

Sufficiency Strategy

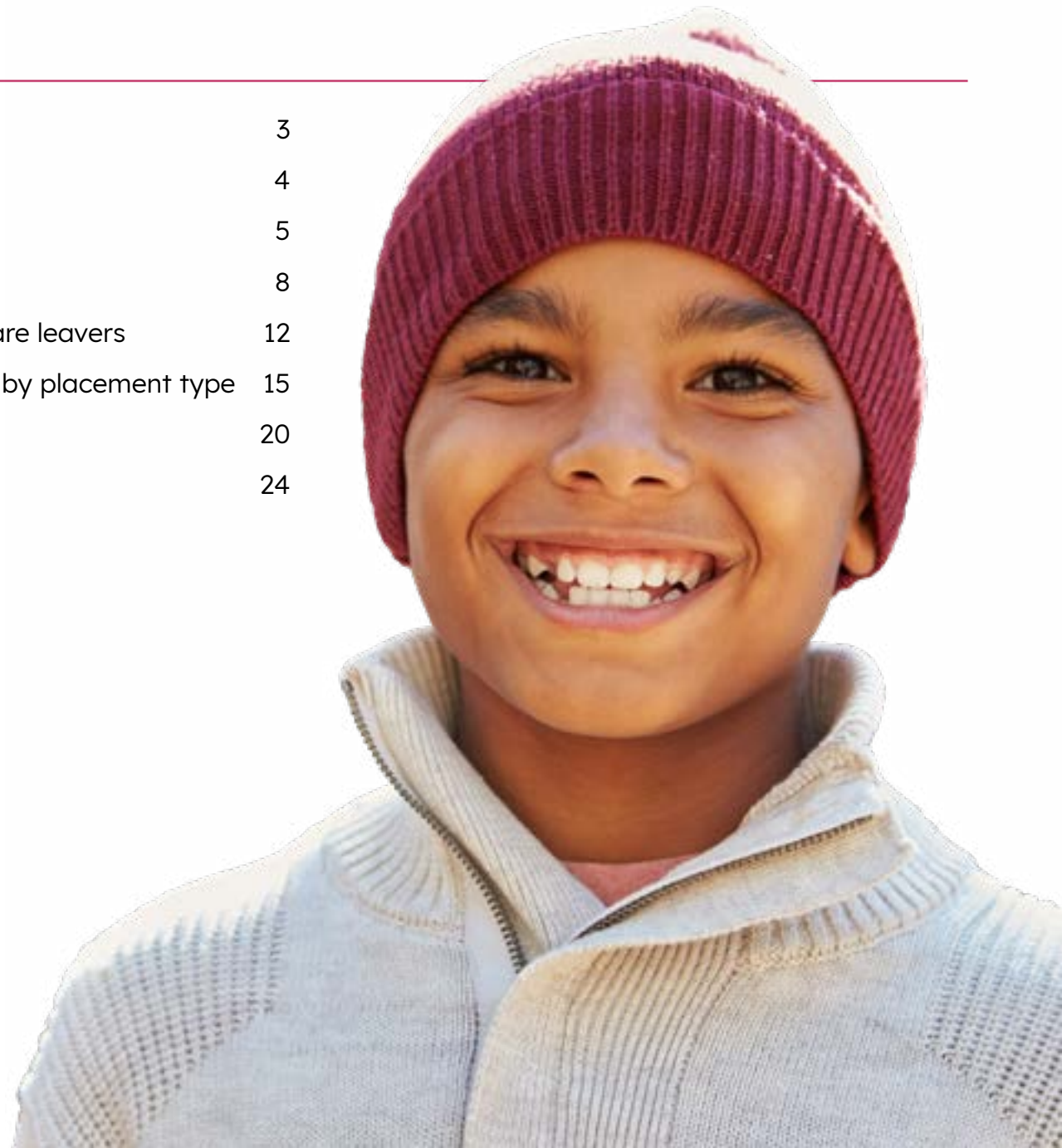
for Children in Care and
Care Leavers in Essex

2023-2026



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Foreword



Helen Lincoln – Executive Director
for Children and Families

As the lead Member for Children’s Services and Early Years in Essex, I know that it is vitally important that we set out how we will ensure children and young people in and leaving care are well looked after. Our job is to ensure that children are not just safeguarded, but are happy and well looked after, encouraging them to be confident and independent so they can succeed and thrive in life. In Essex, our approach has always been to put children and families first in our thinking. We must all remember that each statistic in our care system represents a child, in many cases very vulnerable children. In developing this strategy, we have listened to what children of all ages have told us is important to them and this has shaped our priorities and actions. Our partners across the public sector can help make things better for children who enter the care system and as they grow up and find their independence. This is Everyone’s Essex, and we want everyone to be proud of themselves and able to achieve their aspirations, no matter their background. We all play a vitally significant role in encouraging and supporting children and young people to be the best that they can be, and I am confident that this strategy will take us even further.

At the heart of everything we do in Children and Families service is our Vision to get the best outcomes for the families, children, and young people we support. We support families by working with their strengths. We strive to give them the best chance to be together, where it is safe to do so, and help them go on to build a life and a future together. I am proud that in Essex we have one of the lowest rates of children in care in the country. It is our commitment to ensuring those in and leaving care feel cared for, are safe, have high aspirations and are supported to achieve those aspirations as they grow into independent adults.



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About the children in our care and care leavers

1140

children in care

(August 2022, of which 144 were Separated Migrant Children)

14, 16 and 17 years

Most common ages of children in care including Separated Migrant Children

(August 2022)

17 years

Most common age of Separated Migrant Children and Young People in care

(August 2022)

16.6%

of Essex children in care are Black, Asian or Minority Ethnicity (BAME) this increases to **24.2%** when including Separated Migrant Children

(March 2022)

Placement stability

62.8%

in the same placement for 2+ years (of those that have been in care for 2.5+ years)

(August 2022)

68.9%

CiC in foster care

(August 22)

18

CiC recorded as at risk of exploitation, 1 at risk of sexual exploitation and 2 children at risk of both.

2 children in care had no risk type recorded

In August 2022, **59** children and young people went missing a total of **111** times

741

care leavers aged 18-21 (of which 244 are former SMC)

(August 2022)

63%

of care leavers are in education, employment or training (EET)

(August 2022)

12.4%

3+ placements in a year

(rolling 12 months as at August 2022)



Introduction and purpose



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 to have the right placement in the right place, at the right time.

As restrictions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have eased, we are now focusing on how we respond to the longer-term impact of the pandemic



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, quality and suitability of all providers and unique challenges to Essex.

As restrictions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have eased, we are now focusing on how we respond to the longer-term impact of the pandemic, including young people's mental health and emotional well-being, isolation, loneliness, employability, and cautious markets.

This is within the context of the current resource and overall budget priorities of the Council.

Introduction and purpose



Legal duties

Local authorities have several duties towards children within their area which are related to the Sufficiency Duty. In particular:

- Section 17(1) of the 1989 Act provides that it is the general duty of a local authority to provide a range and level of services to children in need (as defined in section 17(10) of the 1989 Act) and their families in the local area which are appropriate to their needs.
- Section 20 of that Act requires local authorities to provide accommodation for children in need within their area who appear to them to require accommodation in accordance with the provisions of that section.
- Section 21 requires a local authority to accommodate certain children who are either removed or kept away from home under Part V of the 1989 Act or who are subject to a criminal court order.

- In determining the most appropriate placement for a child, section 22C(7)(a) also requires the local authority to give preference to a placement with a relative, friend or other person connected with the child and who is also a local authority foster parent.
- Section 22C sets out the additional factors (in no order of priority) which the local authority must take into consideration when deciding the most appropriate placement:
 - allowing the child to live near his/her home
 - not disrupting the child's education or training
 - enabling the child and a looked after sibling to live together
 - meeting the needs of disabled children
 - and providing accommodation within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably practicable
- The Children and Social Work Act 2017, extends the duties on all Local Authorities (including District and Borough Councils) to have regard to a set of Corporate Parenting Principles when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and care leavers up on the age of 25.

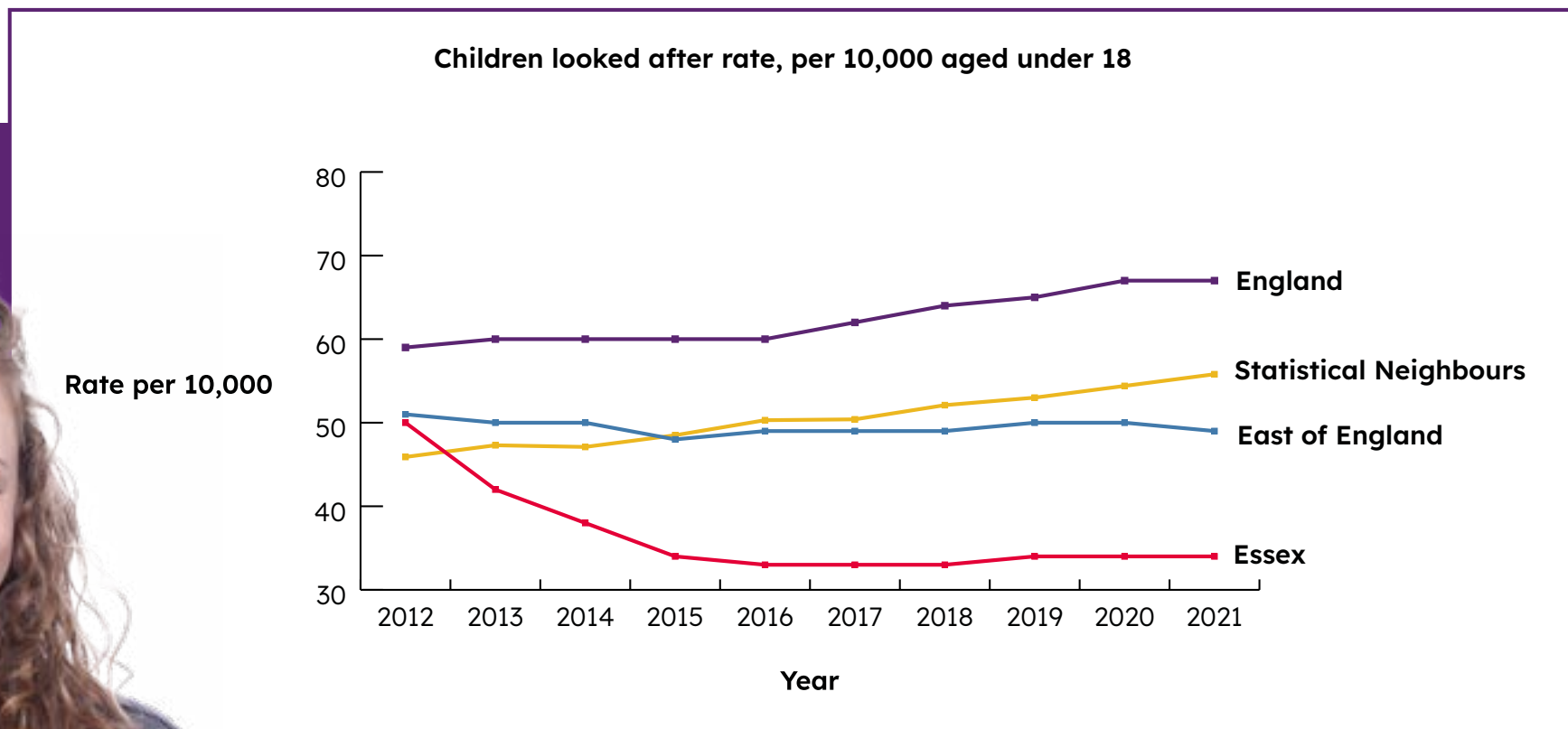


Summary needs assessment



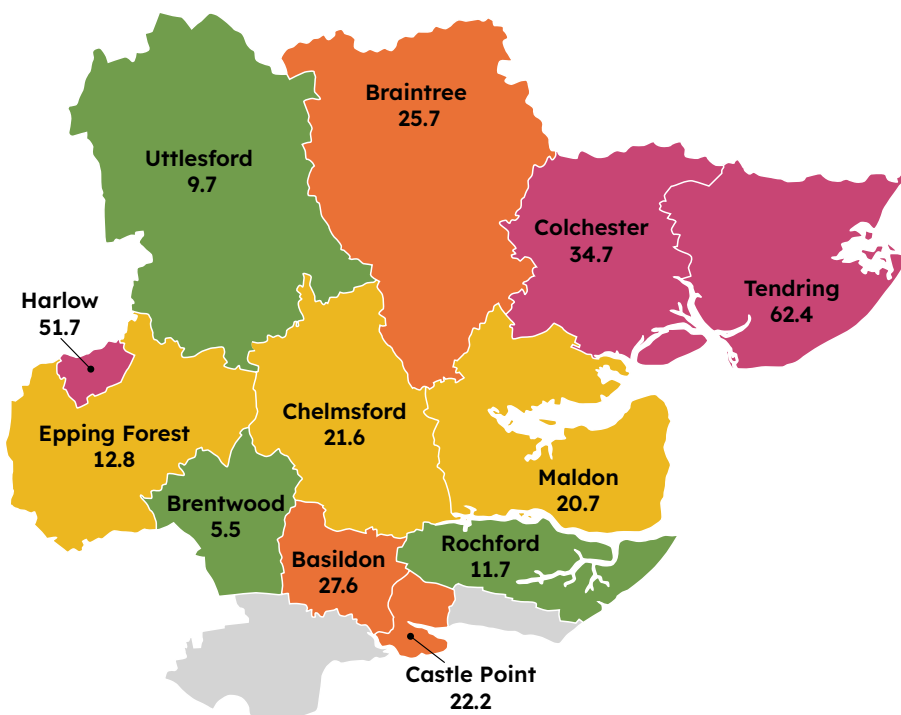
Summary needs assessment

- As of August 2022, there were 1140 Children in Care in Essex. **Forecasts shows numbers may rise to 1250 within the next two years** considering pressures from increased separated migrant children, court delays and increased referrals into the system.
- Of the 1089 children in care as of January 2022, 963 were from Essex while 126 were Separated Migrant Children (SMC) - 20 more children than in January 2021 when there were 106 Separated Migrant Children in care representing a 19% increase.
- The number of Children in Care in Essex has remained below England, East of England, and Statistical Neighbour averages since 2012/13, as shown in Graph 2. Since 2018/19, Essex has had 34 Children in Care per 10,000 each year, **a fall of 32% since 2011/12 with relative stability observed since 2014/15.**
- Tendring is a slight outlier for Essex with the highest prevalence of children in Care in the county (62.4 per 10,000) although this is still lower than the national average (67).



Summary needs assessment

CIC rate per 10,000 0–17-year-olds (February 2022)



- Fostering is the most used form of care with 68.4% of our children in care placed within that sector.
- Essex statistically has a small number of children in residential care (7.7%).
- Ofsted ratings nationally for residential providers on overall effectiveness, has outstanding at 12%, good at 67%, 17% at Requires Improvement and 4% inadequate. **Ofsted ratings in Essex for providers on overall effectiveness, outstanding 3%, good 64%, Requires Improvement 29% and 4% inadequate.**

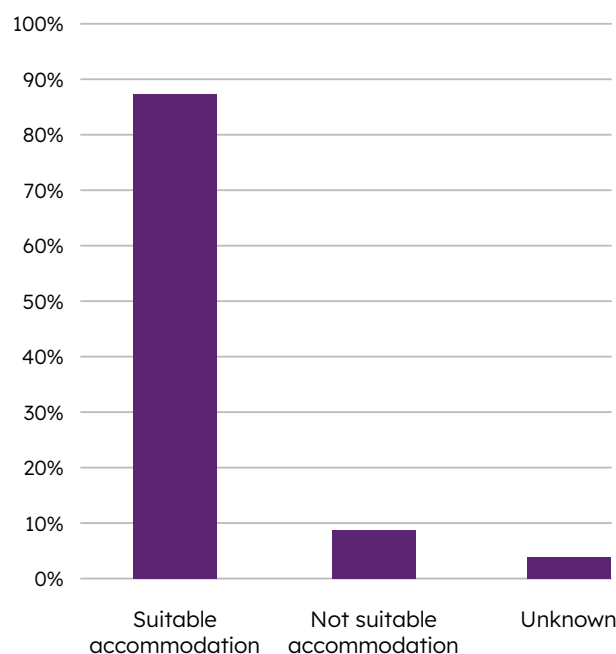
- 76% of placements for Essex’s Children in Care are in county.
- 46% of residential placement capacity in county is taking up by other local authorities.
- Supported Accommodation for Young People represents 15% of placements.
- The percentage of children with 3 or more placements in 12 months has fallen to 11% at the end of 2020/21.
- Similarly, children who experience a mid-year school move in one year are 50% more likely to experience it again the following year.
- The proportion of children who have been in care for at least 2.5 years, are aged under 16 and who have been in the same placement for 2 or more years is improving in Essex. **In 2020/21 69% of these children had been in the same placement for 2 years or more, a 2% rise from 2019/20 and up by 5% from 2018/2019.** The rate is 1% below the current published national average for 2020/21 of 70%, and slightly higher than the statistical neighbour average.
- 9% of Children in Care have an EHCP plan.
- While three quarters of children in care are white British, the proportion of our children in care from Black, Asian, and other minority ethnicities continues to increase. **Children in Care from “any other ethnic group” has almost doubled in the last year** (from 4.8% to 8.2%), with those from a Black African ethnic group remaining the third highest recorded ethnic group, at 4.3%.
- **41% of Children in Care were part of a sibling group**, a slight fall from 42% in January 2021. 22.5% of Children in Care have a sibling in the same placement, lower than when compared to 25% in January 2021.

Summary needs assessment

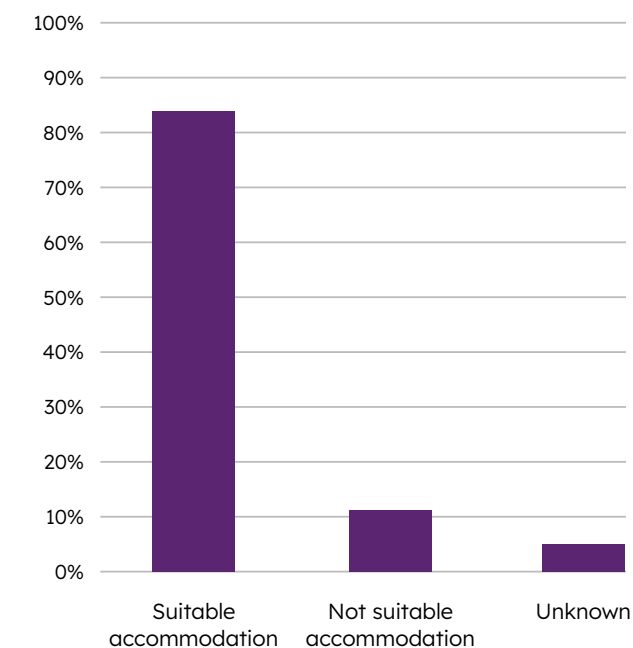
- As of January 2022, there were 126 separated migrant children in care in Essex. This is a 19% increase on the year before. 93% of Separated Migrant Children were aged 16-17 years and 7% were 10-15 years, with 92.1% of these children being male.
- The ethnicity of Separating Migrant Children (SMC) tends to be from the “Any other ethnic group” and has risen from 47.2% of SMC children to 68.3% in the last year, whilst Black African SMC has reduced from 34% to 21.4%.
- In February 2022, there were 70 Children in Care with a disability (6% of children in care). 37 of the 70 children were placed within the fostering sector and 33 were within the residential sector.
- Children are staying in care longer, with 29% of young people being in care for 2-5 years (compared to 27% in Jan 21).
- Over the last four years, the number of children who were looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years has increased by 7%, from 316 children in 2017/18 to 339 in 2020/21, with a 5.9% increase from 2019/20 to 2020/21.
- 87% of care leavers are suitably accommodated.

Care leavers as at 30/08/2022: suitable accommodation

Care leavers all ages 16-25



Care leavers aged 17 and 18



Children are staying in care longer, with 29% of young people being in care for 2-5 years (compared to 27% in Jan 21).

Feedback from children and young people in care and care leavers



Feedback from Children and Young People in Care and Care Leavers

Over 400 children and young people participated in the virtual and face to face It is My Life Festival last year, and around 250 engaged in discussions with decision makers. Of those participating in off-site research interviews, 30 children in care and care leavers shared their experiences, and 21 children in need and children subject of child protection shared their views. For the first time, the views of children under Special Guardianship Orders were also sought.

Education

Children in care report quite different relationships with school with around half of those engaged in discussions describing school as 'good,' expressing their enjoyment of learning and attending school, whilst several others describe no longer being in school stating school was a difficult experience for them.

Of those children in need and children subject of child protection they describe their enjoyment of school and learning, their relationships with friends and looking forward to transitioning to secondary school and college. Whilst the sample from children subject of child protection was small, they all reported positive relationships in school.



Friendships

“End up pushing them away because that is how I keep safe. I do not like getting hurt”

15-year-old child in care

Children in care describe a multitude of difficulties in forming and maintaining friendships. These include being worried about their socialisation skills, getting anxious talking to others, placement rules / restrictions hindering friendships, school peers being 'mean,' and being overtly pulled out of lessons in school for counselling.

Relationships

“I feel cared for and part of the family”

12-year-old child in care

Children in care overwhelmingly describe their relationships with carers as positive; feeling loved, cared for, and settled, with good and supportive relationships is all part of the common narrative. The views of children in need and children subject of child protection are more evenly divided between positive and negative experiences; some describe good and supportive relationships, whilst others describe challenging times, difficult relationships, and lots of arguments.

Around a third of Children in Care, report that they have considered wanting to change placement in the past year. Several say that they have moved placement in the past year and that they are happier for it.

Feedback from children and young people in care and care leavers

Relationship with social workers

“It is good. She is really nice and quick with everything” **12-year-old child in care**

“We have a strong bond. Have jokes and serious conversations” **15-year-old child in care**

Nearly all children in care report good relationships with their social workers, describing relationships which are stable, workers who are helpful, likeable, and easy to get along with. Nearly all children in care feel that their social workers are good at listening and are kind. The reasons given by those children in care with less positive relationships with their social workers include not listening, changing young person’s words, breaking confidentiality, and asking too many questions. Over a third of children in care say that they have experienced a change in worker in the past year and whilst new relationships are good for some, several young people noted the difficulty experiencing change and losing a relationship with someone they liked.



Time with family

“Yeah, I have seen them. It has been good, but I have not seen my brother recently. Normally I see him every month, but it has been 2 or 3 months now” **13-year-old child in care**

“It was virtual in lockdown, but there was always someone behind me, so I felt I couldn’t say what I wanted” **13-year-old child in care**

When talking about their time spent with family during the past year, children in care describe mixed emotions in their experiences. They talk about the different approaches to family time that they have engaged in such as virtual, face to face, or going for walks. Many children in care describe the difficulties they had with virtual time with family; poor connections or data, running out of things to say or finding it hard to interact online, and feeling like someone is always there listening.

When talking more generally about family time, the experiences are generally divided between positive and negative. Those with positive experiences enjoy their time and are pleased to see family face to face, and those with negative experiences describe getting anxious, feeling depressed, feeling a sense of obligation, not feeling comfortable, being worried about family members, and getting upset when family does not engage or show up.

Progress against previous strategy and future intentions by placement type



Progress against previous strategy and future intentions by placement type

D-BIT

The Essex Divisional Based Intervention Teams (D-BIT) works with young people aged 8-17 on the edge of care and is now in the 9th year of operation. In 20/21, 82% of those referred had a successful outcome, with young people remaining in the care of their families and kinship arrangements. 87% of families report all or some goal met at the close of intervention, whilst 71% of families reported improvement in relationships shared with family members at the close of intervention. The service also promotes Children in Care to connect or be unified with their families with the intention of developing a stronger sense of permanence.

D-BIT Core teams contribute to the stabilisation of foster placements, Special Guardianship Order arrangements and supports the prevention of adoption breakdowns. 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.

In-house Fostering

In 2018, Essex invested in a 10-year programme to significantly increase in-house foster care capacity. The intention of the programme is to ensure fostered children benefit from a local, well assessed, supported, and directly provided foster care placement that sustains for as long as the child requires it. This service will provide better outcomes for our children and encompasses improved support for our foster carers, enabling them to look after children with more complex needs.

Progress has been challenging during the Covid-19 pandemic in line with national difficulties regarding recruitment and retention of

foster carers. Prior to the pandemic in March 2020, the percentage of fostering placements that were In-house had been increasing (72% in March 2019 to 79.6% in March 2020). Since peaking in May 2020, there has been a decline in fostering placements that are in-house, with the lowest point being November 2021 at 73.4%. Since November there has again been an increase in line with pre pandemic figures, with 74.8% of fostering placements being in-house in January 2022.

Article 20 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that “Children who cannot be looked after by their own family have a right to special care and must be looked after properly, by people who respect their ethnic group, religion, culture and language”.

With the diversity of children in care changing (e.g., 27% of children in care are non-white British) the county has been taking steps to monitor and increase its level of foster carers particularly Black, Asian and minority groups (BAME). BAME carers are often well placed to support children from the same background, understanding and responding to their individual needs and help them make better sense of their history and identity. This can result in children feeling more settled in a placement.

Essex has developed a fostering dashboard which enables Children Services to keep track of the numbers of children in care from diverse backgrounds in contrast to the diversity of our foster care population.

To develop a satisfactory level of stability in foster care, we need to ensure that children feel valued and that their culture and beliefs are respected, which is why we have produced a film featuring carers from a BAME background to promote and reach a more diverse audience. In addition, as part of Essex’s foster care recruitment drive have promoted existing LGBTQ+ foster carers in a bid to encourage more to come forward to foster.

Progress against previous strategy and future intentions by placement type

Residential Care

ECC currently provides two residential units providing short breaks for children and young people with disabilities. A framework is in place for commissioning mainstream residential care placements and when necessary, outside of that framework placements are spot purchased as required. The framework was reviewed in 2022 and options are currently being explored as to more preferable procurement vehicles suitable for this sector in anticipation for its expiry in early 2024.

ECC are considering the need for developing registered assessment/bridging beds to support the reduction of referrals in crisis direct into the residential sector.

During 2022 ECC embarked on a strategic partnership with an experienced national charity in order to co-produce and scope proven models of care for this cohort. In parallel the Council began a programme to develop solo children's homes, providing local registered placements for our children in care who struggle to cohabit and / or need an emergency placement.

Understanding the complexity and challenges involved with securing sufficient residential placements, work is underway to consider a mixed economy of good quality external and inhouse residential care.

A residential plan is in creation ensuring ECC re-balances it's approach to residential placements, ensuring appropriate levels of care and attention is given to the sector. This will include a Memorandum of Understanding with the local market, resulting in a cultural shift in the ways in which ECC engages and the relationships it holds. Importantly including intervening when a Children's home, which is home to one of our children, receives an inadequate judgement from Ofsted.

Inside Out

Inside Out was launched in July 2018 as a DfE funded Innovation Project and following the success of the pilot, the programme was commissioned from July 2022. Essex is working in partnership with Hertfordshire and with The Children's Society who deliver the direct work with young people. Inside Out provides young people aged from 14½ to 17 with a 'coach' who works intensively with them, their placement, social worker, other involved professionals and where possible, their families. The cohort includes young people who are placed in residential care; those who might have moved from residential to semi-independent placements, and who have experienced instability in their lives.

Adopt East

Essex Adoption Agency is part of the Adopt East Alliance which comprises of 8 Local Authorities (Bedford Borough, Luton, Hertfordshire, Essex, Thurrock, Southend, Suffolk, and Norfolk) and 2 Voluntary Adoption Agencies (Barnardo's and Adoption Plus). Adopt East is one of the largest Adoption Agencies/Alliances in the country.

Local authority partner agencies do not pay an interagency fee for adoptive placements made within the alliance, so there are no barriers to placing our children anywhere in the region. Likewise, adopters are matched with children from across the region. A regional matching co-ordinator organises and supports various family finding events across the Adopt East region.

Essex adoptive families have access to a wide range of support services that are offered through a core regional offer as well as a localised support. There is also an extensive training programme, co-run with adopters, available to support and develop our adoption community.

Progress against previous strategy and future intentions by placement type

CareCubed

ECC has commissioned a new service CareCubed which is a nationally recognised web-based tool to allow benchmarking of services in the residential market. This will allow for transparent review of market uplift requests to ensure a consistent and timely approach. The intent is to work closely with the market to develop services within Essex and to ensure an understanding of the impact of costs both on the market and for Essex.

2 year projection by placement type

Note: % is only indicative of growth as placements are needs lead

Essex placement type forecast

Current CiC 1140	% by placement type	Forecast number of CiC 1250
88	Residential 7.7	96
785	Fostering 68.9	861
171	Supported accommodation 15	188

In the next 2 years ECC anticipate requiring.

- 8 more residential placements.
- 76 more foster placements.
- 17 more Supported Accommodation placements for young people.



Progress against previous strategy and future intentions by placement type

Below indicates ECC perception (as understood by the sufficiency task and finish group) of our expected ability to meet this demand.

Key

- **Red** Expectation of difficulties meeting demand through existing suppliers and/or needs to produce services at high cost
- **Amber** Expectation of mostly being able to meet demand through existing suppliers at reasonable cost but there are cases where this is not true
- **Green** Expectation of being able to meet demand through existing suppliers at reasonable cost

Areas that may influence effectiveness of strategy for placements	Currently ECC	Next 4 years ECC
Fostering in-house 12+	● Amber	● Amber
Adoption	● Green	● Green
Sibling placements	● Amber	● Amber
Supported accommodation	● Green	● Amber
Separated migrant children	● Green	● Green
Supported lodgings	● Amber	● Green
Staying put	● Amber	● Green
Mainstream residential	● Red	● Amber

Areas that may influence effectiveness of strategy for placements	Currently ECC	Next 4 years ECC
Solo/Dual residential	● Red	● Amber
Parent and child	● Amber	● Green
IFA <12	● Green	● Green
IFA 12+	● Amber	● Amber
Step-downs to fostering	● Amber	● Amber
Secure	● Red	● Amber
Tier 4	● Red	● Red
Short breaks	● Green	● Green
Shared care (family-based)	● Amber	● Green
Connected carers	● Green	● Green
Specialist residential	● Red	● Amber
CWD transition 16-21	● Amber	● Green
18+ care leavers	● Green	● Green
PACE	● Green	● Green
Emergency beds	● Red	● Amber

This exercise informed and acted as intelligence to support our approach and priorities.

Making a difference – our approach



Making a difference – our approach

- To continue efforts on early intervention programmes, to ensure that only children that need care enter care.

- For all children and young people in care to experience placements that are well matched, able to meet their needs and are stable.

- To gain a better understanding of why placements do not always endure and intervene appropriately to prevent placement breakdown.

- To continue with family-based placements by default but recognising that this is not right for all young people and there will be occasions where other placement options are more suitable to meet the needs of the child or young person.

- To challenge the negative perception of residential care, and commission and/or create more good quality, local provision.

- To recruit and retain more in-house foster carers.

- To work effectively with providers as partners to ensure that children are placed as close to home as possible.



Making a difference – our approach

Fostering Intentions:

Improve Sufficiency through:

- Use Household Annual Reviews to strategically explore carer capacity and encourage stretching approval / expanding approval when appropriate.
- Expanding bedroom capacity of known and valued foster carers - Availability of capital funding to be promoted and used to increase foster carer capacity through adaptations.
- Continued roll out of all the Therapeutic pathways training provided by Mental Health Coordinators and psychologist, to increase foster carer confidence to manage trauma behaviours.
- Maximisation of foster carer retention.
- A holistic approach to placement stability, engaging all stakeholders involved with children in care. This project will review placement planning, develop a team around the placement meetings and engage all multi-agency partners to view placement stability as everyone's responsibility.
- Launch of new approach to long-term fostering – strengthening matching, simplifying processes, and providing proportionate planning that best meets the needs of each individual child.
- Four new Oasis networks to be developed during 2022 / 2023.
- Continuing to improve our carer's ability to interact with the service digitally by developing further on-line forms to add to the finance forms, and online recording for foster carers

- Continuing to specifically target recruitment activities to attract carers who can meet the sufficiency needs of our children in care. These include carers who can take older children, children with complex 'trauma' behaviours, sibling groups, children with disabilities and carers from a BAME background.
- Launch of the fostering dashboard to ensure that the diversity of our children in care population is matched by our foster carers.

Supported accommodation for young people intentions:

Improve Sufficiency through:

- A review of the SIA framework was undertaken and the process for tender was undertaken with a new framework being implemented into practice in October 2021. As a result of the tender the number of providers (including many who are new to providing services in Essex) has been increased so this will ensure that there is a supply and where possible a choice for a young person needing this type of placements.
- Supporting SIA providers to prepare for registration and inspection by Ofsted, ahead of the implementation of statutory regulations across the sector in 2024.

Making a difference – our approach

Residential care intentions:

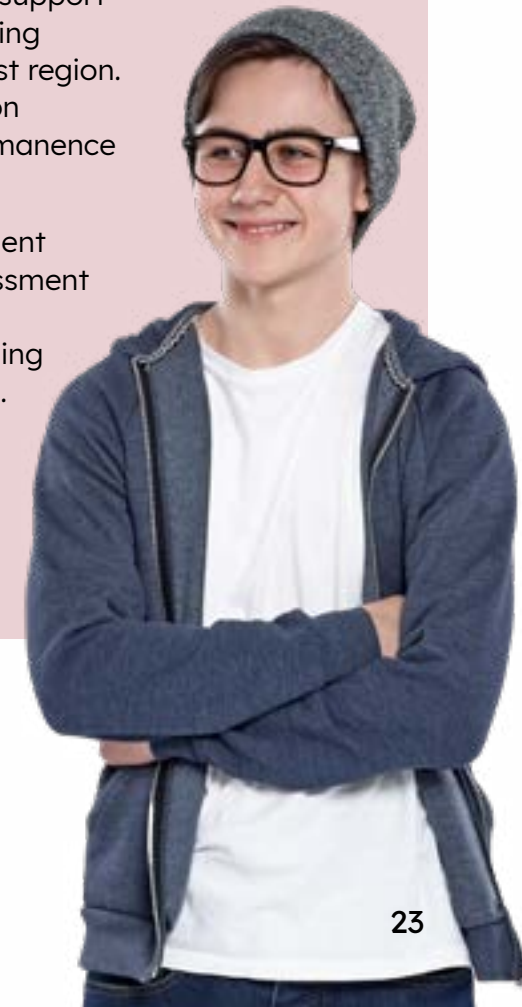
Improve sufficiency through:

- Strengthening and brokering closer relationships with Essex providers to increase access to local placements.
- Creating more placement capacity by providing buildings from which providers can deliver the care and support.
- Creating emergency/crisis placement capacity.
- Capitalising on collaborations with other regional and likeminded Local Authority Partners to address specific gaps in provision.
- Work with our providers to create a sustainable market.
- Work with Local Planning authorities to increase their understanding of the need for Children's Homes.
- Being a strong leader with the market, sharing intelligence on existing and emerging trends and co-producing new innovative models.
- Ensuring there is an even spread of placements across the County, so that we can offer placements in all our localities.

Adoption intentions:

Improve sufficiency through:

- Analysis of the high number of withdrawals that we have seen at various stages of the adoption process to ascertain whether there are any practice challenges behind these withdrawals
- A review of our Early Permanence support in light of the work towards achieving accreditation across the Adopt East region. This will also take into consideration learning from the recent Early Permanence review held.
- A review by the Adoption Recruitment Team of our recruitment and assessment of BAME and LGBTQ+ prospective adopters to ensure that are engaging effectively with these communities.



Governance and next steps



Governance and next steps

Essex County Council will establish a working group of key officers from children services to monitor the intentions, actions, and priorities. This group will develop innovative new concepts to meet our sufficiency duties in response to emerging needs, trends, and legislation as aforementioned. The sufficiency action plan will be reviewed annually.

Sufficiency covers a wide range of areas within children services, and it is important that partners, carers, children, young people, and providers are all invested into the actions contained so partnership and collaboration will remain key therefore Market engagement events will be used to ensure the strategy is kept live.



Priorities

1. Providing good, stable homes and ensuring children and young people feel cared for (aligned with [Co-Parenting Strategy](#)).
2. Ongoing investment and development in inhouse fostering, including continued targeted recruitment of Black, Asian and minority ethnic carers and sibling placements.
3. Ensuring providers are supported to navigate the new regulatory framework for supported accommodation for young people.
4. Ensuring access to the residential sector through relational commissioning and supporting the quality of these services.
5. Using innovative commissioning and procurement models understanding and recognising the current national challenges, specifically surrounded the cost of living and workforce difficulties.
6. Close monitoring / scrutiny of out of county statistics.
7. Working effectively with our Corporate Parenting Partners and advocating on behalf of Children in Care.
8. Engage with the levelling up agenda for Essex.

This information is issued by:
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Children and Families

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Published January 2023