is sent an information pack with the presentation and any additional useful information or references.



# SOUTHEND, ESSEX AND THURROCK LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

The Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) Learning and Development Sub-committee has representatives from all six boards across the three local authority areas and the SET Domestic Abuse Board. A key function of the Sub-Committee is to identify key themes from all reviews and identify opportunities for collaboration.

The two themes for this year were professional curiosity and escalating/challenging decisions. A professional curiosity e-learning package is currently being developed, this will be aimed at those working with children, adults and families. A survey was developed to understand the barriers to challenging decisions and how well practitioners understand the processes in place to challenge decisions - work continues on this area.



## WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHERS

The Southend, Essex and Thurrock exploitation e-learning package has been updated; a total of 306 people have completed the new updated package since its launch in March 2024. The exploitation package is aimed at all practitioners working with adults or children across SET. Essex Social Care Academy have kindly opened places on their lecture series to the wider partnership, topics have included sexual abuse and autism awareness.

The Violence and Vulnerability Unit in Essex continue to provide funding to enable the ESCB to offer trauma awareness training and Every Contact Counts (exploitation awareness training for those working in the night time economy, bus drivers, train station staff, taxi drivers, security staff etc). ESCB have offered three different trauma courses with a total of 273 people attending the courses and 486 people have attended Every Contact Counts training.

Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board (SETDAB) run an online lecture series and ESCB promote all their sessions. Over this year topics have included sessions from those with lived experience of domestic abuse and female genital mutilation, stalking, domestic abuse, stalking and harassment from a cyber security perspective.

ESCB worked in partnership with Public Health and Hertfordshire local authority to roll out Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder training to 184 delegates and this then led to Children's Social Care in Essex commissioning more in-depth training for social workers.

ESCB learning and development opportunities are attended by a wide range of organisations as with previous years the top three types of organisations represented at ESCB Learning and Development opportunities are:

- Voluntary and community organisations 25%
- Health (this does not include Essex Child & Family Wellbeing Service 11%) 13%
- Education (schools and colleges) 11%

If the delegates for Essex Child & Family Wellbeing Service and Health were combined they would make up 25% of delegates.,

# EVALUATION PROCESS

ESCB evaluation process includes a knowledge and confidence check at the start of the course, immediately after and then six weeks later. Overall confidence and knowledge increases following attendance at a course, and importantly in general this is maintained at the six week point too, this suggests that knowledge and confidence has transferred from the training environment to practice. Comments received include:



## **Autism lecture**

Knowledge of Autistic safety was amazing and very thought provoking. I found some of the stories he shared in regard to sensory perceptions very enlightening, and these will be useful in my role.



## **Early Help and Team Around the Family session**

Lots of Information and feel equipped to now carry out TAF confidently.



## **Child protection conference training**

Increased knowledge and understanding on report writing and how to share the reports with families. Awareness of the preparation required. Better understanding of different roles within the Child Safeguarding team. I know who to ask and where to go for information.



### **Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Awareness**

I got an understanding of FASD and the impact on children. I shared my knowledge from the training with my colleagues at work. We discussed the symptoms and that not always they are visible when the children are older.



### **Every contact counts training, a monthly learning and development opportunity raising awareness about the exploitation of children, aimed at those working in the night time economy, taxi drivers and other workers who would not traditionally access safeguarding training**

Training was the best I have had. The training was very informative and thought provoking for me. I feel more confident in knowing what to look out for going forward.

# IMPACT OF THE WORK OF ESCB

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

**Ensuring the partnership is working collaboratively to ensure children and families get the right support at the right time, this has led to the following outcomes:**

- Work is underway for the Effective Support for Children and Families in Essex to be updated by a multi-agency working group with publication planned for September 2024.
- The number of team around the family support officers has increased during this time, three additional posts were funded by the Violence and Vulnerability unit to support those children and young people at risk of entering the criminal justice system and those at risk of experiencing harm in the community.
- The health visiting and school nursing service (provided by HCRG) have a post that works in the Children and Families Hub reviewing all requests for support, there are firm plans in place for a joint ICB post, police officers and probation to all have a presence in the Hub.
- Continue to offer multi-agency early help learning and development through specific courses and within the core level 2 and 3 training.
- Early help drop-ins are held virtually Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday for any practitioner to present an anonymous case to a group of peers from a wide range of agencies who then offer advice and guidance in relation to providing support for the family.
- Statutory partners agree to support the development of Strategic and Operational partnership boards to support the work of the ECC Children and Families Hub.

## **Safeguarding of asylum seekers and refugee families**

- Ensuring the partnership were aware of the multi-faceted approach in Essex and linking in with the existing groups and forums that were discussing and addressing these issues.



# IMPACT OF THE WORK OF ESCB

**Safeguarding children in education** - the focus of this discussion was:

- Children who are electively home educated, the increase in the numbers, the local authority's powers and how the system can work together to safeguard these children.
- The increase in permanent and fixed term exclusions, how the partnership may be able to support schools and raising awareness amongst practitioners to ask why a child is not in school, this will also support the focus on improving attendance.
- The links between risk in the community and those children either not attending school or who are on part time timetables, practitioners need to be aware of the plan to support the child back into full time education.
- Harmful sexual behaviour and the training and support that has been offered to schools including training and access to the Brook traffic light tool.





# IMPACT OF THE WORK OF ESCB

## Online harms

- Operation Haiti - A male adult posed online as a young female and groomed young men to share indecent images of themselves, he then continued to bribe them. This was a huge multi-agency operation, has been recognised nationally as a very good piece of investigation work and was a very good example of excellent multi-agency working at a critical time.
- March 2023 - presentation and discussion re online harms. Key issue: does the professional network understand what it is like to be a young person today? Essex County Council is currently undertaking research on childhood today which can help inform our understanding, but we also need to ensure the workforce is using their interactions with young people to understand this. Many practitioners will separate online and real life, young people do not distinguish between the two.

## Risk in the Community (Essex response to contextual safeguarding)

- Risk in the Community work has developed significantly in the last year, each quadrant in Essex now has a Risk in the Community Senior Practitioner, this has increased the support available to children assessed at high risk of exploitation. Missing and child exploitation bulletins are sent out quarterly.
- Risk in the Community continues to be a high priority for ESCB, the Executive has had regular updates and have agreed the development of a new sub-committee to focus on harm in the community, which is looking at a range of harms and how the partnership ensures there are clear pathways for support for children at the early intervention and the prevention levels.
- Essex Police continue to roll out Operation Makesafe, the purpose of Operation Makesafe is to empower businesses and organisations to tackle child exploitation through increased awareness and training. Essex Police have focussed on hotels and bed and breakfast establishments across the county. The campaign is designed to help business owners and their employees identify potential victims of child exploitation, and where necessary alert the police to intervene prior to any child coming to harm.

## IMPACT OF THE WORK OF ESCB


**Right care right person** - national initiative by police, it is mostly focused on adults but there are cases where it has been applied to children, this is an ongoing local and national debate. Essex Police are providing guidance on escalation where partners do not agree with decisions both in the immediate and reflective. There have been differences of opinions on this initiative but the partnership continue to work well together.

**Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board (SETDAB)** lead on Domestic Abuse (DA) work across Essex, there is currently a re-commissioning of the DA provision in Essex, ESCB have been provided with updates and invited to participate.

**Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI)** following the thematic review of SUDIs across Southend, Essex and Thurrock, a thinking tool was developed to support practitioners.

Access to **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services**, provision of inpatient beds and emotional wellbeing support.

**Review of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review referral and triage processes** to ensure that the right cases are taken forward for a CSPR. Outcome - reduction in the number of referrals for CSPR being received by the ESCB Support team as agencies are considering the potential new learning from cases before referring them.



**Following the thematic review of SUDIs across Southend, Essex and Thurrock, a thinking tool was developed to support practitioners.**

# EARLY HELP

Ensuring the safeguarding system has an effective early help offer is a priority for the ESCB, as this will help to ensure that children and families are getting the right support from the right service at the right time.

The role of the Essex County Council Team Around the Family Support Officer (TAFSO) is to support the safeguarding system at level 2 of the windscreen.

They do not hold individual cases but will support those working with children and families within the early help space.

Team Around the Family Support Officers support the early help system across Essex by offering:



**ADVICE**



**GUIDANCE**



**COACHING**



## Early Help and Team Around the Family



10 workshops



177 delegates

## Preparing for difficult conversations



4 workshops



95 delegates

## Team Around the Family Meetings



610 meetings  
attended

## Coaching sessions to support workforce



1247 sessions  
facilitated

# Early help case study

## **Background**

**Team Around the Family (TAF) meeting was held for a 13-year-old white British male and his lone parent mother.**

## **Concerns**

Concerns had been raised from professionals and the family relating to the young person's anti-social behaviour in the local community, eating disorder, underlying ADHD presentation, risk of school exclusion, aggressive behaviours at home towards mum along with poor adult mental health and historic Domestic Abuse.

## **Meeting actions**

There were a range of actions from the meeting which included some onward referrals to voluntary sector organisations who can work with the young person in school, another for a more specialist domestic abuse support for mum along with some parenting support. Specialist eating disorder support will work closely with the young person and school who will also link with mum weekly to discuss progress.

## **Meeting attendees**

Present at the Team Around the Family meeting were mum, her Community Psychiatric Nurse, CAMHS, the school and the TAFSO.

## **Service user feedback**

Mum has spoken very highly of the support and advocacy she encountered at the Team Around the Family meeting and all parties are more optimistic that working together through the Team Around the Family meeting is more likely to keep progress on track.

# REVIEWS

There were six referrals for Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews in the reporting period, two of them progressed to Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, three have had local learning events and one was not progressed as the learning from the case had been identified through other reviews and local learning from incidents. Essex has also been involved in two out of county Rapid Reviews, neither of which progressed to Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews.

There are currently sixteen ongoing reviews in Essex, nine of these are Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, two of which commenced in the reporting period, both are sadly linked to young people who took their own lives and six have been delayed due to criminal proceedings. There are a number of reports due for publication in Summer and Autumn 2024. As part of the review process all agencies are sent a proforma to complete three to six months post publication to share with the Board the impact of the learning from reviews, to support agencies to do this we highlighted the key themes.



Assessments



Engagement of men/male carers



Harmful sexual behaviour



Neurodiversity



Online safety



Parental responsibility and next of kin



Private fostering



Staff supervision



Strategy meetings



Use of virtual meetings



Voice of the child



# IMPACT OF LEARNING FROM REVIEWS

- Health colleagues reviewed two cases where people died through the use of fentanyl patches, presentation on the learning from these cases to Executive and Stay Safe Groups. The learning from this case raised awareness amongst practitioners in relation to prescribed medication, safe disposal and storage of prescription medication.
- Learning from an out of county rapid reviews resulted in the child death review team raising awareness re the safe use of slings for babies through their newsletter, raising the issue at the Strategic Death Overview Panel and ESCB shared safety information from the Lullaby Trust
- An acute trust has developed flowcharts for midwives to support them to follow up referrals to children's social care, this includes the process to escalate or challenge decisions
- Health colleagues have shared a flowchart to support practitioners to ensure they are clear on who has parental responsibility.
- A local authority has mandated all staff complete the exploitation e-learning package.
- An acute trust has updated their maternity information sharing forms to include partners information and risk assessment.
- Health colleagues have implemented a time to talk program that supports staff to understand child and parent behaviour and to assist them in their response.
- A health provider completed an annual audit, and this evidenced that father's/male carers details were not being discussed or documented in client records so all staff have been requested to complete this and the audit will then be repeated.
- From July 2024 ESCB will be offering harmful sexual behaviour training, delivered by the Youth Justice Service.
- ESCB have an online safety working group, regular online safety training sessions are offered, and online safety campaigns are run on social media each half term.
- Children's Social Care have developed a Child Safeguarding Practice Review Working Group.
- A working group is developing guidance to support practitioners working with parents or carers who are using substances.

# ESCB SUPPORT TEAM

There have been some changes to the support team staffing during this year with a project officer leaving this resulted in being able to offer a permanent role to a seconded project officer. The Practice Development Manager post had been vacant for nine months but was filled in Sept 2023 and has given the team significant capacity.

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

- ESCB support team link with the community and voluntary sector through Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services (ECVYS) the CEO of ECVYS is a member of the Executive Board and the Practice Development Manager attends their quarterly cluster meetings and face to face quadrant meetings to give updates on the work of the Board. An ECVYS representative attends each of the Stay Safe Groups.
- ESCB support team have been active members of the Children's Partnership Board, this has included presenting items on learning from reviews and updates from Working Together 2023.
- ESCB and ESAB statutory partners meet every six months to discuss issues across both boards. The Business Managers of the two teams meet every two months to discuss areas of joint interest.



# ESCB COMMUNICATIONS AND CAMPAIGNS

## Operation Henderson campaign

The Operation Henderson outreach and awareness campaign ran twice during this period in April and October. Highlights across the year were:

- Face to face engagements: 1,391
- Every contact counts training: 87 attendees
- Social media reach: 20,800
- Webpage hits: 702
- QR code scans: 37

Adult passengers were quite receptive to the conversation and looking at the QR code, some surprised exploitation happened in their area.

Outreach conversations were well received by the public, mixture of awareness, good engagement and appreciated information being shared with them.

Young people appeared very engaged and able to talk about the issues, some great conversations and most felt confident about raising issues with someone.

Online safety campaign

Quarterly campaign ran July, Oct and Dec 2023 and March 2024 and followed a well-tested format focusing on various aspects of online safety over the course of the week, which saw a social media reach over more than 22,000 over the four weeks. Three new messages and graphics were created for December 2023 – showcased below. A working group has been set up for April 2024 to look at the future of the campaign.



**BECOME A CRITICAL ONLINE THINKER**

- ☒ Talk about which things you trust and why
- ☒ Think twice about information you might question and why
- ☒ Don't take things at face value
- ☒ Consider other views and gain a well-rounded perspective
- ☒ Do your own research - other online sources as well as real world conversations

**ESCB website**

Average of 11,800 visitors per month.  
Website content restructured to create a centralised hub of safeguarding topics- all info on the topic cab found here eg resources, learning and development opportunities.

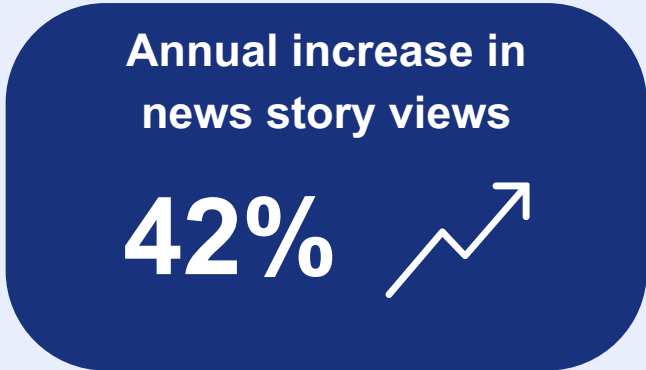
**News stories**

A commitment to uploading regular information to the ESCB latest news page has been successful. This ensures we can share information with partners outside of when bulletins are scheduled. The news page received an average of 670 views each month in 2023-24, a large increase from the previous year where there was an average of 280 views per month.

**ESCB bulletin**

Bulletins are sent the first week of every month to a distribution list of 3300 people across the partnership. This year we introduced a mid-month bulletin which highlights learning opportunities happening in the following few weeks. We have found these prove useful in targeting specific courses which are low on bookings. There is usually a spike in bookings after an email is sent. There has also been targeted communications to specific audiences using the bulletin template as a recognisable format. Again, these have proven effective, particularly with the ‘Getting to know your partners’ sessions.

Average open rate of bulletins is 31% which is above the industry standard.





## FINANCE AND BUDGET

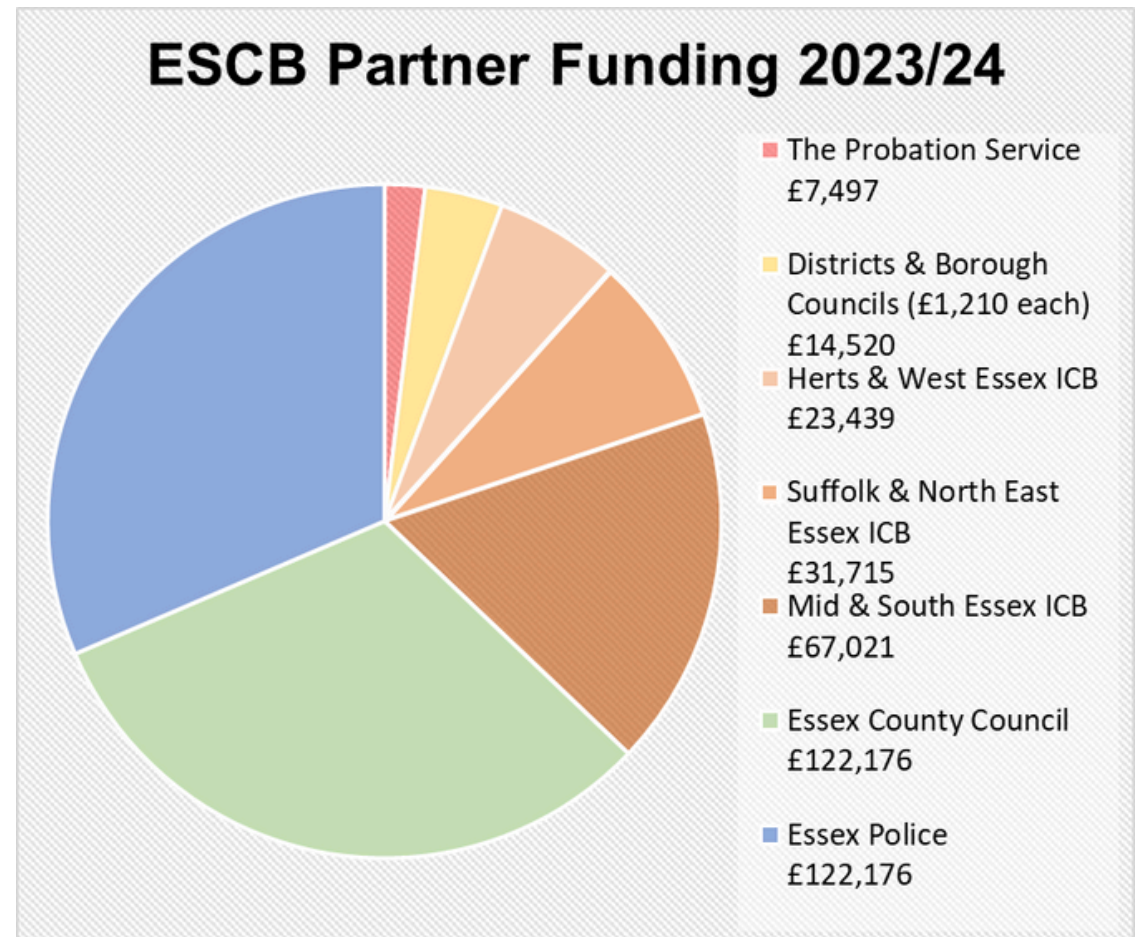
Funding for the ESCB is split equally between the three Statutory Partners with some additional contributions coming from the Probation Service and the Cities, Districts and Borough Councils.

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

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

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

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





## PARTNER CONTRIBUTIONS

Safeguarding Area	21-22	22-23	23-24	Narrative/ Comment
Number of Child in Need Plans	1498	1587	1447	The number of children with an open children in need plan has not varied much over the last three years and seems relatively stable. (end of year figures).
Number of Child Protection Plans	633	688	625	The number of children with a child protection plan has fluctuated, following an increase last year it has now reduced again.
Number of Children Looked After	1118	1164	1149	The number has decreased from last year.
Number of Separated Migrant Children within our Looked After population	136	166	145	The decrease in separated migrant children is reflected in the decrease in looked after children.
Numbers of Children Missing from Education	493	477	545	The of children missing education continues to flex across the years. The number has increased slightly. The average length of a child missing education before returning to school is 5.5 months.
Numbers of Children who are Electively Home Educated	2556	2926	4177	The number of children and young people being electively home educated has continued to increase. There are many factors which contribute to this, these could include increased anxiety during the pandemic not subsiding as life returned to 'normal,' furthermore, it could also be attributed to changing lifestyles with more parents working from home or flexibly.

## CHILDREN SOCIAL CARE

Essex Children's Social Care were inspected by Ofsted (ILACS) in June 2023. The outcome of the Inspection was that Essex has been judged as Outstanding in all five domains of the Inspection (and were the first Local Authority in England to receive this judgement). The report states:



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



Essex County Council maintains two children's homes for Children with Disabilities, both offer respite care, both were rated as Good in all categories following their last Ofsted inspections in October 2022 and February 2023 (respectively).

# ESSEX POLICE

During this year Essex Police have undergone inspection from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services in relation to the Management of Sexual or Violent Offenders (MOSOVO), some positives from this inspection were in relation to the online team and the work around identifying and arresting offenders and supporting families of those arrested. There will be a Police Efficiency, Effectiveness and Legitimacy Inspection later in the year which looks at all aspects of policing as yet there is no date for the inspection.





# HEALTH

## Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board (MSE ICB)

MSE ICB safeguarding priorities were focused on the delivery of the statutory duties and establishing an all-age approach and a revised safeguarding structure, ensuring expertise at a strategic, place and provider level. Below are some examples of the work from the ICB safeguarding team, showing our commitment to safeguarding and the variety of our scope.

- Asthma and Safeguarding Pathway: the ICB worked alongside the Asthma network to develop and implement this pathway and a training session. This was praised by NHSE and requested for wider dissemination.
- Looked After Children Health Strategy 2022-24: supporting the development and implementation of this strategy, aiming to enhance outcomes for Children in Care. Additionally, the ICB brought together the Local Authorities and health providers to develop and implement the Placement Notification Pathway, aimed at supporting smooth transitions between health services for children in care who move in and out of the MSE area.
- Domestic abuse has been incorporated into the MSE Integrated Care Strategy 2023/33. MSE ICB has led Essex Health Commissioners and Providers to work collaboratively and in partnership to promote quality improvement and support the domestic abuse agenda. Work on this agenda will continue in 2024/25.
- Think Family: the restructuring of the ICB's safeguarding team into all-age was designed to integrate support across all age groups and, in time, improving the embedding of Think Family approach. As an example of a significant all-age work, the ICB funded a six-month project to ensure compliance with the Mental Capacity Act (MCA) 2005 and Deprivation of Liberty. This work has produced an improvement plan and an awareness week, providing resources and training to practitioners across MSE.

MSE ICB covers 180 GP Practices and employs five named GPs/Professionals who work alongside the safeguarding team in the delivery of learning and development and safeguarding assurance strategy. MSE ICB launched a biannual safeguarding self-assessment for all GP practices in Mid and South Essex, there was a 95% return rate across the ICB area. Three key areas were covered by the audit; learning and development, process and culture. The safeguarding team will be supporting practices with the implementation of the action plans and the audit will be repeated in Summer 2025.

## **Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board**

In North East Essex Care Leavers Independence Boxes are distributed to support young people's emotional and physical wellbeing. Boxes have been distributed to Care Leavers by HCRG since December 2023. The contents of the packs are based on the views and suggestions made by young people. Evaluation of these is ongoing and will be used to in consideration for an Essex wide approach. This is currently a joint pilot venture by the ICB, HCRG, and Community 360 and has been supported by the Social Care Involvement Team and the Leaving and Aftercare Team. The boxes contain a mixture of items including information about how to access services, health information as well as practical items to support care leavers moving into their first independent accommodation, for example tool kits etc. plus many useful items such as a First Aid Kit, blanket, Oodie, hot water bottle.

Primary Care Safeguarding Forum continues to consider safeguarding across the lifespan. Attendance has been improved by making this is an online meeting. Various external speakers from other agencies and organisations provide additional support and education to Safeguarding Leads from Primary Care.

Primary Care Safeguarding Audit- This is inclusive of children and adult safeguarding. Return rate of the Audit was 77% which demonstrated a good understanding of the importance of safeguarding across Primary Care in North East Essex.

Specific work has continued across Suffolk and North East Essex to raise awareness amongst safeguarding children, looked after children colleagues and children's services about 16–17-year-olds and the Mental Capacity Act.

### **Priority 1 - Work with statutory partners to promote models of early interventions for babies, children, young people and adults in West Essex & Hertfordshire.**

- Focused workstreams on fathers/ significant others in households and the preparation for the roll out of [ICON](#) in Primary Care.
- Development of the Thinking Tool to support practitioners to be curious as to the role fathers/ father figures play within families following learning from National CSPR 'The myth of invisible men.'

### **Priority 2 - Work collaboratively with Integrated Care Partnerships and safeguarding partnerships to support the embedding of lessons learned to bring about change by capturing and sharing learning from national and local reviews.**

- Preparation for the introduction of new Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment for Primary care.
- Key focus on legal literacy and how it is applied across the age span.
- ESCB statutory partners working towards developing a pathway for the management of very complex children when resolution/ effective care planning has not been able to be achieved at operational level.
- Work in progress to introduce MARAC within Primary Care.

### **Priority 3 - Strengthen the Transition to Adulthood for young people to ensure that their welfare is protected and take steps to continue to address the impact of adverse childhood experiences and to prepare them for adulthood.**

- The safeguarding team have supported the ICB Deed of Covenant for Children in Care and Care Leavers in preparation for employment and further education.
- Strengthening of the notification and placement process for looked after children and young people placed out of county to ensure the receiving area support their specific health needs.



**Priority 4 - Inequalities: work with statutory partners to tackle health inequalities and shape safeguarding priorities to reduce loneliness, unconscious bias isolation and serious violence.**

- Extensive work undertaken to promote safer sleep for babies recognising the wider determinates of health, i.e., household/bed poverty which impacts on parental decision making.
- Focused commissioning arrangements to procure Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) services for adults and children is in progress with University College Hospital.
- Work with Primary Care to raise the profile of Prevent and ensure that the risk of enabling a permissive environment is minimised.



## Provide Community Interest Company (CIC)

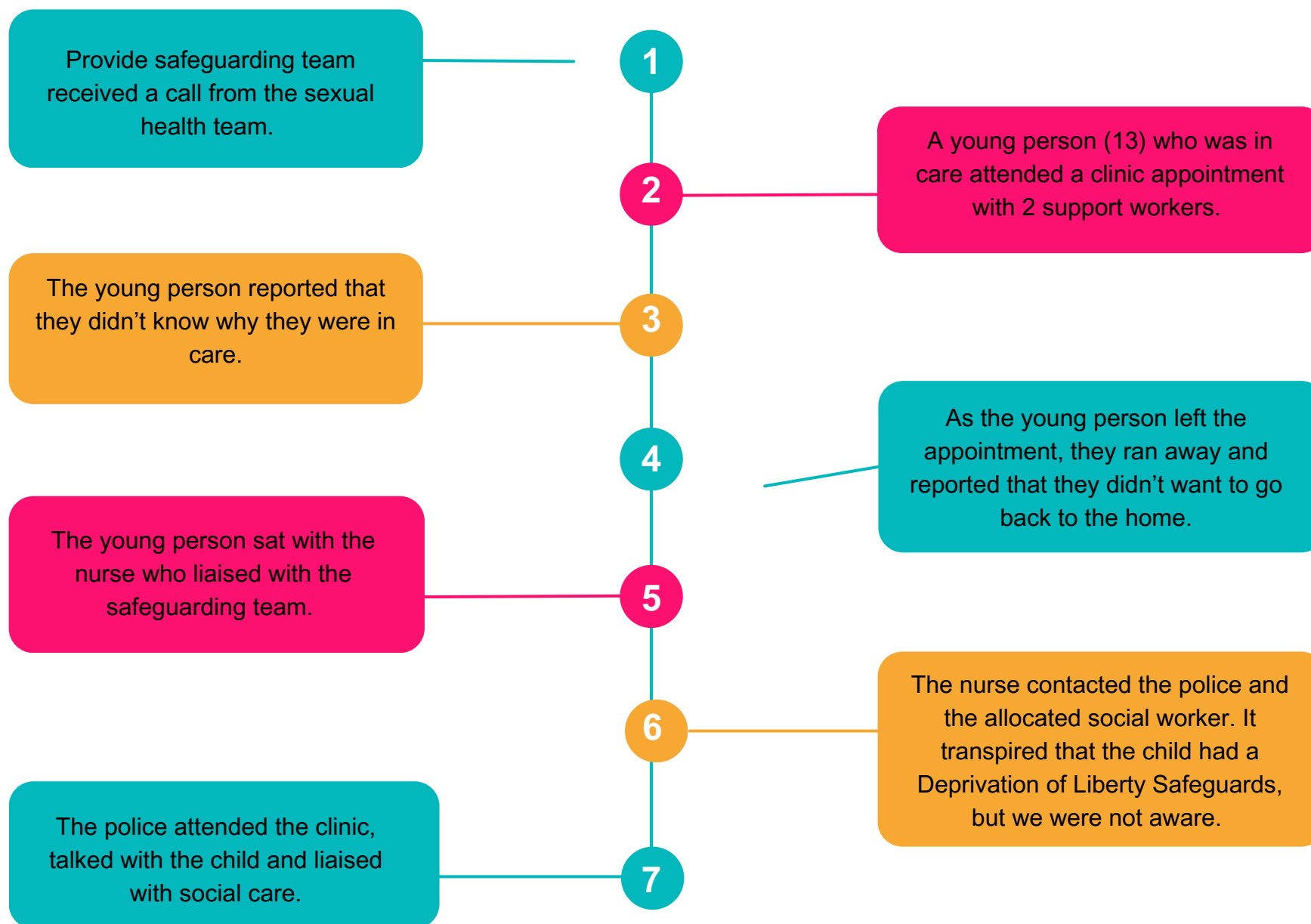
Provide is a member of the Health Executive Forum where partners work together to consider and how we progress safeguarding within our organisations and across pathways of care.

Provide is also working across a community collaborative with EPUT and NELFT in mid and south Essex. This partnership enables our safeguarding teams to work collectively to share good practice, consider and implement new guidance and to jointly implement policy and practice. We are also working on standardising how we deliver safeguarding training and supervision.

**Effective multi-agency working** - The Named Nurse for Safeguarding children supported the Children's Diabetic team due to concerns with management of a child's diabetes. A Children's safeguarding referral was completed alongside the hospital to support the child and family. A meeting was held with education, health and family. The Safeguarding team work across the multi-agency, working together to share concerns and ensure that the appropriate safeguarding has been implemented.



## VOICE OF THE CHILD - A CASE STUDY FROM PROVIDE CIC



## NELFT

Over the past 12 months, NELFT has maintained its commitment in providing safeguarding service to children and adults using the Think Family Approach, strengthening its safeguarding infrastructure to address evolving demands, meeting statutory responsibilities and ensuring safeguarding remains a priority across all services. There has been ongoing work in monitoring progress against the safeguarding strategy, implementing the improvement plan and developing safeguarding measures across the organisation.

The safeguarding team participated in the Multi-Agency Thematic Audit on Neglect. The learning from the HCRG home environment assessment tool is being used to inform the development of a wider neglect assessment tool.

On review of the themes from learning reviews it was identified that a 'Back to Basic's Training' for NELFT practitioners was a need. The training includes; making a good referral, record keeping and use of available assessment tools within the electronic recording systems.

Safeguarding training compliance for the whole organisation is over 96%. For those staff eligible for safeguarding supervision the compliance rates across Kent and Essex have been above 85%.





# SAFEGUARDING IN EDUCATION

The ECC Education Safeguarding Team is a countywide team, covering all education settings (schools, colleges, Early Years settings, childminders, independent schools and alternative provisions, including PRUs). There are around 600 schools and settings in Essex, and around 1700 Early Years settings and other provisions. The team works on a quadrant-based basis and links with the local education teams for that quadrant.

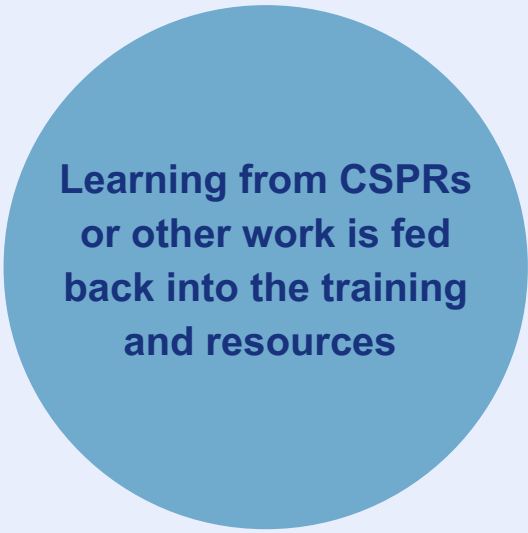
The Education Safeguarding Team continues to provide a range of resources for all settings. These include:

- Model Child Protection policies
- Modular Level 2 safeguarding training programme for all staff working with children
- Guidance documents
- Templates for Child Protection records, reports, risk assessments
- Prevent resources

The team also provides safeguarding training for settings, which this year have included:

- Termly online session on Prevent Awareness
- Termly online session on 'recognising, categorising and responding to harmful sexual behaviour'
- In-person session on 'managing low-level concerns and allegations against members of the workforce'
- Online session on Hate Incidents / Hate Crime
- Termly briefings for schools / settings (4 x in-person and 1 x online)
- Termly briefings for Early Years settings (4 x in-person and 1 x online)
- Termly briefings for governors
- Termly briefings for ECC Education staff
- Termly briefings for new Headteachers / DSLs

The team has extended its training offer to include Level 3 training for DSLs, with effect from September 2024. Any learning from reviews is fed back into the training and resources provided by the team, to ensure both are current, fit for purpose and responsive to addressing issues.



**Learning from CSPRs  
or other work is fed  
back into the training  
and resources**

# VOICE OF THE CHILD-ESSEX COUNCIL FOR VOLUNTARY YOUTH SERVICES

## LISTENING PROJECT

ECVYS once again co-ordinated a listening project through funding from the Violence and Vulnerability Unit, it is an amazing opportunity for young people to share how safe they feel in their communities and for their voices to influence the priorities of the Violence and Vulnerability Unit and beyond. This year 64 youth clubs took part in the activity involving 1434 young people aged 10-25 years. The project highlighted that knife crime/getting stabbed is the top concern for young people, this was the top concern last year too and the percentage of people concerned about it has increased by 5%. The top four concerns for young people, compared to last year, remained similar however this was the first time that some young people raise the issue of vaping as a top concern. To read the full report and see the breakdown by area, follow this [link](#).





# PRIORITY AREAS FOR THE ESCB – 2024/2025

## Priority 1

Develop a neglect sub-committee to progress the learning from the multi-agency thematic audit (MATA) and a Child Safeguarding Practice Review that is due to be published shortly.

## Priority 2

Supporting the Lampard inquiry-the independent statutory inquiry investigating the deaths of mental health inpatients in Essex. The inquiry is covering a 23 year period which it is anticipated could include around 2000 deaths. The terms of reference for the inquiry have recently been agreed with the inquiry commencing in Sept 2024. The inquiry will involve many ESCB members and whilst the majority of cases that will be reviewed will be adults who died this may still impact on those who work with children as those adults may have been known to services as children, at the moment all agencies are awaiting the start of the inquiry and for Baroness Lampard to set out how she will conduct the inquiry. The length of the inquiry is yet to be confirmed.

## Priority 3

Completing reviews and focussing on implementation of the learning and gathering the evidence from agencies in Essex evidencing the impact of the learning from reviews.

## Priority 4

Launch the updated ESCB Effective Support for Children and Families in Essex guidance and encourage use across the partnership.

## Priority 5

Developing the pathways for those young people who are deemed low or medium risk of exploitation.

## Priority 6

Online harms - how do we assess online harms and support children to navigate this? Increasing the understanding of the workforce of what life is like for children in 2024.

## CHALLENGES

Essex Safeguarding Children Board are working to develop a comprehensive multi-agency data dashboard. The ESCB Support Team have been meeting with other areas that alternative dashboards that do not rely solely on collating quantitative data and hope to have a dashboard in place by the second half of the year.

The flow of information across all levels of the partnership is a challenge, the ESCB Support Team have increased their communication methods over the last year and have seen positive results with increased traffic to our news story pages and above industry standard for people accessing our bulletin. A challenge remains with how learning from reviews is cascaded within agencies, how good are agencies at explaining to practitioners that things have changed as a result of a review or serious incident.

## CONCLUSION

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