

**SERIOUS  
ABOUT  
SOCIAL WORK**

**Sufficiency and  
Commissioning Strategy for  
Children in Care in Essex  
2018-2022**

**Updated September 2020**

**Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children in Care  
2018-22: Content**

	<b>Section</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1</b>	<b><u>Introduction and Purpose</u></b>	3
<b>2</b>	<b><u>Needs Assessment Summary</u></b>	7
<b>3</b>	<b><u>Feedback from Children and Young People in Care and Care Leavers</u></b>	10
<b>4</b>	<b><u>Progress and Future Intentions</u></b>	13
4.1	<u>Edge of Care</u>	13
4.2	<u>Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities: Short Breaks</u>	16
4.3	<u>Fostering</u>	18
4.4	<u>Adoption and Special Guardianship</u>	20
4.5	<u>Residential Care Placements</u>	22
4.6	<u>Educational Provision and Support for Children in Care with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities</u>	24
4.7	<u>Semi-Independent Accommodation, Supported Lodgings and Housing Related Support</u>	27
4.8	<u>Leaving Care</u>	28
4.9	<u>Innovation, Joint Commissioning and Partnership Working</u>	29
<b>5.</b>	<b><u>Making a Difference: Reviewing our Strategy and Approach</u></b>	36
<b>6.</b>	<b><u>Appendix 1: Summary of Intentions</u></b>	37
<b>7.</b>	<b><u>Appendix 2: Full Needs Assessment</u></b>	41

## 1. Introduction and Purpose

The Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to **secure accommodation for children in their care, within 20 miles of home and within local authority boundaries wherever possible and appropriate**. This is known as the 'sufficiency duty' and is stated in the Act as: *“the Local Authority must take steps to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the Authority’s area boundaries which meets the needs of children that the local authority is looking after and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority’s area”*.

This Strategy sets out how Essex County Council (ECC) will fulfil these duties and meet the needs of our Children in Care and Care Leavers. It includes the Council’s commissioning intentions, and supports our vision for children and young people which is articulated in our Children in Care Partnership Strategy:

***“In Essex we are committed to supporting children to remain within their families. We do so by working with them to bring about change, so that parents and carers are able to provide good parenting, firm boundaries and emotional support. Where children cannot safely remain with their families, we seek to provide high quality substitute care, preferably within family settings but otherwise in suitably matched high-quality residential units, as near as possible to their home locality to maintain links with their families and communities. We aim for children to be in care for the shortest time possible to achieve a sustainable exit from care that meets all of their needs, whether that is a return home or a permanent alternative family arrangement.”***

When assessing “sufficiency”, Essex County Council considers the condition of the local market (which will include the level of demand for the specific types of provision locally) and the amount and type of supply that currently exists. We also consider the capacity of local providers and the quality and suitability of all providers. This is within the context of the current resource and overall budget priorities of the Council.

To inform this, this Strategy analyses the needs of children and young people in care and the extent to which these can be met in Essex. It also explores likely changes in the overall care population between now and 2022. It includes feedback from children and young people in care and leaving care on their experiences and priorities.

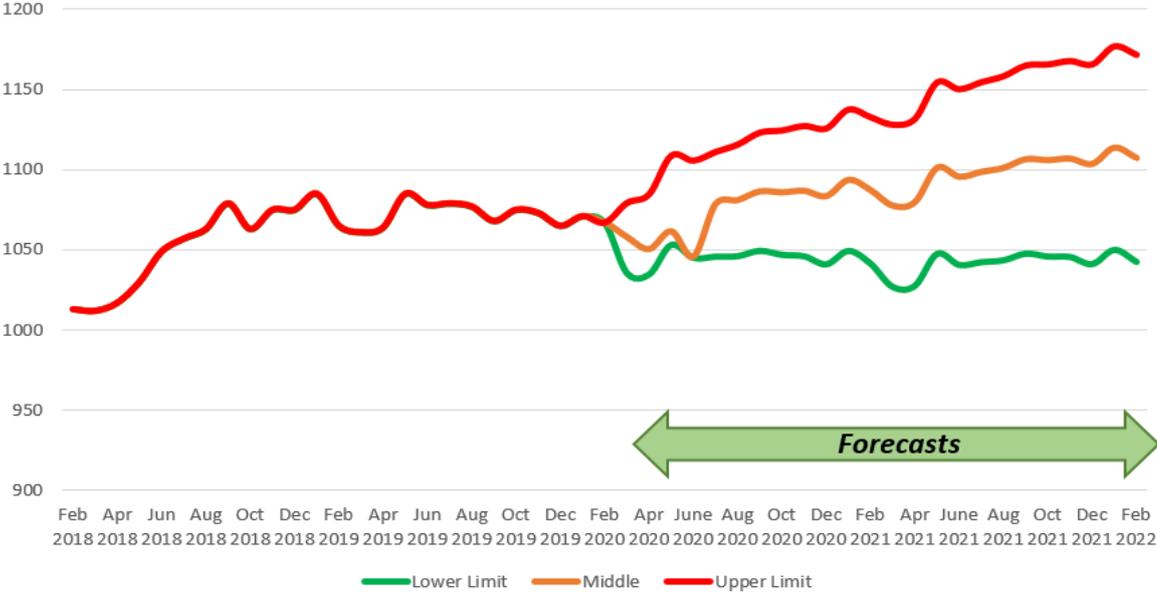
The current iteration of this Strategy has been produced in September 2020 and has therefore been written in the context of the coronavirus pandemic. This has meant that some elements of our intended programmes of work have been disrupted; we are currently considering how they can be restarted or reprofiled. We have also been assessing on an on-going basis the impact of the pandemic on our Children in Care population and on the services we provide. Specific impacts in terms of sufficiency have been:

- An increase in placement demand due to increased pressure on families
- A reduction in foster carer placement availability due to some foster carers shielding and being cautious about accepting new placements
- Disruption to the availability of residential placements due to staffing pressures and restrictions on movements
- Difficulties in undertaking placement moves, including placing children for adoption
- Increased risk of placement instability due to increased pressure on families, lack of respite opportunities and schooling, reduction in support services, etc

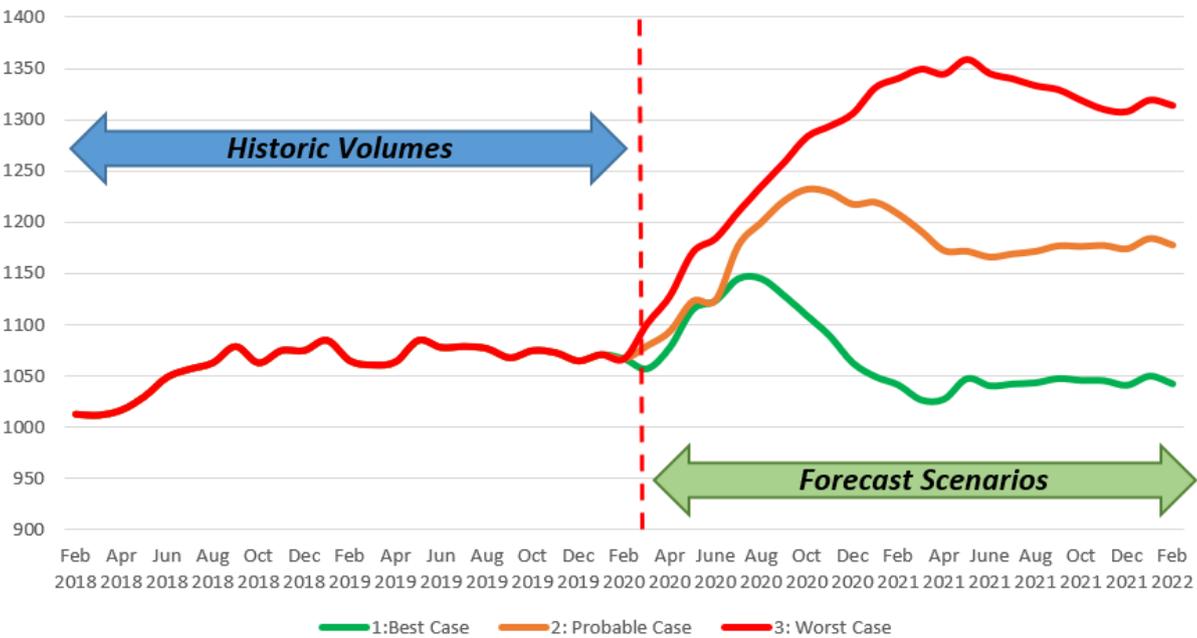
Alongside monitoring immediate impacts, ECC has also been undertaking detailed modelling to anticipate likely future demand pressures which may result from the impact of the pandemic on families and as a result of the reduction in the availability of preventative services during the time of lockdown. Various models have been produced to show both the best and worst case scenarios when the levels of normal demand (what we would have been expecting to happen pre-COVID) are added with potential new demand and any 'backlog' demand that has built up in the system during the lockdown period. Expected normal demand forecast figures range between 1043-1172 to 2022. Forecasts including normal demand, backlog demand and potential

new demand to 2022 vary from 1043 and 1314 across best to worst case scenarios. Current profiling is using 1178 as the most likely 'probable case'. This will be kept under review across the remaining course of this Strategy.

**Children in Care Forecasts: A) Expected Normal Demand**



**Children in Care Forecasts: April 2020 - March 2022**

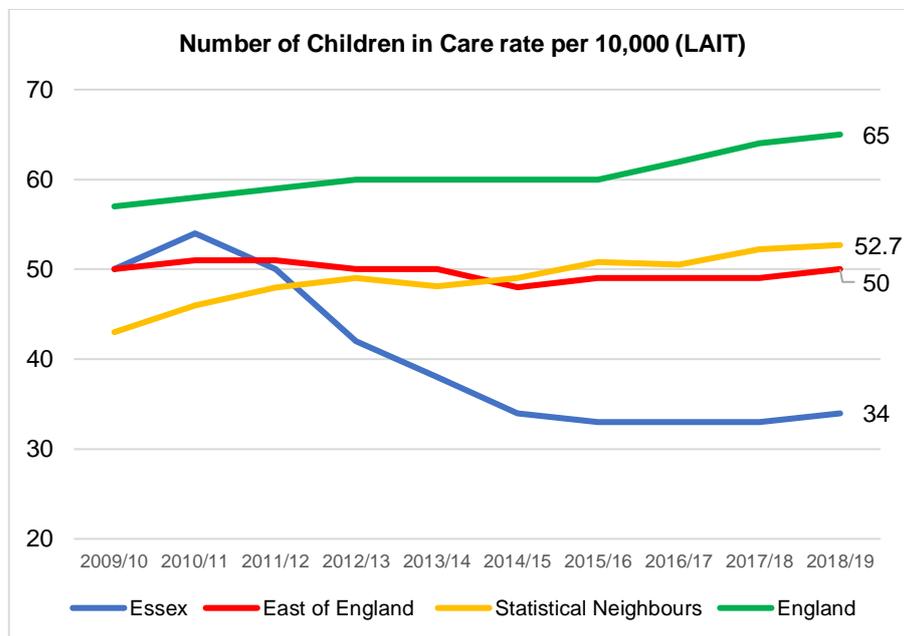


We have also been very aware of the impact of the pandemic on our children and young people in placements, particularly residential ones and those who entered new placements during lockdown. Contact with birth families has been disrupted, which in turn has potential to disrupt placement stability. We have been monitoring the impact on mental health and providing support as required in conjunction with other agencies. Specific concerns have been raised about Care Leavers and the potential for increased isolation and loneliness. The Involvement Service undertook a short-term research project with Care Leavers in May 2020 which found that the majority of the 58 respondents felt well supported but the need for continuing support across certain areas is acknowledged, including dealing with loneliness, parenting young children and accessing certain services. Some young people have had positive experiences from which we can learn, for example young people in supported accommodation, who have found new ways to support each other through difficult times.

## 2. Needs Assessment Summary

A full needs assessment can be found at **Appendix 1**.

- **The number of Children in Care in Essex has fallen over the last ten years**, falling by 26% since 2009/10 (386 children). As of January 2020, there were 1076 Children in Care in Essex which matched the January 2019 figure. The projection for January 2021 is 1094. At the end of March 2020 there were 1053 Children in Care (33.5 per 10,000). The most recent Children in Care per 10,000 for England (2019/20) is 65.00, with a 1.00 change since the previous year.



- **Essex numbers of Children in Care have remained low since 2012/13** compared to the England, East of England, and Statistical Neighbour averages.
- Those entering care within the **16 or over age** category have seen a significant rise in proportion, from 108 in 2017/18 to 143 in 2018/19, an increase of 32%.
- There has been a **rise in the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) population** in care over time, from 93 in 2017/18 (9% of LAC), to 108 in 2018/19 (10% of LAC). As of March 2020, there are 102 recorded UASCs (10% of LAC).

- There has been **increases in the numbers of children leaving care**: with 529 care leaver exits in 2019/20, 472 exits in 2018/19 and 458 exits in 2017/18.
- Numbers of **Care Leavers have been increasing**. As of November 2019, there were 623 Care Leavers in receipt of leaving care services, this was an increase of 18 since November 2018. In March 2020 there were 756 care leavers.
- There has been a continued increase in **physical and emotional assessment factors** present when entering care as well as **neglect and drug and alcohol related factors**. This indicates a continuing demand for provision that can support children and young people with more complex emotional and behavioural needs. There has been an increase in demand for placements that can support young people with more **complex needs and vulnerabilities**, including those at risk of gang involvement, substance misuse and child sexual exploitation.
- In March 2020, **8.33% of Children in Care had a disability** (95 children). In June 2019 this was **9%** (92 children), a slight reduction from 10% in June 2018 (102 children).
- The **overall percentage of children being placed within 20 miles from their original home has increased by 1.4% points**, from 87.6% in January 2019 to 89% in January 2020.
- The **overall percentage of children being placed within Essex has fallen by 7.4% points**, from 74.4% in January 2019 to 67% in January 2020.
- The **most used placement type has continued to be fostering** with 67% of Children in Care being in a foster placement in June 2019, raising to 71% in March 2020.

Placement Category	% of children placed within Essex (Jan 2020)	% of children placed within 20 miles of original home (Jan 2020)	% of LAC by placement type in June 2019
Fostering	71.5	88.8	67%
Kinship Fostering	68.3	97.5	6%
Placed at Home	60	100	2%
Placed for Adoption	65.8	70.7	3%
Residential	37.3	85.6	12%
SIA/supported lodgings	76	91.7	9%
Secure	0	100	0.3%
Blank/other	18	90.9	1%
Total	67	89	

- **Fostering, Placed at Home and Residential have all seen declines in the percentage of placements within Essex** with Placed at Home seeing the largest fall of 35.7% points.
- **Residential remains the placement type with the lowest percentage of placements within Essex** with only 37.3% within in Essex in January 2020, a 5% fall from January 2019.
- In 2018/19, **65% of Children in Care under the age of 16 had been in the same placement for 2 years or more.**
- In 2017/18, **14.7% of Children in Care in Essex had a mid-year school move in one year** making Essex 3.3% points higher than the national average and 2.2% points higher than the Statistical Neighbour average.
- **7.2% of Children in Care in Essex had 2 or more placement changes in 12 months** in 2017/18, 3.2% points lower than the national average and 3.3% points lower than the Statistical Neighbour average.
- As of January 2020, **the majority of young people have been in care for 2-5 years.** However, in January 2019, the majority were in care for 5-10 years. There has also been a significant **reduction in those in care for less than 6 months.**

### **3. Feedback from Children and Young People in Care and Care Leavers**

Essex County Council, as corporate parent, has pledged to ensure that Children in Care and Care Leavers receive the very best chance possible to go on and lead fulfilled and successful adult lives. The Essex Corporate Parenting Pledge, *We Care About You*, was developed with children and young people in 2010 and is reviewed annually. It sets out children and young people's priorities, which help them feel cared about and valued. In addition, the Council has signed up to the National Care Leavers Charter and developed its own commitment in the *Essex Care Leavers Charter*.

All Children in Care in Essex are welcomed into the Children in Care Council which plays a pivotal role in monitoring the Corporate Parenting Pledge; exploring progress qualitatively with other Children in Care and engaging in regular dialogue and work planning with members of the Corporate Parenting Panel and strategic decision makers. Discussions with children and young people at It's My Life events are a crucial component in evaluating Corporate Parenting responsibilities. Regular surveys are sent out to Children in Care and Care Leavers to ensure their views and experience contribute to monitoring our Corporate Parenting Pledge. These programmes and projects are facilitated by the Involvement Service in Quality Assurance and Safeguarding.

In 2019, 319 children and young people participated in the It's My Life event at Danbury including 170 Children in Care and Care Leavers, 61 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children in Care, and 78 Children in Need and Children Subject of Child Protection. Nearly all children and young people participated in meaningful discussions about services, covering important topics such as stability, relationships, aspirations, independence, bullying and social media.

Key messages that were emphasised by children and young people during this event included: the impact of 'being different'; the importance of stability and the impact of instability; the difficulties of being open and honest with peers about being a child in care; and the importance of trusted relationships. These messages emphasise the

sensitivities professionals must navigate in working with Children in Care and children receiving other Social Care services. They must balance often conflicting messages from children and young people wanting adults and professionals to be discreet about being in care, against those children and young people who want professionals to celebrate Children in Care and challenge the often negative associations and perceptions of care.

The resulting report from the 2019 It's My Life event has been widely shared with decision makers and services including the Corporate Parenting Panel, the Children in Care Partnership Board, Children in Care Workstream Meetings, and Extended Managers Meetings for discussion and response. Key actions will include:

- The Virtual School taking a role in how schools can sensitively support Children in Care; minimising opportunities for them to be identified as different. New Trauma Perceptive Practice is being delivered in schools which will develop a better understanding of the need for emotional well-being support.
- Children in Care and fostering teams reflecting on how services might help support Children in Care to tell their stories, manage risk and build resilience against bullying, including building friendships. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service will explore how it enables children and young people to better understand the role of IROs.
- Leaving Care teams considering how Care Leavers can be better supported to re-establish contact with family members. Access to Resources will respond to Care Leavers views about a lack of support available in Semi-Independent Accommodation and opportunities for practicing independent living.
- The Children in Care Partnership Board considering how together it can support Children in Care and Care Leavers to gain experience and access to sought after professions through the use of work shadowing, mentors and apprenticeships.
- Social care teams responding to the views that many children and young people do not understand the role of a social worker and how

confidentiality and lack of trust is a significant barrier for developing good relationships. The co-development of the Social Work Agreement will respond to some of these issues and help foster a better understanding of social work and build better relationships. Services will also reflect on what information is available online for children and young people to 'google' and consider if parents are well equipped to explain what is happening and if not how services might better guide parents to help them explain things to the child and provide support.

- The Essex Social Care Academy and fostering teams will consider feedback from children and young people about how unhappiness often triggers poor behaviour and that more work needs to be undertaken to explore what is happening with the child and manage this before a decision is made to change a placement.

## 4. Progress against the Strategy and Future Intentions

### 4.1 Edge of Care

The Essex Divisional Based Intervention Teams (D-BIT) deliver a range of services to safely divert children from coming into care and to promote Children in Care to connect or be unified with their families.

- D-BIT Core Teams: These teams work with young people aged 8 -17 years on the edge of care and their families, using solution focused brief therapy. The teams are quadrant based and are now in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of operation. In 19/20, 72% of those referred had a successful outcome, with young people remaining in the care of their families and kin. The teams have also contributed to the stabilisation of foster placements and Special Guardianship Order arrangements and the prevention of adoption breakdowns.
- Connecting and Uniting Service: D-BIT also have two Connecting and Uniting Teams to support Children in Care to connect and develop good relationships with their birth family where this is appropriate, and to support the return of children to the care of their families where it is deemed viable and safe to do so. The unification process is developed in collaboration with the child's social worker, the child, their family and support networks and other involved professionals to support successful and sustained results. Families are supported for up to 18 months.

The over-10s team has been operational since 2016 and in the year 19/20 the team worked with 34 families. Of the cases closed, 47% of children referred returned to the care of their kin, and 36% established better family connections with their birth family networks. There was limited work carried out with the other 17% due to various reasons. Owing to the success of the over-10s team, in October 2018, an additional team was established to provide the same service to children under-10. Over the period of operation to date the team have worked with 34 children from 25 families. Of the cases closed to the team, 66% of the children referred have returned home to live

with family members and their cases are closed to the team. Due to safeguarding concerns established at the planning stage of work for the rest of the children referred, these children remain in care.

There are multiple benefits from engagement with D-BIT to the engaged families and the work of the teams also enables fostering placements to be released, contributing to our overall fostering strategy which is focused on increasing in-house provision. The teams focus on better understanding of how we can improve the connections between children and young people in care and their family networks either as a precondition to enabling the young person to return home or as a benefit in its own right. Better understanding this has the potential to contribute to improvements in placement stability, in unification stability, in the use of contact and in outcomes for Care Leavers.

- D-BIT Emotional Wellbeing Project: The D-BIT Emotional Wellbeing Team has been approved to operate for one year as an experimental pilot and will provide Solution Focused interventions to young people aged 11-17 where it is deemed by the referring social worker they have emerging or developed emotional wellbeing difficulties / issues / challenges and they are not eligible or being provided a service by the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service (EWMHS). Referrals will come from across the county from teams including Assessment & Intervention, Family Support & Protection and Children with Disabilities and are largely expected to be from the Child in Need population.

The primary purpose of the Team is the improvement of the emotional wellbeing, resilience and lives of young people who are not currently receiving support. It is intended through this support to prevent future escalations of need including hospital admissions, mental health diagnosis/intervention and entering care. The rollout plans for this team were delayed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic as team members were re-deployed elsewhere in the Service. A partial go-live commenced in June 20 and a plan is in place to align the full capacity of team members to emotional wellbeing cases by the end of 2020, dependent on remaining additional demand pressures requiring continued re-deployment of staff.

- D-BIT Life Chances Project: This project contributes to the work being done in Essex under the Transforming Care national programme which is focused on driving a reduction in the need for people with learning disabilities and/or autism to be placed in mental health assessment and treatment inpatient services, residential care or residential schools; or their engagement with the criminal justice system. This project uses a strength based, whole family approach to provide early support to families with children with disabilities who may be struggling. The Child in Need Reviewing Service (CINRS) are currently monitoring and evaluating the impact of this project to inform its longer-term development.

Each Quadrant has a Family Centre service. Although all the centres are responsible for delivering the same kinds of services, their delivery differs depending on local need. Their services include court-directed parenting assessments, supporting social workers to deliver good quality parenting assessments, and delivering family and group-work, e.g. to address trauma, or domestic abuse (Safer Lives). They also provide a safe venue for supervised contact. Each of the service managers responsible for the Family Centres also has a cross-county lead, for example on domestic abuse.

A specific initiative recently launched in Family Centres is 'Supporting You', a programme for parents who have had their children placed permanently with alternative carers. Parents are helped to address trauma, and other issues preventing them from caring for their child/ren with the intention of improving their ability to care for any future children they may have and reduce the risk of further proceedings. The initiative is being evaluated on an on-going basis but there are early examples of positive impact on an individual basis.

Our Family Group Conference (FGC) Service provides an experienced and effective countywide resource, which better enables families to have a voice. Its work is entirely consistent with our strengths-based approach, promoting a culture in which family resilience is improved and dependence on social work interventions

reduced. Following a successful pilot of the use of FGC in Family Solutions (the Essex Troubled Families Service) this has now been rolled out countywide.

### **Edge of Care intentions**

- Maintain the delivery of good quality edge of care services (including D-BIT, Family Centres and Family Group Conferencing).
- Implement the D-BIT Emotional Wellbeing Team to provide early intervention to young people age 11- 17 open to social care who have emerging emotional wellbeing difficulties.

### **4.2 Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities: Short Breaks**

Essex continues to develop a mixed model of short breaks and respite for families of children with disabilities, to support children to remain at home and prevent escalation to residential provision. This includes a diverse community short breaks offer, two in-house overnight respite centres, spot purchased overnight respite provision and family-based care, including short break foster carers and shared care. Over 3,100 families are registered for our short break services.

ECC has a statutory duty to provide overnight short breaks for disabled children and their families where a need is identified as part of a social care assessment. The provision should meet the individual needs of the child and support the family to have a short break from caring. There is a range of overnight short breaks available to families in Essex, this includes ECC's in-house services (The Maples and Lavender House) and spot-purchased contractual arrangements with providers.

Maples and Lavender are Ofsted regulated short break children's homes owned by ECC. Maples is a two-flat (8 bed) residential home in Harlow. It primarily supports children living and/or attending school in West Essex. Lavender is a three-flat (12 bed) residential home in Colchester. It primarily supports children living and/or attending school in North Essex. Use of Maples and Lavender has decreased over time as the range of alternative options has grown. To meet individual needs and choices, ECC

has promoted the development of a range of overnight respite options and this range of provision has grown over the past few years.

ECC also commissions a Community Based Short Breaks service which includes community clubs and activities for children and young people with SEND and use of adapted beach huts and caravans. In addition to offering respite to families these services also offer children important opportunities to socialise and interact with their peers.

The current model of provision for clubs and activities has a lead provider that oversees the support and quality assurance of the range of club and activities across the county. ECC is redefining the wider offer to children with disabilities to ensure an equitable offer is made to families that need the service. Even though there is a large network of providers across the county, there are issues with sufficiency of places in certain areas and in respect of children and young people with certain needs. The work to develop the offer will consider how to address this, and, how to encourage the expansion of access to mainstream provision.

The Council remains committed to the development of the range of services for children and young people with SEND. The current range of services available in the community for children and young people with SEND are primarily delivered by the voluntary and community sector. Most of these services can be accessed without a formal assessment which reduces waiting lists and waiting times. The availability of these services and the approach to access supports the Council's early intervention offer.

#### **Short Break intentions:**

- Review the range of short breaks and community provision for children with disabilities, to prevent needs escalating and support families within the community efficiently and effectively. The new service offer will be in place by October 2021.
- Review and improve our offer and reward to ECC foster carers providing short breaks for disabled children in order to increase this resource.

- Continue to work with providers to develop a range of overnight and short breaks services to meet a range of needs across Essex. A Strategy outlining specific commissioning intentions in this area will be published by Spring 2021.

### 4.3 Fostering

Where children and young people do need to come into care, we are committed to ensuring that as many as possible are placed with foster carers approved by Essex. We ensure that those carers are supported to provide the level of care we expect and require for children we are responsible for and that they support our vision and values in relation to Children in Care and their families of origin.

The ECC Fostering Service oversee a range of fostering support provision, including:

- A specialist fee paid short break scheme for children with disabilities which promotes family-based respite care for children at risk of escalating to a residential placement
- The PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence Act) bed scheme ensuring that children do not remain in police custody unnecessarily
- An emergency bed scheme providing foster placements for children out of office hours
- The Therapeutic Fostering Team which provides additional support and training to enable foster carers to support young people with higher level needs, reducing escalation to and enabling step-down from residential care
- Recruitment, including a 'thriving ambassador scheme' enabling foster carers to co-construct marketing and recruitment activities
- A buddying scheme for carers taking Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children
- The 'Oasis Network', a new scheme for foster carers that provides support, respite and advice directly from an experienced carer or mentor

To contribute to the stability of foster placements, Mental Health Co-ordinators (MHCs) have been employed in all four quadrants to work with Children in Care/Care Leavers and foster carers. Following consultation with social workers, MHCs will

become involved in cases where there is a risk of placement breakdown and will work with either the foster carer, to support and advise on how to manage behaviours, and / or directly with the child or young person. They also liaise with other agencies such as the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service and other health services where appropriate. Additionally, there is a psychologist in each quadrant who provides clinical supervision and advice and support.

External Foster Care placements are commissioned via a framework of Independent Foster Agencies (IFAs) which commenced in November 2018. This framework meets a range of needs of young people in fostering, from those with 'limited' needs to those with 'intensive' needs who may require additional support around their emotions and behaviour and/or have complex disabilities. The IFA framework incorporates a bi-annual refresh which is due to be activated on the second anniversary of the service.

We will continue to commission a mixed model of provision to secure sufficiency and enable matching of placements but aim to increase the percentage of all fostering care placements that can be met from in-house foster carers. The Council is investing more in recruitment, retention, training and support to enable this and ensure good quality, well supported, locally available foster carers. The target to increase the percentage of all foster care placements that are made in-house during 2019/20 was an ambitious 78%. We achieved 75% and intend to continue increasing the percentage of in-house foster placements.

### **Fostering intentions**

- Expand the number and range of in-house foster carers to support and stabilise more children and young people. The target is to increase the foster care placements that are made in-house to 80% by 2020/21.
- Enhance the support available to children and young people with complex emotional and behavioural needs by increasing intensive therapeutic support and training for all foster carers and Supervising Social Workers (SSW) and developing hub/satellite support schemes in each quadrant.
- Continue to recruit and support specialist fee paid foster carers, to increase the capacity of the service to provide family based short breaks to children and families with disabilities at risk of escalation to a residential placement.

- Re-open the existing framework for external foster care placements for young people with limited through to intensive needs and for parent and child placements, including assessment. Locally based carers will be encouraged wherever possible. (NB: Pursuing this is dependent on the current impact of Covid-19).

#### **4.4 Adoption and Special Guardianship**

We secure permanency for children who cannot remain with their birth families through adoption and Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) wherever possible.

Since 2015, Essex has been working with Suffolk, Norfolk, Hertfordshire, Southend-on-Sea, Central Bedfordshire, Luton, Barnardo's and Adopter Voice to develop the Adopt East Regional Adoption Alliance (RAA) – 'Adopt East'. While each local authority retains their operational responsibility for adoption, it is intended, via joint working, to better enhance the adoption journey for both children and adopters, including speeding up matching; improving adopter recruitment and adoption support; and reducing costs.

The official launch of Adopt East was due in April 2020 but has now been delayed until the Autumn 2020 as a result of Covid-19. Despite the delayed launch, partnership working across the region is evident in key areas of the Adoption Service.

During 2019/20, 58 children were placed for adoption, a decline from previous years. This is in line with a national decline in the number of adoption orders made and an increase in other permanence options. A tracking process is well-established for early identification of children who may require an adoptive placement and joint work between the adoption teams and frontline social work teams is very good when circumstances indicate that a fostering for adoption placement is appropriate. The stability of adoptive placements is very good.

Work has also been completed to improve SGO stability. Following a review of the SGO Service there are now 2 assessments teams working across Essex to strengthen the SGO assessments process and ensure greater consistency. Essex remains committed that SGOs should only be made when a thorough assessment has indicated that it will be sustained to adulthood.

Essex both commissions and directly provides adoption support to meet the diverse, specialist needs of adoptive families and support them to achieve stability, resilience and positive relationships. A framework has been in place since 2015 to replace spot purchased provision. This has increased the availability of services as we have started to work with additional providers, particularly around therapeutic assessment and support. The framework has been extended to run up to March 2021.

A new framework is planned to commence from April 2021 and Essex, Suffolk and Thurrock have committed to a joint framework. The new joint framework will be an example of improving consistency within the RAA and will encourage more providers to offer an improved service. We will look to align commissioning intentions and outcomes and promote regional market engagement wherever possible, particularly where there are regional gaps in provision. We will also work with regional partners to manage the response to the future delivery of the Adoption Support Fund, once national intentions are known.

A new birth family support contract has been commissioned and commenced in April 2020 to last until April 2023 with the option to extend by a further year. This will provide telephone and face to face advice and support for birth families and those affected by adoption.

#### **Adoption and Special Guardianship Orders intentions:**

- Officially launch the 'Adopt East' in 2020 and continue to explore the benefits of partnership working.
- Commission from 2021, a Joint Adoption and SGO support framework with Essex, Suffolk and Thurrock to ensure a range of good quality specialist therapeutic assessments and interventions, as well as training for families and social workers.
- Work with the Regional Adoption Alliance to develop a potentially pan-Essex service for Fostering and Adoption Medicals, to ensure medical support for assessments, advice to panels and to prospective foster carers and adopters.

- Embed the new SGO & Connected Carer assessment teams, alongside the SGO Policy to facilitate increased suitability and stability of Special Guardianship arrangements.

#### **4.5 Residential Care Placements**

Where children and young people have not stabilised within family-based placements, or their outcomes will best be served by more intensive support, a residential placement may be sought. Whilst young people in a residential placement will have a range of needs, the largest needs groups are young people with complex emotional and behavioural needs and young people with disabilities, including those with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and those with autism and/or learning disabilities. This includes young people who may have experienced placement instability.

Essex facilitates local provider engagement to develop its market position, share good practice and discuss local gaps and challenges. Gaps identified include a need to increase the availability of local placements and reduce the percentage of emergency placements (placements made within one week of referral).

ECC commenced a 4-year Children's Residential Framework in February 2020 consisting of 3 lots:

- Lot 1: to support Children with Disabilities – consists of 9 providers
- Lot 2: to support children with SEMH – consists of 11 providers
- Lot 3: to provide short term emergency placements with the option for assessment if required – consists of 4 providers

The new framework agreement has a maximum 4-year term which includes the facility to enable the Council to conduct a review of the framework, and re-open it to new entrants in the second year. This option will enable providers who did not express an interest in the original procurement to join the framework. The Council reserves the right, in its absolute discretion, to re-open the framework more regularly or not at all.

At the point at which the framework is re-opened, existing providers will be required to demonstrate that they still meet the minimum quality standards and will be given the opportunity to submit revised prices. New entrants to the framework will be evaluated in accordance with the original evaluation criteria. In addition, the Council will undertake regular engagement with providers in order to review local capacity and developments and formulate stronger relationships, where these will support the Council's strategic intentions. The Council will continue to collaborate with neighbouring local authorities to share best practice. This includes membership of the Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group (CCRAG) alongside 20 other Local Authorities (see below).

There are rare occasions when sourcing regulated placements for highly complex young people, with needs that are often challenging to contain and care for, is not immediately achievable, and children and young people are very temporarily placed within an unregulated setting. Every effort is made to eliminate the use of such provision and robust oversight and monitoring is in place when such arrangements are commissioned. The inclusion of Same Day Emergency Placements within the Framework could potentially have a positive benefit by reducing the use of unregulated placements for children under 16 and offer a higher quality care package with Ofsted registered providers.

For the financial year 2019/2020 there were 34 unregulated placements (but regulated locally) made for 24 young people at an average cost of £9,500 per week, noting that some providers charge a weekly rate that is significantly higher or lower than this. For the financial year 2020/2021 (up to end of August) there were 8 unregulated placements (but regulated locally) made for 6 young people at an average cost of £11,250 per week, noting that some providers charge a weekly rate that is significantly higher or lower than this.

As a result of remaining gaps within available local provision, during 2019 ECC commenced a piece of work to review options for increasing available placements in Essex and for developing a new model of residential provision which better meets the needs of our child and young people and better integrates with existing local services.

A range of options are currently being explored which include the potential re-establishment of in-house provision or a partnership with another organisation.

Essex is a member of the Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group (CCRAG), which is a regional body of commissioners who share quality assurance processes and market intelligence and facilitate conversations at a strategic level between providers and commissioners. The cross regional partnership has proved positive as it facilitates transparency and improved communications amongst commissioners and providers, opportunities to jointly explore challenges and agree solutions and share our commissioning intentions.

#### **Residential Care Placements intentions:**

- Re-open as required the Residential Framework on its second anniversary in February 2022.
- Strengthen local provider engagement mechanisms to share good practice and explore solutions to increase Essex usage of local capacity, support a sustainable local market, reduce emergency placements and promote stability.
- Continue to investigate alternative options for the delivery of residential care.

#### **4.6 Educational Provision and Support for Children in Care with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities**

In 2018/19, 21.8% of Children in Care in Essex received SEN support, lower than the national average of 28.7% and the Statistical Neighbour average of 29.4%. 33.3% have a Statement/EHC plan, which is higher than the national average of 27.2% and the statistical neighbour average of 30%. 25% of Children in Care are at special schools, 6% are not in school and are receiving home tuition. 6% are in alternative provision.

Most children with SEND who are looked after, attend educational provision within Essex, whether this is at a special school, mainstream school or in an enhanced

provision. Some children and young people will require care and education in residential provision.

In March 2020, there were 95 Children in Care with a disability. 44 of the 95 children were in fostering and the remainder were in residential placements. There are challenges regarding local sufficiency of residential school and care provision for those with SEND. These include local capacity and availability and the ability to match children's needs for specialist support to available provision. As a result of these challenges there has been an increase in the number and cost of Essex pupils educated in special schools outside Essex and an increase in the number of children and young people educated in independent special schools. Part of this increase is because there are gaps in provision in Essex, particularly for children with autism or complex Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs. If trends continue as they are, we will see more children being placed outside Essex in special and independent special schools at significant additional cost.

Placements in residential school are currently spot purchased. Previously ECC had intended to begin market engagement to inform future commissioning intentions in this area however plans for this are currently on hold while clarity is being sought on national guidance.

ECC is seeking to address these challenges by working closely with the Schools Forum to jointly fund a capital programme to increase local sufficiency of special school places and specialist provisions within mainstream schools. This is to meet emerging demand, including for additional places for children with Social Emotional and Mental Health needs and for those with autism. It is expected that as additional local provision is increased and more educational need is met within Essex, this should reduce demand on independent / out of county school placements. In addition, residential provision has been developed at two Essex special schools for children and young people with severe learning difficulties (Glenwood and Lexden Springs). This new provision will support children and young people who may have been at risk of placement breakdown and help to reduce the dependence on 38- and 52-week residential places.

Alongside this activity ECC continues to implement other aspects of its SEND Strategy which seek to improve capacity and confidence to address the needs of children and young people with SEND within the mainstream school system, thus reducing the demand for external provision including residential.

Good progress is being made on the SEND Capital Programme. During 2019 new provision, including residential, was completed at a number of special schools including Harlow Fields, Kingswode Hoe, Lexden Springs, Oak View and Glenwood. Four special free school projects have also been approved for Essex, which are intended to start to be completed from 2022 onwards. As at July 2020, an additional 164 places in Essex primary schools had also been delivered for children with Social Emotional and Mental Health needs. Planning is also on-going for increasing the numbers of places available for children and young people with SEND in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). Additional PRU provision will be delivered incrementally between 2020 and 2024 dependent on the outcomes of detailed feasibility studies.

#### **Educational Provision and Support for Children in Care with SEND intentions:**

- Continue to implement the SEND Capital Programme to develop additional provision including:
  - Operationalising a new SEND forecasting system.
  - Completing a review of the special school estate.
  - Completing a gap analysis of current capacity against future need.
  - Determining further opportunities for investment and growth in Essex special schools.
  - Designing the next stage of the SEND capital programme through a Strategic Business Case in early 2021.
- Continue actions outlined in the Essex SEND Strategy to increase inclusion of children and young people with SEND in mainstream schools.

#### **4.7 Semi-Independent Accommodation (SIA), Supported Lodgings and Housing Related Support (HRS)**

A new framework for Semi-Independent Accommodation was launched in October 2017 and has enabled better oversight of quality and capacity and strengthened monitoring and performance management. The framework provides for support for a range of needs levels, as well as specific support for UASC. A review of the framework is currently being undertaken to inform future commissioning intentions. There has been a recent increase in use of SIA accommodation and this review will include how to develop provision to best meet the level of demand and types of need.

ECC also has an in-house Supported Lodgings provision; carers provide safe and nurturing homes to young people aged 16-18, to promote independence and enable them to move on to their own accommodation at age 18. There are currently 35 supported lodgings carers in Essex, providing 59 beds. Work is underway to ensure that supported lodgings are actively considered as a suitable option for placing older young people.

Housing Related Support is delivered by a single provider with one sub-contractor, through a contract that has been extended to May 2022. Support is provided to four groups of young people including: 16 and 17 years old at risk of homelessness; young people aged 18-21 at risk of homelessness who are assessed as having specific vulnerabilities which are agreed by the ECC; young people leaving care; and vulnerable young parents up to the age of 21 with additional support needs who are open to adult or children's social care. The service delivers accommodation-based support to meet a range of outcomes relating to young people's personal development, safety and long-term housing needs.

#### **Semi Independent Accommodation, Supported Lodgings and Housing Related Support intentions:**

- Complete the SIA review to inform future commissioning intentions when the current framework ends in 2021.

- Increase the number of supported lodgings carers and placements available.
- Maintain the HRS Service under review to ensure provision continues to meet presenting need and to inform the recommissioning of this contract in 2022.

#### 4.8 Leaving Care

The Leaving Care Service is in place to ease the transition of leaving care, improve continuity of support and provide good quality advice, guidance and support. Essex has also invested in Mental Health Co-ordinator posts, with a recent increase to three in each quadrant; one of whom has a specific responsibility for care leavers, including meeting the mental health needs of older UASC and former UASC. There is a good take up of Staying Put in Essex and in 2017/18 this offer was extended to those in Supported Lodgings. In total there were 756 care leavers as at the end of March 2020; 71 of these were recorded as being in 'staying put' arrangements, this has increased from 42 young people in 2017/18. Of these 71, 66 (93%) were in education or employment.

We are committed to continuing to promote the benefits of Stay Put and to extending the number of these arrangements.

We have invested in Targeted Youth Adviser posts as part of the Leaving Care Service. These focus on care leavers not in education, training and employment. These posts have been complemented by two Employment Advisers working across the county, whose role is to expand employment, training and work experience opportunities. The proportion of care leavers in education, training and employment is going up, particularly among our 17 and 18-year olds. There has been year-on-year improvement and as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019, 53% were in education, employment or training. Provisional figure for 19/20 show 57% for 17-18-year olds and 51.2% for 19-21-year olds.

There are currently 3 Personal Advisors working across Essex focussed on Care Leavers who are at risk of homelessness. A key area of work for these Advisors is the development of strong links with local housing authorities.

The Essex Leaving Care Local Offer was published in 2018 and documents the full range of support for care leavers in Essex. Following collaboration with housing

authorities, the Local Offer for Care Leavers now also includes exemption from council tax.

In 2017/18, 83% of Care Leavers were in touch with the local authority and 91% were in suitable accommodation, improving on 83% the previous year. In 2018/19, 83% of Care Leavers were in touch with the local authority and 89% were in suitable accommodation, a fall of 2% points since 2017/18. In 2019/20, the numbers of Care Leavers in touch with the local authority had improved to 93.6%. Care Leavers in suitable accommodation for 2019/20 was at 77.6% for 17-18 year and 87.8% for 19-21-year olds.

#### **Leaving Care intentions:**

- Continue to monitor and promote Staying Put.
- Further increase the percentage of Care Leavers in employment, education and training through targeted employment support.
- Continue to ensure that Care Leavers access suitable accommodation.

#### **4.9 Innovation, Joint Commissioning and Partnership Working**

Essex continues to explore innovative approaches to improving outcomes for Children in Care and works collaboratively with partners within Essex and regionally. This includes the following programmes:

- Inside Out was developed in partnership with Hertfordshire and Norfolk local authorities and is funded through the DfE Innovation Programme, it launched in Essex in 2018. It aims to identify children and young people who have not stabilised in high-needs, high cost placements and take a different approach to improving outcomes. A coach works one-to-one with the young person and family. They co-ordinate support from the residential provider, social worker and other agencies, to support young people to meet their goals, strengthen relationships with their family where possible and step down back home/to lower level, less containing placements. Since 2018, Essex County Council has made 26 referrals into the programme. The goal is for 59 young people in total to have

been through the programme by 2021. Outcomes have been positive, including 4 young people returning home and others stabilising in residential placements, supported living and semi-independent accommodation. Based on these outcomes the programme has now been extended to 2022 and options are being explored to scale up provision and embed the approach into longer term work in Essex.

- The Greater Essex Transforming Care Partnership (TCP) covers Southend, Essex and Thurrock. It aims to strengthen and integrate education, health and care services within the community to support children and young people with complex autism and/or learning disabilities (LD). This is to prevent them from escalating to a Tier 4 placement or residential school and to support timely step down where appropriate. The TCP has received funding from NHS England and is delivering a number of pan Essex pilots to strengthen multi agency working and reduce escalation to Tier 4/residential placements. These pilots include:

The Essex Life Chances project which brings together all elements of the health, social care and education system to help children and young people with complex learning disabilities and autism to remain living with their family and local communities through getting the right intensive and consistent support, at the right time, and supporting families to manage potential crisis situations. As at January 2020 the pilot was actively supporting 9 children and young people and at least 3 of these had been actively diverted from needing a residential care placement. Interventions include Family Group Conferencing, Sensory Assessments, Theraplay, Positive Behaviour Support implementation, Solution Focused Therapy, Makaton training for parents, Advocacy, and young carers support for siblings.

The “Of Concern” process was initially introduced in response to COVID-19 and involved the creation of a register of children and young people with learning disabilities who may be at greater risk during the pandemic. The register was reviewed on a weekly basis by

representatives from social care, the Children's Learning Disability Service (CLDS), and the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service (EWMHS) who were able to target interventions and support based on this shared intelligence. By June, 25 children and young people had been referred to the process. 17 had stabilised and risks had been reduced so they were closed with only one subsequent re-referral. The remaining 8 cases were actively being supported and monitored. Actions have included additional temporary support to families; the completion of behavioural and sensory assessments leading to new Positive Behaviour Support plans; referrals for additional support (e.g. D-BIT, Family Group Conferencing etc.); providing tools and input to support the return to school (social stories etc) and supporting other members of the family (e.g. referrals to mental health services for parents).

The introduction of a "keyworker" role for children and young people with learning disabilities and / or autism that are placed in a Tier 4 in-patient service or who are at risk of an admission to an in-patient service. A "keyworker" was appointed in February 2020 and is supporting all Tier 4 in-patients with learning disabilities and / or autism and working with children and young people who have had a Care, Education and Treatment Review (CETR) that has indicated they need additional support to avoid an admission. Although COVID-19 has impacted on the pilot there are a number of benefits that are already being realised. Prior to the role, community and in-patient services were dis-jointed. The keyworker role has ensured that assessments and treatment plans that commenced in the community can continue within an in-patient service reducing the need for time consuming re-assessments. The co-ordination of community services is also commencing much earlier in preparation for discharge reducing the length of stay and avoiding unnecessary delays for the children and young people.

- Collaborative commissioning for emotional wellbeing and mental health: Children in Care are at higher risk of poor emotional wellbeing and mental health outcomes, which can have significant and long-term effects on their life chances and mental health in adulthood. There can also be challenges in accessing and engaging in local mental health services for those placed out of county.

ECC collaborated with all Clinical Commissioning Groups in Essex, Southend and Thurrock to co-commission Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Services for children and young people (EWMHS). The service went live in 2015 and is available for all those with targeted and specialist mental health needs, with access through a single front door. Children in Care are prioritised, with a target for initial assessment to take place within 7 days of referral, to improve identification and timeliness of support.

The new referral and assessment arrangements put in place for Children in Care improved access to the service but demand for EWMHS has increased significantly and this has resulted in pressure on timescales to access support. The service has therefore been reviewed, to inform commissioning intentions for 2020 onwards, including consideration of support for vulnerable groups and for transition into adult mental health services.

Independent evaluations have now been completed to inform the collaborative of NHS and local authority partners who commission EWMHS and guide the procurement of a new service to commence from November 2021. This work, as well as the direction set via the NHS Long Term plan, has highlighted the need for the service to cater for people up to the age of 25 and to offer approaches which are sensitive to vulnerable groups including those with LD, autism, looked after children, SEND and young people at risk of exploitation.

Procurement subgroups are now formed with a view to work on producing a service specification. This will also consider how to coordinate effectively with the scaffolding of provision around EWMHS, including current online counselling, links to Mental Health Support Teams in schools and the wider voluntary sector offer.

- The Essex Joint Area Allocations Panel is a multi-agency funding panel with representation from health, social care and education that agrees joint support packages for children and young people with complex needs. This includes consideration of additional support for children and young people placed out of county.
- Supporting children and young people with autism: ECC have recently invested additional funding to implement 3 workstreams to provide an enhanced level of support and learning to practitioners to better enable them to support children and young people with complex needs. Planning for these workstreams commenced in April 2019 and they began delivering over the summer of that year. The workstreams are:

Workstream 1 – Autism Clinics: Practitioners access small group support and consultation sessions from specialist psychologists to increase their knowledge and confidence when assessing and supporting children with autism and their families.

Workstream 2 – Training led by Essex Social Care Academy (ESCA): Including:

- *Autism and Asperger's Post Grad Certificate*: upskilling key people across children and families to become lead practitioners for autism supports in e across the service to become lead support in Autism
- *Parental Support Programme Training*: training for social care staff on supporting families - possible 100 places
- *Positive Behavioural Support Training*: for children and young people teams, support workers, residential and social workers – possible 70 places in total
- *Positive Behavioural Support with Functional Assessment Training*: targeted at children and young people teams, support workers, residential and social workers and those completing assessments

Workstream 3 – Autism Conference: This conference was held as part of ESCA's work to upskill practitioners in working with autism and improve levels of knowledge and understanding. Attendees included Children and

Families staff, foster carers, education professional and representatives from other local authorities. When the event was advertised to the workforce, all 140 tickets allocated for Children and Families social care staff sold out within 1.5hrs and over the coming weeks a waiting list built up of over 100 staff. The conference aimed at raising awareness of autism with keynote speakers and workshops for practitioners. Significant positive feedback was received.

ECC also recognises that there are undiagnosed children and adults with autism living in Essex. We are looking how we can further develop and define a support offer within Family Solutions teams to offer families effective and accurate early help and or sign posting. An additional £200k investment has been made available to support this and to make family centres more 'autism friendly'.

#### **Innovation, Joint Commissioning and Partnership Working intentions:**

- Extend the Inside Out programme through to 2022 and consider options for embedding the approach in Essex longer term reflective of evaluation outcomes.
- Explore the options to continue autism clinics beyond 2021.
- Procure a new EWMHS service from 2021.
- Continued implementation of the pan Essex Transforming Care programme, working with system partners to:
  - Complete the Life Chances pilot by March 2021 and ensure the new ways of working that have been developed become business as usual.
  - Continue with the "Of Concern" process and extend the remit to include children and young people with autism.
  - Extend the keyworker pilot until March 2022 in preparation to meet the NHS Long Term Plan target that by 2023/24 children and young

people with a learning disability, autism or both with the most complex needs will have a designated keyworker.

## 5. **Making a Difference: Reviewing our Strategy and Approach**

An Action Plan is in place which sets out how the priorities outlined in this Strategy will be taken forward. Its implementation will be overseen by Operational and Commissioning Services. This Strategy will be refreshed annually and overseen by the Children and Families Senior Leadership Team and the Corporate Parenting Panel.

**Appendix 1: Summary of Intentions**

Area of Focus	Intentions
<b>Edge of Care</b>	<p>Maintain the delivery of good quality edge of care services (including D-BIT, Family Centres and Family Group Conferencing).</p> <p>Implement the D-BIT Emotional Wellbeing Team to provide early intervention to young people age 11- 17 open to social care who have emerging emotional wellbeing difficulties.</p>
<b>Short Breaks</b>	<p>Review the range of short breaks and community provision for children with disabilities, to prevent needs escalating and support families within the community efficiently and effectively. The new service offer will be in place by October 2021.</p> <p>Review and improve our offer and reward to ECC foster carers providing short breaks for disabled children in order to increase this resource.</p> <p>Continue to work with providers to develop a range of overnight and short breaks services to meet a range of needs across Essex. A Strategy outlining specific commissioning intentions in this area will be published by Spring 2021.</p>
<b>Fostering</b>	<p>Expand the number and range of in-house foster carers to support and stabilise more children and young people. The target is to increase the foster care placements that are made in-house to 80% by 2020/21.</p> <p>Enhance the support available to children and young people with complex emotional and behavioural needs by increasing intensive therapeutic support and training for all foster carers and Supervising Social Workers (SSW) and developing hub/satellite support schemes in each quadrant.</p> <p>Continue to recruit and support specialist fee paid foster carers, to increase the capacity of the service to provide family based short breaks to children and families with disabilities at risk of escalation to a residential placement.</p>

	<p>Re-open the existing framework for external foster care placements for young people with limited through to intensive needs and for parent and child placements, including assessment. Locally based carers will be encouraged wherever possible. (NB: Pursuing this is dependent on the current impact of Covid-19).</p>
<p><b>Adoption and Special Guardianship</b></p>	<p>Officially launch the 'Adopt East' in 2020 and continue to explore the benefits of partnership working.</p> <p>Commission from 2021, a Joint Adoption and SGO support framework with Essex, Suffolk and Thurrock to ensure a range of good quality specialist therapeutic assessments and interventions, as well as training for families and social workers.</p> <p>Work with the Regional Adoption Alliance to develop a potentially pan-Essex service for Fostering and Adoption Medicals, to ensure medical support for assessments, advice to panels and to prospective foster carers and adopters.</p> <p>Embed the new SGO &amp; Connected Carer assessment teams, alongside the SGO Policy to facilitate increased suitability and stability of Special Guardianship arrangements.</p>
<p><b>Residential Care Placements</b></p>	<p>Re-open as required the Residential Framework on its second anniversary in February 2022.</p> <p>Strengthen local provider engagement mechanisms to share good practice and explore solutions to increase Essex usage of local capacity, support a sustainable local market, reduce emergency placements and promote stability.</p> <p>Continue to investigate alternative options for the delivery of residential care.</p>
<p><b>Educational Provision and Support</b></p>	<p>Continue to implement the SEND capital programme to develop additional provision including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operationalising a new SEND forecasting system.</li> <li>• Completing a review of the special school estate.</li> <li>• Completing a gap analysis of current capacity against future need.</li> <li>• Determining further opportunities for investment and growth in Essex special schools.</li> <li>• Designing the next stage of the SEND capital programme through a Strategic Business Case in early 2021.</li> </ul>

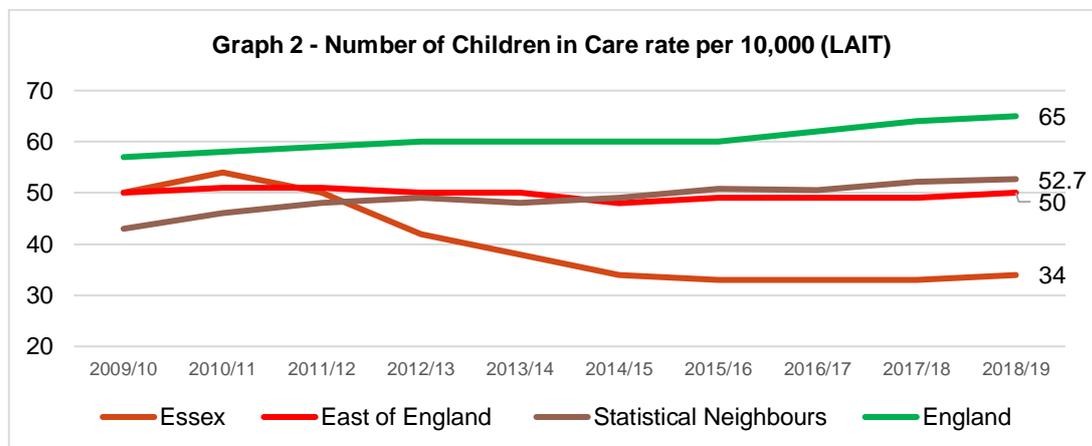
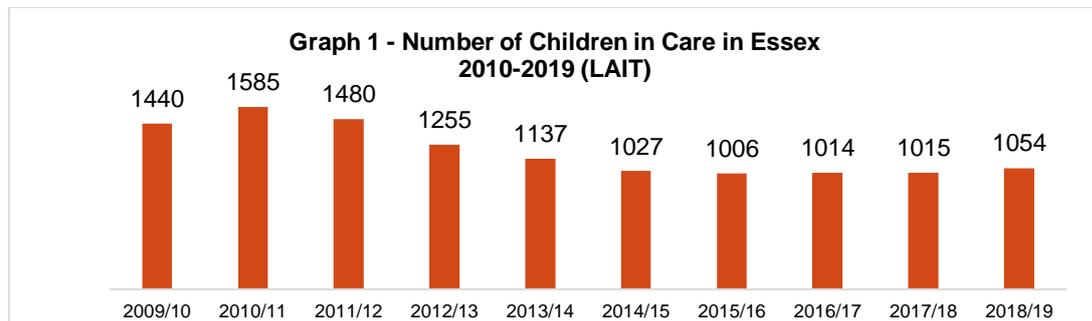
	<p>Continue actions of the Essex SEND Strategy to increase inclusion of children and young people with SEND in mainstream schools.</p>
<b>SIA, Supported Lodgings and HRS</b>	<p>Complete the SIA review to inform future commissioning intentions when the current framework ends in 2021.</p> <p>Increase the number of supported lodgings carers and placements available.</p> <p>Maintain the HRS Service under review to ensure provision continues to meet presenting need and to inform the recommissioning of this contract in 2022.</p>
<b>Leaving Care</b>	<p>Continue to monitor and promote Staying Put.</p> <p>Further increase the percentage of care leavers in employment, education and training through targeted employment support.</p> <p>Continue to ensure that care leavers access suitable accommodation.</p>
<b>Innovation, Joint Commissioning and Partnership Working</b>	<p>Extend the Inside Out programme through to 2022 and consider options for embedding the approach in Essex longer term reflective of evaluation outcomes.</p> <p>Explore the options to continue autism clinics beyond 2021.</p> <p>Procure a new EWMHS service from 2021.</p> <p>Continue to implement the pan-Essex Transforming Care programme, working with system partners to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete the Life Chances pilot by March 2021 and ensure the new ways of working that have been developed become business as usual.</li> <li>• Continue with the “Of Concern” process and extend the remit to include children and young people with autism.</li> </ul>

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|--|---|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Extend the keyworker pilot until March 2022 in preparation to meet the NHS Long Term Plan target that by 2023/24 children and young people with a learning disability, autism or both with the most complex needs will have a designated keyworker.</li></ul> |
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## Appendix 2: Assessment of Needs

### 1. Number of Children in Care

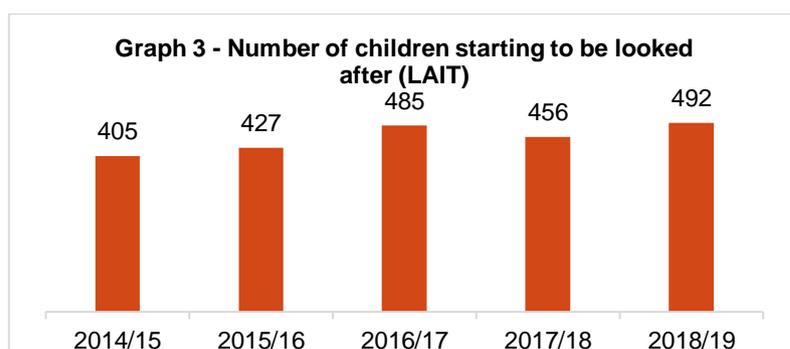
- As of January 2020, there were 1076 Children in Care in Essex, matching the January 2019 figure. Essex did not reach the projected number of children in March 2019 of 1129, instead there were 1062. These projections were based on an increase in the population of 0-18-year olds in Essex. The projection for January 2021 is 1094.
- As shown by **Graph 1**, the number of Children in Care in Essex has fallen over the last ten years, falling by 26% since 2009/10 (386 children). After a 10% increase between 2009/10 and 2010/11, the number fell each year between 2010/11 and 2015/16. However, the number has slowly increased each year since 2015/16.
- When looking at the rate per 10,000, Essex numbers of LAC have remained low since 2012/13 compared to the England, East of England, and Statistical Neighbour averages, as shown in **Graph 2 and Table 1**. In 2018/19, Essex had 34 LAC per 10,000, a fall of 32% since 2009/10.



**Table 1: Rate per 10,000 Number of LAC**

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
<b>Essex</b>	50	54	50	42	38	34	33	33	33	34
<b>East of England</b>	50	51	51	50	50	48	49	49	49	50
<b>Statistical Neighbours</b>	43	46	48	49	48.1	49	50.8	50.5	52.2	52.7
<b>England</b>	57	58	59	60	60	60	60	62	64	65

- As illustrated by **Graph 3**, between 2017/18 and 2018/19 the number of new entrants into care increased by 8% (36 children) despite a 6% fall the year before. In 2018/19 492 children started to be looked after.
- Those entering care within the 16 or over age category have seen a significant rise in proportion, from 108 in 2017/18 to 143 in 2018/19, an increase of 32%.



- There has been a 3% increase in the number of children leaving care, with 458 exits in 2017/18 compared to 472 in 2018/19.
- As of November 2019, there were 623 care leavers in receipt of leaving care services, this was an increase of 18 since November 2018.
- When looking at reasons for leaving care, there has been an increase in those that were adopted where consent was dispensed with, with 23 children having this reason for leaving in 2017/18 (5%) to 51 in 2018/19 (10.8%). Those leaving care and moving into supportive accommodation also saw an increase, from 77 (16.8%) to 104 (22%).
- The proportion of males exiting care increased by nearly 4% points between 2017/18 and 2018/19. From 57.4% to 61.2%. As of January 2020, 41% of Children in Care were female and 59% were male. This is the same pattern as January 2019.

- In June 2019, 3.6% of care leavers were under 18 when they left care. 28.6% were 18, 23% were 19, 26.7% were 20, 12% were 21 and 6.1% were over 21. In June 2019, there was a higher proportion of LAC aged 18 and below leaving care than in June 2018 (32.2% vs 27%).
- As of January 2020, 40% of Children in Care were aged 10-15 and 32% were 16-17. This drops to 23% when UASC are excluded.
- There has been a rise in the UASC population in care in 2018/19, from 93 in 2017/18 (9% of LAC) to 108 in 2018/19 (10% of LAC).
- 10% of Children in Care have a sibling in the same placement, as of January 2020. In February 2020, 68.5% of Children in Care were part of a sibling group.
- We have continued to see increases in physical and emotional assessment factors present when entering care as well as neglect and drug and alcohol related factors. In 2018/19, 221 of the 511 children entering care had neglect as an assessment factor, an increase of 82 since 2017/18. This indicates a continuing demand for provision that can support children and young people with more complex emotional and behavioural needs.
- In June 2019, 9% of Children in Care had a disability (92 children), a slight reduction from 10% in June 2018 (102 children). 43 of the 92 children with a disability were in fostering in June 2019 (47%) and 40 were in residential placements (43%).
- The increase in homeless families moving into Essex has an impact on demand for children's social care. In the first quarter of 2018/19, 182 homeless households were placed in Essex by London boroughs, compared to 61 in the first quarter of 2017/18. In 2018/19, 543 homeless households were placed in temporary accommodation in Essex by London and East of England Local Housing Authorities (LHA's). 71% of those placed were into Harlow (383 homeless households).

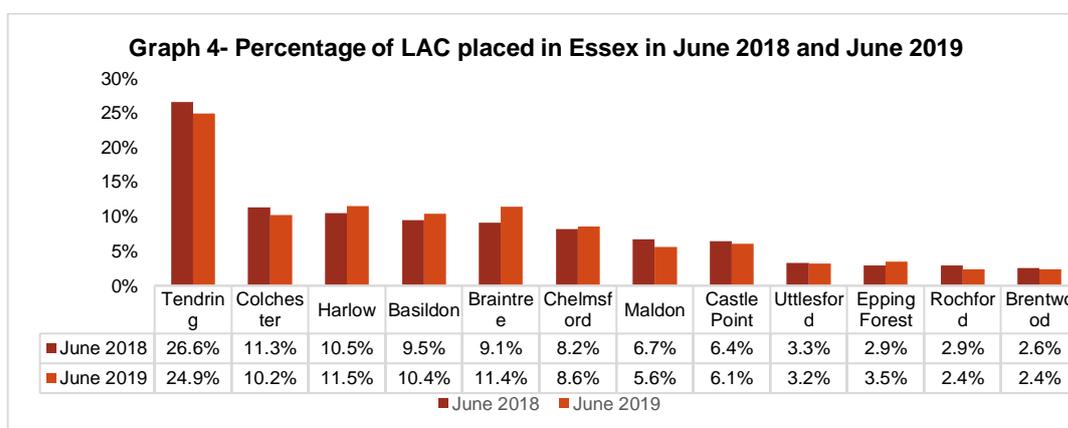
## **2. Education of Looked After Children (LAC) – 2018/19:**

- 21.8% of LAC in Essex have SEN support, lower than the national average of 28.7% and the statistical neighbour average of 29.4%.
- 33.3% of LAC in Essex have a Statement/EHC plan, higher than the national average of 27.2% and the statistical neighbour average of 30%.
- 25% of LAC are at special schools, 6% are not in school and are receiving home tuition. 6% are in alternative provision. 46% of the cohort are not being entered for GCSE exams.

- Overall absence of LAC in Essex is higher than the national average at 5.9% compared to 4.7% nationally. Persistent absence of LAC in Essex is also higher than the national average at 14.8% compared to 10.9% nationally.
- In 2018/19, the average attainment 8 score of LAC was 20.9%, 1.7% points higher than the national average. Progress 8 was also above the national average for LAC.
- Fixed term exclusion figures for LAC in Essex were higher than the national average in 2019 at 13.6% compared to 11.6%. Persistent and overall absence figures for LAC in Essex are also higher than the national average.

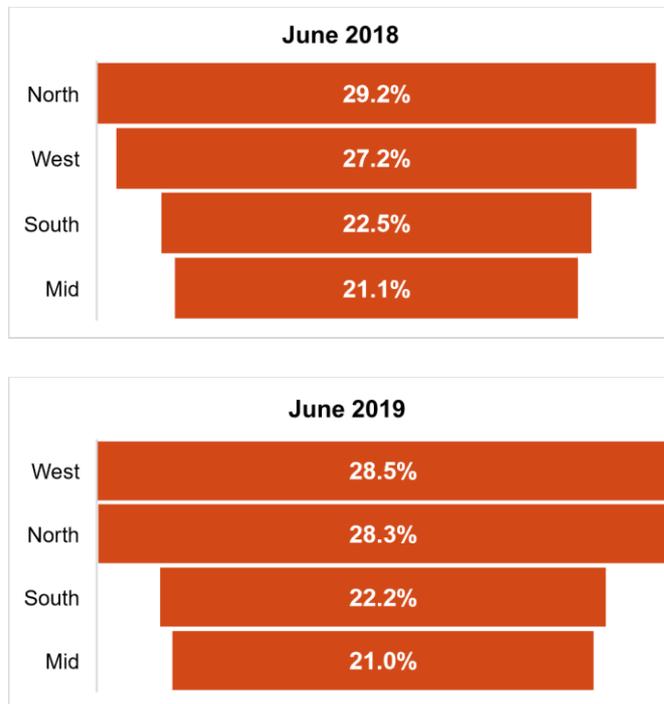
### 3. Meeting Sufficiency Requirements

- For some young people a decision to place at a distance will have been made in response to their individual plan and needs. However, the intention in most cases is to place children and young people within Essex/within 20 miles of home.
- As shown by **Graph 4**, the district with the highest proportion of children placed in Essex in June 2019 was Tendring with nearly 25% of LAC in Essex. This was a slight decrease from June 2018. The district with the largest increase in proportion of placements was Braintree with 9.1% in June 2018 but 11.4% in June 2019, making it the district with the second highest proportion of LAC in June 2019. Rochford and Brentwood remain the districts with the lowest proportion of children placed with only 2.4% of Children in Care placed in each of these districts.
- 87% of those placed in Tendring were in Fostering. Likewise, 86% of those placed in Braintree were Fostering placements. This is the largest placement category across all districts except for Harlow with 48% of placements being in SIA/Supported Lodgings and 40% being in Fostering.



- As shown in **Graph 5**, the quadrant with the largest proportion of LAC as of June 2019 was West with 28.5%. This was a slight decrease from June 2018 at 29.2%. The proportion of LAC in North has increased from 27.2% in June 2018 to 28.3% in June 2019. South and Mid have remained stable.

**Graph 5 – Proportion of LAC by Quadrant (June 2018 and June 2019)**



- Table 2** below shows the breakdown of children placed within 20 miles of their original home and those placed over 20 miles. Since January 2019, the overall percentage of children being placed within 20 miles from their original home has increased by 1.4% points from 87.6% to 89% in January 2020.
- Fostering, Kinship Fostering and Placed at Home have all seen increases in the proportion of children placed within 20 miles of the child’s original home. However, Residential, SIA/Supported lodgings and Other have all seen declines in the proportion of placements within 20 miles. Placed for Adoption also saw a fall and remains the placement type with the lowest percentage of children placed within 20 miles of home. However, this is in line with the council’s aims of placing these children more than 20 miles from their original home. This saw the largest fall, falling by 8% points since January 2019 from 78.7% to 70.7% in January 2020.

**Table 2: Placements within 20 miles (at January 2020)**

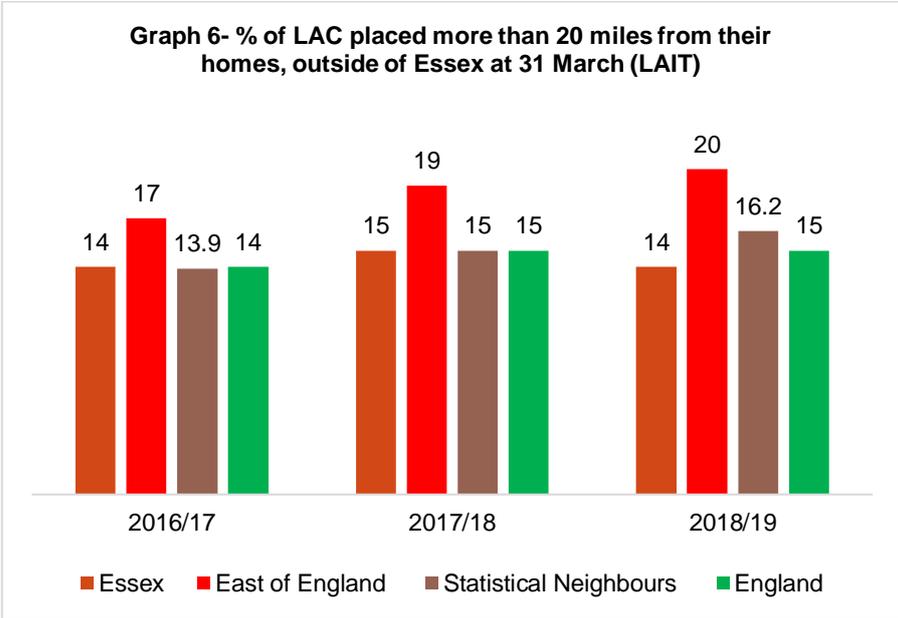
Placement Category	Within 20 Miles	Over 20 miles	% within 20 miles	Difference in % since Jan 2019
Fostering	604	76	88.8	1.5 up
Kinship Fostering	77	2	97.5	4.3 up
Placed at Home	25	-	100	8.7 up
Placed for Adoption	29	12	70.7	8 down
Residential	101	17	85.6	2.2 down
SIA/supported lodgings	111	10	91.7	3.7 down
Secure	1	-	100	-
Blank/other	10	1	90.9	3.8 down
<b>Total</b>	<b>958</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>1.4 up</b>

**Table 3: Placements within Essex (at January 2020)**

Placement Category	Placed in Essex	Placed outside of Essex	Not recorded	% within Essex	Difference in % since Jan 2019
Fostering	486	165	29	71.5	12 down
Kinship Fostering	54	23	2	68.3	0.5 up
Placed at Home	15	8	2	60	35.7 down
Placed for Adoption	27	13	1	65.8	12.6 up
Residential	44	70	4	37.3	5 down
SIA/supported lodgings	92	10	19	76	4.2 up
Secure	-	1	-	0	-
Blank/other	2	8	1	18	2.2 up
<b>Total</b>	<b>720</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>7.4 down</b>

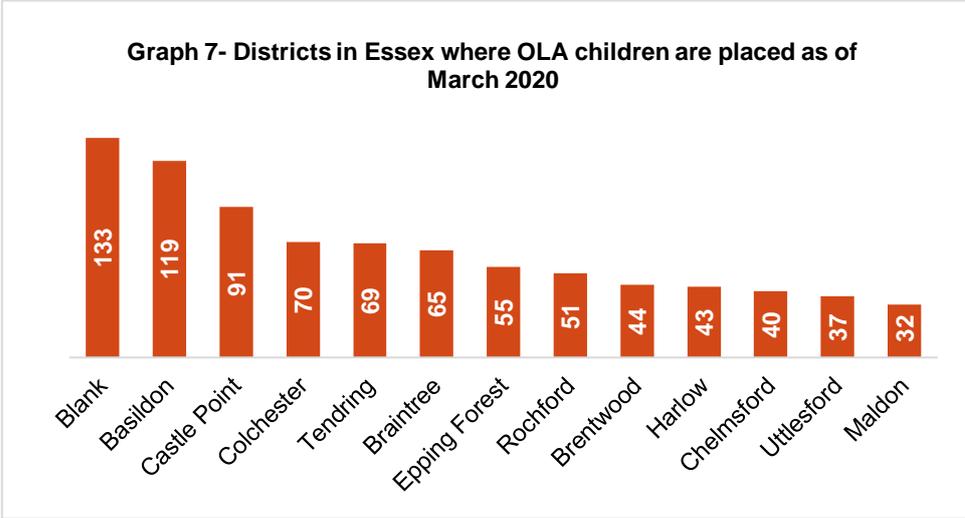
- **Table 3** below shows the breakdown of children placed within Essex and those placed outside of Essex. Since January 2019 the overall percentage of children being placed within Essex has fallen by 7.4% points, from 74.4% to 67% in January 2020. 28% of Children in Care were in a placement outside of Essex, 5% points higher than January 2019.
- Fostering, Placed at Home and Residential have all seen declines in the percentage of placements within Essex. Residential remains the placement type with the lowest percentage of placements within Essex with only 37.3% within Essex in January 2020, a 5% point fall from January 2019.

- Placed for Adoption has seen the largest increase in the proportion of placements within Essex, increasing by 12.6% points from 53.3% in January 2019 to 65.8% in January 2020. Kinship Fostering, SIA/Supported lodgings, and Other have also seen increases in the percentage within Essex. This is despite SIA/Supported Lodgings and Other seeing declines in the proportion of placements within 20 miles.
- The percentage of children placed outside Essex and more than 20 miles from home has remained stable over the last three years (**Graph 6**). At the end of March 2018/19, 14% of LAC in Essex were placed outside of Essex and more than 20 miles from their homes. This was below the England, Statistical Neighbour and East of England figures. In 2018/19 Essex had the lowest percentage; 1% point below the national average, 2.2% points below the statistical neighbour average and 6% points below the East of England average.
- In 2018/19, 97 new young people were placed more than 20 miles from home. 220 were placed less than 20 miles from home (120 had no distance recorded).
- 385 new young people were placed within Essex in 2018/19 and 83 were outside of Essex (with 43 not recorded)



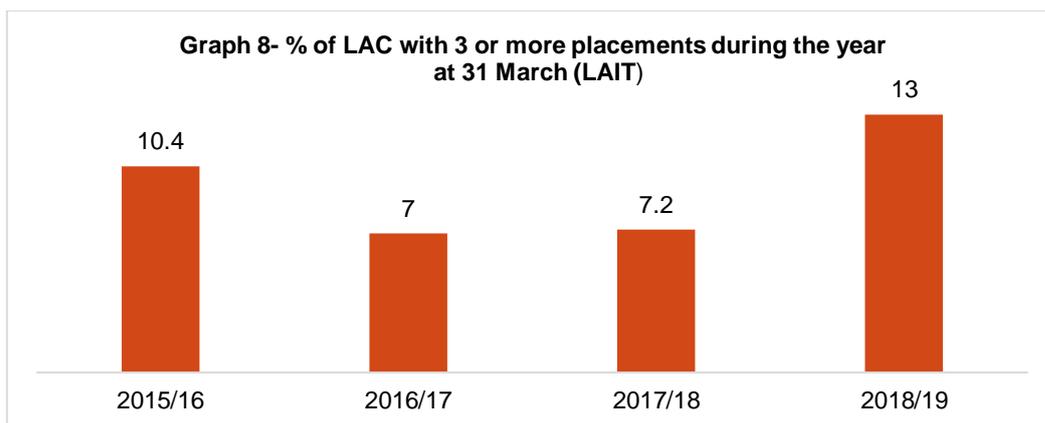
**4. Pressure from other local authorities**

- As of March 2020, there were 849 children in Essex placed from other local authorities (OLA's). The OLA that has placed the most children in Essex is Southend with 115, followed by Thurrock with 109. The next top OLA's placing children in Essex are Hertfordshire, Suffolk and Barking & Dagenham.
- As shown by **Graph 7**, the district in Essex with the highest number of children from OLA's is Basildon with 119. Maldon has the lowest number. 133 had no district recorded.



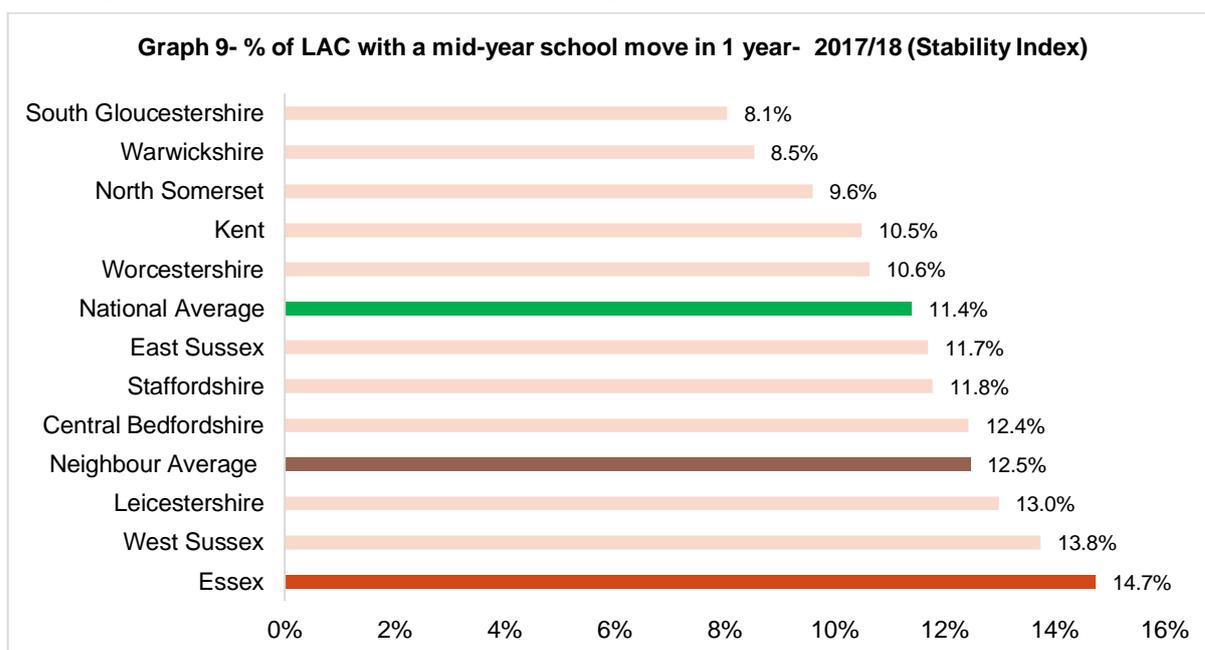
**5. Stability and Length of Time in Care**

- In 2018/19, 13% of LAC had three or more placement changes during the year. This is a 5.8% point increase since 2017/18 (**Graph 8**).
- 65% of Children in Care under the age of 16 had been in the same placement for 2 years or more in 2018/19. This was a 7% point fall from 2017/18.



**School Instability:**

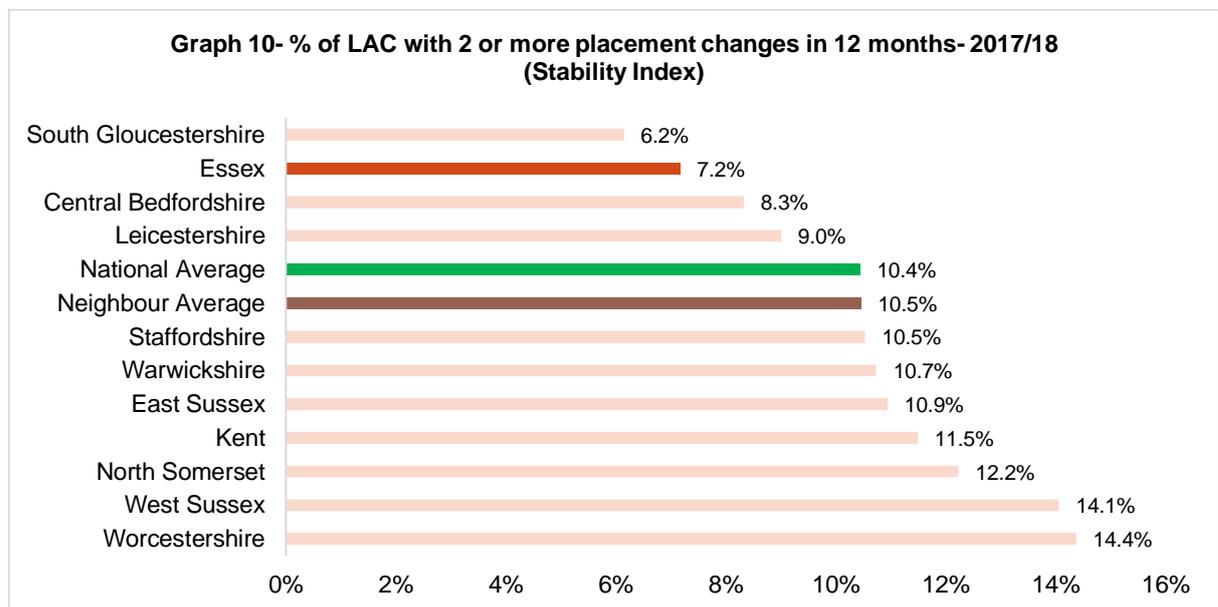
- In 2017/18, 14.7% of LAC in Essex had a mid-year school move in one year (**Graph 9**). This was 0.5% points lower than 2016/17 but 3.3% points higher than the National average. In 2016/17 the difference between the National average and Essex was 2.6% points, suggesting the gap between Essex and the national average is widening.



- Essex was 2.2% points higher than the Statistical neighbour average in 2017/18, compared to 1% higher in 2016/17. Essex is higher than any other county in the Statistical neighbours, the closest to Essex being West Sussex, almost 1% point lower.

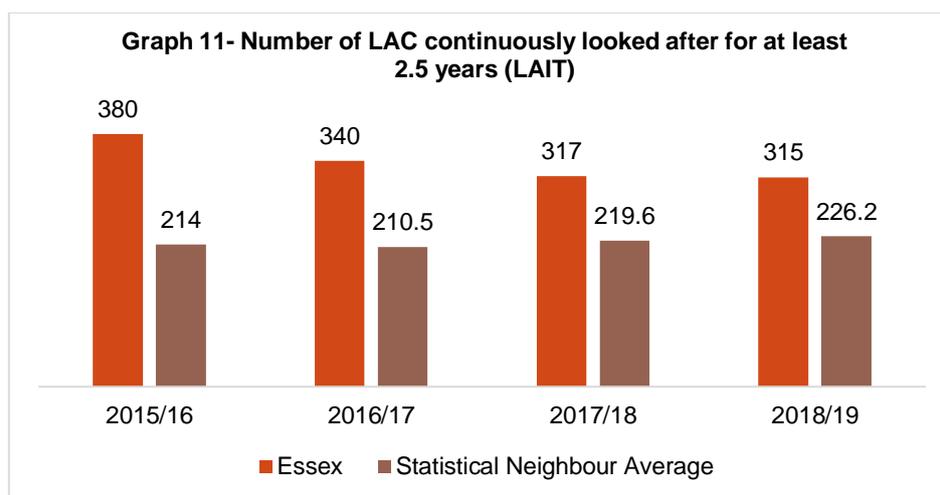
Placement Instability:

- In 2017/18, 7.2% of LAC in Essex had 2 or more placement changes in 12 months (**Graph 10**). This was 0.5% points lower than 2016/17. In 2017/18, Essex was 3.2% points lower than the national average. This was a larger gap than in 2016/17 when Essex was 2.9% points lower than the national. Therefore, Essex is moving away from the national average in the right direction and the gap is widening.
- In 2017/18 Essex was lower than the statistical neighbour average by 3.3% points. This difference was a smaller gap than in 2016/17 when Essex was 3.7% points lower than the national. Therefore, the gap between Essex and the neighbour average is getting smaller.
- In 2018-19, there was a significant rise in the percentage of children with 3 or more placements, rising from 7% in 2017-2018 to 12.5%. The figure has now dropped to 9.3% at the end of 2019-20.
- There has been a small change in the number of Children in Care for a least 2.5 years at period end, living in their current placement for 2 years. This is at 65.8%, up 0.8% but is still below the current published national average from 2018-19 of 69%.



- Those experiencing multiple placement moves in one year are three times more likely to experience in again the following year. Similarly, children who experience a mid-year school move in one year are 50% more likely to experience it again the following year.

- Older children, children who enter care at the beginning of adolescence, children with additional behavioural or emotional needs, and children whose legal status indicates more vulnerability are all more likely to experience multiple placement moves.
- As of January 2020, the majority of young people have been in care for 2-5 years. However, in January 2019, the majority were in care for 5-10 years. There has been a significant reduction in those in care for less than 6 months. For example, in June 2018, 32% of LAC had been in care for less than 6 months. In June 2019, this dropped to 18%. There has also been an increase in those staying in care for 1-2 years.
- As shown in **Graph 11**, in the last four years, the number of children who were looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years has fallen by 17%, from 380 children in 2015/16 to 315 in 2018/19. However, the number has remained stable since 2017/18. Essex remains higher than the statistical neighbour average each year.



## 6. Types of Placements and Trends

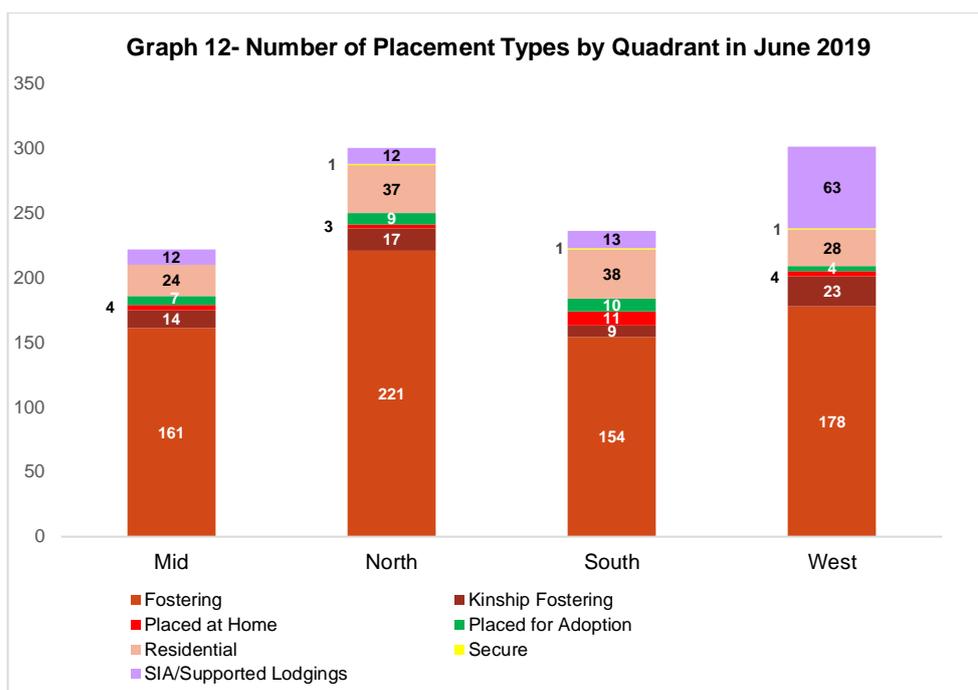
- As highlighted by **Table 4**, the breakdown of placement types has remained consistent over the last three years. The most used placement type has continued to be Fostering with 67% of Children in Care being in a foster placement in June 2019. This has fallen slightly since June 2018.
- Placed for Adoption placements saw the largest fall out of all placement types since June 2018, from 5% to 3% of Children in Care being Placed for Adoption in June 19. This was the same figure as June 2017.

- The proportion of Kinship Fostering, Placed at Home, Residential, Secure and SIA/supported lodging placements have increased slightly since June 2018 but remain stable.

**Table 4: Placement Types**

Placement Category	June 17	% of total	June 18	% of total	June 19	% of total	Trend
Fostering	736	70%	724	68%	714	67%	Down
Kinship Fostering	60	6%	54	5%	63	6%	Up
Placed at Home	15	1.5%	16	1.5%	22	2%	Up
Placed for Adoption	37	3%	50	5%	30	3%	Down
Residential	120	11%	115	11%	127	12%	Up
Secure	-	-	2	0.2%	3	0.3%	Up
SIA/supported lodgings	73	7%	85	8%	100	9%	Up
Blank/other	13	1.5%	14	1.5%	13	1%	Down
<b>Total</b>	<b>1054</b>		<b>1060</b>		<b>1072</b>		Up

- As shown in **Graph 12**, in June 2019, the majority of placements in all quadrants was Fostering, with North having the highest number of fostering placements (221). The quadrant with the highest number of Kinship placements was South (11). South also had the highest number of Placed at home, Placed for Adoption and Residential placements. West had the highest number of SIA/Supported lodging placements with 63 compared to 12 or 13 in the other quarters. The number of Secure placements is very low with only 1 placement in the quadrants of North, South and West.



- In 2018/19, 262 new placements were made with in house fostering placements, an increase of 16 since 2017/18. 56 placements were made with external foster carers in 2018/19, 117 less than 2017/18.
- As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019, 74.9% of all foster care placements are made in-house (including kinship carers). 73.4% when excluding kinship carers.
- The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted, is 415 days, as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019.
- The average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family is 180 days, as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019.
- There has been an increase in demand for placements that can support young people with more complex needs and vulnerabilities, including those at risk of gang involvement, substance misuse and child sexual exploitation.
- In 2018/19 there were 26 alternative provision placements, and these were all children under 16. Unregulated placements are those that are not required by law to undergo any sort of registration process with a regulatory body. However, it should not be assumed that these placements do not provide a supportive service to some young people. These placements do not operate without oversight. All unregulated placements used by Essex County Council are quality assured by the

authority's Children and Young People Placement Service (CYPPS), and the young people who live in them are supported and regularly visited, by their social workers.

- In 2018/19 47.8% of children started a period of care under a section 20 single period of accommodation, and in 2018/19 this increased to 58.1%.
- **Table 5** summarises the legal status of LAC in June 2019 compared to June 2018. As of June 2019, 52% of LAC had a care order and this was consistent with June 2018. 26% of LAC had a legal status of Single period of accommodation under section 20 in June 2019, this was a slight increase from June 2018. 13% of LAC had a legal status of Interim Care order and this was a 4% point increase since June 2018. 7% had a legal status of Placement order granted and this was a decrease of nearly 4% points from June 2018.

**Table 5: Legal Status of LAC**

<b>Legal Status</b>	<b>June 18</b>	<b>% of total</b>	<b>June 19</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Care order	558	52.6%	562	52.4%
Emergency protection order	9	0.9%	1	0.1%
Interim care order	103	9.7%	143	13.3%
On remand, or committed for trial or sentence, and accommodated by LA	6	0.6%	5	0.5%
Placement order granted	116	10.9%	76	7%
Single period of accommodation under section 20	264	25%	283	26.4%
Under police protection and in local authority accommodation	2	0.2%	-	-
Care Order S31 1(a) CA89	2	0.2%	2	0.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1060</b>		<b>1072</b>	