

1. Key issues facing local authorities in the South East

1.1. South East local authorities' ambitions for their communities can be summarised under four main categories:

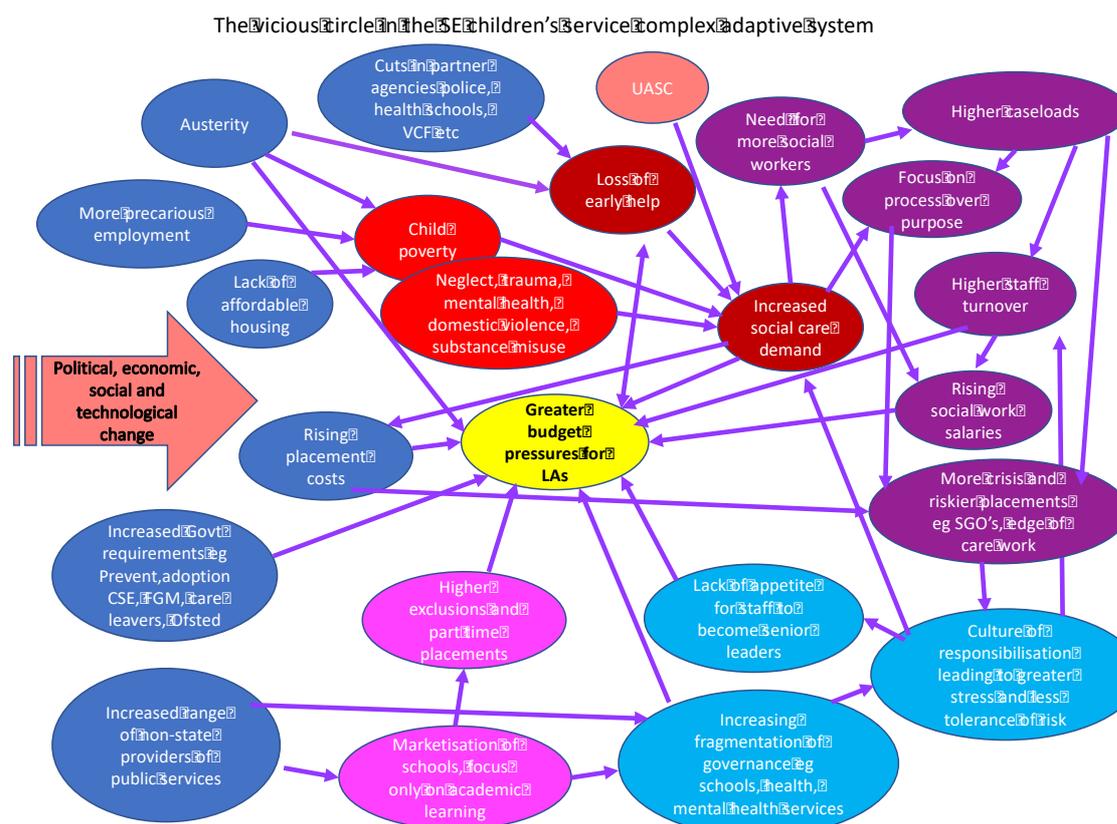
- **Building long term resilience in children and families** who are subject to severe stress and challenges through a collaborative and effective early help network
- **Increasing the effectiveness and consistency of children's social care practice** in delivering sustainable change in families where children are at risk of harm
- **Providing stable permanent nurturing placements** for looked after children and helping care leavers to flourish and thrive
- **Leading a strength based, restorative and inclusive culture** across the children's services sector, including schools, so that all children achieve and flourish and are not 'othered', stigmatised and excluded, particularly children with SEND, from poverty and from BME groups, LAC and previously LAC.

1.2. Key systemic challenges: both the survey and the interviews identified the following as the top priority challenges for local authorities in the South East

- **Financial stringency:** An expectation of achieving year-on-year budget savings targets and what the LGA has identified as a £2 billion shortfall for children's services nationally
- **Social work and social work manager recruitment and retention:** A labour market in which authorities are competing to recruit competent experienced social workers and senior leaders thereby pushing up salaries and costs
- **Affordable effective placements:** A placement market in which costs are rising faster than the rest of the UK both for residential and foster placements, some of which break down.
- **Effective early help:** Early help/front door/prevention including making financial case for early help to make an impact on children, young people and families, so that they do not need more intensive intervention and sustaining early help that genuinely reduces need and demand for higher levels of service.
- **Fragmented governance:** Increased marketization of services and significantly reducing capacity in partner organisations to deliver effective services for children at risk (e.g. police, health, mental health, housing, adult services, VCF sector)
- **Quality SEND provision and funding and managing rise in ECHPs:** Increasing number of children are being identified as needing ECHP's. At the same time, more of these children are being put on part-time timetables or being excluded from school.

1.3. Children's services are part of a complex adaptive system and the current focus on improvement nationally fails to articulate effectively the dynamics that underpin the challenges faced by directors in protecting children from harm and helping them to achieve and flourish. These are represented in the system map below.

Annexe 1 – Key issues facing local authorities in the South East



- 1.4. Directors are responding to a vicious cycle in this system as result of political, social, technological and economic change. The continuing policy of austerity is affecting both the capacity to deliver services to protect children and the demand for these services as a result of increasing child poverty. The budget cutbacks across local authorities and partner services, have reduced the early help safety net for these families, leading to increased demand on social care. This demand has led to spiralling costs, through the need to recruit more social workers and find placements for children with greater needs.
- 1.5. At the same time, the marketisation of public services and schools has led to an increasing number of providers across the sector. This has made governance much more fragmented and devolved accountability to a lower level. In schools in particular, staff now feel less confident in managing risk and therefore expect social care or SEND teams to take responsibility for children. Against this backdrop, there is Ofsted, which increases the sense of responsibility and distracts from the systemic challenges. As one director said, *“There is an unhealthy preoccupation with it. There is a definitely a need for a focus on improvement, but it is like teaching to the test, in that when you narrow the focus, you lose the big picture.”*
- 1.6. Directors felt it was no longer possible, or even rational, to look at improvement through the narrow lens of activities to improve processes, practices and systems within individual organisations. They were seeking to change a system that was intensively focused on process, to one which focused more on purpose and creating change in families so that children could thrive. They were clear that the funding gap between what is available and what is needed to improve children’s lives was now so great that much energy and effort

needed to be put into highlighting these challenges and to securing sufficient funding to keep children from harm.

- 1.7. A key challenge locally was not to be continually seen as on the ‘naughty step’ due to the need to fund rising demand. Helping local politicians and government to understand the vicious cycle above, and securing the policies and funding to break it, was as much of a priority as working together to secure improvement. In addition, a number of suggestions for joint work were more geared towards gaining greater efficiencies by working together, than about improving practice per se.
- 1.8. This very much reflects the national picture summarised by the ADCS. ADCS President Stuart Gallimore’s 2018 inaugural speech particularly identified the pressure on children’s services arising from the impact of austerity and the significant number of children who are born into and live in poverty. The LGA has identified the current shortfall in funding across England for children’s services is about £2 billion. This situation requires very resilient leadership, a constant quest for innovation and learning. It will also need a high degree of solidarity and collective action by local authorities if the situation is to be improved.

Strategies for improving practice and performance

- 1.9. Sharing existing good practice in the South East LAs. One of the aims of the regional alliance is to identify where the good practice in the region is and increase the rate at which it is shared. In the survey referred to above, South East local authorities were asked to identify areas of good and effective practice that they would be willing to share with others and also areas in which they would like support from other LAs. The SESLIP team has done some matching of these requests, and now that most local authorities have agreed that these can be shared, we are encouraging authorities to make direct approaches to each other, keeping the SESLIP team informed of any matches made.
- 1.10. A number of further priorities were identified for this plan through both the survey and the interviews. Some of these are reflected in the 10 priorities, other ideas have been noted for action at a future date

How we produced this plan

- 1.11. The plan has been developed through the following activities:
 - asking every DCS to complete a survey (see **Annex 1**). This asked about key priorities and asked each local authority what they might offer to others, and what help they would like from others.
 - reviewing 30 published Ofsted Safeguarding, JTAI and SEND reports over the past four years which looked at key themes and over 430 strengths and areas for improvement.
 - Analysing 19 current local authority self-assessments to identify common strengths areas for improvement and opportunities for collaboration.
 - Taking the feedback from the series of Triad Peer Challenge days held in Spring 2019
 - Undertaking a desktop analysis of performance and cost data for the South East in comparison to England.
 - Interviewing 11 DCSs on the current challenges faced by children and families in their authorities

2. Characteristics of the South-East region

- 2.1. There are 12 unitary authorities and seven counties, with approximately 2 million children and young people, or just over a fifth of the total population. The region is a fast growing and very prosperous with the largest regional economy in the UK outside London. In contrast, approximately one in eight children (aged under 16) is living in poverty.
- 2.2. The South East has rural and urban areas, coastal communities and areas on the fringe of London, but there are common themes in the provision of children's services. Child poverty was most frequently referred to by directors. Increasing numbers of children are under-nourished, neglected and at risk of exploitation because of increases in domestic violence, mental health difficulties, trauma, parental illness and substance misuse in families. Families are not only finding it challenging to provide appropriate care for babies, but there are increasing number of adolescents that are experiencing high levels of neglect. Increasingly, a reason for referral into social care is that families in financial difficulties are in unsuitable or unstable housing.
- 2.3. Children are increasingly involved with drugs and gangs because of the "county lines" drug running, which is now reaching into areas previously untouched by this activity. Many areas are seeing an increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Alongside this there is an increase in mental health problems and developmental disorders (e.g. ASD, ADHD, self-harm, anxiety and trauma related conditions); more children are being identified as having special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). There is also greater expectation on local authorities to prevent and respond to harm to children in more circumstances e.g. children at risk of female genital mutilation, being radicalised, child sexual exploitation, gang involvement, neglect, trafficking, honour-based violence and forced marriage.

What we have achieved as a region so far

- 2.4. The South East Sector Led Improvement Programme (SESLIP) has been active since 2010. All 19 authorities have supported the programme on a subscription model for since 2014. The programme is governed by a Steering Group that includes three DCSs, a Chief Executive, a Lead Member, and LGA advisers. The main activities of the programme have been:
 - Support for the Assistant Director (Safeguarding) and Assistant Director (Education) networks
 - Data Benchmarking Group
 - SEND co-ordination network, known as SE19
 - Over 50 Topical and DCS Peer Challenges
 - Workforce Development, including a memorandum of cooperation on agency staff
 - Leadership Development, including coaching to improve performance, training the trainers and managing in times of austerity
 - Complex LAC and Edge of Care Project
 - Task and finish groups on projects such as Academy Chain protocols, Early Help Indicators, Voice of the Child

Current performance in the South East

2.5. Performance according to Ofsted Grade at last full inspection (ILAC or SIF) (as at 7 March 2019)

	Number				Percentage			
	Outstanding	Good	RI	Inadequate	Outstanding	Good	RI	Inadequate
East of England	1	4	6	0	9%	36%	55%	0%
East Midlands	0	4	5	0	0%	44%	56%	0%
Inner London	2	6	5	1	14%	43%	36%	7%
North East	0	5	6	1	0%	42%	50%	8%
North West	0	7	13	3	0%	30%	57%	13%
Outer London	1	14	2	2	5%	74%	11%	11%
South East	1	8	7	3	5%	42%	37%	16%
South West	0	3	10	3	0%	19%	63%	19%
West Midlands	0	3	9	2	0%	21%	64%	14%
Yorkshire and Humberside	3	7	2	3	20%	47%	13%	20%
	8	61	65	18	5%	40%	43%	12%

2.6. In SEND inspections, 10 of the 19 SE authorities have had a report, and 4 (40%) required a written statement of action (compared to 37 out of 79 (47%) nationally).

2.7. 30 inspection reports were reviewed including SIF, ILAC, JTAI, SEND and other inspection reports. Some of the reports date back four years and may not represent the current performance. Strengths were identified in the following areas across several different authorities:

- Senior leadership
- Political oversight and member commitment
- Placement stability
- CSE practice
- Early help
- Edge of care
- LSCB
- Threshold guidance and application
- Troubled families
- Unaccompanied minors
- Virtual school
- Youth voice (children in care councils, youth inspectors, parent forums etc.)

2.8. Themes that were identified as needing improvement in several authorities included:

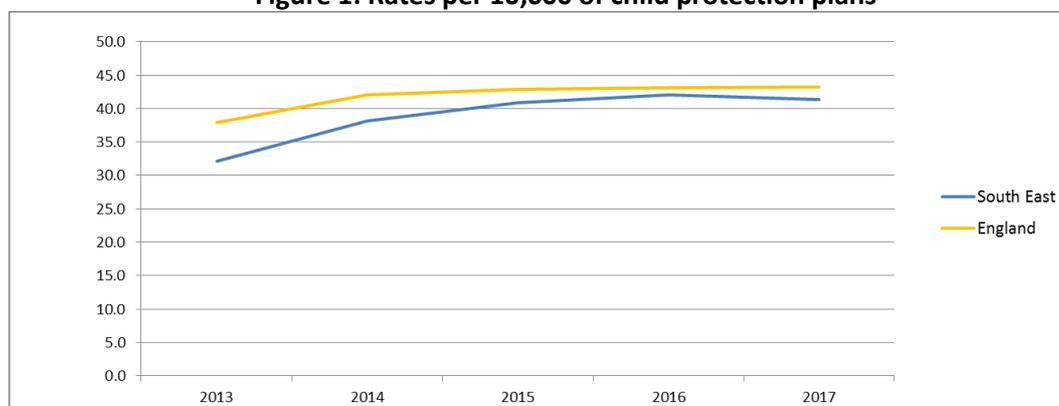
- First line management
- Accommodation for care leavers and use of bed and breakfast
- Life story work
- CAMHS capacity
- Core groups
- Designated clinical officer
- Number of NEET care leavers

- 2.9. For the local authorities identified by Ofsted as inadequate there were shared issues relating to:
- Staff turnover, high reliance on agency workers and impact this has on relationships with children and families
 - Quality of assessment, identification and escalation of risk
 - Purposeful social work practice
 - Lack of QA having an impact
- 2.10. The review also identified several areas where one authority's strength correlated with another's 'area for improvement'. A list of matches is available from the SESLIP team for any local authority who would like to know where good practice has been identified in the region.

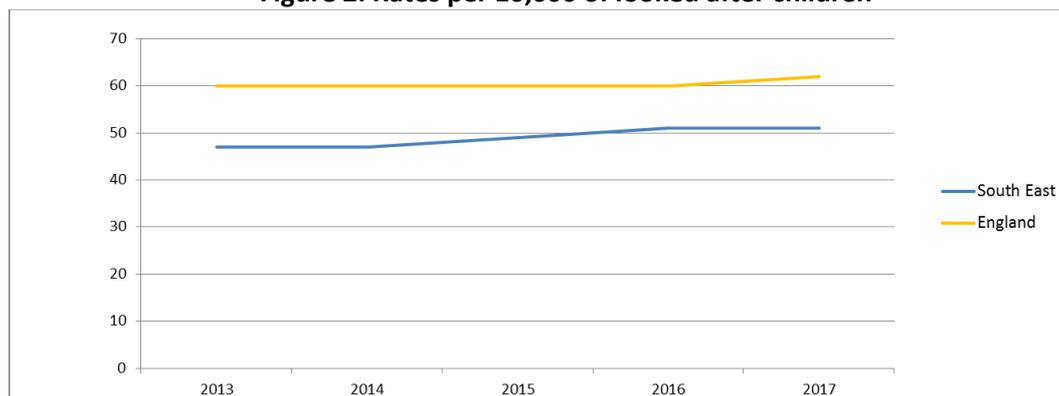
What the data reveal

- 2.11. Performance in the South East overall is generally similar to that of England as a whole. The following comparisons are of interest:
- Despite having lower levels of disadvantage overall, the performance of FSM and SEND pupils in the South East at age 11 is lower than the England average.
 - The rate of referrals per 10k at 554 is significantly higher than the England average of 548, although there is considerable variation across the region.
 - The rate of CIN per 10k at 303 is significantly lower than the England average of 330 (only four of 19 LAs have higher rates than the England average)
 - The previously rising rate of CPP is stabilising and is significantly lower than the England average, although there is considerable variation across South East LAs (as at March 17).

Figure 1: Rates per 10,000 of child protection plans



- 2.12. The previously rising rate of LAC per 10k in the South East (51) is stabilising and is significantly lower than the England average (62) although 7 out of 19 authorities have higher rates.

Figure 2: Rates per 10,000 of looked after children

- 2.13. In the SE, at the end of 2016/17, 9,760 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan, which is less than the figure for 2015/16 (9,770); with 9,830 children being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 51 per 10,000 children). Of this number, 15% were placed for care outside the Local Authority and further than 20 miles from where they used to live.
- 2.14. So overall, all the South East is showing lower levels of need in terms of measures of poverty and unsurprisingly lower levels of intensive intervention within the social care system. These needs rose in 2013 -2014 but have stabilised somewhat since then. However, the South East does have higher levels of referrals, and there is significant variation between authorities on this data.
- 2.15. The school data show that the region as a whole performs better than the national averages in nearly all headline measures.

Table 1 – School Data

	South East	England
All Schools (as at 3 March 2019)		
% schools rated good or better	88.4	84.9
% pupils in schools rated good or better	87.7	83.2
Secondary Schools -2018 provisional		
% schools below floor	10.4	11.6
% schools coasting	9.4	9.2
KS1 % achieving the expected standard		
Reading	78	75
Writing	71	70
Maths	78	76
Phonics	83	82
KS2 % achieving the expected standard		
Combined	65	64
Reading	77	75
Writing	77	77
Maths	76	75
KS4		
Progress 8	0.01	-0.02
Attainment 8	47.8	44.5

Sources. Schools good or better retrieved from www.watchsted.com. KS1 data: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/phonics-screening-check-and-key-stage-1-assessments-england-2018>, KS2 data: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-curriculum-assessments-key-stage-2-2018-provisional>, KS4 data: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/key-stage-4-and-multi-academy-trust-performance-2018-revised>.

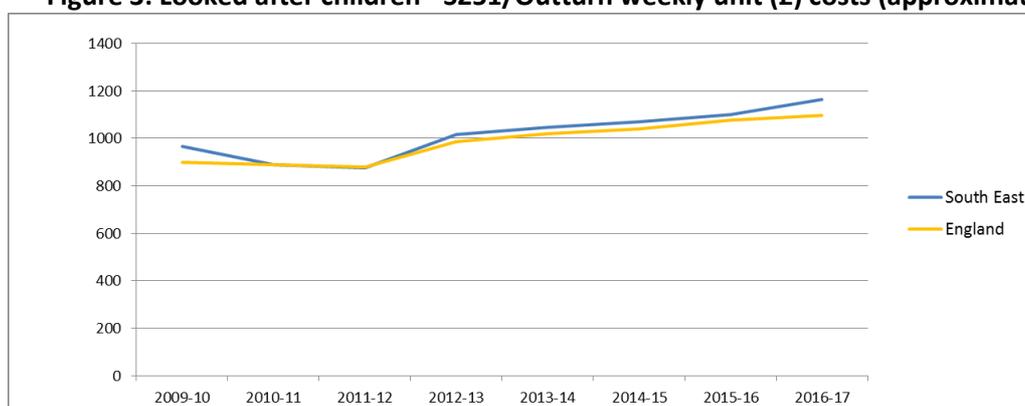
2.16. The regional average conceals a wide variation, with particular challenges for five authorities who have performance in one or more of these factors placing them in the lowest 10% of authorities. They are Isle of Wight, Medway, Portsmouth, Reading and Southampton. By contrast eleven of the authorities have performance in one or more of these factors placing them in the highest 10% of authorities. They are Bracknell Forest, Brighton and Hove, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Kent, Oxfordshire, Slough, Surrey, West Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead and Wokingham.

Cost comparisons - South East costs versus costs in England as a whole

2.17. Cost comparisons for children’s social care have been made using the Section 251 outturn statements for South East local authorities on average against the England average for the past 8 years. The following cost data reveals significant challenges for the SE.

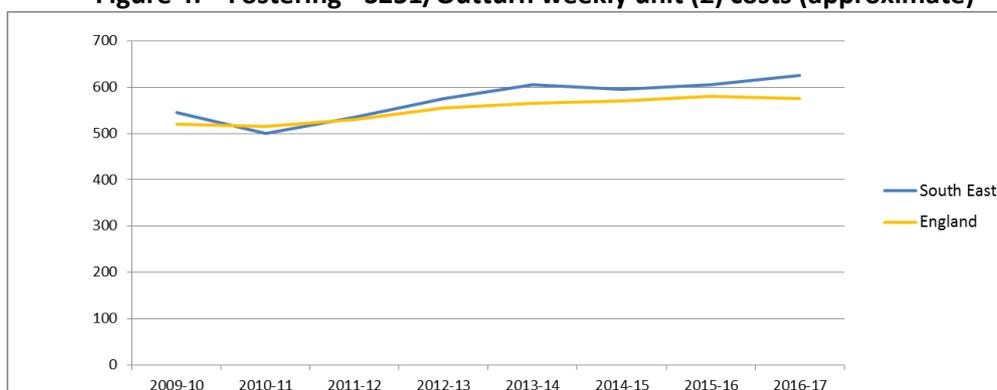
2.18. Looked after children outturn weekly unit costs have been rising over the past five years and are now 6% higher in the South East than in England (£1,165 per in the South East per week versus £1,095 in England)

Figure 3: Looked after children - S251/Outturn weekly unit (£) costs (approximate)



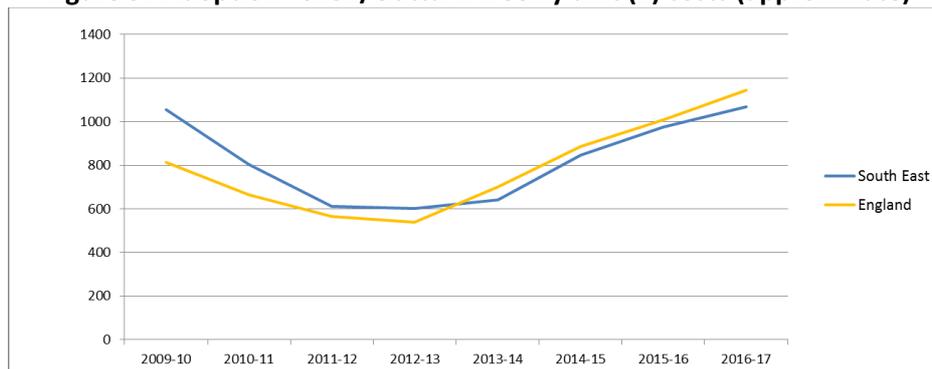
2.19. Fostering outturn weekly unit costs have been rising over the past seven years and are now 8% higher in the South East than in England, (£625 in the South East per week versus £575 in England).

Figure 4: Fostering - S251/Outturn weekly unit (£) costs (approximate)



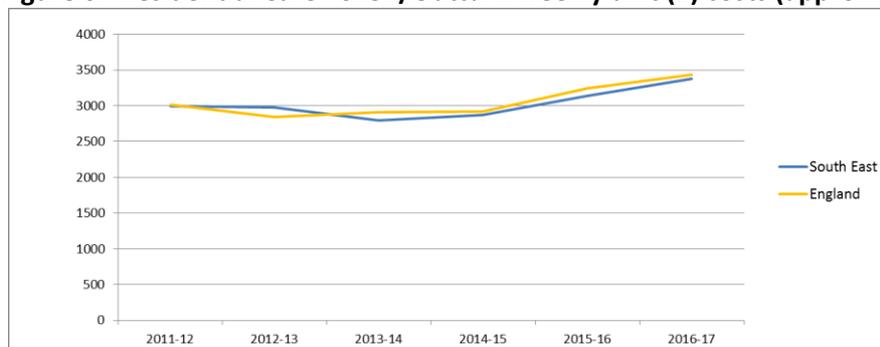
2.20. Adoption outturn weekly unit costs have almost doubled across South East and England since 2011-12 and are currently 7% lower in the South East than in England as a whole (£1,070 per week in the South East versus £1,145 in England).

Figure 5: Adoption - S251/Outturn weekly unit (£) costs (approximate)



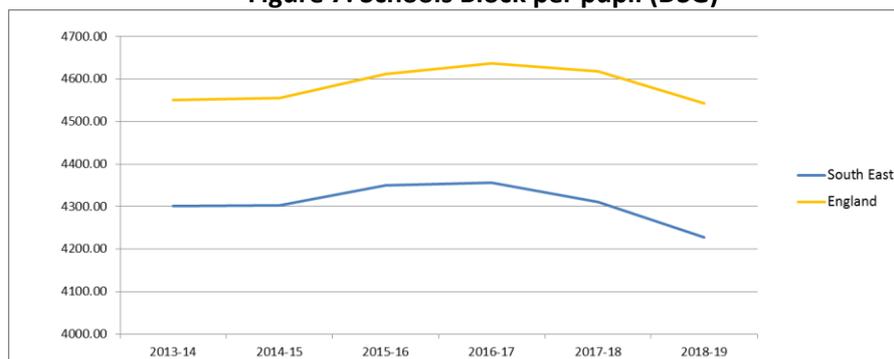
2.21. Weekly outturn cost of residential care is fairly similar to that of England, but this cost has increased by 21% over the past four years (from £2,795 to £3,375 per week in the SE). South East LAs are paying, on average, an extra £400 a week per child in a residential setting compared to 2011-12.

Figure 6: Residential Care - S251/Outturn weekly unit (£) costs (approximate)



2.22. The schools block cost per pupil has dropped by 2% in England and the South East in the past two years and is 7% lower in the South East than in England as a whole. This will particularly effect SEND funding.

Figure 7: Schools Block per pupil (DSG)



Annex 3: Regional improvement plan survey sent SE LAs

Q1: Name of local authority

Q2: Given your knowledge of the issues faced by children's services across South East England, what are the three most important issues that authorities need support with?

Q3: In compiling the regional improvement offer, what are three things you could contribute to other LA's as something that is working well in your service, and how would you want to reach out to others to share your expertise? Examples could be:

- An excellent training programme for front line managers in social care that has improved accountability for performance A staff friendly data scorecard/system to help make better management decisions at team leader level
- An experienced mentor to support managers of looked after children's teams Innovative commissioning of CAMHS services to deliver increased access to services
- A learning partnership with schools that is taking responsibility for school to school peer support A new strategy that has significantly reduced out of area special educational needs residential placements

Q4: In identifying the regional improvement ask, what are three things you want to request help with to improve your service, and how would you want to receive any offers of help? Examples could be:

- An external team for a day to moderate our audits of child protection work
- Mentoring for my new Head of Fostering and Adoption from an experience Head of Service with a Good Ofsted rating
- Support/advice to our Corporate Parenting Board to help them challenge our services more across the Council and beyond
- A challenge day for our school improvement team to facilitate the development of more innovative approaches to fostering school to school support A review of our arrangements for evaluating the impact of early help support

Note responses to this question will be kept confidential within the SESLIP project team. Key themes will be summarised without identifying LAs.

Q5: Is there a preferred timescale for any of these asks within 2018-19?

Q6: Are you willing to be contacted by Anna Wright to take part in a 40-minute structured telephone interview to help tease out in more detail priorities for your authority and authorities across the region?

Q7: Any other comment you would like to make on the process of development or key content of a regional improvement plan

Annex 4: DCS regional peer challenge February 2019

1. All South East local authorities are taking part in a regional peer challenge in 2018-19 in triads as follows:

1	Wokingham	East Sussex	Surrey
2	West Sussex	Kent	Portsmouth
3	Slough	Hampshire and IoW	MK
4	W&M	Oxfordshire	Medway
5	West Berkshire	Buckinghamshire	BHCC
6	Bracknell Forest	Reading	Southampton

2. The SESLIP/LGA team prepared a data benchmarking pack for each local authority in October 2018.
3. A training/preparation/trust building event was held on 30 November 2018 to facilitate the triads in providing robust challenge to each other.
4. Each authority has produced a self-assessment, which is based on the Ofsted Annual conversation self-assessment, signed off by the DCS.
5. SESLIP staff provided confidential feedback on drafts of these self-assessments to 16/19 authorities.
6. Peer challenge days were held February 2019, with two dates having to be re-arranged at short notice to later in the spring.
7. The days have 3 x 2-hour challenge sessions.
8. The days have been attended by the 3 x DCS and up to 3 direct reports that each DCS wishes to bring with them.
9. SESLIP staff have facilitated the days and collected feedback on best practice/common systemic issues that need to be addressed.
10. The peer challenge triad will ensure full notes are taken of each challenge session so that these can be shared with Lead Members/CX's
11. Following the peer challenge, there will be an opportunity for each authority to consider what support it would find useful from a menu of options

Post challenge support options

12. The post-challenge support offer is a key part of ensuring continuing improvement. There are a range of support opportunities available. There will need to be an agreed process for coordinating the support offer to local authorities, so that they are not overwhelmed with offers of support.

Showcasing good practice

13. Funds will be made available to support the capture and dissemination of the good practice identified by local authorities. Where a local authority has great practice that is felt to benefit everyone, or the peer challenge process identifies that a local authority has a great story to tell, then funds can be applied to help celebrate and explain the successes.

Topical peer challenge

14. This involves an LA selecting a specific service area that they would like peers to look at in more depth. The host council produces a self-assessment of that service area and a lead DCS from another authority discusses with the host Council exactly what they would like the peer

challenge to look at. Fieldwork takes place over two days with an oral or PowerPoint presentation at the end of the visit. There is an optional 6-month follow-up.

DCS peer challenge

15. This process involves three local authorities working together. The overall aim is to allow the DCS, together with CEx and Lead Member, to improve understanding of how leadership and management processes impact on service quality, practice and service improvement. The peer challenge team visit focuses both on developing insights which will secure operational improvement, and on seeking insights to the way leadership and management might change to better support service delivery and improved outcomes for children.

Partners in practice

16. There are 15 local authorities who have been identified nationally as Partners in Practice (PiPs) and funded by DfE to develop sector improvement support. PiPs will offer some universal thematic support; however, a significant part of their focus will be to support those councils who are at most at risk of failure. Where local authorities wish this support, the next step would be a conversation with the DfE regional improvement lead. This support may be from a PiP inside or outside the region depending on need. Hampshire is the only South East authority who are funded to deliver PiP improvement support. However, there are 14 others including six London authorities who may be in the position to support authorities in the South East region. The DfE regional leads would work with the local authority to identify what the needs are in consultation with the LGA and the SESLIP team and then agree a package of support from PiP LAs which can offer the best fit (variables considered in doing this include support offer, capacity, geography, politics and existing partnerships). DfE are working with PiPs and the LGA to put in place a menu of support – including some universally available support, targeted options or support which can be designed bespoke to the needs of the local authorities.

Support from a peer authority in the region

17. There will be the option to identify authorities in the region who have developed specific areas of recognised good practice to provide peer support to other local authorities. This could include support from one leadership team to another, peer coaching, or consultancy to set up specific programmes, systems or projects.

Development of regional projects to support key risk areas

18. Part of the SESLIP improvement plan will continue to involve setting up specific projects to support improvement. An example of this is the work currently undertaken by the workforce development group to implement a memorandum of understanding around agency arrangements, share best practice, undertake research and develop apprenticeship arrangements. There is an option for 2-3 authorities to work together to commission project work which will deliver improvement in their areas. There is also the option to develop further group audit/ assurance activity, for example the current look at LAC efficiency.

Leadership development and CPD for DCS and aspirant DCSs

19. Funds will be made available to support leadership development either within one authority, or on a regional basis in order to respond to issues, improvement priorities or risks identified by the peer challenge process. There continues to be the capacity to develop regional training that meets identified needs across the region. Currently courses on leadership development, change management and coaching are available, both as individual courses or as Train the Trainer packages. The DfE is also assessing options for a national support offer to help grow the market for new DCS.

Continued development of benchmarking data

20. The benchmarking group will continue to grow and develop in areas where authorities' value increased access to data.

Support from the LGA

21. The LGA can offer a range of support which could include:

- A corporate peer challenge which offers a diagnostic and support for the Council's corporate and political leadership, focusing specifically on the Council's capacity to drive improvement in children's services
- Access to a multi-disciplinary peer challenge (as part of the LGA's national support offer). This includes a safeguarding diagnostic, a care practice diagnostic and peer challenges of CSE, LSCB and SEND. There is now also a financial efficiency diagnostic tool in development
- Bespoke support packages to local authorities as required

22. As part of the DfE's newly funded programme with the LGA

- All local authorities will have access to the Children's Services Leadership Essentials course. This fully subsidised 2-day residential programme aims to support Lead Members, Deputy Lead Members and scrutiny chairs with the key challenges they face in the changing policy landscape, and to develop leadership capacity, share learning and provide a valuable networking opportunity.
- All regions will be supported on Lead Member networks for each region – this will include transfer of learning on key aspects of political leadership responsibility for children's services, providing Lead Members with an overview of regional improvement priorities and focus and to ensure they are confident and capable to hold their own councils to account. The Lead Member network will also provide opportunities to build on the Children's Services Leadership Essentials learning and networking.
- Utilising the LGA's regional Principal Advisers and regional children's services improvement advisers to provide support through such activity as mini 1-day reviews, facilitation of vision and strategy development, coaching, financial reviews and Ofsted readiness assessments
- Intensive packages of support to build political leadership capacity, including training, coaching and mentoring for lead members; providing effective political oversight and scrutiny and implementing strong corporate parenting systems.

Annex 5: Glossary

ADCS	Association of Directors of Children’s Services
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CEx	Chief Executive (of a Local Authority or a Children’s Services Trust)
CIN	Children in Need
CP	Child Protection
CPP	Child protection plans
CSE	Child sexual exploitation
CYP	Children and young people
DA	Domestic abuse
DCS	Director of Children’s Services
DfE	Department for Education
ECHP	Education Health and Care Plan
ILACS	Ofsted's single inspection framework for inspecting local authority children's services
JTAI	Joint targeted area inspections
LAC	Looked after children
LGA	Local Government Association
LM	Lead Member – a Councillor who is the Executive or Cabinet or Portfolio holder for Childrens’ Services in their authority
LSCB	Local Safeguarding Children’s Board
MASH	Multi agency safeguarding hub
NEET	Young person not in education, employment or training
PiP	Partners in Practice – children’s services authorities funded by the DfE to undertake improvement work
QA	Quality assurance
RI	A “Requires Improvement” judgement given by Ofsted
Section 251 outturn statement	Local authorities submit annual statements on planned and actual expenditure on education and children’s social care to the Secretary of State for Education.
South East ADCS	The South East branch of the ADCS
SE19	Network of 19 local authority SEND managers
SEND	Special educational needs and disability
SESLIP	South East Sector Led Improvement Programme
UASC	Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children