

# *EssexWorks* for every child

## A High Level Strategy for the Schools, Children and Families Directorate

### Introduction

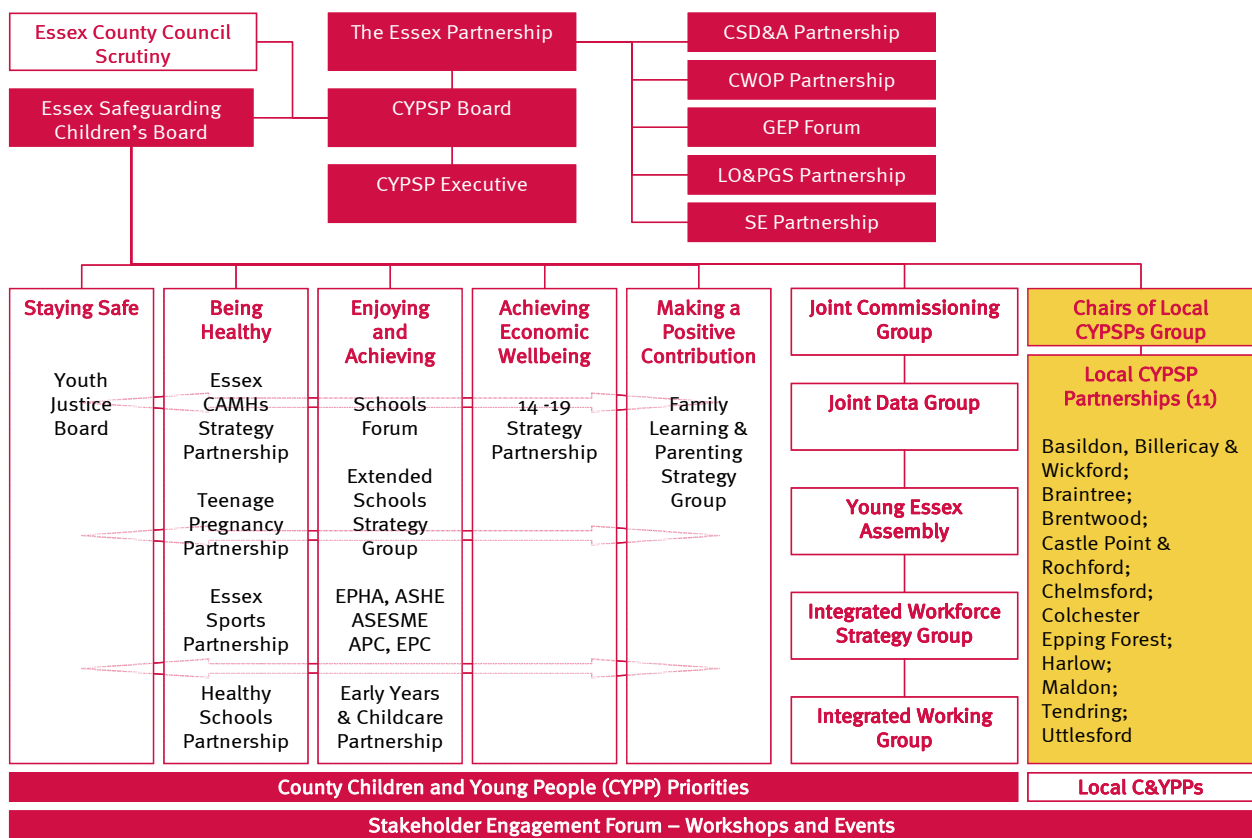
*EssexWorks* outlines our vision for Essex – to deliver the best quality of life in Britain – and our four year programme of change to achieve it.

*EssexWorks for every child* sets out in more detail certain implications *EssexWorks* has in terms of the County Council's ambitions for all the children of Essex. This document is designed to set the strategic direction for the Schools, Children and Families (SCF) Directorate over the next three years. Sitting between the *EssexWorks* Corporate Plan and the SCF Directorate Business Plan, and with a view to developing clear links to the next Children and Young People's Plan, this High Level Strategy addresses areas where we need to particularly focus in light of current under performance, especially relative to the ambitions set out in *EssexWorks*. It is important to note that it does not seek to cover all the work of the SCF Directorate, much of which is very strong.

Essex prides itself on striving to ensure the best quality of life for every citizen. What we mean by 'a good quality of life' is, however, unique to every citizen. Whilst common themes exist such as the enjoyment of the local environment; good personal health and well-being; quality time with friends; supportive, warm family relationships; satisfying work or voluntary activities; and a strong community spirit, the importance placed on each is a result of personal preference. From this starting point it is therefore essential that at every appropriate moment we provide a range of choices to our citizens to enable them to determine their own services and future. We believe that decisions should be exercised as closely as possible to the people they affect, and that power should be devolved to the lowest practicable unit. For example, when it comes to picking a school, that unit is the individual parent.

Strong partnerships are critical to our success. The Children's Trust consists of a single county-wide partnership board, 11 local children and young people's strategic partnerships (CYPSPs) and 28 local delivery groups.

The CYPSP Board plans and oversees the commissioning of high quality services to meet the needs of children, young people and their families.



The SCF Directorate has four service groupings, one responsible for school improvement and early years, one for vulnerable children, one for localities including the integrated Teams Around Schools, Children and Communities (TASCCs) and one for Strategy and Business.

This High Level Strategy is structured according to three vital principles underpinning our ambitions for the children of Essex to have the best quality of life in Britain.

1. **Liberating potential.** We are committed to driving up standards in all schools and narrowing the achievement gap by promoting diversity, aspiration and championing the role of parents and governors within the schools system.
2. **Prevention first and always.** We will focus our services on early identification of children’s need in order to prevent escalation which requires a higher level of support.
3. **Strong families.** We will focus our services on supporting families wherever possible, putting them at the heart of decision-making and building access to services around their needs.

# Context

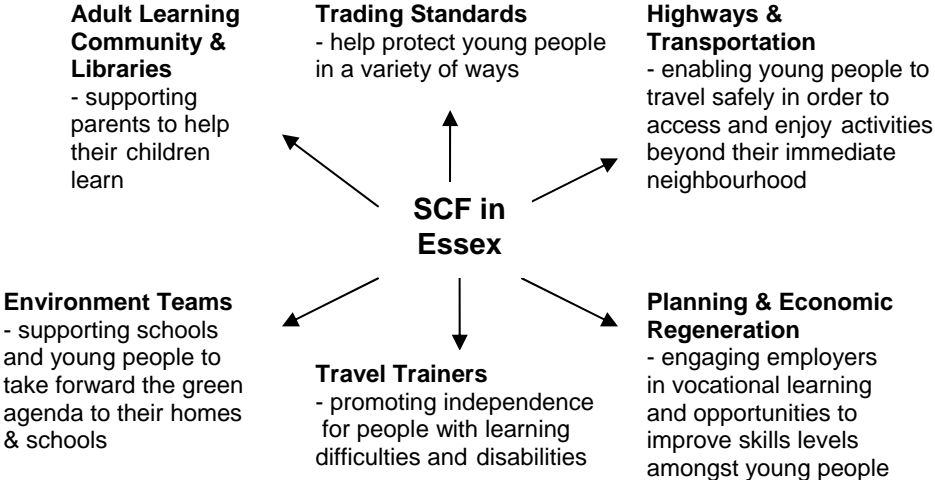
1.36 million people live in Essex, of whom 329,100 (24.2%) are children and young people under 19 years of age. Overall, the 0-19 year-old population has grown but across the county this growth has largely been in the 15-19 age group. However, estimates indicate that Basildon and Brentwood will experience an increase in the pre-school population whilst Harlow will experience an overall decline in the population of children and young people over the same period.

Essex covers a large geographic area and the local authority has a range of specific agencies to deliver co-ordinated services for children and young people. In itself this poses challenges for the county with the list of statutory partners including five Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and 12 borough and district councils, as well as Police, Fire Service, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and non statutory partners including schools and voluntary organisations. Our 210,000 school pupils attend 571 schools: 80 secondary, 470 primary, 19 special schools and 2 nurseries.

The SCF Directorate was created as a response to the Council’s vision for localities and its ambition to improve outcomes for all children. It also responds to the Children’s Act 2004. We are required to deliver more effectively the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes for children as set out in the Children’s Act, these are:

- 1. Physical and mental health and emotional well-being (Be Healthy)
- 2. Protection from harm and neglect (Stay Safe)
- 3. Education, training and recreation (Enjoy and Achieve)
- 4. The contribution made by children to society (Make a Positive Contribution)
- 5. Social and economic well-being (Achieve Economic Well-being)

In addition to the contribution made by the SCF Directorate and its partners, there are many other areas of council services that contribute to children’s well-being. It is essential that these services are joined up in order to achieve the most efficient services to Essex citizens.



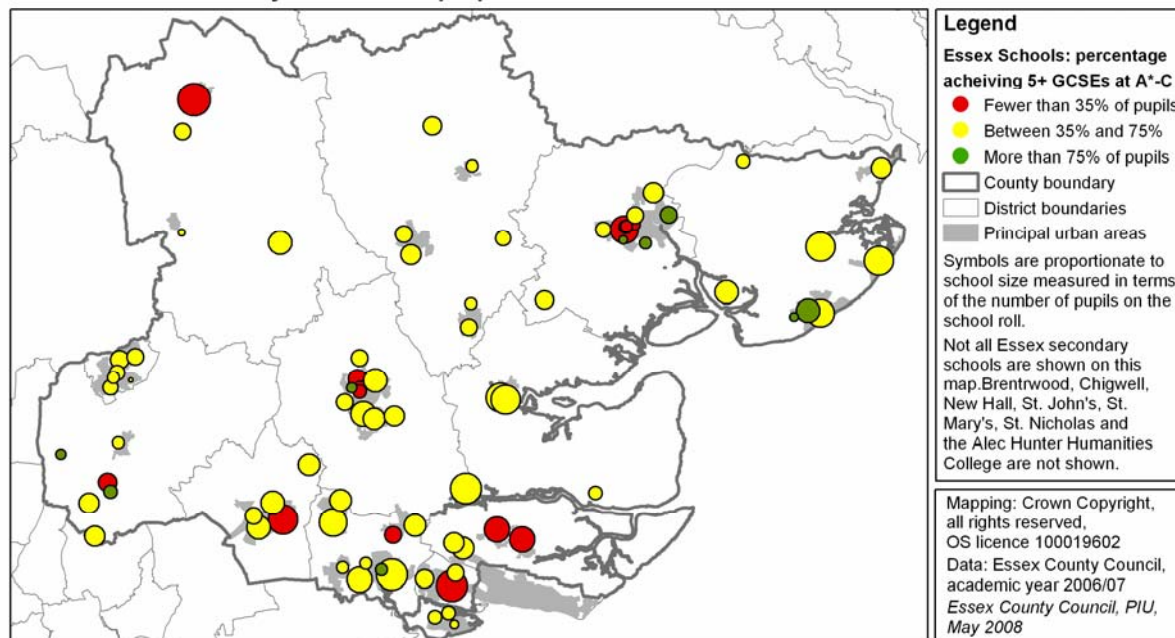
# Liberating Potential

Every child must have the support to maximise their individual talents. Currently this is not always the case in Britain. There is a stubborn, and unacceptable, linkage between disadvantage and educational under-performance.

In Essex, children in primary schools achieve results in line with similar authorities and the national average, with above average reading standards and, as a result of targeted interventions, the total number of schools below floor targets has reduced year on year from 104 in 2004 to 64 schools in 2007. By age 16 the majority of students achieve 5 A\*-C at GCSE.

During the past year the number of secondary schools in categories of concern has been substantially reduced. During the financial year 2006-7 four secondary schools were removed from special measures. However, currently three secondary schools remain in special measures in the county and two that have a notice to improve. This is not acceptable and a key priority of this strategy is that we have no schools in special measures in the next twelve months.

Essex Schools by size and pupil attainment at GCSE



We are, however, not content just to remove schools from Ofsted categories, rather we want all schools to be regarded as “good” or “outstanding” by Ofsted. There are at present five schools below government floor targets for 30% of pupils obtaining 5+ A\*-C grades at GCSE results but a significant number who are at risk of dropping below this; there are 18 schools below the floor target for 30% of pupils obtaining 5+ A\*-C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics. There is a significant number of schools where the gap between 5+A\*-C grade GCSEs and 5+A\*-C grade GCSEs including English and mathematics is greater than 10 percentage points.

Achievement should not be judged narrowly on individual academic results but rather more widely to recognise the alternative routes to individual achievement. We therefore must work to provide a diverse range of courses - both academic and vocational - that provide the opportunities for all to succeed.

To increase educational achievement and skills, an *EssexWorks* priority, and to liberate the potential of all Essex children to enjoy and achieve, we will:

1. **Introduce radical initiatives to ensure diverse, high quality secondary schools in every area of the County.** We will promote diversity through the introduction of new schooling structures such as academies, trust schools and federations. These new arrangements will become mechanisms for bringing additional funding, developing innovation and supporting effective collaboration in order to improve standards of attainment in underperforming schools;
2. **Secure collaboration between and across all education and training providers in meeting the needs of all learners.** Collaboration can yield economic advantages (from sharing of resources, accessing new funding streams and economies of scale), exchange of ideas and good practice between schools and enhanced curriculum through shared provision all leading to school improvement and raised standards;
3. **Expand popular schools wherever possible.** We will encourage those schools that achieve consistently high standards to expand so that more local children can benefit;
4. **Maximise the benefits from the Building Schools for the Future programme, using it as a catalyst to drive up achievements and standards in schools.** The present Building Schools for the Future programme (waves 4, 5 and 6) bring a funding package of c. £350 million to cover the construction of 22 secondary schools, 6 special schools and 2 Pupil Referral Units;
5. **Implement proposals to deliver more vocationally oriented provision within the 14-19 strategy, along with better advice and guidance.** We will support the development of more high quality Work Based Learning Provision and access to Apprenticeships in partnership with employers, the LSC and relevant agencies;
6. **Raise attendance levels at school through enhancing the capacity of teams and use of high impact strategies.** We will introduce advertising campaigns, aimed at parents, highlighting the detrimental affects of children being absent from school during term time. Education Welfare Officers will take an enhanced role in tackling persistent absenteeism in schools and support interventions at the earliest sign of problems. We will also raise awareness of the issue of pupil absence with Governors and request that they play a role in monitoring and challenging, both authorised and unauthorised, absence in their schools;

7. **Assist governors to provide greater challenge to schools and consider local area based improvement plans.** We will enable the use of comparative schools information to ensure awareness of key issues and drivers by providing relevant data. We will introduce and facilitate local area meetings between chairman of governing bodies, with senior officers in attendance to provide advice and champion the governors' responsibilities.
8. **Work with schools to narrow the achievement gap.** We will use detailed analysis of school level data to identify where vulnerable groups of children are not making good progress and work with the schools to put additional targeted programmes in place to accelerate their rates of progress.
9. **Provide more effective support for children with special and additional educational needs.** We will work to ensure more resources, to meet needs, are provided to frontline services and reduce the bureaucratic and costly reliance on statementing processes. We will also work to ensure there is appropriate provision within the county so that children with particular needs can be educated close to home and remain part of their communities.

## How we compare with our statistical neighbours

Reduced secondary school persistent absence rate (NI 87)

Percentage of persistent absentee secondary pupils (those missing 20% or more of the school year). (2006/7)											
	Bedfordshire	Staffordshire	West Sussex	Worcestershire	Swindon	North Somerset	Warwickshire	Hampshire	Leicestershire	Essex	Kent
%	4.2	5.3	6.1	6.1	6.1	6.1	6.2	6.8	6.9	7.2	7.4

Our target for 2009/10 is 5.5%

Achievement of at least 78 points in the Early Years Foundation Stage with at least 6 in each of the scales in PSED & Communication, Language and Literacy (NI 72)

Percentage of children achieving at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage with at least 6 in each of the scales in Personal Social and Emotional Development and Communication, Language and Literacy (2006/7)											
	Staffordshire	Swindon	Warwickshire	Bedfordshire	Leicestershire	West Sussex	Hampshire	Kent	Essex	North Somerset	Worcestershire
%	57	54	50	49	48	46	45	43	41	41	36

Our target for 2009/10 is 50%.

Increased Achievement of 5 or more A\*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent including English and Maths (Threshold) (NI 75)

Percentage achieving 5 or more A*- C grades at GCSE or equivalent including English and Maths (2006/7)											
	Hampshire	West Sussex	Leicestershire	North Somerset	Kent	Warwickshire	Worcestershire	Essex	Bedfordshire	Staffordshire	Swindon
%	51.3	49	48.8	48.5	48.5	47.8	47.7	47.2	47.1	45.7	41.4

Our target for 2009/10 is 53.9%.

Fewer 16 to 18 year olds who are not in education, training or employment (NEET) (NI 117)

Percentage of 16 to 18 year olds who are not in education, training or employment (NEET) (2006)											
	West Sussex	North Somerset	Hampshire	Worcestershire	Leicestershire	Kent	Warwickshire	Essex	Bedfordshire	Staffordshire	Swindon
%	4.5	4.8	5.2	5.5	5.5	6.4	6.7	6.9	7.2	7.6	8.3

Our target for 2009/10 is 5 %

## Prevention first and always

We believe that local government has a crucial role in leading services to shift their focus from dealing with the consequences of difficulties in children's lives to working together to prevent things from going wrong in the first place.

The focus of providing early intervention at an early age and stage to prevent issues escalating is an aspiration in Essex. The prevention of escalation, family breakdown and children becoming looked after has to be the primary focus of children's social care services. This is not only in the best interests of children, young people and their families but it reduces costs and means more resources can be channelled into providing frontline support.

It has been clearly identified and research shows, that the provision of high level family support services to Children in Need (CIN) can prevent children becoming looked after. Care is often seen as a solution to their problems but for most of these young people, it often exacerbates their difficulties and leads to a spiral of damaging behaviours. It is often the case that these young people return to their families of origin when they are older. The aim of this strategy is to support the development and focus of services to prevent escalation and address the high numbers of looked after children (LAC) in Essex.

Children's Social Care is currently operating at a high cost, particularly in the provision of services to LAC. Our gross expenditure in 2006-07 on looked after children was £156 per capita aged under 18. This is higher than eight out of ten of our statistical neighbours, for example Leicestershire spend on looked after children £94 per capita aged under 18. Essex also has a higher number of LAC than comparator authorities. We currently have around 1270 LAC which equates to 43 per 10,000 population. Kent for example is 41 per 10,000 and has plans to reduce this still further.

Redirecting resources from the currently high numbers of LAC to prevention is therefore a key aim of this strategy. We will achieve this by:

1. **Developing more effective services for children on the edge of care and preventing children coming into care.** We will invest in high level family support services that will provide services to adolescents, greater CIN services including additional social workers, and use of family group conferences and family centres. We will reduce the use of care proceedings and the numbers of adolescents in care by intervening earlier. We will also reduce the number of out of county placements and the use of residential care by increasing our in house foster carers and the use of kinship care with the use of Special Guardianship Orders and Resident Orders.
2. **Increasing stability and rehabilitation for children.** We will ensure children are placed for adoption early and rehabilitated to their families when they need to be.
3. **Increasing our retention of social workers.** The turnover of social workers in Essex is 17.9% (2006/7). In order to reduce this figure, we have recently introduced a new

market pay supplement for new and existing social workers. Further research and analysis to establish the main drivers causing social workers to leave will be undertaken and policies responding to this will be introduced – for example increase support, better management of case loads, wider availability of qualifications and clear career paths. We will also expand mobile working and roll out tablet and wireless based access to systems. This will enable social workers to enjoy more flexible working practices – allowing them to avoid coming into the office to write up forms and access client records.

## How we compare with our statistical neighbours

Initial assessments for children’s care carried out within 7 working days (NI 59)

Percentage of initial assessments within 7 working days of referral (2006/7)											
	Warwickshire	Bedfordshire	Kent	Leicestershire	Hampshire	North Somerset	Swindon	West Sussex	Staffordshire	Worcestershire	Essex
%	92	87	75	72	69	68	68	64	63	50	46

Our target for 2009/10 is 90%.

More child protection reviews undertaken promptly (NI 66)

Looked after children cases which were reviewed within required timescales (2006/7)											
	Worcestershire	Bedfordshire	Kent	Hampshire	Leicestershire	Swindon	North Somerset	Staffordshire	Essex	Warwickshire	West Sussex
%	100	96.6	96.4	92.7	91	87.7	82.7	80.1	75.9	71.7	59.9

Our target for 2009/10 is 98%.

## Strong families

Families are the bedrock of society and the place for nurturing happy, capable and resilient children. The quality of a child's upbringing is fundamental in determining their life outcomes. At its best, a family's love and encouragement will provide a child with the confidence and self esteem to succeed. At its worst, and for a small minority, the experience can leave lasting scars.

Approximately 75% of parents say that there are times in their lives when they would like more support and this can range from advice to more structured and intensive interventions. We also know that when discussing with children and young people across Essex what our priorities in our Children & Young People's Plan should be, they told us that help to their parents was important as they looked to their parents as their main source of advice and help.

We must therefore support parents more successfully to nurture their children effectively. This means providing access to service when and where parents, children and young people need them. We will continue to remove the artificial barriers between service groups and replacing these with positive networks and joint delivery programmes with other agencies. The Children's Trust Approach across Essex will continue to ensure that practitioners from a number of organisations are brought together to work around children's needs in one place and improve multi-agency skills needed for addressing complex issues.

To increase support for families to nurture their children we will:

1. **Make greater use of the Effective Parent Partnership Approach (EPPA)** plus a range of parent support programmes funded through Extended Schools grant delivered by both the statutory and voluntary sector. EPPA provides an easy-to-use tool to help schools meet the challenges of engaging well with all families. Families should be able to request the advice, guidance and support they need when and where is convenient. Our parenting strategy will develop the range of services to meet the spectrum of parent's needs;
2. **Launch of Contact Point** - the Essex managed element of the National Children's Index, a key requirement of the Children Act designed to ensure that every child's engagement and interactions with all public agencies are recorded. This will improve further the ability of professionals to communicate with one another regarding children and families they are working with;
3. **Increase the uptake of individual budgets for children and young people with disabilities.** These provide a flexible option for people with disabilities which as well as personalising packages to the individual is also more cost effective for service users. Individual budgets have already proved a popular approach as a solution for more efficient and client focussed care in adult services;

4. **Develop the capacity for more preventative services and family support.** We will support children and young people with a seamless integrated response, so the development of the lead professional role in coordinating and liaising with the key professionals involved in the child's life will be essential to delivering an integrated package. This will include robust multi-agency CIN meetings and greater focus at an early stage and providing a range of preventative services.

## How we compare with our statistical neighbours

More core assessments carried out within 35 working days (NI 60)

Percentage of core assessments for children's social care that were carried out within 35 working days of their commencement (2006/7)											
	Warwickshire	Swindon	Worcestershire	Leicestershire	Kent	Hampshire	North Somerset	Bedfordshire	West Sussex	Essex	Staffordshire
%	97.8	89.7	87.1	86.4	84.3	81.8	78.3	77.9	70.9	63.3	61.8

**Our target for 2009/10 is 90%**

A narrower gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest at the early years stage (NI 92)

Narrowing the gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest (2006/7)											
	Staffordshire	Leicestershire	Kent	Warwickshire	North Somerset	Swindon	Hampshire	Bedfordshire	West Sussex	Worcestershire	Essex
	32.2	33	33	33.1	33.6	34.1	34.1	35.4	37.1	37.8	37.9

**Our target for 2009/10 is 30%**