

Strengthening Services for Children and Families in Suffolk Board Bulletin

Re: Board Meeting 15 May 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 July 18th.

Children's Social Care Improvement Update

The Board began with a standing item covering improvement within Children's Social. The Children's Social Care Improvement Action Plan seeks to address the seven Priority Improvement Actions identified by inspectors following the Ofsted ILACS in June 2024 and outlined in the inspection report published in August 2024.Care.

The aim of this project is to improve the overall quality of children's social care practice to ensure that the identified Improvement Priority Actions achieve and maintain a consistently 'Good' and better standard of practice to improve outcomes for children and young people in need of support, protection and care in Suffolk.

For ease, this has been divided into highlights, challenges and next steps.

Highlights:

This report provides updates on seven key priority improvement areas (PIAs) within children's social care.

PIA 1: MASH Thresholds

The 'Families First' Programme planning remains on track to support the creation of an Integrated Front Door (IFD) and a Steering Group is in place. A QA audit focusing on MASH thresholds and decision-making is progressing as scheduled, focusing on areas such as domestic abuse, substance misuse, mental health, and unborn babies.

PIA 2: Homeless 16/17-Year-Olds

A Youth Homelessness Focus Visit was conducted by the Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government with CYPS and District and Borough Housing Authorities in early April 2025. Formal feedback is expected on 15 May 2025.

PIA 3: Timeliness of PLO to Achieve Permanence

A PLO Task and Finish Group has been established following an audit and diagnostic review. The DFJ Trailblazer Pilot has concluded, and efforts are underway to launch the Permanence Improvement Programme (PIP), aimed at reviewing cases to reduce drift and delay.

PIA 4: Pathway Planning

A total of 48% of care leavers now have a Pathway Plan using the new Liquid Logic template, reflecting a 23% improvement from the previous month. A Case Summary audit has reported some progress, although the service is striving for more consistency and pace.

PIA 5: Care Leaver Entitlements and the Local Offer

The Local Offer has been integrated into the new pathway planning template, with 85% of young people confirming awareness and understanding. An audit is underway to consider whether services are culturally appropriate for separated migrant children (unaccompanied asylum seeking children) and care leavers.

PIA 6: Support for older Care Leavers Aged 21+

Support for care leavers aged 21+ has increased, with 141 individuals receiving assistance in March 2025. The "stepping back" approach is being refined, and remedial measures are in place to re-engage young people whose service involvement was

previously discontinued prematurely and to identify and support care leavers who are 'additionally vulnerable' due to homelessness, mental ill health, substance misuse, being incarceration in prison or being pregnant/a young parent.

PIA 7: Understanding the Quality of Practice

Multiple diagnostic reviews have been completed, including Sector Led Improvement partnerships with Essex, Norfolk, and Achieving for Children, the MHCLG Homeless Focus Visit by MHCLG and an upcoming Local Government Association diagnostic review of Corporate Parenting. These diagnostics have helped CYPS to develop its self-evaluation so that the service now knows itself much better than at the time of the Ofsted inspection in 2024. This is reflected in the refreshed version of the self-evaluation. The Quality Assurance new ways of working continue, with a new collaborative audit cycle launched on 1 May 2025.

Challenges:

1. Measures that Matter – completion of these by HOS has been slow and faltering but has now been progressed satisfactorily for the Board.
2. Accommodation sufficiency and risk of homelessness. The number of care leavers in unsuitable accommodation/emergency accommodation has increased to 73 (from 70 in February 2025) and remains a key priority area.

Next Steps & Key Actions:

Building on the priority improvement areas, the following actions are set to be completed in the coming weeks and months:

1. MASH Readiness – Preparation continues for the Ofsted Focus Visit, anticipated in June 2025.
2. DfE Resource Allocation Board Approvals – Awaiting decisions on phase 2 proposals for Essex and Norfolk for 2025/26.
3. Achieving for Children Diagnostic – Agreement on next steps for phase 1 findings.
4. Essex LADO Diagnostic – Completion of the diagnostic assessment.
5. MHCLG Homeless Focus Visit – Formal feedback expected on 15 May 2025, followed by targeted action planning.
6. Corporate Parenting Peer Review – Scheduled to take place between 27–30 May 2025.
7. Care Leaver's Local Offer – Update and refresh as soon as possible by July 2025.
8. MASH Audit – Completion and presentation of findings at the IQP Board on 20 May 2025 and then onto the July 2025 Strengthening Service Board meeting.

9. Pathway Plan Review – Assessment and discussion of feedback at the IQP Board on 20 May 2025 and then onto the July 2025 Strengthening Services Board meeting.
10. DCS Eastern Region Self-Assessment – Finalisation of self-evaluation for the DCS event on 2 July 2025.
11. Improvement Action Plan – the first iteration of the Improvement Action Plan (Mark1) will be closed in May 2025 in accordance with the one year anniversary of the Ofsted ILACS in June 2024. A second refreshed iteration of the Improvement Action Plan (Mark II) will be launched in June 2025, and this will be presented to the July 2025 Strengthening Services Board.

MEASURES THAT MATTER:

The 'Measures that Matter' support the highlight reporting for the Children's Social Care Improvement Action Plan and focus on the Priority Improvement Areas arising from the Ofsted (June 2024), which are summarised below:

- The consistency in the application of thresholds in the MASH.
- The quality of assessment and support to children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless, including joint assessments with housing, the provision of emergency accommodation and ensuring that children are made aware of their right to be accommodated by the local authority.
- Timeliness of the application of pre-proceedings and proceedings to ensure that children do not experience delay in their permanence being secured.
- The quality and consistency of pathway planning with care leavers.
- Care leavers' understanding of their entitlements and the local care leaver offer.
- The assessment and accessibility of support for care leavers post-21.
- The comprehensiveness and accuracy of the local authority's understanding of the quality of practice for children, families and care leavers.

A new Measures that Matter framework has been developed and includes the following in relation to each of the above Priority Improvement Areas:

- Performance data/key performance indicators
- Quality assurance updates taken from audits
- Feedback from a variety of sources, including service users and partners

When presented together, the performance data, quality assurance updates and service user feedback provide are designed to provide easy to digest information about key areas of practice.

SEND Improvement Update

The next agenda item was an overview of improvement of SEND services.

Highlights:

Recent developments highlight significant strides in key areas of improvement:

- Deep Dive Preparations Completed – Evidence has been collated for Part 2, covering Leadership and Governance.
- Exclusions Strategic Solutions Group – In the process of being developed to address exclusion-related challenges.
- Quality and Performance Board – Successfully established to oversee ongoing improvements.
- Internal Funding Group – Set up to focus on deficit management planning within the High Needs Block.
- Progression of Key Roles – New appointments include the Strategic PfA Partnership Lead and Head of SEND Transformation to strengthen leadership and service delivery.
- Governance Structures – Agreed at the SEND Improvement Board, forming a local area partnership, with implementation underway.

Challenges:

- Performance regarding the timeliness of EHC Draft Plan remains a clear priority with direct oversight from Assistant Director with weekly progress reporting
- Quality Assurance systems required strengthening and the Quality Assurance Framework has been reviewed by Q&P Board for implementation
- The volume of SEND Complaints remains high
- Communication with parents and carers remains a priority with a targeted communication audit being undertaken and a strategy being developed

Next Steps:

- Tracking of timeliness of EHC Drafts to be continue
- Complaints monitoring review and communication audit to be completed and developing a strategy
- Informal update on Deep Dive
- Preparation for any OFSTED monitoring visit

DEEP DIVE: CARE LEAVERS

The Board then welcomed a deep dive review focusing on care leavers and presented by the relevant Head of Service. The deep dive addressed key priority areas of practice, focusing on quality and performance, as well as highlighting improvements to date and

on-going challenges. One of the key messages was the importance of corporate parenting and promoting relational practice with care experienced young people, with the emphasis on 'more parenting' and 'less corporate'. Examples of care experienced young people's continuing challenges, especially in relation to accommodation sufficiency, as well as feedback from young people about the services they receive as well as a celebration with notable achievements in relation to running the London marathon and song writing.

Families First Progress Update

Finally, the Board heard a progress update about the Families First national reforms and the local programme.

Key progress included:

- Governance and co-design arrangements
- Broad agreement for a pilot area in the North area, including Lowestoft and Waveney.
- A review of a costed plan with associated key decisions
- A fully recruited Programme Team
- Established links with partner agencies for alignment / join up moving forward

One challenge was shared regarding the need for wider communications about proposed structural changes to support pilot. All Board members were asked to support key messages within their respective organisations and agencies.

The next meeting will be held on July 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 Charvonja

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