

Appendix 10 – Family Safeguarding: Investment for Financial Sustainability on Children’s Services

1. Summary proposal

- 1.1 The proposed Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for the Council incorporates an ambitious plan to improve outcomes for children while reducing costs to the council, through the implementation of the nationally trialled Family Safeguarding model. Under this plan, the Children’s Services Department (CSD) budget would be increased in 2023-2024 for this and then progressively reduced so that by 2026/2027 (the year after the MTFP period) the budget would be back to the equivalent level of 2022-2023 with a view to costs being sustained in the medium term at this level if possible. Through the plan, the profile of costs to the service would be re-engineered through investment in stronger support for families (the Family Safeguarding model), which evidence suggests would then lead to reduced need for children to be provided with care outside their family, reducing costs to the council. The plan is in line with the recommendations of the national care review and best practice adopted by several high performing councils.
- 1.2 The cost of this plan, above the current budget allocation to Children’s Services, is expected to be just over £6m. However, over that period the plan is expected to lead to cost avoidance/ savings of over £11m, given the current trend of rising demand, leading to net savings of over £5m.
- 1.3 This plan will not address two areas of projected increased spend by the Department, which are reflected separately as pressures in the council MTFP. These are:
- (i) Costs related to Home to School Transport driven by a combination of increased numbers of children needing places at special schools/facilities and additional energy costs.
 - (ii) The costs of meeting the proposed new statutory school attendance duty, from September 2023. This is a duty to provide family support, at no cost to schools, to the families of all children whose attendance at school is less than 50%. Currently over 1,000 children fall into this category who are not currently known to Children’s Services. Implementation of the duty from September 2023 depends on the Government finding a legislative vehicle to impose it now that the proposed Schools Bill has been withdrawn. The Department for Education (DfE) has signalled that Ministers propose to identify such a vehicle however, so we need to be prepared.
- 1.4 Over the proposed four year implementation period for Family Safeguarding, we aim to reduce the number of looked after children, not including unaccompanied asylum seekers (UASC), from the current number of around 595 (excluding UASC) to around 530, reducing/ avoiding alternative care costs by £11.6m over that period. We propose to implement the programme in two stages, primarily because of the challenge of recruiting and developing the workforce required. A further factor is the acute pressure which current and expected demand poses for our current management capacity and the need to ensure change is managed carefully in that context. The proposed start date for Family Safeguarding delivery (January 2024) reflects the need to allow up to September 2023 to focus on successful implementation of CSD’s edge of care programme (Connected Families). It is important to note that we are proposing a major change programme for the service at a time when headwinds for Children’s Services are strong and may well increase further as a result of cost of living pressures.
- 1.5 Our modelling of the impact of implementing Family Safeguarding focuses at this stage on reduction in care costs alone. Other areas of the country which have implemented the model have seen reductions in addition to the numbers of children on child protection plans. This will enable us to sustain appropriate caseloads. A strong service, delivering cutting edge

Family Safeguarding, in which social workers have manageable caseloads, will be important in the current extremely competitive labour market.

1.6 It should also be noted that, in addition to re-engineering social care spend for both service sustainability and better outcomes for children, CSD is planning over the next three years to deliver a wider, ambitious, but essential, associated policy agenda. Key strands of this, which are particularly relevant to our budget sustainability, are:

- reversing recent significant deterioration in school attendance and in the emotional wellbeing of children. Poor school attendance drives social care demand: equally addressing it, (including delivery of the proposed new statutory duty from September 2023) requires resource.
- addressing long term issues of poor access to education by some of the most vulnerable young people, for example through currently unchallenged part-time timetables. Again, this requires resource for oversight, but is essential if we are to tackle a major driver of poor outcomes, including need for alternative care.
- strengthening collaboration between schools to secure the best possible shared approaches to supporting vulnerable young people, including those with Special Educational Needs (SEN), and raising standards of educational achievement. We need to continue to support our local partnership structure to deliver this objective.
- integrating our education facing services: we are currently taking forward a major restructure of the Education Division designed to strengthen our support and challenge for schools, working on an area basis.
- encouraging all partner agencies to make support for children and young people a priority, as indicated (for example) in the new NHS Integrated Care System (ICS) Strategy.

2. The strategic case: managing service demand

2.1 Over recent years Children's Services nationally and locally have experienced a significant increase in demand. Since 2010 there has been a 53% increase in the number of children subject to child protection planning and a 28% increase in the number of children in care nationally (LGA, 2020). This has been further exacerbated by the pandemic and more recently the cost of living increases, with a continued projected increase in demand and complexity, specifically in the areas of child protection planning and looked after children.

2.2 East Sussex Children's Services has a strong track record in relation to the quality of services for children and families, having been judged as outstanding in the most recent ILACS (Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services) inspection of 2018. Our rate of looked after children per head of population has been and currently remains below the expected IDACI (Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index) rate. We are not immune to the pressures in demand being experienced across the system, however. Over the past two years East Sussex has experienced a 28% increase in demand at the front door, a 9% increase in children in need, and a 2% increase in children subject to child protection planning. There has been an 8% increase in the number of looked after children since 2015-16 (not including UASC). Our current looked after children rate is above the average for the three statistical neighbour areas currently rated either good or outstanding, with one of those areas (Essex) having a rate 50% lower than ours. Essex has invested heavily in the Family Safeguarding approach.

2.3 The national Independent Review of Children's Social Care published in 2022 pointed to a significant shift nationally in the last ten years from preventative to late and more costly intervention and placements, reducing the resources available to deliver practical and intensive earlier support for families. That pattern can be seen in East Sussex.

2.4 In East Sussex we support the majority of our children in care through in-house foster care (78%) However, due to a combination of national demand, shortage of placements and complexity of need for some of our children, we have seen an increase in the number of children requiring residential provision and increased costs as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Increasing costs of residential placements

Number of children in residential agency placements	Costing >£10k/ week	Costing >£100k/ year
2017/18	5	16
2021/22	8	51
Increase	60%	219%

2.5 The national care review has referenced that for every child entering care, who could have remained safely at home with the right support, there is a significant financial (as well as human) cost, *“the provision of public services for those who enter care are valued at £70,900 per year, compared to £26,900 for children who need a social worker”* (MacAlistair, J. 2022, p47).

2.6 Our data demonstrates that domestic abuse, parental mental health and substance misuse play a dominant part in driving social care referral activity. The Family Safeguarding programme aims to tackle the main causes of parental and family breakdown, through delivering rapid and proactive support through multi-agency support teams, made up of practitioners who specialise in working with the adults in the family on the key areas of domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse, working alongside social workers.

3. The model

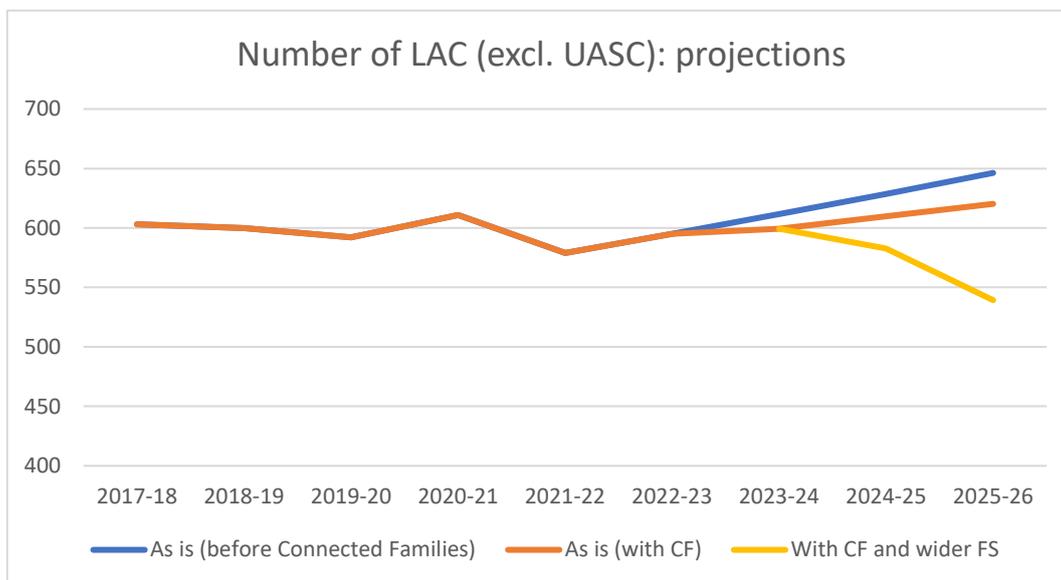
3.1 The Family Safeguarding model provides a planned and strategic approach which will enhance our demand management, whilst also delivering better outcomes for our children and families.

3.2 The model provides intensive support for adults in the three key areas of domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse. These three key areas are the most common factors nationally and locally in assessments of the needs of children for protection. There is also a strong correlation with family poverty. Demand for support services in these areas in East Sussex as elsewhere exceeds the available supply. They are often co-morbidities and are a significant factor in family breakdown, premature deaths and poor outcomes for people with care experience. Access to these mental health and substance misuse services is based on clinical need, and whilst Children’s Services works in partnership with these services, there is a limit on how much influence it can have on how NHS services operate.

3.3 The Family Safeguarding model of small multi-agency teams of specialist adult workers, trained in a range of highly effective interventions integrated with social work teams was originally developed by Hertfordshire in 2015. It has been independently evaluated as effective and has been adopted by 12 other local authorities. Through its implementation Hertfordshire has evidenced a radical impact on outcomes for children and families including reductions in children subject to child protection planning and significant reductions in children who become looked after. Whilst drawing heavily on Hertfordshire’s approach, the initiative will reflect and build on our own successful and well-established East Sussex ‘Connected Practice’, approach, which is strength based, trauma informed and relationship-based (in common with Family Safeguarding). We have an effective multi-disciplinary SWIFT service and ‘Foundations’ programme which this initiative will be able to build upon to offer earlier intensive support and interventions to families and increase resources for reunification. Much of the infrastructure needed to support the implementation of Family

Safeguarding, for example in terms of protocols for joint working with and supervision by adult services, is already available through those existing local programmes. Family Safeguarding would not draw qualified social workers from the wider Children's or Adult Social Care (ASC) workforce as the workers needed do not have to be social work qualified. The Director of Adult Social Care and Health and Director of Public Health support the development and have agreed to detailed discussions to ensure that their expertise informs the programme and to avoid conflicts with ASC capacity requirements.

- 3.4 The Family Safeguarding model is referenced heavily within the national Care Review, which recommends that Children's Services should draw on a multidisciplinary workforce with the time, skills, and autonomy to give children and families the support they need, pursuing adult as well as child outcomes. Investing in the model now will allow East Sussex to develop and embed the approach within our services ahead of the expected DfE national implementation programme. We know that both West Sussex and Brighton and Hove are pursuing the same course and there would be significant merit in not delaying entry into what will inevitably become a competitive recruitment market. The financial modelling includes an investment in workforce development: it is recognised that there may be some recruitment challenges, and these could be addressed through an investment in "growing our own".
- 3.5 Investment will be required for multi-disciplinary teams of key adult services. The programme aims to deliver more rapid, earlier multi-disciplinary interventions to enable children to live safely within their families and will also focus on delivering support to parents and carers where there is potential for looked after children to be reunified with their families.
- 3.6 Three multi-disciplinary teams will be developed. Each team will consist of four Domestic Abuse workers, four Substance Misuse workers, four Adult Mental Health workers and one Practice Manager. The teams will be co-located with social workers and practitioners within Locality Social Work and Family Assessment teams as well as the Looked After Children's Service. The costs of the programme incorporate Operational Management and administrative support.
- 3.7 The model uses evidence-based interventions that contribute to improved levels of engagement and safeguarding with parents and children. The key intervention models will be:
 - Motivational Interviewing (part of our 'Connected Practice' approach)
 - Structured parenting assessments
 - Tailored parenting interventions
 - Intervention programmes for perpetrators of domestic abuse (including impact on children)
 - Intervention programmes for victims of domestic abuse (including impact on children)
 - Programmes to increase children's resilience
 - Drug and Alcohol Recovery programmes
 - Mental Health Interventions
- 3.8 The graph below illustrates the looked after children (LAC) (excluding UASC) projections following implementation of these proposals.



4. The financial case

4.1 To deliver whole service Family Safeguarding Transformation, £2.299m investment is required annually. The costs and anticipated savings are detailed in the table below. We have based these financials on evaluation data from Hertfordshire and the DfE 2020 evaluation of the early implementation of the programme in three other local authorities. It should be noted that the savings identified in our model are based on the average cost of a looked after episode. Other benefits from the model include a reduction in child protection cases, which would maintain manageable caseloads, a key factor in social worker recruitment and retention.

£m	23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27
Costs	0.316	1.264	2.299	2.299
Saving	-	(1.458)	(4.374)	(5.832)
Net Cost/ (Saving)	0.316	(0.194)	(2.075)	(3.533)
Cumulative Net Cost/ (Saving)	0.316	0.122	(1.952)	(5.485)