

Strengthening Services for Children and Families in Suffolk Board Bulletin

Re: Board Meeting July 18th 2025

Compiled by the Chairman of the Board, Nicola Beach, Chief Executive of Suffolk County Council

Purpose and frequency of the Board:

The Board has been established to strengthen the improvement and transformation of services provided by a range of partners for children and families in Suffolk. The Board will do this by:

- Agreeing shared priorities to improve and transform services
- Providing professional support and challenge to strengthen services, by achieving better outcomes for children and families, and better performance
- Delivering improvements and reforms, in line with agreed planning, reform milestones and target dates
- Unblocking barriers to accelerate improvements, and
- Monitoring the progress of improvement and reform

Board members include colleagues from the NHS, Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership, Department for Education, Essex County Council, Suffolk Constabulary and Cabinet members. A full list of members is listed at the end of this bulletin.

The Board will report progress to Suffolk County Council's Cabinet, with regular updates provided to Key Leaders, including the Leader of the Council and relevant Executive Members. HMI Ofsted, Care Quality Commission and HMI Probation, will continue to monitor progress through their respective regulatory inspection frameworks.

Members of this Board will collaborate with other strategic groups and will operate as a delivery arm of the Suffolk Safeguarding Children's Partnership, ensuring two-way communication and feedback.

We are also committed to engaging frontline staff and managers, regularly testing the impact of improvements. We will also seek feedback from children, young people, and their parents and carers, through various stakeholders.

Meetings take place every two months, with the next meeting planned for September 18th.

Children's social care improvement and quality assurance update

There have been a number of highlights in the work to improve social care and strengthen our quality assurance. These include:

Revised PLO Guidance

The revised Public Law Outline (PLO) Guidance has been formally approved. A new process flowchart has been developed to support implementation and has been shared with all managers to ensure consistency and understanding across the service.

Quality Assurance Thematic Audit and Learning Circle

Following the recent Quality Assurance Thematic Audit, which focused on MASH thresholds, decision-making, and planning, the Head of Service has convened a '*Building Better Practice*' learning circle. This initiative brings staff together to reflect on audit findings and implement the recommended actions to strengthen professional practice.

Achieving Permanence for Children Project

A new initiative, the Achieving Permanence for Children Project and Panel, will commence in July. The panel will be chaired by the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting and will focus on promoting timely and effective permanence planning for children.

SLIP Activity – Phase 1 and Next Steps

Phase 1 of the SLIP (Service Learning and Improvement Programme) activity has delivered positive outcomes. Building on these foundations, the proposed Phase 2 will aim to secure sustainable and measurable improvements, ensuring long-term impact across key service areas.

Revised Quality Assurance Framework

The revised Quality Assurance Framework, launched in May 2025, has introduced a new audit tool, expanded the number of trained auditors, and established a new monthly auditing cycle. These developments are designed to strengthen oversight and drive continuous improvement in practice quality.

A couple of challenges were shared with the board which included the number of care leavers in unsuitable accommodation or emergency accommodation and an increased demand on services, particularly advocacy support.

The next steps identified in this piece of work includes a new head of quality assurance starting in August 2025 and the development of an action plan to respond to recommendations from the Corporate Parenting Peer Review held in May 2025. Work also continues to prepare for the ILACS focus visit on the Front Door.

Education and inclusion improvement

As is standing agenda item, the board also heard about progress, risk and next steps within our SEND improvement work.

A large amount of work is happening here, some of which includes:

DfE Deep Dive – Leadership and Governance

The Department for Education (DfE) Deep Dive Part 2, focusing on leadership and governance, was completed in June 2025. The review identified several areas of positive progress, described as “*green shoots of hope*”, indicating early signs of improvement and strengthened leadership across the service.

SEND Communication Audit and Group

A comprehensive SEND Communication Audit has been completed. In response to the findings, a new *SEND Communications Group* has been established and will be chaired by the Communications Manager from August 2025. The group’s primary objective will be to develop and implement a robust SEND Communication Strategy to enhance engagement with children, families, and partners.

Co-Production Charter

A new Co-Production Charter has been developed in partnership with key stakeholders. The Charter is currently progressing through the final approvals process and will be published following sign-off. It will set out clear principles and commitments to promote meaningful co-production with children, young people, and families.

Local Offer Peer Review

A peer review of the Local Offer is being scheduled for Summer 2025. This review will provide valuable external feedback on accessibility, quality, and effectiveness, supporting ongoing improvement and alignment with best practice standards.

Leadership Appointment – Head of SEND Transformation

The newly appointed *Head of SEND Transformation* will take up post on 21 July 2025. This role will provide strategic leadership and drive forward the implementation of the SEND Improvement Plan, ensuring that progress is delivered at pace and impact is sustained.

Accelerated Action Plan for Operational Improvement

A focused and accelerated action plan has been developed and implemented to strengthen operational delivery and improve outcomes for children and their families. The plan prioritises key areas requiring rapid improvement and is being closely monitored for progress and impact.

Data Dashboard for Vulnerable Children

A new data dashboard has been developed to track and monitor the progress and wellbeing of the most vulnerable children. This dashboard is reviewed weekly by the Director of Children’s Services (DCS) and senior management team to inform decision-making and ensure timely responses to emerging issues.

Some of the challenges flagged to the board include commissioning across the SEND area partnership without being informed by data, preparation for adulthood and quality assurance processes.

Next steps within this area includes refreshing the Priority Action Plan, ongoing preparations for the Ofsted and CQC monitoring visit and work to scope and create a 0-25 service.

Deep dive: MHCLG visit feedback and next steps

The board heard feedback from a visit from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to look at preventing and reducing youth homelessness across Suffolk County Council and Suffolk's district and borough councils.

Overall, the MHCLG were impressed with our partnership working and stressed that we had many things in development, and we had ambition to do better. They raised several strengths as outlined below:

- Strong commitment to build on partnerships to strengthen services to prevent youth homelessness with ambition to build a better offer
- Housing Partnership Board and Young Person Action Group – youth homelessness focus across County and Districts & Boroughs (D&Bs)
- A wide range of homeless prevention and family support services across County and D&Bs
- County Transformation and Improvement plan – recent momentum and focus on homeless 16/17 year olds, with new Joint Protocol
- Family Solutions Edge of Care Service well established and recognised by Ofsted providing support to keep families together
- Staying Close Service – early adopter in continuous development with ambitious opportunities to broaden scope and support
- Care leavers - Strong Local Offer coproduced with YP / Skills4Life

The board heard that the key priorities identified by the MHCLG focused on practice, particularly around 16/17 homelessness and upskilling the leaving care service to improve their housing knowledge. They believed there were some areas to build on as a system, particularly consistent training and information, and the development of a Youth Homelessness Prevention Action Plan setting out joint strategic commitments and detailing the actions to be completed as a system. MHCLG praised the partnership

and the recent Housing Workshops which have seen multiagency buy in and attendance from the Youth Homelessness Advisor at MHCLG.

Some of the consideration for improvements included reviewing the Young Persons Housing Action Group and refocus on a Youth Homeless Prevention Group. MHCLG also advised to complete a Youth Homeless Needs Assessment within the next 9-12 months, which will feed into the Children In Care Sufficiency Strategy. Data was also an area in which improvement is needed. The vision will be to work across district and borough councils and Suffolk County Council to create a systems data set. This will be kept under review at the new Youth Homelessness Prevention Group and the Quality, Improvement & Performance Group.

The next meeting will be held on September 18th.

Thank you,

Nicola Beach

Chief Executive, Suffolk County Council

Full List of Members:

Suffolk County Council, Chief Executive, Nicola Beach (Chair)

Suffolk County Council, Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services, Sarah-Jane Smedmor (Co-Chair)

Suffolk County Council, Lead Member and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services, Councillor Bobby Bennett

Suffolk County Council, Cabinet Member for Education and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Councillor Andrew Reid

Suffolk County Council, Executive Director of Adult Social Care, Gareth Everton

Suffolk County Council, Director of Public Health and Communities, Stuart Keeble

NHS Suffolk and North-East Essex Integrated Care Board, Director of Nursing, Lisa Nobes

NHS Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board, Tracey Bleakley

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, Chief Executive, Arthur Charvonia

Department for Education, CSC Team Leader, Regional Improvement Group,

East of England, James Allen-Perry

Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership, Independent Scrutineer, Chris Robson,

Essex County Council, Head of Children's Improvement Partnerships, Dave Barron

Suffolk Youth Justice Management Board, Chair, Assistant Chief Constable,

Eamonn Bridger

Suffolk County Council, Assistant Director (Children's Social Care, Corporate Parenting and Youth Justice), Codrutza Oros-Marsh

Suffolk County Council, Assistant Director (Family Support, MASH, Safeguarding, QEPD, Resources and Support), Allison Hassey

Suffolk County Council, Assistant Director for Health, Nursing and Midwifery, Community Services and Commissioning, Richard Cracknell

Suffolk County Council, Interim Assistant Director (Education, Skills, and Learning), Julia Grainger

Suffolk County Council, Interim Assistant Director (Inclusion), Helen Phelan

Suffolk County Council, Interim Assistant Director (Transformation and Improvement), Gail Hancock

Suffolk County Council, Interim Head of Programmes, James Boxer

With prior permission from the Chair, and in exceptional circumstances, a suitable senior executive may deputise on behalf of their named representative.

The following Business Partners will also attend the Board, unless otherwise advised in advance:

Suffolk County Council, Head of Data and Intelligence, Harriet Wakeling

Suffolk County Council, HR Strategic Partner, Michael Howe

Suffolk County Council, Finance Strategic Partner, Sonya Harban

Suffolk County Council, Communications Strategic Partner, Kate Dodd