

Essex means business

Improving outcomes for children, young people and families in Epping Forest

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The need to improve

Essex CC Schools Children, & Families rated 'inadequate' in JAR 2009; made subject to gov intervention Dec 2009; rated 'inadequate' in SLAC Ofsted Inspection in 2010.

ECC Children's Social Care was characterised by:

- High level of unallocated work;
- High number of agency staff;
- Risk averse, process led and procedure driven culture
- Managed from the centre – lack of devolvement for budgets and decision-making

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Impact

- High numbers of children in care and subject to child protection plans
- Significant number of serious case reviews
- High spend on legal services
- Avoidance of decision making
- Defensive or reactive practice

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Response

- Improvement Plan
- New DCS in 2010; new Director of Social Care in summer 2011
- Announced Ofsted inspection September 2011 - improvements recognised and “adequate” rating given
- Gov intervention lifted Dec 2011- move to Phase 2 improvement
- Positive Adoption Inspection Feb 2012

The vision

- A new senior management team and a new quadrant structure in place....and a determination to achieve a wholesale culture shift to bring practice in line with principles of Munro review of child protection
- We aim to invest in staff; improve supervision and support for social workers; improve social work practice; use social work skills to work with families to bring about change and build resilience; integrate children and families' perspective into assessments
- We aim to develop good strong relationships with key partners to enable collaborative working and an integrated approach to providing help to families

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Structure

- 4 quadrants, each covering the whole portfolio of operational Children's Social Care
- Commissioning budgets and associated decision making devolved
- Some county-wide services retained – but with operational links
- Quadrant directors hold strategic county wide leads
- Quadrant directors responsible within locality partnerships

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Achievements in West/Epping Forest

- the number of unallocated cases is right down
- the number of assessments completed within timescales is up
- the number of children on a child protection plan is down considerably as is the number coming onto a plan for a second time
- many families are supported at an earlier stage including 66 families in EF supported by various agencies coordinated through multiagency panels between January 2011 and January 2012
- the protocol for referring a child to CSC (via the Initial Response Team) was tailored to West and communicated
- the professional disagreement process was adapted with West contacts, discussed and circulated

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Commissioning for Children in Epping Forest

- We want to develop a single strategic commissioning approach across children's and adult's services
- We want to work with partners for smarter commissioning with reduced duplication and reduced costs
- We want to develop the right balance between local and County wide commissioning for local responsiveness and value for money
- We are reviewing what we deliver directly ourselves and what we commission others to deliver for us
- Like all public bodies when we commission we are bound by procurement regulations including open tendering

Working Together for Children and Young People in Epping Forest

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- We want to align resources across partners towards agreed outcomes
- We will explore pooling and increased collaboration including through Whole Essex Community Budgets

Responding to Member's enquiries

- The Member Enquiries Team was created in May 2011 as part of a pilot to improve and establish a process for responding to Member and MP correspondence in relation to complaints and formal representations
- The team work virtually across Essex County Council to ensure subject matter expertise for each area of service. They are a direct point of contact for Members and MPs and can be used by District Council Members for complaints/representations about SCF/ECC provision.
- Member Enquiries service standards are:
 - Formal e-mail acknowledgement – **24 hours**
 - Formal letter acknowledgement – **3 working days**
 - Full response timescale – **up to 10 working days**
- Pilot phase ended December 2011 but service will still continue during the evaluation stage between January and April 2012
- The process will be formalised between April and June 2012 including a formal policy and procedure document which will be published for Members and MPs

Member Enquiries Team contact details

- **E-mail** – member.enquiries@essex.gov.uk
- **Postal address** – Member Enquiries Team, Essex County Council, County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1LX
- **Telephone** - 01245 437278. For Highways related issues the number is: 08457 430430.
- The service operates from Monday to Thursday 9am - 5.30pm and Fridays 9am - 4.30pm
- This service does not prohibit you from corresponding with officers directly. Officers are encouraged to resolve issues at the first point of contact where possible.