

Beacon case study

Theme name Integrated Children's Services
Authority name Essex County Council

Summary overview of authority and approach

Essex is a large, complex, multi-tiered authority, working with 11 Primary Care Trusts and 12 district / borough councils.

In Essex, there is a strong commitment - from elected members and senior officers - to the agenda of integrating children's services. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP's) sets the strategy for children's services, and coordinates efforts towards achieving better outcomes for children and families, through 11 local CYPSP's.

The county CYPSP is leading work on implementing the Children Act 2004, building on a portfolio of local examples of existing integrated practice.

The CYPSP has developed the vision and shared priorities and objectives amongst all agencies for the delivery of services to children, young people and their families.

In Essex, there is a two-tier approach to achieving this:

- through the county CYPSP, which sets the strategic framework for agencies countywide
- through a network of local CYPSPs, to provide strategic leadership in communities

Local CYPSPs are largely based on borough / district council areas, and are linked to local community planning through the 12 local strategic partnerships in Essex. There are complexities beyond the two-tier setting in Essex, with key players having a 'greater Essex' / sub-regional function. These include the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Essex Southend and Thurrock (EST) Connexions Service, the Essex Police Service, the Strategic Health Authority, voluntary sector organisations with a greater Essex remit, and GO East and the various regional agencies.

Essex County Council has put in place a structure for the delivery of integrated children's services. It was one of the first authorities to appoint a director of children's services. Schools and children and young people's services have been established, which are improving collaborative working across the county council services.

Service delivery groupings are structured to promote strong collaboration across the school improvement and children in need agendas. The schools service covers school improvement, school planning, post-16, and early years and childcare services. The children and young people's service covers special educational needs, education welfare services, looked after children, children in need, and youth services. The Youth Justice Team and the Pathfinder Children's Trust, as cross-cutting service areas, are currently located within the Children's Directorate, a small cross-cutting strategic unit which supports the director of children's services.

The Pathfinder Children's Trust is one of the main vehicles for achieving significant changes in front line service delivery. The council does not view this as being about structures, but it is interested in developing radically different user pathways into services, and fundamentally different responses from the various agencies and professionals involved. The project is a demonstrator project, that is using additional multi-disciplinary resources to demonstrate how services can work together to provide accessible, flexible child-centred services to children and families at the earliest point. There has been a strong emphasis on the involvement of schools in the Pathfinder Children's Trust, and the initiative embraces a number of other related projects, such as extended schools, healthy schools and school consortia and the local children's centre.

The overarching strategy in Essex is to refocus and realign a greater level of resources on early intervention and prevention - providing better coordinated, more easily accessible and flexible early intervention and prevention services, which reduce the escalation of problems. There is a strong focus on participation of children and young people, and partnership with parents and other agencies, and the evaluation of projects.

There is a range of local examples of emerging integrated children's services, which are all based on, and start with, the needs of the child and family. These build on the strengths of families and communities, in partnership with them and other agencies, as well as evidence-based practice.

As they develop their strategy for achieving a model of integrated children's services across the county, Essex is working on implementing lessons learned from these areas of emergent practice.

Such areas of practice include - the Young Essex Assembly, the 'Its My Life Forum', the Good Beginnings programme, the multi-agency resource centre, and family group conferencing.

Good Beginnings

Good Beginnings is a multi-agency programme, providing early diagnosis and intervention for young children with autism, and their families. The programme focuses on offering early intervention to children with ASD, and including these children in their local early years settings, funded jointly by Special Educational Needs and Psychology Service, and Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership.

The jointly-developed project agreed protocols for all agencies, which ensure they work together to plan coordinated children's programmes. The project delivers training and support for parents and carers, intensive teaching programmes for young children with autism in both the home and early years settings, and training for staff across health, learning and social care settings.

Positive benefits, for both children and parents, have been demonstrated alongside an increased understanding of autism amongst professionals across the agencies. This is demonstrated through a reduction in stress scores for parents, using a parent stress index. All the children supported on the programme attended mainstream pre-school settings, and 50 per cent of them have now entered mainstream primary schools. Monitoring of children on the programme indicates that the severity of the child's autistic behaviour is reduced following intervention, and children are making gains across other areas of learning.

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