

Essex Safeguarding Children Board

Yearly Report 2025-2026



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Foreword from the Lead Safeguarding Partners

We are pleased to present the Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB) Yearly Report for 2025-2026. This report outlines how organisations across Essex have worked together over the past year to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. It highlights the collective commitment of our Safeguarding Partners and Relevant Agencies to ensuring that children are safe, heard and supported to achieve their potential.

The past year has been one of both progress and challenge. Children, families and professionals continue to face increasing pressures resulting from the rising complexity of need, the impact of poverty and inequality, growing concerns relating to mental health and wellbeing, and the emergence of new risks in online environments. Despite these challenges, partners have remained committed to strengthening safeguarding practice, learning from experience and working collaboratively to improve outcomes for children.

During 2025-2026, we have continued to strengthen our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements through robust scrutiny, joint audit activity, workforce development and learning from reviews. We have seen positive examples of agencies working together to identify and respond to neglect, child sexual abuse, exploitation, domestic abuse and other safeguarding concerns. We have also continued to develop resources, guidance and learning opportunities to support practitioners across the safeguarding system.

A particular strength of the partnership is the commitment of professionals across Essex. Every day, practitioners across health, education, policing, social care, probation, the voluntary sector and many other organisations work together to support children and families. We would like to thank all colleagues for their dedication, professionalism and determination to continually improve safeguarding practice.

We know that the voice and lived experience of children and families must remain at the centre of everything we do. Throughout this report you will see examples of how feedback from children, young people and families has informed our work and helped shape services and priorities.

As we look forward, we recognise that significant change lies ahead. The transition to a single Essex Integrated Care Board, the implementation of the Families First Partnership Programme, wider national reforms, and Local Government Reorganisation will all shape the safeguarding landscape. Throughout this period of change, we remain fully committed to ensuring that safeguarding children remains a shared priority and that our partnership continues to provide strong leadership, challenge and accountability. Our local arrangements for delivering safeguarding responsibilities are set out in our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements. These arrangements reflect the equal and shared accountability of our safeguarding partners and continue to recognise education as a key partner in safeguarding children across Essex.

Working closely with our neighbouring safeguarding partnerships in Southend and Thurrock, we have agreed six shared priorities for the coming year:

- Neglect
- Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Sexual Abuse
- Domestic Abuse
- Mental Health
- Transitional Safeguarding
- Neurodiversity

We remain committed to learning, improvement and partnership working so that every child in Essex has the opportunity to grow up safe, supported and able to thrive.



Tom Abell, Chief Executive Officer
NHS Essex Integrated Care Board



Nicole Wood, Chief Executive Officer
Essex County Council



Rachel Nolan, Chief Constable
Essex Police



ESCB Independent Scrutineer

As Independent Scrutineer for the Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB), I provide high level strategic challenge and scrutiny to the partnership.

I attend Lead Safeguarding Partner meetings, Delegated Safeguarding Partner meetings, and the broader partnership forum, ESCB. As a member of the Delegated Safeguarding Partners group, I provide independent scrutiny and challenge of decision making in relation to Rapid Reviews, and CSRs. I attend one Stay Safe Group in each locality a year to strengthen understanding of local safeguarding practice, identify emerging issues and support shared learning across the partnership and undertake specific pieces of scrutiny.

Throughout 2025-2026 I have continued to observe a partnership that demonstrates strong joint ownership of safeguarding responsibilities, effective multi-agency collaboration and a genuine commitment to learning and improvement. There is clear shared accountability across the Safeguarding Partners, supported by equal funding arrangements and a culture that encourages both constructive challenge and professional respect. ESCB also works effectively in partnership with the safeguarding children's partnerships in Thurrock and Southend on various aspects of safeguarding activity.

The work of the partnership is delivered by a number of highly effective sub-committees and local Stay Safe groups, supported by a very experienced Business Manager and Support Team, who are essential to the smooth running and impact of the partnership.

As Independent Scrutineer, I chair termly meetings of the chairs of the Board's sub-committees, alongside the chairs and vice-chairs of the four quadrant Stay Safe Groups. These meetings help ensure alignment across the partnership's work, minimise duplication, identify and address any gaps, and strengthen links between strategic priorities and local safeguarding practice.

Each Stay Safe Group is led by a chair and two vice-chairs, representing the three Safeguarding Partners. This leadership arrangement promotes shared ownership, joint decision-making and equal accountability at a local level. The Stay Safe Groups play a vital role in promoting effective multi-agency working, sharing and embedding learning from reviews, and identifying and responding to local safeguarding issues and challenges. Through my engagement with these groups, I have seen evidence of strong local partnership working, active information sharing and a willingness to address emerging safeguarding concerns collectively. These arrangements help ensure learning is shared across the system, local issues are escalated appropriately, and safeguarding practice continues to develop.

Across the partnership, agencies work collaboratively and constructively, providing appropriate challenge and holding one another to account in pursuit of improved outcomes for children and young people. I continue to be impressed by the level of engagement demonstrated by partner agencies, the strength of multi-agency relationships, and the collective commitment to ensuring effective safeguarding practice within local communities.

For the period of this yearly report, three specific areas of scrutiny were identified, as set out below.

Effectiveness of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements in Essex

I reviewed the ESCB Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements against the requirements of Working Together to Safeguard Children and met individually with each Delegated Safeguarding Partner. My findings provide assurance that the partnership continues to meet national expectations. Joint and equal accountability is evident, relationships are strong, and there is clear ambition to continually improve safeguarding practice.

The partnership has successfully embedded Lead Safeguarding Partner arrangements and continues to respond positively to significant organisational change, including the transition to a single Essex Integrated Care Board and preparations for Local Government Reorganisation. While these changes present risks, safeguarding partners have demonstrated a clear commitment to maintaining effective safeguarding leadership and oversight throughout the transition period.

Review of decision making in cases of intrafamilial Child Sexual Abuse

I have had discussions with the Essex County Council Service Manager and Audit Manager who lead on coordinating the Multi-Agency Case Audits and Multi-Agency Thematic Audits, during this year they have focused on intrafamilial child sexual abuse. A number of audits have been completed, and a summary of the learning emerging is being prepared.

The Southend, Essex and Thurrock Sexual Violence and Abuse Board, is supported by an all-age Sexual Abuse Partnership Coordinator, this is a new appointment by the Police, Fire, Crime Commissioner's Office to support the work across Southend, Essex and Thurrock. This has included the development of an updated strategy and multi-agency data collection.

A lot of activity has taken place following publication of the National Panel's report[1], it is an agreed priority across Southend, Essex and Thurrock. The Lead Safeguarding Partners and Delegated Safeguarding Partners will monitor progress. Scrutiny of this continues in 2026-2027.

Review of implementation of recommendations from reviews

A key aspect of my scrutiny role is to consider how effectively learning arising from local and national reviews is translated into improved safeguarding practice. Throughout the year, I have received regular updates on the implementation of recommendations from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, Rapid Reviews and other learning activities.

The partnership has appropriate mechanisms in place to monitor progress against agreed actions and to assess the impact of changes made by agencies. Scrutiny has focused not only on whether actions have been completed, but also on whether learning has been embedded and has led to improvements in professional practice and outcomes for children and families.

I have seen strong evidence of agencies working collaboratively to embed learning from reviews through training, communications, supervision, policy development and local safeguarding forums. While demonstrating impact on outcomes for children remains challenging, the partnership continues to strengthen its approach to evidencing how learning influences professional practice and service improvement.

Overall, I am assured that Safeguarding Partners in Essex continue to work effectively together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. The partnership has maintained a clear focus on learning, scrutiny and continuous improvement while responding to significant organisational change. The challenge for the coming year will be to sustain this momentum, strengthen evidence of impact and ensure that children and families remain at the centre of all safeguarding activity.



David Archibald
ESCB Independent Scrutineer



Estimated population: 1.56 million people.

Children and young people make up 22.4% of our population (350,209).

POPULATION & WELLBEING

13.9% of our children are estimated to be living in Relative Low-income households, and this rises to 21.6% in some locality areas.

20.3% of children access free school meals.

5% of the school population is supported with an Education and Health Care Plan.

EDUCATION

Around 55,279 children are taught in Essex's 199 maintained schools and 167,733 are taught in 356 Academies.

More than 8 out of 10 schools are judged as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted (88.6%).

COMMUNITIES & HEALTH

3 of the top 10 other languages used in Essex are of European origin. English as an additional language is used by 12.8% at Primary age and 10.7% at Secondary age.

85.1% of the population is White British.

143 General Practices across Essex.

There are 5 hospitals across the Greater Essex footprint managed by 3 acute trusts.



Essex Police

Following the Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy (PEEL) Inspection last year, Essex Police has made significant improvements in the area of Protecting Vulnerable People. This has included a move to operating with just one version of an electronic PP57 (referral form for referrals for concern about a child to Children's Social Care) across all force areas and local authorities. This process allows for each PP57 to be viewed and quality assured, enabling faster, more informed safeguarding decisions. The new process also ensures that Essex Police now hold complete, auditable records of all referrals shared with Children's Social Care. This not only strengthens accountability and transparency but also enables the Force to identify patterns and trends in safeguarding concerns, thus supporting more strategic, data-driven decision-making.

A bespoke safeguarding training package is being designed for all those working in partnership safeguarding. This will provide a blended training in 5 key vulnerability areas for all those staff involved in safeguarding. It will be a mix of e-learning, classroom exercises and operational activity. Roll out of this course is due to be completed April 2027.

Governance of safeguarding Key Performance Indicators has also been strengthened with quarterly Key Performance Indicators dashboards scrutinised in our Assistant Chief Constable chaired Strategic Vulnerability Board.

There were no other inspections in relation to the Safeguarding Partners in this period.

Structure and Governance

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements for Essex sets out the governance structure and arrangements for Essex Safeguarding Children Board.

Education is a Safeguarding Partner in the Essex arrangements in recognition of the critical contribution made by schools, early years settings and colleges in safeguarding children. The Director of Education for Essex County Council is represented at Delegated Safeguarding Partner meetings and education representatives participate across Board structures.

The Delegated Safeguarding Partners ensure that safeguarding activity remains responsive to local need and that agencies remain fully engaged in the partnership's work.

On 1 April 2026 the three Integrated Care Boards currently covering Essex will be replaced by one Essex Integrated Care Board which covers the Greater Essex footprint. The Partnership is working closely with health colleagues through the transition period to ensure effective safeguarding governance, partnership representation and continuity of health contributions to safeguarding arrangements. Many of the future arrangements are still to be decided and work will continue over the coming year.

The ESCB's role is to promote effective multi-agency collaboration, continuous learning and accountability. The Board delivers its work through a series of sub-committees and Stay Safe Groups, creating clear links between strategic decision-making, quality assurance activity and frontline practice. This structure enables learning, performance information and practitioner feedback to flow throughout the safeguarding system, supporting continuous improvement across partner agencies.

This is the current structure of the Board with the sub-committees and Stay Safe groups. All sub-committees and groups continue to be chaired by a representative from the Statutory Partners.

Delegated Safeguarding Partners

The Delegated Safeguarding Partners have remained consistent throughout this year, Education are treated as a Statutory Partner in the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and attend all meetings, these arrangements are embedded in the ESCB governance.

The current priorities for the partnership remain the same as the previous year;

- Safer in the community
- Safer at home
- Safer in Education
- Safer Safeguarding Systems

This report reflects the work of the partnership in relation to the priorities. Going forward in 2026-27, the priorities have been aligned with Southend and Thurrock as agreed by the Lead Safeguarding Partners.

Families First Partnership programme

The Delegated Safeguarding Partners agreed that the governance of the Families First Partnership programme should sit with the Essex Safeguarding Children Board, the programme team report regularly to the Board ensuring multi-agency working across all areas of the programme. The Programme now has a multi-agency oversight board which makes the day-to-day decisions allowing the Board to focus on key strategic decisions.

Essex Safeguarding Children Board

It was agreed from January 2026 the word executive would be dropped from the title of this meeting, to support the understanding across the partnership that this is the wider partnership board that brings together the Safeguarding Statutory Partners and the named relevant agencies as set out in the ESCB Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements.

The ESCB meets four times a year with four additional meetings scheduled to enable reviews to be signed off for publication. The Board was chaired by health until the end of 2025; the Director of Children's Services then commenced the role from January 2026.

The ESCB receive a quarterly Business Support Team report which highlights the activities of the sub-committees, Stay Safe Groups and other partnership activity.

Stay Safe Groups

This has been a challenging year for the Stay Safe Groups in relation to leadership from the Statutory Partners, the upcoming changes to the Integrated Care Boards meant ICB colleagues could not always commit to full participation and then there were changes to personnel in the other Statutory Partners which resulted in a significant amount of support from the ESCB Support team and ECC Leads for Partnership Delivery to keep the momentum going outside the meetings and ensuring agendas were planned and any speakers invited. The Integrated Care Board have stated their commitment to the Stay Safe groups going forward, this may be a challenge initially due to staffing. All Delegated Safeguarding Partners remain committed to supporting the work of the Stay Safe groups.

Two of the stay safe groups have moved to being in person and attendance at these meetings remains strong.

A key benefit of all the Stay Safe Groups are the relationships, links and networks made through the meetings; these relationships support the safeguarding system.

Key Impact Themes from Stay Safe Groups

During 2025-2026, Stay Safe Groups continued to provide an important forum for local safeguarding partners to identify emerging issues, strengthen professional networks and improve safeguarding practice.

Service Development and Early Intervention

- Development of a multi-agency drop-in pilot at the Basildon Crisis Café, providing coordinated support for young people experiencing emotional wellbeing and mental health difficulties.
- Increased awareness of Open Road's (substance misuse service for adults) flexible outreach approach, helping professionals identify alternative ways of engaging parents and carers who may struggle to access traditional office-based services.

Improving Safeguarding Practice

- A primary care digital tool has been developed that prompts primary care practitioners to consider safeguarding when entering clinical terms related to children's genital or urinary conditions- this may support earlier identification of child sexual abuse concerns.
- Enhanced focus on children's lived experiences, cultural identity and anti-racist practice following learning from the local Proud to be Me report and national reviews.

Responding to Emerging Risks

- Establishment of a multi-agency working group in response to increasing concerns regarding cannabis use during pregnancy.
- Promotion of safer sleep messages and resources following local concerns regarding SUDI, supporting earlier preventative conversations with families.

Stay Safe Groups also facilitated networking, information sharing and improved awareness of local services, helping practitioners access support more effectively for children and families.



Harm in the Community sub-committee

The sub-committee is chaired by ECC and over the year they have worked on the following areas:

Online harms

Young people completed a Public Health Relationships, Sexual, Health Education survey, as part of the survey there were questions in relation to the online harms. The survey was split into three age groups. Feedback from the 11-16 age group was that if they were unsure about something they had seen online, they would want to talk to a parent/carer or someone in school. This highlights the importance of a trusted adult in young people's lives. The older age group reported that they would talk to friends.

The sub-committee are working on a 12-month communications plan aimed at parent/carers and professionals that promotes the recently launched Government website [Help your child stay safe online - Kids Online Safety](#) and the range of resources within it. The website provides information and advice on a range of topics, at different developmental stages.

Resources to support early intervention and prevention in relation to harm in the community

Work continues developing resources to support early intervention and prevention work in relation to harm in the community.

Supporting and participating in Child Exploitation week in June 2026

The sub-committee received feedback regarding the Child Exploitation week held in June 2025, further detail regarding this week is in the campaign section of the report. Feedback from the ECC Risk in the Community team was the need for wider partnership engagement with the event, the Harm in the Community highlighted that they had not felt like they had had the opportunity to be involved as they could be and to promote the events amongst their teams. This year the sub-committee have had regular updates and been invited to be part of working groups and take part in activities during child exploitation awareness week in June 2026.

Neglect sub-committee

The Neglect sub-committee is chaired by the ICB, significant progress has been made in its first year. It had been identified through multi-agency reviews that there is an inconsistent understanding of neglect across the partnership, there is no common language for practitioners, it can be fragmented into single issues, there are different thresholds and tolerances across agencies and varying confidence to challenge other agencies.

The sub-committee has developed a multi-agency definition and neglect framework, based on the work of Jan Howarth and the Multi-Agency Thematic Audit on neglect. The framework gives examples of the potential impact on the child of the various types of neglect and reflects on the different ages and stages of child development. This work will support a review of the Effective Support guidance in Autumn 2026. During the development of the framework, it was agreed that we would refrain from using the term 'medical neglect' and refer to it as the neglect of medical needs. Medical neglect suggests the medical professional has not fulfilled their role whereas we are often talking about cases where parents/carers have not sought or not brought children to medical appointments or appropriate treatment.

Cumulative neglect has been a theme of reviews in Essex; this is an area of practice development going forward

Health partners have developed practical pathways for conditions such as asthma, epilepsy, diabetes and dental health where there are concerns that a child's medical needs are not being met. These pathways give practitioners clearer guidance on what to look for, when to escalate and how to work with other agencies, supporting earlier and more coordinated help for children and families.

Going forward we are looking at developing an e-learning package, with shared core material across Southend, Essex and Thurrock, increasing the opportunity for joint training across Southend, Essex and Thurrock where possible.

The next stage is to understand from practitioners what would support them in their work with neglect, learning from local reviews and Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews has demonstrated that there is not generally an issue with identifying neglect but the challenge is evidencing cumulative neglect, supporting parents to make meaningful changes, sustaining changes and how to respond when those changes are not sustained. To support this the neglect sub-committee is going to run a workshop for practitioners to understand if there are resources or learning and development opportunities that would support them in their work.

Assurance and Scrutiny

The ESCB has an Independent Scrutineer, and they have provided a summary at the beginning of this report, in addition to the scrutiny provided by the Independent Scrutineer a summary of activity and the impact is below;

Our assurance and scrutiny activities include:

- Section 11 Audits in partnership with the Safeguarding Children's Partnerships in Southend and Thurrock
- Joint adult and children safeguarding audit
- Multi-Agency Thematic Audit
- Multi-Agency Case Audits
- Evaluation of the ESCB Learning and Development offer

Education settings safeguarding audits

Education settings are required to complete a safeguarding audit every two years. The last audit was undertaken in the 2024-2025 academic year and will be repeated next academic year. There is also work being undertaken to replicate this process for early years settings so there is a formal reporting process to the ESCB from that sector too. The audit data analysis is reported to the ESCB Board so there is oversight of safeguarding arrangements in Education settings at that level.

Feedback from children and families

There is an expectation across the partnership that each agency has mechanisms in place to ensure that children and families have the opportunity to feedback on the services they receive and influence service design and delivery. It is expected that if this relates to multi-agency safeguarding activity it would be fed back to the Board via the Stay Safe Groups or the Performance, Audit and Quality Assurance sub-committee. A question in the section 11 audit and joint children and adult safeguarding audit asks about service user involvement and participation, only three organisations marked themselves as partly met, the rest were fully met. For the joint children and adult safeguarding audit, out of the 21 responses, three organisations responded that they were partly met, the rest were fully met. All organisations who were partly met have actions in place to address this.

Section 11 Audits

Section 11 Audits are undertaken across Southend, Essex and Thurrock on a biennial cycle; in addition to the SET wide agencies, there are several agencies who just work across the Essex area, the audit was also sent to them. The audit was circulated in Autumn 2025, given the impending changes within the ICB it was decided not to request a Section 11 return for the three Essex facing ICBs but that the request would be sent to the new Essex ICB mid cycle when the update request will be sent to the other agencies.

The 2025-2026 Section 11 Audit results achieved an overall strong level of engagement and compliance across partner organisations; a total of 20 agencies were sent the audit. Two organisations are national organisations who submitted a generic audit, the data from the audit cannot be included in the analysis of the SET audit but the content has been reviewed and they are compliant. Three audits were returned outside the timeframe set so were not included in the data analysis but have been reviewed.

Southend Safeguarding Children's Partnership Performance, Audit and Quality Assurance sub-group undertook a review of all the SET section 11 audits submissions, (the Business Managers from Thurrock and Essex also attended) following this audit review, a letter was sent to all the organisations thanking them for completion and providing feedback on the content. All organisations will be contacted mid-way through the cycle for an update on any outstanding actions or evidence to support maintaining standards.

The majority of responding agencies demonstrated high levels of safeguarding assurance, with five organisations reporting full compliance against all 40 standards and no organisations indicating that any standards were "not met." Overall, 93.7% of standards were assessed as fully met, reflecting a consistently robust safeguarding framework across Essex partners.

The level of compliance in Section 11 is high however, it is a self-assessment process so agencies are asked to provide action plans to evidence how standards will be maintained or how agencies may work to enhance compliance, this has a limited response, however at the midpoint agencies were asked to provide updates against any actions and to evidence how they were maintaining standards.

Joint Adult and Children Safeguarding Audit

Following the last round of Section 11 audits and a peer review workshop with City, Borough and District Councils it was agreed to work with the Essex Safeguarding Adults Board (ESAB) to develop a joint children and adult safeguarding audit tool with a working group of council representatives. Many councils had felt the standards were not applicable to them, but when we worked through those standards in the peer review session this was linked more to interpretation of the standard rather than not being able to evidence the standard. Working Together 2026 sets out the requirement for stronger collaboration between partnerships and housing providers so it was decided that this would be a good opportunity to invite housing providers/associations to complete the audit. ESAB had previously invited housing providers to complete the safeguarding adult audit. Trying to establish who the housing providers are across Essex was a challenge, it seems there is no comprehensive list held in any one place.

A total of 24 housing providers were contacted and invited to a briefing session before the audit was sent to them, 11 housing providers returned the audit. Further work is needed to engage with housing providers. Of the 12 City, Borough and District Councils, eleven returned the audit.

Overall safeguarding compliance was high, with an average score of 2.68 per standard out of 3, indicating that most standards were close to being fully met. City, Borough and District Councils achieved a slightly higher average (2.70) compared to Housing providers (2.65), demonstrating generally robust safeguarding arrangements across both sectors.

Performance across organisations was consistently strong, with several councils and housing providers achieving near-maximum scores, reflecting well-established safeguarding leadership, effective multi-agency working, and embedded policies and procedures. However, a small number of lower scores within both groups reduced the overall average, highlighting areas where further development is required. The analysis indicates that while safeguarding practice is largely effective across Essex partners, there remains a need to improve consistency - particularly within some housing providers - and to strengthen engagement to ensure a more comprehensive system-wide picture in future audits.

Multi-Agency Audit Activity

The Essex County Council Professionals Standards and Audit Service coordinate the Multi-Agency Case Audits (MACA) and the Multi-Agency Thematic Audits (MATA) on behalf of the Essex Safeguarding Children Board.

During 2024 a Multi-Agency Thematic Audit (MATA) in relation to domestic abuse was undertaken as a result of learning from the audit:

- June 2025 - ESCB presented the MACA findings to the seven Boards across Southend, Essex and Thurrock- ESCB, ESAB, Thurrock adults and children's boards, Southend adults and children's boards and SETDAB
- June 2025 - The Southend, Essex and Thurrock Boards funded training sessions on Spiritual and Ritual Abuse and So-Called Honour Based Abuse, this training will be repeated at least annually (funding permitting)
- August 2025 – Development and distribution of a ESCB Safety Planning Practice Tool
- 3 learning summaries from the MACAs have been published on the ESCB website
 - Domestic abuse MACA April 2025
 - HBA MACA April 2025
 - CSA MACA November 2025

The current theme of Multi-Agency Thematic Audits is child sexual abuse within the family environment, analysis of local data indicates that Essex identifies Child Sexual Abuse within the family environment at the point of social care assessment less frequently than many of its statistical neighbours and records comparatively low numbers of children identified as being at risk of Child Sexual Abuse through assessment and child protection planning processes. Essex Police similarly record lower levels of reported child sexual abuse offences when compared with comparable police force areas.

Taken together, these indicators suggest a continued need to strengthen the identification, assessment and understanding of child sexual abuse across the partnership and to improve how agencies work together to recognise and respond to concerns at the earliest opportunity.

In recognition of both the national evidence base and local data, the Professional Standards and Audit Service and Essex Safeguarding Children Board have maintained Child Sexual Abuse as a strategic priority for evaluation, learning and practice improvement.

Building on learning from previous thematic audit activity, ECC Professional Standards and Audit Service commissioned and led a Multi-Agency Thematic Audit focused on Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment. This forms part of a broader programme of work designed to strengthen professional understanding, improve assessment and analysis, increase confidence in recognising signs and indicators of CSA, and support more effective multi-agency responses.

The ECC Professional Standards and Audit Service has worked alongside the ESCB Support Team and a network of 46 multi-agency coordinators to undertake a range of activity including:

- Leading and co-ordinating multi-agency audit activity to evaluate practice and identify learning.
- Facilitating multi-agency reflective learning opportunities to improve understanding of CSA.
- Identifying learning needs and supporting the delivery of targeted workforce development activity.
- Promoting evidence-informed resources and tools developed by the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse.
- Influencing strategic priorities through active participation in partnership boards and workstreams.
- Supporting the development of systems, processes and datasets designed to strengthen local understanding and oversight of CSA.

There have been a number of multi-agency case specific audits undertaken in relation to child sexual abuse too, the learning from the case audit and thematic audit will be shared with the Board. There has been agreement for the Delegated Safeguarding Partners to lead a task and finish group that will bring the learning from local audits and review the national recommendations to develop a local action plan; this is work planned for 2026-2027.

Other work planned for 2026-2027 is the development of a child sexual abuse practice tool and the theme of the Stay Safe conferences in March 2027 will be child sexual abuse.

Key Data

The ESCB continue to work with Southend and Thurrock to develop a multi-agency dataset that can be collated across the three local authority areas, it is hopeful that we will be able to trial the new dataset request in quarter 2 of the next financial year. The data below is from ECC Children's Social Care and Education teams.

The inability to consistently access and analyse comparable multi-agency performance information remains a recognised limitation within the partnership and has therefore been identified as a priority improvement area for 2026-2027. It is however recognised that the individual Statutory Partners have robust performance frameworks in place, and performance data is scrutinised both locally and nationally.

Safeguarding Area	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	Narrative / Comment
Number of Child in Need Plans	1447	1460	1522	The number of children with an open Child in Need plan at year end has remained broadly stable over the past three years, with a modest increase in 2025-2026.
Number of Child Protection Plans	625	694	630	Child Protection Plan numbers continue to fluctuate year-on-year. Following the rise seen in 2024-2025, 2025-2026 saw figures reduce to levels similar to 2023-2024.
Number of Children Looked After	1149	1139	1227	The number of children looked after increased in 2025-2026 after two years of decline. Previous reductions were largely driven by falling numbers of separated migrant children.
Number of Separated Migrant Children within our Looked After population	145	90	94	Separated migrant children in care decreased significantly in 2024-2025 and remained low in 2025-2026, contributing to the overall reduction in the looked-after population in prior years..
Numbers of Children Missing from Education	545	659	610	There are several reasons behind Children Missing Education, again, not one cause or source. There will be children that are missing because they have been withdrawn from schooling by parents whilst awaiting support within the SEND system. Furthermore, children with anxiety, behavioural issues or other emotional needs may struggle to attend school regularly
Numbers of Children who are Electively Home Educated	4177	4709	5157	There are a number of reasons for this increase, there is not just one cause. There is a national challenge with the SEND system, and this has seen parents choosing to home educate their child due to frustrations linked with delays in assessments for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP's), not receiving a placement in a particular school of choice and therefore believing that home educating would be the best option for the family. The numbers over the last 3 academic years have consistently risen throughout each academic year and by a similar rate. Whilst the EHE cohort has risen significantly, over the same period the overall school population has remained static.

There were nine referrals for Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews in the reporting period, all referrals are triaged by the Statutory Partners who make the decision on whether to submit a Serious Incident Notification and then progress to a Rapid Review.

The Statutory Partners agreed that one of the referrals did not meet the criteria for rapid review. Eight referrals progressed to rapid reviews:

- Two progressed to a CSPR
- Three will be local learning reviews
- Three are the focus of a thematic review around vulnerable families where neglect is a theme

In addition to the above, reviews that were ongoing over the course of the year were eight Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, and four alternative local learning reviews. Many of these have been ongoing for some time this is due to criminal investigations, delays in judicial process, inquests and volume of reviews.

Reviews in Essex have included a focus on:

- Decision making at the ECC Children & Families Hub when there have been repeated referrals
- Clarification on the process regarding escalation and challenging decisions both within agencies and externally
- Cumulative neglect

Impact of learning from reviews

Four reviews (one CSPR, two local learning events and one thematic review) have been published this year, with further publications planned for later in the year. Reviews are published on our website for a period of 12 months, following the publication of each review the review author hosts a multi-agency briefing. The briefing focuses on the learning from the review and embedding it in practice.

Two author briefings were held this year, 128 people from a range of agencies attended the two briefings. Following attendance at an author briefing, delegates can request the presentation to share the learning with their colleagues, they are then contacted three months after this for feedback and examples of impact.

An example of feedback following an author briefing:

“

‘We had a reflective discussion within a team meeting about the case. We spoke about learnings from it and spoke specifically about information sharing and collating information with other professionals. We spoke about the importance of hearing the voices of other professionals such as teachers. Some people in our team also recognised the case and had worked in previously so we thought about some learning from their experiences. We also spoke about drug use and how we need to be observant and collate information we have around this as well as gain the parents’ voice’

”

Every 6 months the ESCB requests all agencies to provide examples of evidence of impact of the learning from published reviews. Following the latest request for evidence some examples of evidencing the learning from reviews is below.

Learning from a local serious incident has resulted in group supervisions in relation to reviewing known history, patterns of referrals and No Further Action's (NFA) and the cumulative narrative this provides of a child's lived experiences (Cafcass)

Colchester Hospital have a new policy for missed medical appointments, which may indicate neglect of medical needs, and when a referral to social care is to be considered.

EPUT shared a guide to court orders and pre proceedings within the May 2025 safeguarding newsletter highlighting what the Public Law Outline (PLO) is, and what the key aims are. The guidance highlighted when PLO proceedings would be used and there is a link to the ESCB Guide to the Public Law Outline within the newsletter.

HCRG Care Group have recently introduced a Safer Sleep Checklist to support all contacts with under 1-year olds. This checklist outlines: what should be discussed, what resources should be shared, what should be observed and when the safer sleep practice tool should be used. This will be audited to provide assurance that the changes to practice have been embedded in practice. Practitioners are asking families if they can see the sleep area. Co-sleeping advice is given to families whether they disclose they intend to co-sleep or not and are encouraging families to seek safer sleep information when they find themselves out of normal routine.

All children are to be engaged with in person within 15 days of allocation in public law proceedings and no later than 10 working days prior to the first s.7 filing date in private law proceedings, as set out in our Seeing and Engaging children policy. Children to be seen alone and babies to be seen awake. This policy was updated in December 2025 to include that children must now be seen in person at least every 12 weeks in Public Law proceedings, and in Private Law proceedings where a guardian has been appointed under Rule 16.4. (Cafcass)

EPUT have shared the SUDI Practice Tool with all staff and continue to have ongoing discussions with staff through supervision and Duty. The Perinatal Mental Health Service have added the SUDI Practice Tool to their clinical record

Domestic abuse was embedded within the standards as part of the Primary Care Safeguarding Audit 2025 and incorporated into the Adult and Children's Safeguarding Policy for use across Primary Care, ensuring a consistent and inclusive approach to safeguarding practice. (ICB)

As part of the 2025-26 safeguarding training sessions for General Practices, the ICB had a dedicated focus on recognising and engaging families who are resistant to support, with practical strategies to help GPs and professionals work collaboratively to achieve improved outcomes for children and families

NELFT has undertaken work to strengthen recognition and response to male victims of domestic abuse, promoting a gender-inclusive approach to identification, assessment, and support. NELFT's Domestic Abuse Policy has been updated, and staff have access to guidance, helplines, and resources via the NELFT intranet.

Probation has a Women's Strategy which aims to engage women through trauma informed and psychologically safe practice. This includes women only reporting centres, where children can be brought to appointments.

The NELFT Safeguarding Team will be strengthening the understanding of the PLO process and multi-agency working by:

- Including a section on the PLO process in the Safeguarding Standard Operating Protocol which is currently being updated.
- The ESCB PLO guide to practitioners has been shared across SET CAMHS

Learning from reviews and practice-what has been developed to support practitioners?

Learning from reviews and practice conversations highlighted that there were areas of practice that could be improved, ESCB had started developing practice tools as a resource for anyone working with children and families, feedback has been positive so this year the following have been developed:

- **Safety planning practice tool** (July 2025)
 - During reviews we found inconsistencies in the meaning of a safety plan in different organisations. The plans ranged from verbal advice through to very comprehensive plans which may not have been aligned to each other. This guidance has been produced to help create a better shared understanding of safety planning.
- **Physical chastisement practice tool** (Sept 2025)
 - Practitioners at Stay Safe meetings discussed having difficulties having conversations about physical chastisement so this guidance was developed to support them in having early conversations and talking to parents/carers about alternatives.
- **Race, Ethnicity, Culture and Religion practice tool** (Feb 2026)
 - Following the publication of “It’s Silent”: Race, racism and safeguarding children by the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and findings from local reviews where important elements of a family's identity were unknown or not properly considered. This practice tool was developed to enhance the way in which we support individual families so that practitioners fully take account of their racial identity, ethnicity, religious beliefs/practices and culture.
- **Safer sleep practice tool**
 - This was updated and a set of slides with information added to the ESCB website to raise awareness about the need for more conversations about safer sleep for babies. There have been a significant number of baby deaths through SUDI across Essex, so all agencies are working to ensure their staff are giving parents and care givers safer sleep information, directing them to the Lullaby Trust website and using their usual communication channels to promote safer sleep messages.

- **Neglect**

- We asked a local youth group to record a video/soundbites of them talking about neglect and the support that is needed, this is the amazing resource they have produced.

- **Vaping resources**

- Many education and youth settings were raising concerns about young people vaping and how to manage this. Working together with public health a toolkit was developed to support education settings. HCRG Healthy Schools Team worked with parents and carers to produce a toolkit to support them. Essex Public Health Team have worked with a range of organisations to develop a public health campaign on youth vaping Clear the Air.

- **Non accidental injury**

- Remains a concern within reviews, the Southend Essex and Thurrock Management of Suspicious Unexplained Injury/Bruising was updated and published in July 2025. Multi-agency training is available about the inconsistent explanations or unusual patterns likely to be present with non-accidental injury, particularly highlighting the risk to nonmobile infants, and the need for immediate safeguarding. This training allows multi agency practitioners to have discussions about this and be given practical advice.



ESCB has offered and worked in partnership with others to deliver 72 different learning opportunities, a total of 2080 delegates have attended those opportunities. (this does not include the Stay Safe conferences or e-learning) Some learning opportunities have been offered in person though the majority remain virtual.

This has been the first year that the Board has not received an additional grant from the Violence and Vulnerability unit to support multi-agency learning opportunity which is reflected in the reduced number of learning and development opportunities.

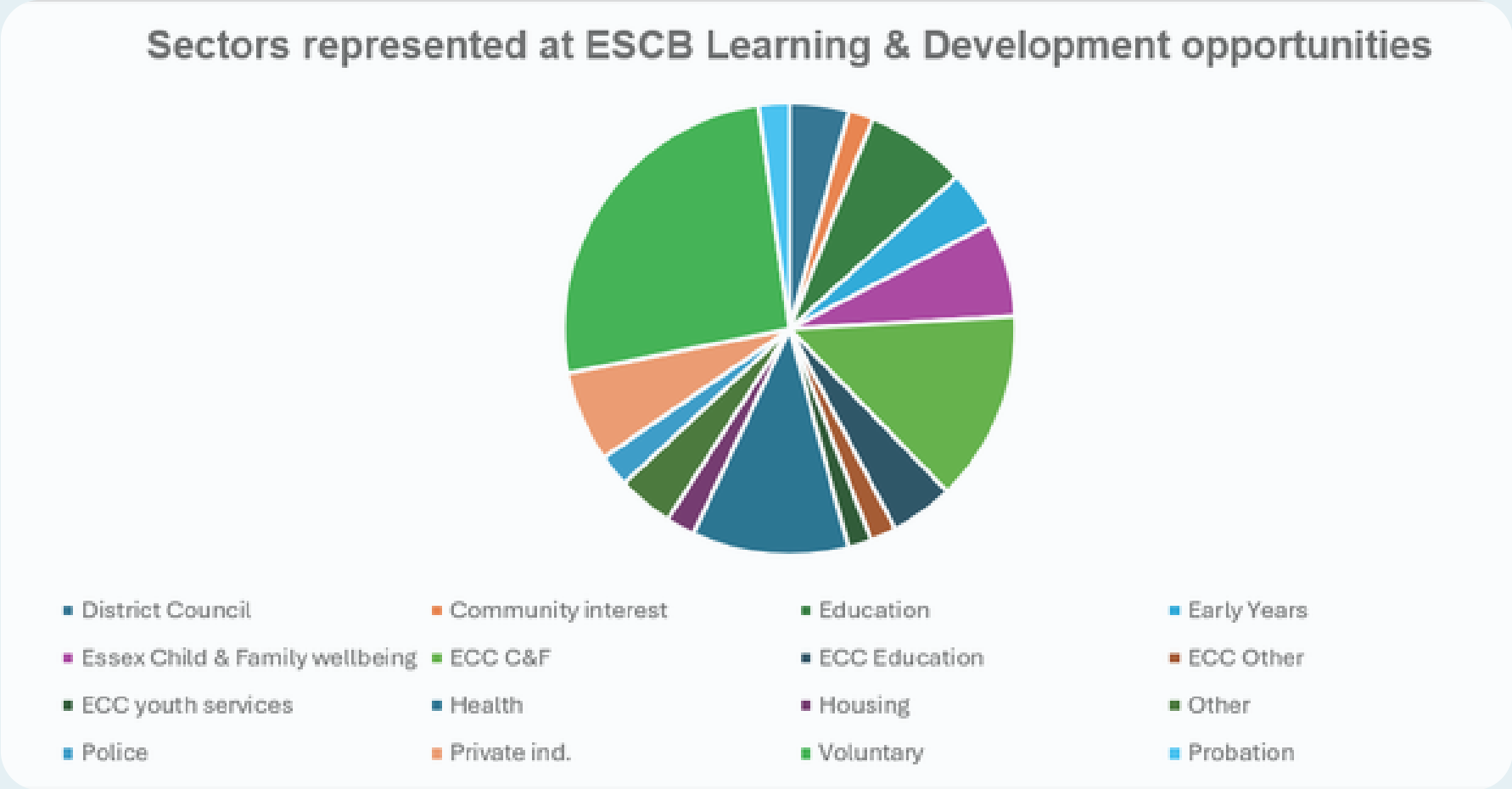
As well as core safeguarding training there was a range on offer for more specific topics including: Child Protection Conference Training, Children's Lived Experience of exploitation, Drug and Alcohol use-emerging trends and challenges, Harmful Sexual Behaviour. For the full range of opportunities see our website.

ESCB offers free access to a range of e-learning opportunities they are:

- Level 1 safeguarding
- Southend, Essex and Thurrock exploitation awareness
- Professional Curiosity
- Non-Accidental Injury

2911 people completed and achieved certificates in one of these e-learning packages. All e-learning packages have a knowledge quiz that needs to be passed before a certificate is issued.

The table below shows the percentage of delegates attending from each sector (this does not include e-learning or the Stay Safe Conferences)



Those working or volunteering in the community and voluntary sector continue to be the sector most likely to attend ESCB learning and development opportunities.

Essex Learning and Development Sub-Committee

The Essex Learning and Development Sub-Committee continue to meet on a regular basis; it continues to be a valuable forum for multi-agency collaboration. Members share resources and contacts and look at opportunities for multi-agency learning and development opportunities. Over the course of the year, they have provided feedback on the ESCB website, suggested organisations for the Getting to Know your Partners sessions and contributed to the Stay Safe conferences.

Southend, Essex and Thurrock Learning and Development Sub-Committee

The Southend, Essex and Thurrock Learning and Development Sub-Committee now brings together the seven partnership Boards across Southend, Essex and Thurrock (adult safeguarding boards, children's safeguarding partnerships/board and the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board) the focus is on opportunities for shared learning and development opportunities, common themes coming from reviews and where there is opportunity to collaborate.



Evidencing the impact on practice from ESCB Learning and Development Opportunities

‘I found today to be very helpful and informative. I actually enjoyed it! The information was helpful, factual and interesting. The trainer covered many aspects linked to sexual abuse and emotional abuse which I found very interesting especially for counsellors who work alone.’ **(Designated person training)**

‘From this training I have taken away the importance of being more alert to potential signs of abuse or neglect, making sure that I always keep the child at the centre of any concern. I have also committed to familiarising myself further with the ESCB Effective Support Document so that I can confidently access the right level of help for children and families. In addition, I will ensure that I share information appropriately and in a timely way and feel more prepared to challenge practice if I believe a child’s welfare is at risk.’ **(Level 2 Safeguarding training)**

‘Following the ESCB Child Protection Conferences training, I identified several key actions to take forward in my practice, which I have since begun implementing in real safeguarding contexts.’

(Child Protection conference training)



‘We’ve also been searching around the Directory of Services and much more equipped to signpost families to better resources than we knew about before.’

(Early Help and team around the family workshop)

‘I will ensure that all staff are confident in recognising and reporting allegations or concerns about adults working with children. I will review our current safeguarding and reporting procedures to make sure they align fully with the LADO process. I will make sure all new and existing staff understand how to contact the LADO and when a referral should be made.’ **(Managing allegations within the workforce)**

‘I feel so much more aware than before the training. Thank you so much indeed. I came to the MAPPA training with an open mind and honestly not knowing much about the team or their role. By the end of the training, I understood what MAPPA stood for, what their role was and what they do for all of us. I found the training very insightful, honest and helpful. I will be sharing the PowerPoint with our team at our next team meeting as am sure they will find this useful too.’ **(Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) awareness)**

Stay Safe Conferences

ESCB re-commenced its annual Stay Safe Conferences in 2025 due to venue availability and capacity in the team, there have been two sets of conferences held in the reporting period, usually there will be one set per financial year.

In April 2025, four Stay Safe conferences were held focusing on multiagency working and themes from reviews. A total of 365 delegates attended the conferences. Delegates received a presentation on the learning from a thematic review into teenage suicide in Essex, an activity about communication, cultural and linguistic sensitivities for ethnically diverse families and self-care.

In March 2026 four more conferences were held with a combined attendance of 315 delegates. The theme was inclusion and diversity, offering colleagues a valuable opportunity to connect, share experiences, and reflect on current practice and how it might be strengthened going forward. The programme included a thought-provoking session about anti-racist practice, a case study provided by Essex Police which included neurodiversity and racism. Additional inputs focused on supporting neurodiverse young people and championing the needs of the LGBTQI+ and Gypsy Roma, Traveller communities.

98% of the delegates attending the conference said they had gained knowledge from the conference that they would use to help make their environment more inclusive. Delegates were asked if there was anything on the programme that they had found particularly useful:

“

‘Being aware of policies and how to actually implement them, feeling more confident in terminology around racism, LGBTQIA+ and neurodiversity’

“
‘The race topic really stood out to me today! This is the topic that made me really reflect on my service/ how others may perceive our service!’
”

“

‘Everything! I spoke to my colleague and we’re already planning a discriminatory focused teaching and safeguarding supervision session with peers’
”

Getting to Know Your Partners

The Getting to Know Your Partners sessions were introduced in response to learning from reviews which highlighted a lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities between organisations. Since January 2024 we have welcomed almost 900 attendees to the 23 one-hour monthly sessions.

The aim of each session is to: Strengthen partnerships, encourage open and transparent dialogue, improve coordination and efficiency and work together better on shared accountability and outcomes.

Organisations that have delivered a session this year are

- The Children's Society
- Essex Partnership University Trust (EPUT)
- Essex County Council Education Department
- Youth Service-young carers
- Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller support – Phoenix Futures
- Essex Police

Between April 2025 and March 2026, a total of 269 attendees participated across 8 delivered sessions. While booking numbers were consistently higher, actual attendance reflects the impact of competing work priorities and day-to-day demands, which influenced participants' ability to attend. Despite this, attendance showed a positive upward trend, increasing steadily following the summer pause, indicating growing engagement and interest in the programme.

Voice of the child

Feedback from children and young people has directly influenced the work of the Harm in the Community sub-committee, Violence and Vulnerability activity, awareness campaigns and future ESCB priorities, ensuring that safeguarding activity reflects the lived experiences of children and young people in Essex.

Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services Listening project

Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services were funded once again by the Essex Violence and Vulnerability Unit to facilitate a listening project, this is the seventh year of running the project and an amazing 5724 young people took part in the project this year, over twice as many as the previous year!

1,367 participated through 'in-depth' discussion and gave detailed insights to questions asked at 89 youth clubs/groups/activities and through detached youth work.

4357 took part in 4 Yes/No questions - 4,263 were asked in assemblies and detached youth work facilitated by the VVU Youth Resource Networkers and 94 took part through participation at the VVU Youth Voice Day.

The project asks young people across the county to share their views on how safe they feel in their communities. This report is used to help shape the work of the Violence and Vulnerability Unit in Essex, the Community grants, and wider partnership work focused around keeping young people safe. The full report can be found [here](#).

Integrated Care Board

Co-produced a media clip with care experienced young people to improve the uptake of Initial Health Assessments.

Essex Police

The voice of the child is embedded within operational practice through investigations, safeguarding referrals, Encompass notifications and engagement activity undertaken by local teams.

Feedback is gathered through multiple routes across the partnership system, including:

- Direct engagement activity such as community events, schools and local outreach;
- Partnership structures including youth voice forums, youth councils and family hub feedback;
- Victim engagement processes and safeguarding reviews (including CSPRs).

This feedback informs local priorities and service delivery, for example through development of community-based interventions and targeted prevention initiatives.

Significant work is underway in force to ensure we capture voice of the child at every appropriate opportunity. This is to maintain the professional curiosity of officers and identify when a child is at risk or in need. Work is ongoing with partners to improve how lived experience is collated and used to inform system-wide learning and decision-making.

Child Protection Conferences

There has been a continued focus on participation and ensuring children's voices inform safeguarding decisions. Nearly 2,000 children and young people were invited to share their views, with 70% contributing to their Child Protection Conference either directly or indirectly. This work supports the ESCB ambition to place children's lived experiences at the centre of safeguarding practice and decision-making.

Risk in the Community-Listening to Children and Families

What Children Tell Us

Children's feedback continues to be one of the strongest indicators of impact within the Risk in the Community model. 83% of young children and/or families attend their Risk in the Community meeting.

Children report feeling heard, understood, believed and included. They describe Risk in the Community practitioners as being honest, responsive and skilled at understanding their lived experience. They also describe using Risk in the Community workers as a bridge with police and other professionals, especially where they want information handled appropriately and acted upon.

Children also notice when professionals challenge wider system barriers, for example around school exclusion, victim-blaming language or misunderstanding of their vulnerability.

What Parents and Carers Tell Us

Parents and carers consistently describe the importance of a safeguarding response that acknowledges that many risks occur outside the home and are beyond their control.

Parents can feel misunderstood or unfairly blamed when traditional safeguarding responses are applied to contextual harm. In contrast they report more confidence and greater engagement where professionals recognise the nature of Risk in the Community, focus on disruption and coordination, and avoid placing responsibility for the harm solely within the family.

Parents also highlighted the importance of support spaces where they can share experiences, reduce isolation and learn from others.

Statutory Partner Contributions and Impact

The Statutory Partners and wider partnership contribute effectively to the ESCB through collaborative working and respectful challenge, below are some examples

Child Protection Conferences

The Child Protection Conferencing Service plays a vital role in bringing together partners from health, education, police, social care and the voluntary sector to assess risk, make safeguarding decisions and coordinate plans for children at risk of significant harm. Through Child Protection Conferences, the service promotes effective multi-agency information sharing, collaboration and decision-making, supporting ESCB's commitment to strong safeguarding arrangements.

Child Protection Coordinators provide leadership across the safeguarding system through their involvement in Stay Safe Groups, liaison meetings and performance activity. They also support workforce development by delivering strengths-based Child Protection Conference training across Essex, helping to promote consistent, relationship-based safeguarding practice.

Since 2024, 835 professionals have formally fed back on the multi-agency child protection process. The multi-agency partnership report feeling listened to and supported, feeling part of decision-making, being able to contribute effectively, positive experiences throughout the child protection process. They reported increased confidence in progressing plans over the course of the child protection journey. The multi-agency partnership particularly valued clear decision-making, transparent thresholds and rationale, recognition of strengths and progress, child-focused discussions, effective management of emotionally challenging meetings.

Service data demonstrates oversight of children subject to Child Protection Plans, conference timeliness, consultation activity and outcomes. For example, Child Protection Coordinators chaired 1,335 conferences involving 3,127 children, undertook 882 child protection consultations and achieved 88% compliance with holding Initial Child Protection Conferences within statutory timescales, arrangements always made with consideration for families engaging and attending.

Child Protection Conferences

What was the impact?

For children and families, there is stronger multi-agency decision-making, improved information sharing, greater focus on children's lived experiences and more co-ordinated planning through child protection conferences.

For the partnership, the service has strengthened professional understanding of safeguarding thresholds, promoted strengths-based and relationship-based practice, improved consistency in conference decision-making and contributed to quality assurance, audit, review and learning activity across Essex.

Multi-agency partners are placing greater emphasis on hearing and evidencing children's views in child protection conferences. Service feedback demonstrates high levels of participation from children and young people, ensuring plans are increasingly informed by lived experience rather than professional opinion alone.

Through ESCB, the service delivered training on strengths-based child protection conferences, partner agencies have received support to understand their role, responsibilities and contribution within conferences. This has resulted in better quality information sharing, more informed decision-making and improved multi-agency ownership of safeguarding plans.



Statutory Partner Contributions and Impact

Essex Integrated Care Board

The contribution below reflects activity undertaken during 2025/26 by the former Essex-facing ICBs - Hertfordshire and West Essex, Mid and South Essex, and Suffolk and North East Essex, alongside preparation for the transition into the new Essex ICB on 1st April 2026.

During a time of significant organisational change, ICB safeguarding team representatives have continued to attend and contribute to the ESCB functions, maintaining strong partnership engagement and safeguarding leadership. The ICB has continued to provide strategic safeguarding leadership across the health system, with a focus on strengthening practice, embedding learning and supporting multi-agency working.

Key activity included:

- Delivery of, and access to Level 4 safeguarding training and supervision, with particular emphasis on embedding learning from National and Local Reviews, including professional curiosity, professional challenge, decision making and information sharing.
- Delivery of a series of domestic abuse learning events, including a specific focus on male victims has been provided across the ICBs and for Primary Care.
- North East Essex ICB funded and supported Next Chapter to initiate a pilot in three GP practices, providing staff training, IDVA support and a toolkit to identify and respond to disclosures of domestic abuse.
- Strengthened escalation processes across health and the multi-agency partnership, including the Placement Breakdown Pathway
- Dissemination of NHSE Guidance on unassisted births through a 7-minute briefing to Primary Care and provider services.
- Co-ordination of the CP-IS Phase 2 rollout alongside Primary Care colleagues and NHS Digital Leads, improving identification of children subject to Child Protection Plans and Looked After Children.
- Influenced improvements in data recording across health providers for children and young people, in relation to ethnicity and nationality, following the National Audit on Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, led by Baroness Casey (2025).
- Continued to focus on safer sleeping alongside recognising the impact of adult vulnerabilities and trauma on parenting capacity and the safety and wellbeing of infants and children.
- Update of the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Health Strategy for 2025-27 to reduce unwarranted variation and enhanced outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers
- Brought together local authorities and health providers to develop and implement the Placement Notification Pathway, supporting smooth transitions between health services for looked after children.

Essex Integrated Care Board

The Integrated Care Boards have continued to support safeguarding practice across Primary Care through safeguarding advice, learning and development opportunities and shared learning from local and national reviews. This included targeted learning on themes such as child sexual abuse, neglect, domestic abuse, professional challenge and information sharing, supporting practitioners to recognise concerns and respond appropriately. Safeguarding learning opportunities were also extended to dental services, recognising their important role in identifying neglect, injury and wider safeguarding concerns in children and young people.

Through a structured Primary Care safeguarding assurance cycle the Integrated Care Boards continued to support General Practice across Southend, Essex and Thurrock to strengthen safeguarding culture, improve referral processes and enhance multi-agency working. Findings from assurance activity were used to shape targeted support and learning for practices.

In collaboration with specialist health teams, the Mid and South Essex ICB led development of health pathways for the neglect of childhood asthma, dental health, epilepsy and diabetes. These were agreed through multi-agency arrangements and are intended to sit alongside the Effective Support for Children and Families in Essex guidance, supporting clearer identification, escalation and response where children's health needs are not being met.

A shared Health and Wellbeing Care Plan has been developed for children with complex or unmet health needs, to improve communication between families and professionals, clarify responsibilities and support coordination where multiple services are involved.

What was the impact?

Partnership working and system learning have contributed to:

- Increased system focus on safer sleeping and co-sleeping risk awareness
- Improved professional language and understanding (e.g. around “non-engagement”) has been explored in practitioner events and supervision
- Enhanced sharing of learning from neglect reviews, audits and MATA findings across Local Operational Groups and Primary Care
- Improved identification of vulnerable children, for those who are on a Child Protection Plan or are Children in Care, through the rollout of CP-IS across a wide range of health providers
- Strengthened safeguarding practice in Primary Care and other health providers through targeted, GP safeguarding forums, supervision, audit feedback and practice discussions.

Safeguarding in Education

The team continues to deliver termly safeguarding briefings, both in-person in each quadrant and an online version, the sessions are split into early years settings and all other education settings. The ESCB Support Team regularly attend the termly briefings to talk about the role of the Board and share learning from reviews. These briefings continue to be well-attended and complement the other training offered by the team, providing regular updates on key information to support leaders in their safeguarding role. There is also a termly briefing for governors which is held online and recorded and a similar version for all Education Directorate staff.

Last academic year the briefings for schools and settings were attended by 496 people at the in-person sessions and 223 accessed the online version. The early years briefings were attended by 294 people in-person and 426 attended online. The governors' termly online briefings were attended by 370 governors and around 340 have viewed the recording of the session.

There is also other work undertaken across the Education Directorate which links very closely with and underpins safeguarding in individual settings:

- The Inclusion Strategy is a key piece of work, and this is being promoted and developed across all settings. There are various strands to the strategy, specifically around Early Help, inclusion, attendance and wellbeing.
- Trauma Perceptive Practice is the Essex approach to understanding behaviour and supporting emotional wellbeing in children and young people. To support this approach is the Trauma Perceptive Practice programme, which has been shared with all education settings, the vast majority of which have now engaged with the training programme in some way.
- There is a Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Team in Essex who work very closely with the Education Safeguarding team and produces a range of resources and guidance documents to strengthen support for mental health and wellbeing in settings.

Safeguarding in Education

The Essex County Council Education Safeguarding Team is a countywide team, covering all education settings (schools, colleges, early years settings, childminders, independent schools and alternative provisions, including Pupil Referral Units). The Head of Education Safeguarding and Wellbeing heads up the team and attends ESCB meetings at all levels so there is Education representation at each one. The team works in close partnership on a range of issues with many other agencies including ECC Children and Families, Police, Children Workforce Allegations Team, CAMHS and the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service.

There are around 650 schools and settings in Essex, and around 1700 early years settings and other provisions. The Education Safeguarding Team has strategic oversight of safeguarding across all education settings and provides a wide range of resources and guidance documents. This includes model policies, risk assessments and reporting templates. The team also provides safeguarding advice and guidance, including on complex cases, and will signpost to other services as required. It takes a lead role in strengthening safeguarding practice across Education settings and offers an extensive training programme to support this.

In September 2024 the team launched its Level 3 safeguarding training offer for Designated Safeguarding Leads in Education settings across the sector. This has been incredibly successful, and the team has now trained just under 2000 staff in the last two academic years, the training supports a strong, consistent approach to safeguarding across all education settings.

In addition to the level 3 training the team offer a wide range of training opportunities to education staff, the team also shares regular written safeguarding bulletins containing key information for settings.

Statutory Partner Contributions and Impact

Essex Police

Essex Police contributed to the Essex Safeguarding Children Board and the wider Essex safeguarding system through strategic leadership, operational delivery and multi-agency activity focused on preventing harm and improving outcomes for children and families.

Activity aligned to the ESCB Business Plan principles:

- **Safer at home:** strengthened domestic abuse responses, recognising children as victims in their own right, and supporting safeguarding through Operation Encompass.
- **Safer in the community:** coordinated partnership activity addressing child exploitation, missing children and harm outside the home, including in transport networks, public spaces and accommodation.
- **Safer safeguarding systems:** improvements to referral quality, information sharing and governance of learning from reviews and audits.
- **Safer in education:** school collaboration via Encompass, children and young people engagement, safeguarding awareness.
- **Online safety initiatives:** Joint work with partners and businesses including Sort Your Settings and Fake or Real - Know the Deal, addressing online harm and emerging risks such as AI-generated exploitation and deepfakes.

Essex Police supported implementation of national reforms including Working Together, Operation Soteria, and work arising from the Casey Review into child sexual exploitation, ensuring alignment between national direction and local partnership delivery.

At a local level, officers contributed directly to partnership priorities through activity including multi-agency case audits, delivery of non-accidental injury training, neglect workstreams, multi-agency training delivery, and leadership of Stay Safe groups.

Effectiveness of our contribution

What has worked well

- A Section 11 audit (January 2026) assessed Essex Police as Fully Met in 39 of 40 standards, providing strong assurance of governance, leadership, supervision and multi-agency working.
- Effective integration within multi-agency safeguarding arrangements supporting coordinated and timely responses to risk.
- Improvements to safeguarding referrals, including digitisation of PP57 processes, enhancing consistency, auditability and identification of cumulative risk.
- Centralised tracking of learning from multi-agency case audits and other reviews, strengthening oversight and dissemination of learning into practice.
- Delivery and alignment of training (including Operation Soteria and Rape and Serious Sexual Offences first responder inputs), contributing to improved investigative quality, trauma-informed practice and victim engagement.

Challenges

- Increasing demand and complexity, particularly relating to domestic abuse, exploitation and online/AI-enabled harm. Restructure in Essex Police has enabled growth in our Domestic Abuse Investigation Teams to mitigate this increase.
- Ongoing need to strengthen consistency of multi-agency information sharing and professional curiosity.
- Disproportionality and data quality (especially ethnicity recording) remain areas of focus across the partnership.

What was the impact?

Partnership working during the year has contributed to:

- Improved identification of accumulative risk by adaptation of PP57 process to allow a fuller referral of at-risk children with increased information sharing.
- Earlier and more effective intervention in domestic abuse and safeguarding cases through joint working and Section 47 activity.
- Improved investigative standards and victim engagement following aligned training/practice development.
- Increased awareness of child exploitation risk across non-traditional safeguarding environments, including accommodation, transport and digital spaces.
- Stronger alignment between learning from reviews and operational practice.
- There is also increasing partnership focus on understanding and responding to disproportionality within safeguarding systems, supported by improved data scrutiny and shared analytical work.

Statutory Partner Contributions and Impact

Essex Probation Service

Probation remains an engaged partner of the ESCB, contributing to board-level discussions and assurance. We contribute to open, timely and transparent information sharing, ensuring that relevant intelligence about individuals who pose a risk is available to partners, enabling more informed decision-making. We contribute to Rapid Reviews following serious incidents and child deaths, sharing relevant information and analysis. We actively support the translation of learning into practice, ensuring recommendations are embedded within probation processes and shared with frontline staff through our quality matters board and leadership team meetings. We would like to develop reflective learning sessions based on these outcomes and plan to implement this within the next 12 months.

We have shared vital information and been involved in learning that has supported our own agency as well as others. Building strong relationships with partners has enabled us to progress areas that have been a challenge (such as information sharing with Children and Families Hub).

Our Deputy Head of Service is an active member of the Neglect Sub-Committee which supports ESCB's focus on improving responses to neglect. This has enabled us to provide insight in parental behaviour on children, supplying us with thought and understanding of neglect which can contribute to us thinking about the risks to children, and the voice of the child in our work and decision making.

We have shared regular updates from the board, including the newsletter and staff have been actively signing up to ESCB training such as "Child Protection", which has seen a positive impact on our practice. In addition, staff attended the Mid Stay Safe conference hosted in March and shared learning from the day.

Child and family voices are reflected in our contributions to MAPPA, MARAC and Child Protection processes, where there is a clear expectation that decision-making is informed by an understanding of the lived experiences of children and families. Another example is an internal child protection oversight meeting that is chaired by Essex North Probations deputy head of service, where practitioners are required to reflect on the voice of the child alongside considerations of any adverse childhood experiences that parents may have experienced.

We have strengthened this approach in the last 12 months through joint training with children social care partners, which has enhanced our understanding of how to effectively capture and reflect the voice of the child in both operational practice and strategic discussions. We further run a yearly "Think Child" campaign which we are currently planning for in July. This has supported improved professional curiosity, more child-centred analysis, and stronger contributions to multi-agency decision-making.

Statutory Partner Contributions and Impact

What was the impact?

We have increased our Child Protection conference understanding through regular attendance at child protection conference training offered through ESCB, with signups becoming a mandatory action for trainee probation officers to complete to embed their learning.

We have shared essential learning material which is linked to learning reviews to support practitioners working with parents, such as safer sleep materials.

We have strengthened our collaboration with the Children and Families Hub, with a particular focus on improving information sharing and ensuring a more coordinated response to families' needs.

The “whole family approach” has been identified as a key area for further development and we will look to target this area over the next 12 months.

Example of effective practice

We managed a case in custody involving significant domestic abuse concerns, where the individual made threats to abduct his children upon release. These concerns were appropriately escalated through child protection processes and subsequently managed at MAPPA level.

A coordinated multi-agency response was implemented, involving Police, Probation, Children's Social Care, and the Prison Service, all working together to safeguard the family. Probation developed a robust risk management plan, including securing an Approved Premises (AP) placement and electronic monitoring on release. Children's Social Care arranged for the family to move into temporary accommodation to further reduce risk. Police coordinated safety planning, briefings, and support for the family, while the prison managed communication and information sharing prior to release. As a result of this strong partnership working, effective communication, and shared safeguarding approach, the individual was released directly to Approved Premises and the family remained safe.

Statutory Partner Contributions and Impact

Essex County Council - Involvement Service - Missing in Essex

The ECC Involvement Service offers a range of support to children and young people who have been identified as going missing through the work of the Missing Coordinator and the provision of missing chats and follow on support.

As with previous years, the highest cohort of young people who go missing are not known to Children's Social Care prior to their first missing episode, this accounts for 62% of children who go missing. Many of these young people will never be known to Social Care due to parents being able to put in boundaries and young people responding to interventions.

Whilst Children in Care account for just 15% of children going missing, the frequency of missing episodes in this group, an average of 8.5 episodes per child means they account for 45% of all missing episodes.

This year saw a reduction in children and young people placed in care placements within Essex by other Local Authorities going missing, however the overall number of missing episodes for this cohort increased. Missing chats are not routinely offered by Essex to those young people placed by other Local Authorities, although this can be requested and a decision will be taken on a case-by-case basis.

Missing chats

Engagement in missing chats is choice based, not all young people chose to accept a missing chat, however missing chats can also be offered to parents/carers to help them to support their child and follow on support can also be offered to Essex children placed inside and outside of Essex. Staff work closely with parents, carers and other professionals so seek the best way to engage a young person. The continuity of the offer, despite numerous refusals demonstrates a commitment to listening to young people's views and experiences.

“You have helped me so much by calling. I feel like you've listened and I'm so pleased you're going to pass on what I've said and the worries I have for R” Parent

Over the course of the year a total of 1671 missing chats were accepted, 572 with young people and 1099 with parents and carers.

Statutory Partner Contributions and Impact

62% of young people accepting a Missing Chat between March 25 and December 25 did not go on to have further missing episodes in 2026.

Missing Chats provide an opportunity for early identification of risks to address a range of different harms associated with those children who go missing. In this reporting period 77 new safeguarding concerns were identified through missing chats.

Follow on support is offered as a part of a missing chat to young people where there are ongoing issues or concerns that may lead to further missing episodes. The ongoing support offered to a young person is tailored to their needs, it may be group or one to one work. Missing Chats workers liaise with a variety of staff and organisations, supporting young people and parents to overcome barriers to engaging in services. The use of missing mini plans as part of early intervention work has supported parents and professionals' understanding of the reasons a child may go missing and to feel more confident in the missing process, whilst creating an opportunity for discussion with the children to prevent further missing episodes.

Where education was discussed with children and young people:

- 30% were in full-time education
- 37% were on part-time timetables
- 33 % were Not in Education, Employment or Training or not attending education.

Those not attending education were 3 times more likely to go missing than those in full-time education. Poor emotional wellbeing and mental health continues to be identified as a significant Push for young people going missing, being recorded in 61% of Missing Chats as a contributing factor.

Parental missing chats also highlight the importance of seeking the child's voice in understanding the dynamics at home, often parents and children will have differing views of reasons for a child going missing. For example, issues within the family home were identified as a push factor in 53% of missing chats with children and young people, and only 20% of parental missing chats.

"It's easier to go out than stay and argue, sometimes she asks me to leave" Young person

Statutory Partner Contributions and Impact

Children and young people go missing for many different reasons, whilst the majority are not being exploited, going missing can be an indicator of serious harm in a child or young person's life.

171 children and young people had open Risk in the Community records on the Children's Social Care system when they were reported missing, representing 13% of all missing children and young people and 32% of episodes.

Demographics of Missing Children

There has been a small increase in the number of children recorded as being from Black or Asian backgrounds reported missing, whilst there has been a small decrease in children reported as being from Dual Heritage backgrounds. This difference could be due to improved ethnicity recording. Overall, the number of children from the Global Majority recorded as going missing has increased to 17% of the total number reported as going missing and 20% of missing episodes.

The remain limitations to the accuracy due ethnicity data not being consistently collected across the safeguarding system, the actual number of children from the Global Majority who go missing is considered to be higher than those we have recorded.

Females account for 5 of the young people with the highest number of missing episodes, with the top 4 all being female. Conversely, when looking at children with the longest missing episodes, only 2 females feature in the list, with the longest period of missing for a female being 41 days in comparison to 121 days for a male.

Children aged 15 years old had the highest number of missing episodes (886) accounting for 24% of all missing episodes in the reporting period, with boys representing 63% in this age group. Within the children aged 13yrs and 14yrs more females were reported missing, with females accounting for 60% of missing episodes for this age group.

Case Study-neurodivergence

Molly is 15 yrs old; she was diagnosed ADHD aged 10. As a young child she lived with her mum, where she witnessed domestic abuse and experienced significant instability due to multiple house moves. She has lived with dad and step-mum since the age of 13, who shared they are doubtful of her ADHD diagnosis, believing it does not explain or excuse some of Molly's behaviour.

Molly shared that she 'used to go missing a lot' when she lived with mum, these episodes were never reported. She has had one reported missing episode since living with dad and step-mum, the family were not open to Children's Social Care at the time of the reported missing episode.

The push factor identified by Molly was impulsiveness and a need for freedom/space/get out of the house. Molly felt that this impulsivity may be triggered her ADHD. Molly described to examples of her behaviours which could be attributed to ADHD and possibly either Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) or Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA), (undiagnosed).

She shared struggling with the different parenting approaches, her step-mum undertook all the parenting, Molly felt she was seeking an 'explanation' for her behaviours, whilst she felt dad was inconsistent in his approach (angry and then conciliatory). The pull factors for Molly were friendships, fun, freedom and a sense of excitement. Molly explained the challenges she experienced in trying to make 'the right choice' but enjoying the excitement of not doing so at times.

Outcome:

The Missing Chat highlighted the impact of Molly's Neurodivergence in relation to her missing. The Missing Chat worker met with step-mum to discuss hers and dad's concerns and strategies to prevent further missing. Through the discussion it was agreed there may be potential for exploring the assessment pathway for Autism/PDA for Molly.

Molly has not had any further missing episodes.

Risk in the Community/Risk Outside the Home

The feedback from young people, parents/carers and data shows us that the most consistent message from the year is that risk reduces where children experience trusted, stable and purposeful support. The most common protective factors associated with children closing to MACE 1 for risk reduction were:

- Trusted professional relationships
- Improved family relationships
- Attendance or reintegration into education
- Changes in peer groups
- Access to positive activities
- Emotional wellbeing support

Evidence from practice, partnership activity and feedback from children and families suggests that Essex is increasingly developing a more contextual, relationship-based and intelligence-informed approach to safeguarding. Children and young people continue to report trusting relationships with Risk in the Community practitioners, and parents describe valuing responses that recognise that many risks occur beyond the home and are not within parental control.

Almost 60% of young people open to MACE 1 (Multi-Agency Missing and Child Exploitation meeting) have either diagnosed or suspected neurodivergent needs, with ADHD being the most common identified diagnosis. This learning has increased understanding of how some neurodivergent children may experience heightened vulnerability to coercion, manipulation, peer pressure and exploitation, reinforcing the importance of adapting safeguarding responses to individual needs.

The majority of young people open to MACE 1 were not engaged in full-time education, with many attending on reduced timetables, accessing alternative provision or experiencing disrupted educational pathways.

Statutory Partner Contributions and Impact

Early Help

Ensuring the safeguarding system has effective early help offer is a priority for the ESCB, the Safeguarding Partners want to ensure that children and families get the right help at the right time.

The role of 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 early help.

The Essex County Council Team Around the Family Support Officers support the early help system across Essex through offering advice, coaching and guidance to the wider workforce and delivering learning and development opportunities.

If a request for support to the ECC Children & Families Hub does not meet threshold for intervention at level 3 or 4 then the requestor and family are offered advice and guidance to develop an early help plan and where appropriate the TAFSO will offer to support with Team Around the Family meetings.

450 delegates attended TAFSO delivered learning opportunities, these include topics such as having a difficult conversation, early help and team around the family workshop, completing an early help plan and ECC Children and Families Hub related workshops.

Early Help Drop-ins are a key support for all practitioners in Essex, they are co-facilitated by the ECC Partnership Leads and Team Around the Support Officer alongside a range of other practitioners, there are four virtual drop-ins per week, although they are quadrant based, practitioners can attend any of the drop-ins. The early help drop-ins are there to support any practitioner who wishes to discuss a case anonymously to get advice and guidance from colleagues in attendance on potential next steps, support services that may be able to assist the child and family.

Team Around the Family Support Officers facilitated 372 team around the family meetings, an increase on last year. An element of the TAFSO role is to build workforce capacity in relation to early help, so through coaching, mentoring and leading the first team around the family meeting it supports the practitioner coordinating the meeting.

Early help case study

The young person (14) was a victim of assault in the community, they became very anxious & could not engage in lessons, rarely attending class. They have a diagnosis of ADHD and Tourette's and was at imminent risk of permanent exclusion from school.

At home there was a recent history of post separation parental conflict which had impacted the children. TAFSO discussed a TAF with mother, offered support and an initial Early Help Plan was co-created over the phone.

The initial TAF attendees included mother, the young person, pastoral staff, Head of Year and Essex Police. There were concerns over recent police incidents, including the young person leaving the house in the middle of the night, not being contactable, and having peers over at their house, who were missing themselves. TAFSO was able to facilitate a discussion with the young person in the TAF around exploitation.

Actions agreed at the TAF included; mother bringing the young person into school daily, the young person to take their ADHD medication more consistently, referral made by school to Children's Society CARE together, Life 360 to be added onto their phone & any missing episodes to be formally reported by parent.

The young person's mock exams went well; professionals are happy with progress citing that the young person is like a different child in how she presents and communicates.

Without the TAF process and the team of support, such as the C.A.R.E referral and Police information sharing so effectively, the risk of exploitation may have increased further and led to possible social care involvement. These issues may have also impacted further on the stability of relationships at home and could have led to total withdrawal from education. The young person has attended most of the TAF meetings so far, and has been vocal, forthright and open throughout which has no doubt helped with the collaborative joined-up approach.



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

- Attendance at the Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services (ECVYS) quarterly cluster meetings and quadrant meetings, ECVYS celebration supper and Youth Voices Day event
- Active members of:
 - Children and Young People's Partnership Board,
 - Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board young people's group
 - Safer Essex
- Contributed to the development of the new Sexual Abuse and Violence Strategy
- Coordinated the move to the SET Child Protection Procedures going live on a web-enabled platform
- Presentation of the work of ESCB was given to the ECC People and Families Scrutiny Committee
- Regular meetings with the Essex Safeguarding Adults Board Manager and with Essex County Council Social Care Academy to support collaborative working
- Joint working with Southend and Thurrock safeguarding partnerships on a range of projects

ESCB communications and campaigns

Child Exploitation Awareness Week-communicaton statistics

7,597 Social Media Impressions with 331 Engagements (likes, shares, comments)

928 Website Visits

67 QR Code Scans – linking directly to safeguarding information.

Regional radio coverage (Greatest Hits Radio & Heart Essex) and online news stories and police communications

ESCB communication highlights

During this year the ESCB Senior Communications Officer went on a secondment, so the remaining team members have all picked up elements of the communications role in her absence and this will continue for a further 18 months. It must be noted that the team have done an amazing job in maintaining and in some areas increasing the reach of the ESCB communications channels.

ESCB website - Average of 12,166 visitors per month

News stories – Building on last year's commitment to uploading news stories more regularly, there has been a further 5% increase in the number of views of the news page each month.

ESCB bulletin - Bulletins are sent twice a month, there is a general bulletin at the beginning of a month and then another learning and development focused bulletin mid-month. ESCB bulletins have an average open rate of 34%, this is considered above the industry standard and slightly higher than the previous year.

Social media – ESCB has been running daily posts on Facebook and LinkedIn since December 2025, the number of impressions across both platforms has increased since the team have been posting more regularly. Daily posts include posts created by the ESCB Support Team and sharing posts from other key organisations both in Essex and nationally.

ESCB communications and campaigns - Child Exploitation Awareness Week 2025

A decision was made to bring the various child exploitation activity into a week of activity across the county in June 2025. Each day of the awareness week focused on a key audience:

Monday: Leisure & Hospitality (Operation Makesafe-a national police-led initiative that trains hospitality workers to spot and report the signs of child exploitation). This led to conversations about exploitation with 79 people.

Outcomes from Operation Makesafe

- Strong willingness to engage
- Gaps in safeguarding knowledge identified
- Demand for practical response training
- Some concerning real-world scenarios observed

Tuesday: Sports venues and coaches – there was a focus on raising awareness of exploitation as part of the Active Essex networking event that was already planned.

Wednesday: Transport hubs and networks (Operation Henderson-a local initiative that aims to raise awareness of how exploitation can be present on transport networks, supports staff, drivers and the public to spot concerns early and promotes clear reporting routes). This led to conversations about exploitation with 681 people.

Outcomes from Operation Henderson-conversations with adults

- High engagement with passengers and staff
- Increased awareness of reporting routes
- Intelligence gathered from frontline interactions
- Safety concerns raised in some locations

Outcomes from Operation Henderson-conversations with children and young people

- Growing awareness of exploitation risks
- Positive engagement with materials and conversations
- Hesitancy remains around reporting concerns

Thursday: Raising awareness in relation to online safety with parents and carers – 408 people attended this session.

Friday: Education providers-lesson plans were provided to education settings to support them to raise awareness in relation to exploitation with their students.

The communication statistics

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ESCB Budget

Funding for the ESCB is split equally between the three Statutory Partners, this has been the case for the last five years, additional contributions come from the Probation Service and the City, District and Borough Councils.

Contributor	Value of contribution	
	2025/26	2024/25
Essex County Council – Children & Families directorate	£144,823	£134,199
Essex Police	£144,823	£134,199
ICBs: - Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB - Suffolk and North East Essex ICB - Mid and South Essex ICB	£144,822 - £27,784 - £37,594 - £79,444	£134,198: - £25,746 - £34,834 - £73,616
The Probation Service	£7,497	£7,497
12 local (city, district & borough) councils	£14,520 (£1,210 each)	£14,520 (£1,210 each)
Total income	£456,486	£424,614

The contribution from the Statutory Partners was increased to ensure the ESCB Business Support Team posts are funded through the main budget and not reserves. The budget going forward to 2026/27 will be a standstill position give the financial pressures on the Statutory Partners, as a result any reviews will need to be covered by the reserves or funded on a case-by-case basis.

Priority areas for the ESCB 2025-2026

The Lead Safeguarding Partners have set the priorities across Southend, Essex and Thurrock for the partnerships/board for the coming year, they are set out in their introduction. In addition to the shared priorities Essex will continue to focus on the agreed strategic priorities of:

- Safer at home
- Safer in education
- Safer in the Community
- Safer Safeguarding Systems

In addition to the above the Board will continue to

- Support the implementation of the Social Care reforms and the Families First Partnership programme of work
- Reviews continue to be a significant area of work for the partnership and the support team; the focus continues to be on the implementation of the learning and evidencing the impact.
- Development of the Child Sexual Abuse within the family environment working group to coordinate the work underway in Essex and identify any gaps.
- Ensure the partnership has reviewed processes in Essex in response to the Southport Inquiry.
- Continue to support the Lampard inquiry-the Independent Statutory Inquiry investigating the deaths of mental health inpatients in Essex. The inquiry has commenced and has started hearing from some of the agencies involved and bereaved families. Partners are responding to requests from the inquiry as needed and it is anticipated this inquiry will be happening for several years.

What are we, as a Board, doing better because of Partnership activity?

- Stronger professional challenge and transparency
- Greater shared ownership of safeguarding priorities
- Improved joint responses to emerging risks and shared responses

Challenges

There are a number of significant changes to the safeguarding system over the coming year and beyond, it is vital that the system remains focused on safeguarding children.

Strategic risks/opportunities

- The Government announced the decision in relation to Local Government Reform in March 2026, the Government announced that there will be five unitary authorities created replacing the county council, current unitary authorities and city, borough and district councils. Vesting day will be 1 April 2028, with shadow authorities coming into place post elections in May 2027. Decision on future safeguarding partnership arrangements will be part of the discussions as the work on local government reform develops.
- National programme of police reforms
- Significant changes within Probation following the sentencing review which will take time to embed, it will change the way in which Probation manages individuals quite significantly with expected increases in community sentencing which increases the need for strong safeguarding and risk management partnerships.
- The changes within the Integrated Care Board are being embedded and the new ways of working are still being implemented.
- A number of partners raised the issue of the continued challenge of the collection, analysis, and sharing of meaningful data across the partnership. Ensuring that the right information is provided to the appropriate practitioners in a timely way remains complex, particularly when sharing across agencies and geographic boundaries.
- Ensuring there are effective information sharing arrangements in place, this is especially important during a time of significant system changes
- Challenges have included working across three local authority areas and a significant number of health providers during a period of organisational change and reform. Maintaining consistency, avoiding duplication and developing approaches that are sustainable across the Essex footprint has required continued strong partnership working and clear safeguarding leadership.

Practice risks/opportunities

- Embedding whole-family approaches across agencies, including effectively integrating adult-focused services such as probation with children's services, will remain a key area of challenge and opportunity.
- Managing increasing demand/complexity, particularly in exploitation, domestic abuse and mental health
- Responding to emerging threats including online and AI-enabled abuse.
- Ongoing impact of the cost-of-living crisis, poverty and deprivation on children and families
- The need for early intervention to address emotional dysregulation and mental health difficulties.
- Strengthening the voice and lived experience of children and young people
- Strengthening early identification of risk outside the home: Further strengthening workforce confidence to recognise and respond to risk outside the home at an earlier stage, including at low and emerging risk levels.

System risks/opportunities

- Strengthening consistency and clarity in multi-agency roles, responsibilities and information sharing.
- Increasing expectations on providers to take on safeguarding functions previously undertaken by the ICB, without additional capacity or clear system accountability.
- Ensuring the learning from reviews is cascaded throughout agencies, relevant learning is implemented and that, where relevant, agencies can evidence the impact of the learning from reviews.
- Embedding a more robust understanding of online harm: developing shared language, confidence and practice tools.
- The impact of social media on children and young people and how the system can support parents/carers and practitioners.