Corporate Parenting Board

Date: Wednesday, 30 November 2022
Time: 3.00 pm
Venue: Committee Room 1, County Hall, Dorchester, DT1 1XJ

Members (Quorum)
Kate Wheller (Chairman), Richard Biggs (Vice-Chairman), Ryan Holloway, Carole Jones, Stella Jones, Andrew Kerby and Cathy Lugg

Chief Executive: Matt Prosser, County Hall, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1XJ

For more information about this agenda please contact Democratic Services
Meeting Contact Tel: 01305 224709 - megan.r.rochester@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting, apart from any items listed in the exempt part of this agenda.

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Agenda

Item   **Pages**

1.   **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

     The Chair to open the meeting and welcome those present.

2.   **APOLOGIES**

     To receive any apologies for absense.

3.   **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

     To disclose any pecuniary, other registrable or non-registrable interests as set out in the adopted Code of Conduct. In making their decision councillors are asked to state the agenda item, the nature of the interest and any action they propose to take as part of their declaration.

     If required, further advice should be sought from the Monitoring Officer in advance of the meeting.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 24th April 2022.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Representatives of town or parish councils and members of the public who live, work or represent an organisation within the Dorset Council area are welcome to submit up to two questions or two statements for each meeting. Alternatively, you could submit one question and one statement for each meeting.

All submissions must be emailed in full to megan.r.rochester@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk by 8.30am on Friday 25th November.

When submitting your question(s) and/or statement(s) please note that:

- no more than three minutes will be allowed for any one question or statement to be asked/read
- a question may include a short pre-amble to set the context, and this will be included within the three minute period
- please note that sub divided questions count towards your total of two
- when submitting a question please indicate who the question is for (e.g. the name of the committee or Portfolio Holder)
- Include your name, address and contact details. Only your name will be published but we may need your other details to contact you about your question or statement in advance of the meeting.
- questions and statements received in line with the council's rules for public participation will be published as a supplement to the agenda
- all questions, statements and responses will be published in full within the minutes of the meeting.

6. PROPOSED MEETING SCHEDULE SIGN OFF

The Chair to sign off the proposed meeting schedule.

7. INTRODUCTION AND SCENE SETTING

Paul Dempsey, Corporate Director Care and Protection, to set the scene of the meeting.

8. CORPORATE PARENTING DATASET 5 - 24

Matthew Chislett, Service Manager for Corporate Parenting and Permanence, to report.

9. **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL: EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN CARE**   25 - 68

To receive a report from Lisa Linscott, Principal Teacher.

10. **ADVOCACY AND INDEPENDANT VISITORS**   69 - 84

Claire Denby and Louise Beardmore to report.

11. **INDEPENDANT REVIEWING OFFICER'S ANNUAL REPORT**   85 - 128

Martha Sharp, Manager Quality Assurance and Partnerships, to report.

12. **SERVICE DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY CHANGE- BETTER CARE AND EDUCATION FOR UNACCOMPANIED MINORS IN DORSET**   129 - 140

Louise Drury, Head of Service Children in Care and Leaving Care, to report.

13. **AOB- FOSTERING FAMILY DAYS**

Kaye Wright, Youth Voice Manager, to report.

14. **AOB- THE CHILDREN'S DISABILITY REVIEW**

To receive a report from Matthew Chislett, Service Manager Corporate Parenting and Care Leavers.

15. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

To confirm details and deadlines for papers for the next meeting of the (formal) Corporate Parenting Board which will be held on Thursday 27th April 2023.

16. **URGENT ITEMS**

To consider any items of business which the Chairman has had prior notification and considers to be urgent pursuant to section 100B (4) b) of the Local Government Act 1972. The reason for the urgency shall be recorded in the minutes.

17. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

To move the exclusion of the press and the public for the following item(s) in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the meaning of paragraph X of schedule 12 A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

The Live Meeting will end before Members consider the following item.

Corporate Parenting Performance Report

People - Childrens

September 2022 Performance

Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

Corporate Parenting Board - Performance

Introduction

This purpose of this report is to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an overview of performance. These indicators are grouped together under the relevant areas. Work will continue with managers to develop targets.

Overview of Performance

The report assesses the performance of available data during or as at the end of the last month, snapshots of this data are taken. Performance is compared with the previous month and whether there has been an improvement or decline in performance. Where appropriate, a target has been set to ensure high performance and drive improvement and there is RAG rating for these indicators. Targets have been set in line with national and statistical neighbour rates/averages and this information is included in the report where it is available and in discussion with Service Managers. Sparkline graphs have been included to illustrate trends.

RAG Rating and Performance Direction

Where a target has been set, indicators are RAG rated using the criteria below:

Green Performance is good and in line with or exceeding target: consistent with the National/Statistical Neighbour average.

Amber Performance is below target; inconsistent with National/Statistical Neighbour average; action is in place with likelihood of improvement.

Red Performance is poor; well below expected levels nationally; improvement is required.

Latest performance is compared with the previous month with arrows indicating direction of performance as follows:

- improved performance compared with previous month
- same performance compared with previous month
- decline in performance compared with previous month

Benchmarking Note:

Good and Outstanding Statistical neighbours for are Shropshire, Wiltshire, East Sussex, Cornwall and Suffolk. The latest available benchmarking data has been included.

Corporate Parenting Data Set (last 6 months)

Dorset Council

	Benchmarking 19/20		Current Target	Baseline Dorset March 2020	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Direction of Performance	Status	Trend
	Eng AV	Good + AV											
Profile													
Measure													
Rate of children in care as at end of month													
	67	57.6	60	70	66.3	66.5	67.1	66.2	67.2	67.1	✓		
Number of children who became CIC													
			10	21	16	11	11	12	15	11	✓		
Number of children who ceased to be CIC													
			13	22	15	16	7	15	6	9	✓		
Number of CIC who are UASC at end of month													
					27	35	35	35	38	41			
% of CIC who are UASC													
	5	6.5			6.0	7.8	7.7	7.8	8.4	9.0			
Health													
% of New Children in Care receiving their IHA within 20 days (one month in arrears)													
			95	28	0.0	14.3	50.0	44.4	0.0		✗		
% CIC for 12 months or more with Annual Health Assessment completed on time													
	91	92	90	79	87.9	89.4	90.0	92.3	87.7	85.5	✗		
% CIC in care 12 months or more who have had a dental check within 12 months													
	40	30.4	85	78	60.2	61.6	61.6	61.9	56.0	57.2	✓		
% of ALL CIC at end of month with up to date immunisations													
	86	92	88	83	82.2	80.0	81.5	85.5	84.6	83.0	✗		
Emotional Wellbeing													
% of children for CIC for at least 12 months age 4-16yrs with completed SDQ assessment													
	80	69	80	61	79.5	82.0	79.8	76.5	76.6	74.3	✗		
Average SDQ score for children in care who have been in care for more than 12 months (age 4 to 16)													
	13.7	14.1	15	18.6	15.6	15.4	15.6	15.9	15.8	15.9	✗		
Safety													
% of children in care (at any point in last 6 months) with at least one missing episode in the last 12 months													
	10	9	10	16	14.0	13.0	14.0	14.0	14.0	14.0	⚠		
% Children in Care who have had more that 1 episode of Missing													
	6	6.0	6	8.2	9.4	8.8	8.9	9.1	9.5	8.7	✓		
Total No. of allegations made against foster carers in a year (Rolling 12 months)													
	10	11.0		27	19	20	20	19	17	18			

Corporate Parenting Data Set (last 6 months)

	Benchmarking 19/20		Current Target	Baseline Dorset March 2020	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Direction of Performance	Status	Trend
	Eng AV	Good + AV											
Placement													
% Children in Care living in foster placement													
	71.8	73.3			70.0	71.0	71.0	71.0	70.0	70.0	⚠		
% of CIC at end of month with 3+ placements in previous 12 months													
	9	9.4	9	11	9.1	8.9	9.0	9.2	8.6	7.1	✓	🟩	
% of children in care for 2.5 years or more, aged under 16 who have been in their placement for 2 or more years													
	70	72.2	70	69	63.6	62.8	63.8	63.2	61.7	62.5	✓	🟥	
% Children in Care living in a commissioned placement													
	48	58		49.0	57.0	57.0	58.0	59.0	59.0	61.0	✕		
% CIC placed 20 miles away from home													
	21	34	35	47	43.2	42.2	39.9	40.0	39.6	39.4	✓	🟧	
% CIC placed outside Dorset													
	42.1	25.6	30	40	42.8	43.1	42.1	42.9	43.3	42.7	✓	🟥	
Number of unregulated placements (H5, P2, R1)													
			10	47	22.0	23.0	21.0	25.0	31.0	33.0	✕	🟥	
Education													
% Children in Care with an Education Health and Care Plan													
	45.2	39.58			34.9	36.9	37.1	36.2	NA	33.4			
% Children in Care achieving expected standards in Key Stage 1													
							12.5			Data published September 2023			
% Children in Care achieving expected standards in Key Stage 2 Maths													
	51	48.6					30.4			Data published September 2023			
% Children in Care achieving expected standards in Key Stage 2 Writing													
	50	46.3					13.0			Data published September 2023			
% Children in Care achieving expected standards in Key Stage 2 Reading													
	49	46.9		51.0			26.1			Data published September 2023			
Average Attainment 8 score for Children in Care													
	17.7	19.08					Data published March 2023			Data published March 2024			
Average progress 8 score for Children in Care													
	1.23	1.42					Data published March 2023			Data published March 2024			
% of children with a PEP within 20 days of coming into care													
			100		100	NA	NA	100	NA	NA			
% all Children in Care Unauthorised absence													
			1		3.05	3.15	2.68	2.85	NA	3.45	✕	🟥	

Corporate Parenting Data Set (last 6 months)

	Benchmarking 19/20		Current Target	Baseline Dorset March 2020	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Direction of Performance	Status	Trend
	Eng AV	Good + AV											
Education													
Average Attendance % for Children in Care of school age			95		90.1	89.5	88.8	88.7	NA	90.2	✓	🟧	
% Children in Care (school age) who have had at least one suspension in the current academic year					12.5	13.9	15.3	18.2	NA	3.0	✗		
% all Children in Care on reduced timetable			2		2.5	1.8	1.8	2.5	NA	1.7	✗		
Permanence													
% of CIC for 4 months or more with a completed permanence plan			90	73	97.5	96.2	96.0	93.6	91.6	90.0	✗	🟧	
% Children who have achieved Permanence					41.7	43.6	40.4	40.1	38.7	38.9			
% Children Achieved Permanence SGO	14	14.0	15	8.6	15.0	19.0	15.0	16.0	17.0	11.0	✗	🟥	
% Children Achieved Permanence Adoption	10	12.4	12	9.0	5.0	7.0	9.0	14.0	17.0	18.0	✓	🟩	
Sufficiency													
Number of Foster carers at end of month			215	206	194	189	191	190	189	191	✓	🟥	
Number of new households recruited – Mainstream				26	3	2	0	0	1	1	⚠		
Number of new households recruited – Connected Person				45	0	3	0	1	5	6	✓		
Number of new households recruited – Temporary					2	1	4	2	0	0	⚠		
Number of households de-registered – exclude connected carers			2	12	3	4	3	3	2	2	⚠	🟩	
Number of households resigned				15	3	0	1	2	5	6	✗		
Number of applicants undergoing assessment (Foster Carers)					12	12	12	9	8	10	✓		
Number of allegations made against foster carers that were substantiated				14	0	0	0	0	0	1			

Corporate Parenting Data Set (last 6 months)

	Benchmarking 19/20		Current Target	Baseline Dorset March 2020	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Direction of Performance	Status	Trend
	Eng AV	Good + AV											
Adoption													
Number of adoptions finalised in month													
			16	0	9	0	3	1	2	✓		
Number of children living in adoptive placements pending adoption orders													
				20	13	14	15	14	14	!		
Number of children with a match identified													
				0	0	1	2	1	3	✓		
Number of children where family finding is ongoing													
				15	14	18	15	15	13	✓		
Numbers of Adoption placement order revocations over last 12 months													
				2	3	4	4	4	4	5	✗		
Average number of days between entering care and moving in with adoptive family for adopted children (adjusted for foster carer adoptions)													
			342	376	423	406	412	476	476	414	✓	🟧	
The average number of days from the date of the placement order to the date the child was matched to prospective adopters													
			121	178	137	133	136	158	158	151	✓	🟧	
Number of adoptive families recruited													
			60	6	1	3	2	0	1	✓		
Number of adoptive Families in assessment													
				44	48	32	32	32	30	✗		
Care Leavers													
% Care Leavers with an up to date pathway plan at end of month													
			95	66.5	82	83	84	84	75	73	✗	🟥	
% Care Leavers who are living in suitable accommodation (19-21 yrs)													
	88	89.8	96	88	93	95	96	96	98	98	!	🟩	
% Care Leavers who are in Employment Education or Training (19-21yrs)													
	52	55	60	48	52	54	57	56	57	57	!	🟧	
% Care Leavers who are in touch with Dorset Local Authority (19-21yrs)													
	91	92.2	93	92	98	98	98	98	98	99	✓	🟩	
Number of Health passports due within the month (2 months in arrears)													
					4	8	8	3	3				
Number of health passports completed (2 months in arrears)													
					4	8	8	3	3				

Corporate Parenting Data Set

People - Childrens
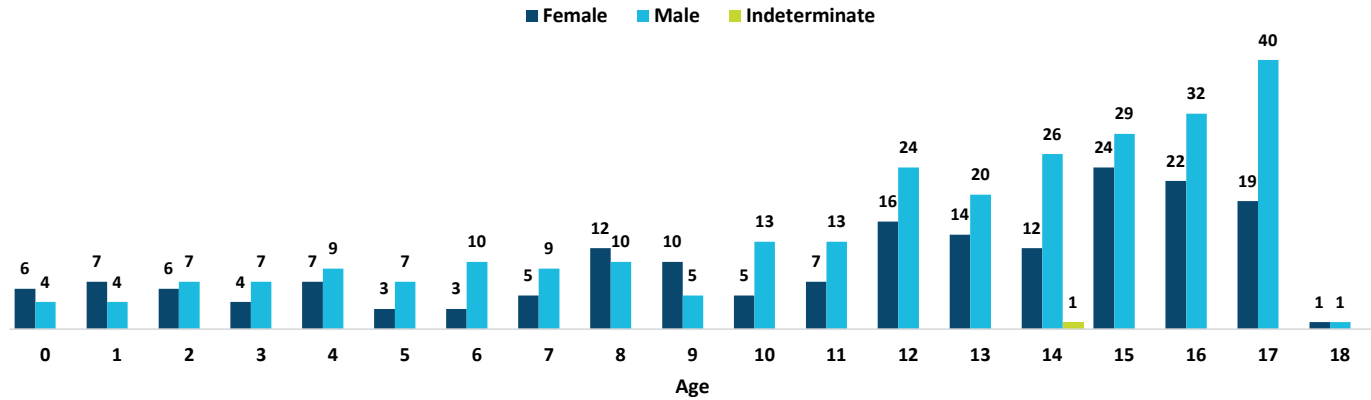Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

PROFILE Dorset Council

Number of Children In Care at 30th September 2022:

454

Number of Care Leavers at 30th September 2022:

287

Children In Care by Age & Gender at 30th September 2022

■ Female ■ Male ■ Indeterminate

Age	Female	Male	Indeterminate
0	6	4	
1	7	4	
2	6	7	
3	4	7	
4	7	9	
5	3	7	
6	3	10	
7	5	9	
8	12	10	
9	10	5	
10	5	13	
11	7	13	
12	16	24	
13	14	20	
14	12	26	1
15	24	29	
16	22	32	
17	19	40	
18	1	1	

Comments:

Dorset Council has seen a slight decrease from previous months in the total number of children in care. Dorset Council remains a committed partner of the National Transfer scheme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The overall percentage of children in our care under this scheme has grown from 2.8% in January to 9% in September 2022 of our total children in care population. We have strong operational processes insuring any child entering Dorset Councils care need care, with processes in place to ensure they achieve permanence in a timely manner. There will be an increase in the overall number of care leavers in the medium term as our 17-year-old young people turn 18 and transition into the care leaver service. We continue to have a monthly multiagency transitions group to support transitions into post 18 support for our young people.

Legal Status at 30th September 2022

- ■ C1 Interim Care Order
- ■ C2 Full Care Order
- ■ E1 Placement Order Granted
- ■ V2 Single Period of Accom Under Section 20
- ■ V4 Accommodated under an agreed series of short-term breaks, when agreements are recorded

Legal Status	Value
C1 Interim Care Order	64
C2 Full Care Order	297
E1 Placement Order Granted	23
V2 Single Period of Accom Under Section 20	70
V4	7
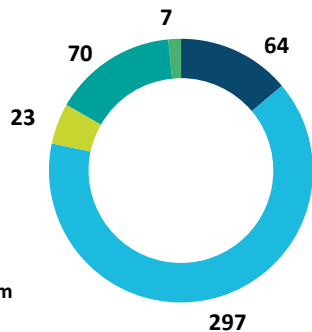
Duration in Care at 30th September 2022

- ■ 0-3 months
- ■ 4-6 months
- ■ 7-12 months
- ■ 13-24 months
- ■ 25-36 months
- ■ 37+ months
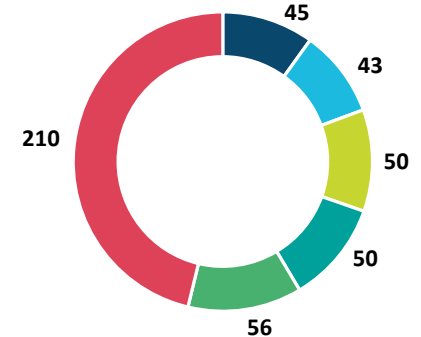
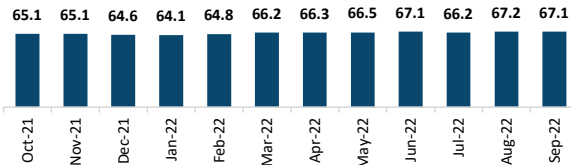| Duration	Value
0-3 months	45
4-6 months	43
7-12 months	50
13-24 months	50
25-36 months	56
37+ months	210

Corporate Parenting Data Set

People - Childrens
Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

PROFILE Dorset Council

Rate of Children In Care per 10,000

Month	Rate
Oct-21	65.1
Nov-21	65.1
Dec-21	64.6
Jan-22	64.1
Feb-22	64.8
Mar-22	66.2
Apr-22	66.3
May-22	66.5
Jun-22	67.1
Jul-22	66.2
Aug-22	67.2
Sep-22	67.1

England Av 20/21	67 per 10k
Dorset 20/21	66 per 10k
Good+ SN Av 20/21	58 per 10k

% of Children In Care who are UASC

Month	%
Oct-21	2.0
Nov-21	2.5
Dec-21	2.5
Jan-22	2.5
Feb-22	3.4
Mar-22	5.1
Apr-22	6.0
May-22	7.8
Jun-22	7.7
Jul-22	7.8
Aug-22	8.4
Sep-22	9.0
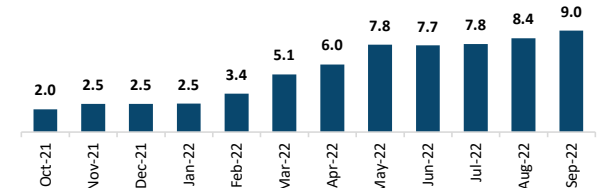
Comments:

Our rate of children in care per 10,000 has steadily increased since January 2022. Dorset Council is part of the National Transfer scheme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. We have seen an increase in children coming into our care in this way in 2022 which has increased our overall child in care number. There has also been an increase from 0.7% to 1% of the children in care population which will further elevate our children in care number per 10,000

We are committed to continuing to work towards achieving a similar rate per 10,000 as Good+ Statistical neighbours. Considerable efforts continue to be made to only have children come into our care when appropriate to do so and they achieve permanence without drift or delay.

Number of Children who have come into Care
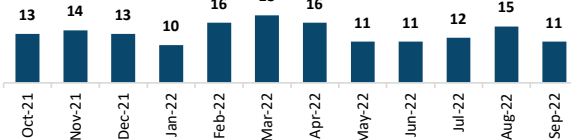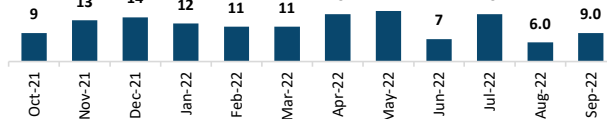
Month	Number
Oct-21	13
Nov-21	14
Dec-21	13
Jan-22	10
Feb-22	16
Mar-22	18
Apr-22	16
May-22	11
Jun-22	11
Jul-22	12
Aug-22	15
Sep-22	11

Number of Children who ceased to be in Care

Month	Number
Oct-21	9
Nov-21	13
Dec-21	14
Jan-22	12
Feb-22	11
Mar-22	11
Apr-22	15
May-22	16
Jun-22	7
Jul-22	15
Aug-22	6.0
Sep-22	9.0

Number of CIC who are UASC at end of month

Month	Number
Oct-21	9
Nov-21	11
Dec-21	11
Jan-22	11
Feb-22	15
Mar-22	23
Apr-22	27
May-22	35
Jun-22	35
Jul-22	35
Aug-22	38
Sep-22	41

Corporate Parenting Data Set

People - Childrens
Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

HEALTH **Dorset** Council

% of New CIC receiving their IHA within 20 days

Month	Value
Oct-21	85
Nov-21	17
Dec-21	8
Jan-22	18
Feb-22	0
Mar-22	6
Apr-22	9
May-22	14
Jun-22	50
Jul-22	44
Aug-22	0
Sep-22	
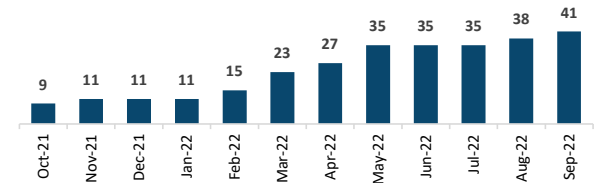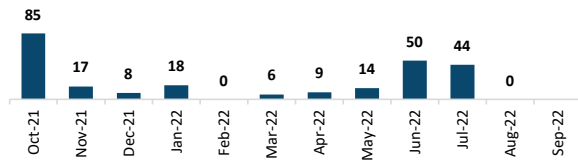
Comments: % of New Children in Care (CIC) receiving their Initial Health Assessment (IHA) monthly data is reported 1 month after the month is due, this is to allow for the data to fall into the month due, i.e. a child accommodated on 31 December would not be calculated until 26 January. Data is from our Mosaic system. Benchmarking data is currently not available.

We continue to monitor our children in gaining consents within 5 working days of the young person coming into care and their Initial health assessment being completed in 20 working days. In August

We continue to work closely with our health colleagues to address any issues in real-time with all professionals involved fully committed to improving performance. All escalations are done on a weekly basis to the Designated Nurse for CIC and Care Experienced Young People.

% CIC Annual Health Assessment completed on time

Month	Value
Oct-21	84
Nov-21	82
Dec-21	81
Jan-22	79
Feb-22	84
Mar-22	89
Apr-22	88
May-22	89
Jun-22	90
Jul-22	92
Aug-22	88
Sep-22	86

England Av 20/21	91 %
Dorset 20/21	81 %
Good+ SN Av 20/21	92 %
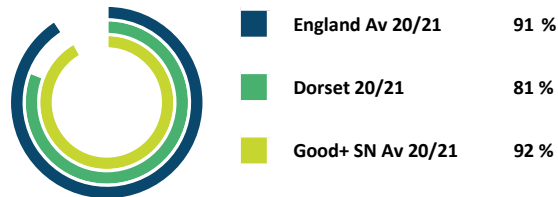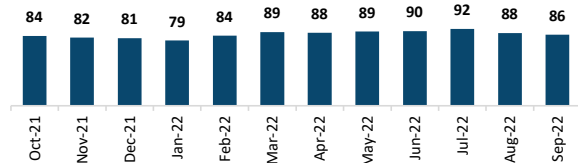
Comments:

Figures shown on the graph are for children in care for 12 months or more, the percentage having their Annual Review Health Assessment (RHA) completed on time. It should be noted that our measures are different from the CCQ who measure % of children in each month who have had their review health assessment as opposed to our measure. Review Health Assessments out of area response is determined by out of area health team capacity.
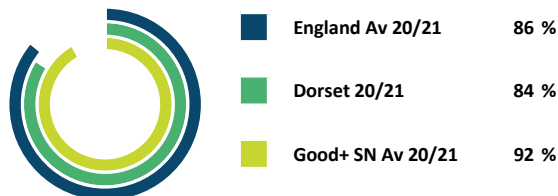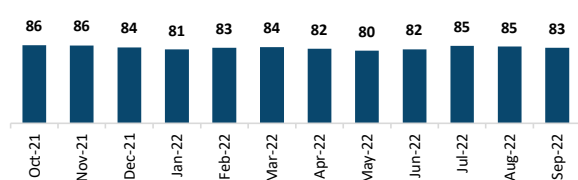
% CIC who have had a dental check within 12 months

Month	Value
Oct-21	48
Nov-21	50
Dec-21	57
Jan-22	60
Feb-22	61
Mar-22	62
Apr-22	60
May-22	62
Jun-22	62
Jul-22	62
Aug-22	56
Sep-22	57

England Av 20/21	40 %
Dorset 20/21	23 %
Good+ SN Av 20/21	30 %
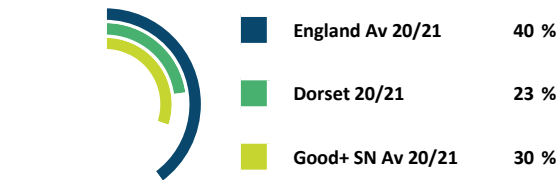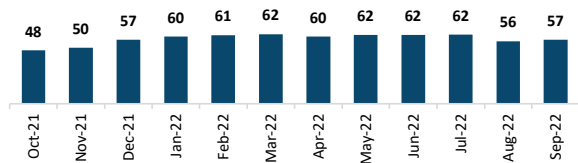
Comments:

Figures shown on the graph are for children in care (CIC) for 12 months + and whether they have had a dental check within the last 12 months. Our performance in children accessing annule dental review has now plateaued for the past 3 months. Our children remain seen as a priority vulnerable group in the South West. Performance in this regard remains a national issue.

% CIC at month end with up to date immunisations

Month	Value
Oct-21	86
Nov-21	86
Dec-21	84
Jan-22	81
Feb-22	83
Mar-22	84
Apr-22	82
May-22	80
Jun-22	82
Jul-22	85
Aug-22	85
Sep-22	83

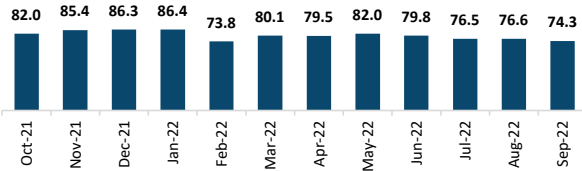|	
England Av 20/21	86 %
Dorset 20/21	84 %
Good+ SN Av 20/21	92 %

Comments:

Figures shown on the graph are for the percentage of children in care at end of month with up to date immunisations. Dorset Health data shows Immunisations for Children in care are up to date with the UK Immunisation schedule for the month of those due a Review Health Assessment in the month.
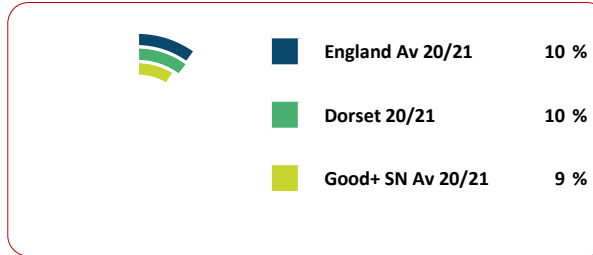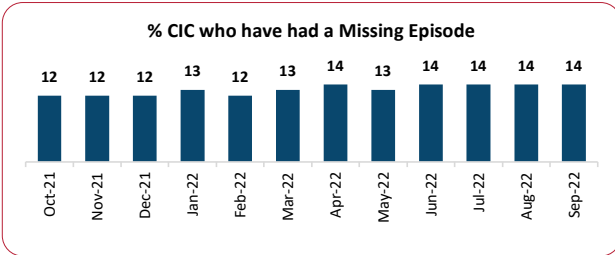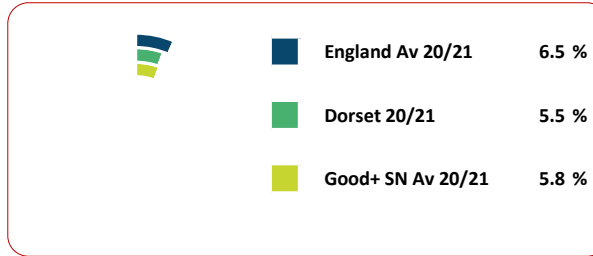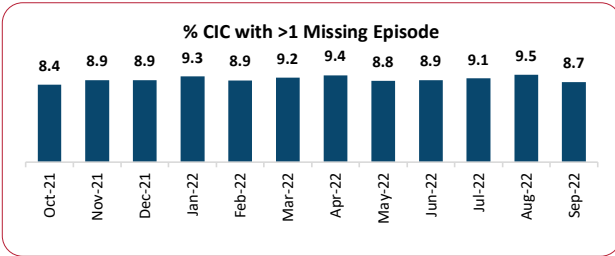
Corporate Parenting Data Set

People - Childrens
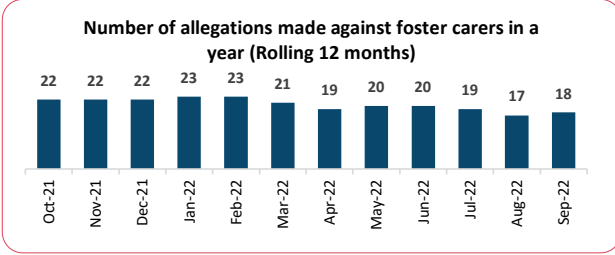Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

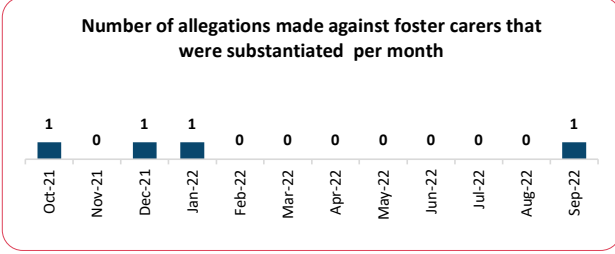# EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Dorset Council

% of CIC for 12+ months age 4-16 yrs with completed SDQ assessment

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
82.0	85.4	86.3	86.4	73.8	80.1	79.5	82.0	79.8	76.5	76.6	74.3

■ England Av 20/21	80 %
■ Dorset 20/21	81 %
■ Good+ SN Av 20/21	69 %

Comments:

We continue to remain focused on this as a priority for Children Services. We have seen a reduction in completion of the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire since June 2022. We are monitoring and tracking on a child level basis these scores and what that means for our children.

Average SDQ Score for Assessments within last 12 months for CIC 12+ months aged 4-16 yrs.

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
15.3	15.3	15.4	15.4	15.5	15.7	15.6	15.4	15.6	15.9	15.8	15.9
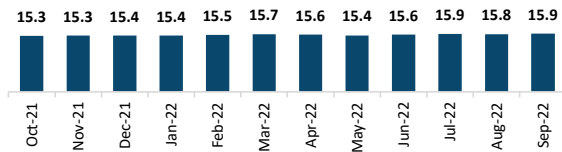
■ England Av 20/21	14
■ Dorset 20/21	15
■ Good+ SN Av 20/21	14

Comments:

Dorset's average score has increased in September. A score below 14 is best. The average score for those completed falls in the slightly raised banding. This may be in part due to a focus on our children in care that professionals have concerns with.

Corporate Parenting Data Set

People - Childrens
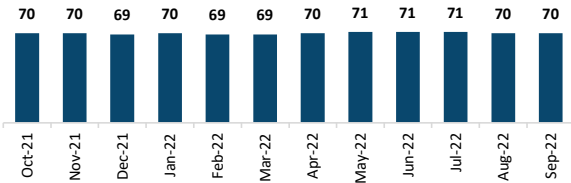Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

SAFETY **Dorset** Council

% CIC who have had a Missing Episode

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
12	12	12	13	12	13	14	13	14	14	14	14

England Av 20/21	10 %
Dorset 20/21	10 %
Good+ SN Av 20/21	9 %

Comments:

The % of our children in care who have had a missing episode in September remained stable, however this figure is still too high and further work is required to reduce this %. The Daily Missing Meeting continues and we are also introducing a weekly meeting chaired by a member of the Children's Advice & Duty Service team (who chair the daily meetings), whereby those young people who have increased vulnerability/risks, such as repeat missing episodes and our CIC will be discussed at these meetings, to inform care and support planning.

% CIC with >1 Missing Episode

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
8.4	8.9	8.9	9.3	8.9	9.2	9.4	8.8	8.9	9.1	9.5	8.7

England Av 20/21	6.5 %
Dorset 20/21	5.5 %
Good+ SN Av 20/21	5.8 %

Comments:

The percentage of our children with more than one missing episode has remained high, whilst we saw slight reductions across May, June and September. The introduction of the weekly missing meeting will inform care and support plans and aim to reduce missing episodes and any identified risks.

Number of allegations made against foster carers in a year (Rolling 12 months)

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
22	22	22	23	23	21	19	20	20	19	17	18

England Av 20/21	10
Dorset 20/21	15
Good+ SN Av 20/21	11
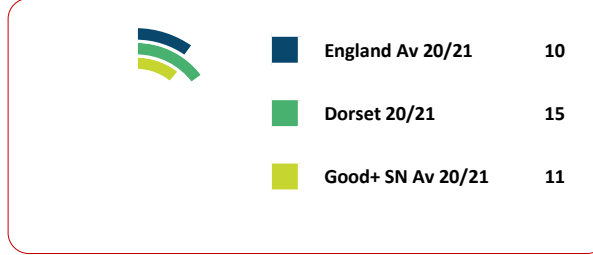
Comments:

In September there was only one allegation made against a foster carer. Please see below.

Number of allegations made against foster carers that were substantiated per month

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

| 12 month Dorset Total 20/21 | 4 |

Comments:

There has been 1 allegations substantiated against a foster carer in the last 8 months. The young person involved is no longer with the carers and whilst one foster carer resigned the other carer did not meaning that the case will be presented to panel. The allegations concerned inappropriate physical intervention.

Corporate Parenting Data Set

People - Childrens
Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

PLACEMENT
Dorset Council

% CIC Living Outside Dorset Council Area

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
41	40	43	43	43	43	43	43	42	43	43	43
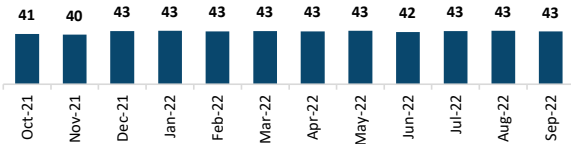
England Av 20/21	42 %
Dorset 20/21	42 %
Good+ SN Av 20/21	26 %

Comments:

We continue to have too many children placed out of their local area. We continue to review permanence plans for these children. Just over two thirds have been in their placement for more than a year. A proportion of these children are placed in connected persons placement which are placement falling outside of the Dorset Council locality.

Children in Care Living in Foster Placement

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
70	70	69	70	69	69	70	71	71	71	70	70

England Av 20/21	71 %
Dorset 20/21	72 %
Good+ SN Av 20/21	74 %

Comments:

The majority of our children continue to live in a family home.
Figures are taken from ChAT.

CIC Living in a Commissioned Placement

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
54	56	55	55	55	56	57	57	58	59	59	61
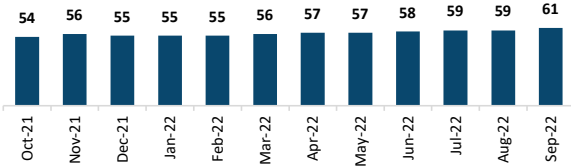
England Av 20/21	48 %
Dorset 20/21	54 %
Good+ SN Av 20/21	58 %

Comments:

Figures are taken from ChAT and include children in care as at the end of each month. Includes all placements that are not in Dorset provision.

Corporate Parenting Data Set

People - Childrens
Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

EDUCATION
Dorset Council

% Children in Care with an EHC Plan

Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
38.5	40.6	37.6	36.8	34.9	36.9	37.1	36.2		33.4

% Children in Care with an EHC Plan

England Av 20/21	29 %
Dorset 20/21	37 %
Good+ SN Av 20/21	33 %

Average Attendance % for school age CIC

Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
89.0	89.0	87.9	90.1	89.5	88.8	88.7		90.2
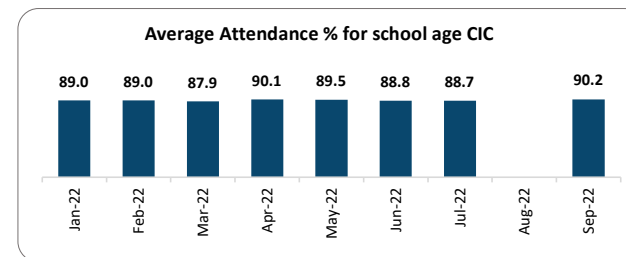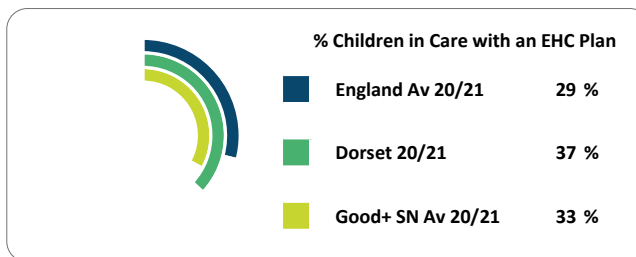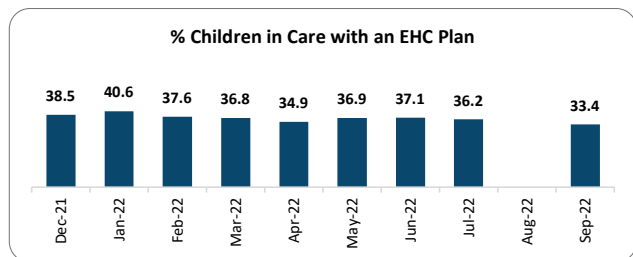
	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
Children with a PEP within 20 days of coming into care (%) - Termly	100	NA	NA	100	NA	NA
Children in Care Unauthorised absence (%)	3.1	3.2	2.7	2.9	NA	3.5
CIC (school age) who have had at least one suspension in the current academic year (%)*	12.5	13.9	15.3	18.2	NA	3.0
Children in Care on reduced timetable (%)	2.5	1.8	1.8	2.5	NA	1.7

* Measure amended in April 2022 to reflect the cumulative number and percentage of all CIC who receive a suspension during the academic year.

Comments:
County and National data is not available for 2021 year due to Covid-19 pandemic. The use of these indicators , for accountability, is suspended. Dorset Council continues to support our schools to provide the best education for all. National data for 2021/22 has not yet been published.

	Dorset 21/22	England Av 18/19	Dorset 18/19	Good+ SN Av 18/19	Good+ SN 18/19 Range
CIC achieving expected standards in KS2 Maths (%)	30.4	51.0	57.0	48.6	35 - 46
CIC achieving expected standards in KS2 Writing (%)	13.0	50.0	43.0	46.3	32 - 42
CIC achieving expected standards in KS2 Reading (%)	26.1	49.0	43.0	46.9	25 - 37
Average Attainment 8 score for Children in Care	No data	19.2	14.4	15.4	14.9 - 17.8
Average progress 8 score for Children in Care	No data	-1.2	-1.0	-1.4	- 0.93 - -1.33

Comments:
Academic outcomes for our children are very positive and have improved across all key stages compared to 2020/21 apart from reading progress at Key Stage 1 and 2. Progress at primary age in writing and Maths has improved in 2021 – 22 compared to the previous year, with reading dipping back. At KS2, (year 6), there were 23 children on roll. Fourteen of these children have either an EHCP or SEN need with five children in specialist provision. Children in year 6 are performing well for spelling, punctuation and grammar but at a lower level for their reading and writing levels.

Attendance stands at 90.2% for September. All year groups have above 90% attendance for this year except for year 2 (86.6%),year 10 (83.0%) and year 11 (73.7%). Children are monitored through the CiC Inclusion board and pupil progress meetings to improve absence. The remaining children with unauthorised absences are being challenged by the specialist teacher in the Virtual School to check that accurate recording is in place. Children on reduced timetables have reduced in September to 1.7% of our children. This accounts for four children who are currently on reduced timetables. One child is new into care and has increased their hours in school in the Autumn term with plans to increase during the term.

Corporate Parenting Data Set

People - Childrens
Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

PERMANENCE

Dorset Council

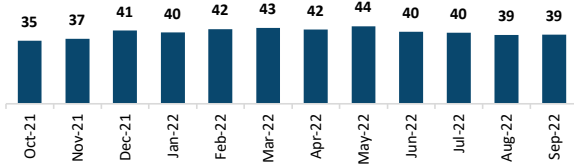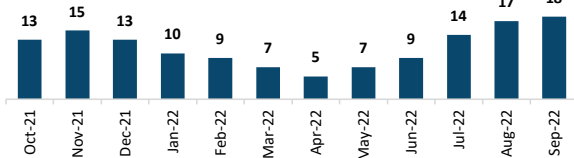### % Children with a Permanence Plan

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
98	98	99	99	99	98	98	96	96	94	92	90
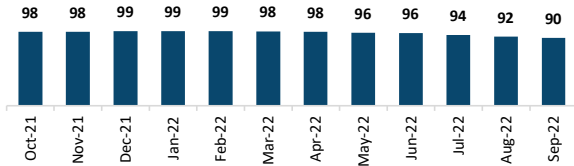
Comments:

This continues to be a consistent picture for Dorset Children with month-on-month seeing consistent performance. There has been a reduction of 2 % from the previous month which continues to be closely monitored by operational and senior managers.

We have processes in place and a data dashboard to track permanence and we continue to monitor and track our children's permanence option and timeliness of achieving permanence. A monthly permanence report is also shared with senior managers and operational staff. There continues to be growing scrutiny from our Quality Assurance and Reviewing Officers to ensure further oversight of timeliness and quality of permanence plans. Figures are taken from Mosaic for children in care for 4 months or more at the end of each month

% Children who have achieved Permanence

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
35	37	41	40	42	43	42	44	40	40	39	39

Comments:

We remain committed to ensuring our children are achieving permanence in a timely way. This performance has plateaued around 40%. To refocus operational staff in achieving permanence for children in care. Monthly meetings are now chaired by operational service managers to ensure oversight of the children who have not achieved permanence. This enables clear timescales to be set for individual children. It should be noted that the number of children in care have increased which may reduce the achieving permanence percentage.

% Children Achieved Permanence: SGO

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
15	15	21	17	18	20	15	19	15	16	17	11
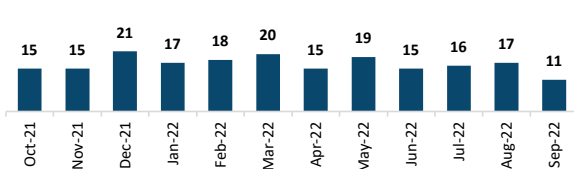
England Av 20/21	14 %
Dorset 20/21	12 %
Good+ SN Av 20/21	14 %

Comments:

Figures are taken from ChAT and include children who left care in the last 6 months.

We continue to look at all options for securing permanence for our children whilst in our care.

% Children Achieved Permanence: Adoption

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
13	15	13	10	9	7	5	7	9	14	17	18

England Av 20/21	10 %
Dorset 20/21	14 %
Good+ SN Av 20/21	12 %

Comments:

Figures are taken from ChAT and include children who left care in the last 6 months.

Dorset Council continues to progress and track our children through the adoption process in a timely way, in close partnership with ASPIRE.

Corporate Parenting Data Set

People - Childrens
Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

PLACEMENT

Dorset Council

% Children in Care with 3 or more Placements

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
9	10	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	7
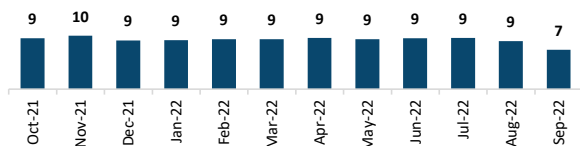
England Av 20/21	9 %
Dorset 20/21	9 %
Good+ SN Av 20/21	9 %

Comments:
Dorset Council performance has been in line with our good statistical neighbours and the national average. In September we performed better than our good statistical neighbours and the national average by 2%. We continue to use stability meetings as a way of offering support early to reduce crisis escalating and placement break down.

% CIC 2.5 Years in same placement for 2+ Years

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
65	67	67	67	63	65	64	63	64	63	62	63
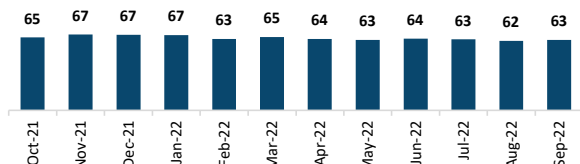
England Av 20/21	70 %
Dorset 20/21	76 %
Good+ SN Av 20/21	72 %

Comments:
This continues to be a consistent picture and we continue to develop practice to ensure that where possible children achieve permanence and stability earlier. We know our children and have a forward planner for all our children who have not achieved permanence in these placements and have clear plans to progress their permanence in a timely way.

% CIC Living 20+ Miles from Home Address

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
44	43	43	43	44	44	43	42	40	40	40	39
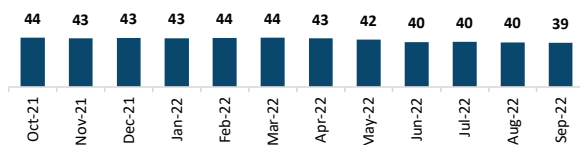
England Av 20/21	21 %
Dorset 20/21	48 %
Good+ SN Av 20/21	34 %

Comments:
We continue to have too many children who are placed away from their local community. Recruiting local carers for local children is central to our sufficiency strategy and the expansion of our own in-house provision. There has been a slow and steady reduction of children accessing placements more then 20 miles away from their home address since the beginning of 2022.

Number of unregulated placements (H5, P2, R1)

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
21	19	18	18	19	24	22	23	21	25	31	33
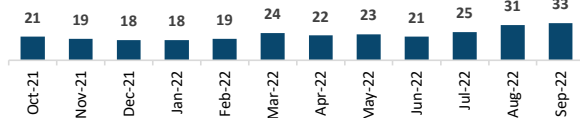
Comments:
All of our children in unregulated placement are 16 + and are closely monitored on a monthly basis. We have seen an increase since March 2022 due to the increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people coming into our care via the National transfer scheme.

Corporate Parenting Data Set

People - Childrens
Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)
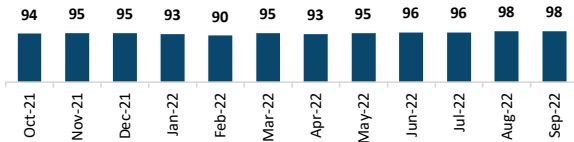
SUFFICIENCY

Indicator	Dorset 19/20 (whole year)	Dorset 20/21 (whole year)	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
No of approved foster carers (All)	206	244	194	194	193	190	190	192	194	189	191	190	189	191
Number of applicants undergoing assessment (Foster Carers)			13	13	13	11	11	11	12	12	12	9	8	10
No of new households recruited														
Mainstream	26	25	0	1	0	1	1	2	3	2	0	0	1	1
CP	45	38	2	2	1	5	2	3	0	3	0	1	5	6
Temporary CP			0	0	5	0	0	4	2	1	4	2	0	0
No of households de-registered (excludes connected carers)	12	12	1	1	0	1	3	2	3	4	3	3	2	2
No of households resigned	15	16	1	1	3	6	3	2	3	0	1	2	5	6

Comments:

Recruitment has remained challenging with a number of factors impacting upon people wishing to become foster carers. The cost of living is one of the primary factors which is reflected on a national basis particularly in respect of the ability of local authorities competing with independent fostering agencies over foster carer payments. There has also been an issue with a number of potential foster carers deciding to offer temporary homes to Ukrainian refugees. To address these challenges remedial work continues with the micro-site and a weekly meeting is held with the agency commissioned to manage the digital advertising. This ensures that face to face recruitment works in tandem with digital recruitment and vice-versa.

The number of enquiries for prospective foster carers has remained at a very low level with again only 6 enquiries for the whole of September. It should be noted that retention and recruitment are significantly linked and ensuring that the current carers feel supported and valued provides a sound foundation for recruitment. (Word of mouth remains one of the key recruitment reasons). To ensure that this continues to approve the following actions are undertaken.

1.Improving the level of support when transitioning from assessment to post approval. This involves an increased frequency in visiting by the supervising social workers.
2.A support meeting to be convened 6 weeks after the initial placement of any child.
3.Review of support package for foster carers undertaken in supervision with team managers.
4.Ongoing review of recruitment strategy ensuring that for example there is a strong focus upon attracting established foster carers from IFA's and other providers.
5.Weekly managers meeting reviews both vacancies and foster carers / placements who are deemed to be at risk and then a plan is developed to manage this.
6.A review of all mainstream foster carers to consider both current approval but also why they have a vacancy and more importantly what is the plan to resolve this.

Corporate Parenting Data Set

People - Childrens
Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

CARE LEAVERS — Dorset Council

With an up to date Pathway Plan

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
71	65	62	81	80	84	82	83	84	84	75	73
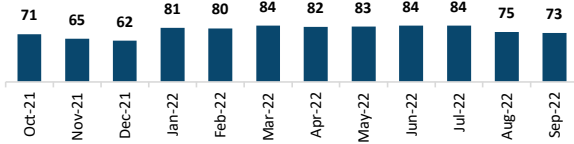
Comments:

There has been a reduction in performance since July 2022. The Care Leaver service has more recently been approved to recruit five Personal Advisors and a part time Team Manager which will improve capacity within the services and ensure improved sustained performance into the future. This investment has been made based on future forecast of the demands on the service and our improved revised practice standards.

Benchmarking data currently not available. Figures taken from Mosaic for all Care Leavers at the end of each month.

Quality and timeliness of pathway plans remains a focus for the Care Leaver services who continue to closely monitoring performance.

Living in Suitable Accommodation (19-21)

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
94	95	95	93	90	95	93	95	96	96	98	98

England Av 20/21	88 %
Dorset 20/21	88 %
Good+ SN Av 20/21	90 %

Comments:

The number of our Care Leavers in suitable accommodation remains consistently high in August and September. Those in unsuitable accommodation are monitored through a monthly highlight report to CSLT.

At the end of September there was 1 Care Leavers in B&B, 1 Care Leavers in custody, 1 Care Leavers in emergency accommodation

Please note: For 'Living in Suitable Accommodation' and In Employment, Education, or Training' measures we use current data available but benchmarking data is using data from last birthday.

In Employment Education or Training (19-21)

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
53	54	51	48	48	50	52	54	57	56	57	57
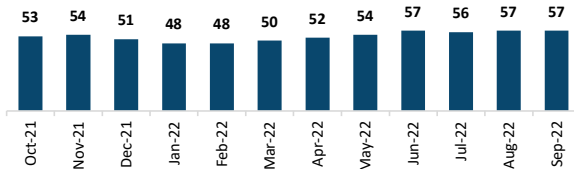
England Av 20/21	52 %
Dorset 20/21	43 %
Good+ SN Av 20/21	55 %

Comments:

Improvements in our NEET statistics have improved slightly from earlier in the year and we continue to work with our NEET reengagement team to improve performance and maximise impact for our care leavers.

Who are in touch with Dorset LA (19-21)

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
99	99	99	99	99	98	98	98	98	98	98	99
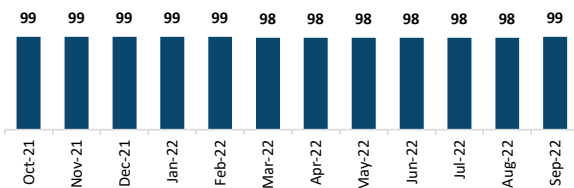
England Av 20/21	91 %
Dorset 20/21	94 %
Good+ SN Av 20/21	92 %

Comments:

Our 'In Touch' rates are higher than our statistical neighbours, we do have a small number of Care Leavers we are not in touch with. Where we are not in touch, Care Leaver will still have an allocated PA who will continue to try to make contact by whatever means they can.

Corporate Parenting Data Set

People - Childrens
Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

CARE LEAVERS

Dorset Council

Number of Health passports due within the month (2 months in arrears)

Month	Value
Oct-21	7
Nov-21	7
Dec-21	7
Jan-22	6
Feb-22	6
Mar-22	4
Apr-22	4
May-22	8
Jun-22	8
Jul-22	3
Aug-22	3
Sep-22	

Number of health passports completed (2 months in arrears)

Month	Value
Oct-21	7
Nov-21	7
Dec-21	7
Jan-22	6
Feb-22	6
Mar-22	4
Apr-22	4
May-22	8
Jun-22	8
Jul-22	3
Aug-22	3
Sep-22	
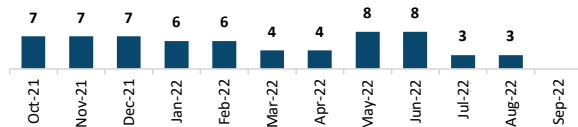
Comments:

Health passports provide an overview of health for a young person leaving our care.

It details immunisations, allergies, medication, health history such as any significant illnesses known or operations. It also supports our young people to know their health information and where to go for support if needed. For example, sexual health services, mental health services.

Health Passports are shared by Dorset's Child in Care Nurse with our Children in Care 6 months prior to their 18th birthday. This is an in-person discussion and is also shared electronically and in paper form with our children their current social worker and their Personal Advisor to support smoother transitions.
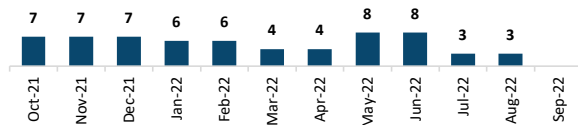
Corporate Parenting Data Set

People - Childrens
Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

ADOPTION — Dorset Council

Indicator	Dorset 19/20	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
Number of adoptions finalised in year	16	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	3	1	2
Number of children living in adoptive placements pending adoption orders	-	21	21	20	20	20	13	14	15	14	14
Number of children with a match identified	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	3
Number of children where family finding is ongoing	-	12	12	14	13	15	14	18	15	15	13
Number of revocations of Placements Orders	2	7	5	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	5
Number of adoptive families recruited	60	4	3	4	2	6	1	3	2	0	1
Number of adoptive Families in assessment	-	44	37	33	35	44	48	32	32	32	30

Average number of days between entering care and having an adoptive placement

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
522	508	541	532	518	544	423	406	412	476	476	414
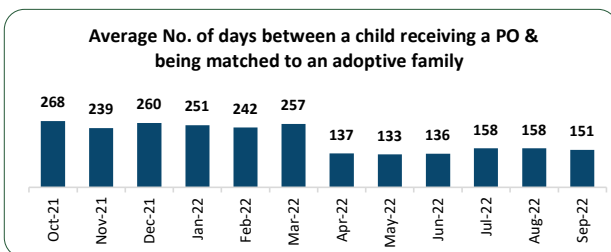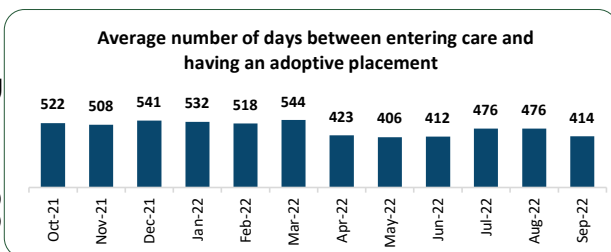
National 2019	376
Dorset 2019	285
Good+ Statistical Neighbours 2019	342

Average No. of days between a child receiving a PO & being matched to an adoptive family

Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
268	239	260	251	242	257	137	133	136	158	158	151

National 2019	178
Dorset 2019	129
Good+ Statistical Neighbours 2019	149

Comments:

There are currently 8 children with Placement orders waiting to be matched, however 3 are linked to families, 2 of these are booked into Matching Panel in November.

1 child was linked, however, due to his wishes and feelings, the care plan has changed to Long term foster care. This needs to be presented to ADM.

The 4 remaining are a sibling group of girls. There are two couples recently approved at panels that have expressed an interest in larger sibling groups and these are currently being explored. The children have also been added to Linkmaker to source prospective adopters to avoid any delay.

There have been delays in achieving adoption for some children due to the delays inherent within the Court process, enabling birth parents to seek leave to oppose the making of the adoption orders. Currently there is a sibling group of 2 children, who have been in their adoptive placement since October 2021 – birth parents leave to oppose was dismissed and the adoption order will be made on the 11th November 2022.

There have been 16 Adoption Orders granted in Q1&2 an increase from the 21/22 yearly total of 14. There have been 3 further adoption orders granted in respect of Dorset children in October, and there are two pending adoption hearings in November 2022.

Aspire continue to recruit adopters and currently have 31 approved adopters available, an increase since the last report of 12. Of those 31 available adopters 15 are willing to take Early Permanence placements. However, Aspire continue to be able to match children with their own prospective adopters which reduces the pool, however there are currently 32 families in assessment. Aspire are running Information evenings on a two monthly basis, the next information evening is in November and has 20 prospective adopters attending.

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Corporate Parenting Board
30 November 2022
Virtual School Annual Report 2021 - 22

Choose an item.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr A Parry, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s):   Cllr

Executive Director: T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

Report Author: Lisa Linscott and Jo Smark-Richards
Title: Virtual School Annual Report 2021 - 22
Tel: 01305 228587
Email: lisa.linscott@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

This report provides a detailed analysis and evaluation of the activity of the Virtual School in the academic year 2021 – 22. The report is provided as a separate document.

Recommendation:
For Corporate Parenting Board to recognise and support the activity of the Virtual School.

Reason for Recommendation:
The annual report from the Virtual School is provided to the Virtual School Governing Body and Corporate Parenting Board each year to highlight strengths, outcomes and areas for further development in the coming year. The Virtual School is thankful to councillors for their support and in particular to those on the governing body, who participate in regular monitoring activity.

1. **Financial Implications**

1.1 The Virtual School receives DfE funding each year to support children in care, those previously in care, and those with a social worker as per DfE guidance.

2. **Environmental Implications**

Not applicable

3. **Well-being and Health Implications**

3.1 Children's wellbeing is paramount to the work of the Virtual School and is evidenced throughout the report.

4. **Other Implications**

5. **Risk Assessment**

5.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low
Residual Risk: Low

6. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

7. **Appendices**

7.1 Appendix 1: DVS Annual Report 2021 - 2022

8. **Background Papers**

Dorset Virtual School Annual Report

2021/22

Contents

You discovered parts of me,

I did not know I had.

Fragments of my soul I

believed to be too

consumed by darkness to

ever be loved again.

You braved the monsters

that hid in

my fear

and anger

and hurt.

You somehow softened the

stone that preserved my

heart,

and melted away the aches

of another story.

By Charlie Fearon

Khadija Ali, Year 9

Foreword

This annual report is a wonderful opportunity to share in and celebrate the achievements and successes of our children and young people over the past year. I am incredibly proud of all our children and young people, who daily show their resilience, perseverance and determination.

I would like to thank all our carers, teachers, Virtual School Leads, Social Workers, Personal Assistants and the wider teams that support our children to achieve their potential and widen their aspirations.

Cllr. Andrew Parry

Dorset Council Cabinet Member for Education, Children & Early Help

Introduction

Dorset Virtual School is a proud advocate of our children. Our vision for our children is that they are thriving in the right educational setting, attending, feel included and listened to so that our children become independent and resilient young people. We do not give up when one of our children hits a bump in the road; we set our sights high, in the knowledge that every child has the potential and right to a wonderful future leading from a brilliant education.

We have had a very busy 2021 – 22. Our children have seen two of the toughest years trying to maintain their education through a pandemic, but we have seen much resilience and many wonderful examples of determination from them, exemplified in our weekly awards and our wonderful EPIC Awards, showing just how exceptional our children truly are.

The Virtual School Team have worked tirelessly to ensure that, following the ILACS inspection report on November 2021 highlighting the Virtual School as highly ambitious and determined, we moved to our next stage of strengthening our practice and working towards being an outstanding service. I believe that much that has been done this year moves us forward on that journey.

Lisa Linscott, Principal Teacher

Purpose

This report provides an overview and analysis of the impact of the Virtual School's work during the academic year 2021 - 22. The Virtual School is the key educational advocacy service of Dorset's Education Service within the Children's Services Directorate for Dorset's Children in Care and Care leavers regardless of where they are placed.

The Virtual School is ambitious for its children and ensures that our partner schools have high expectations and aspirations for the educational outcomes of our children to ensure that the life chances of each child are improved. The Virtual School has strong oversight and challenge from the Virtual School Governing Body and Corporate Parenting Board.

A year in summary

2021/22 has been a year of embedding robust and consistent processes to ensure best practice in monitoring and supporting our children and young people to be successful. Realignment and expansion of the Virtual School Team has enabled greater collaboration with the wider Children's Services team and the opportunity to embed a data focus that fosters high expectations whilst upskilling staff to ensure a greater confidence in supporting children. We have focussed on effort to celebrate and recognise child successes and to develop the use of the child-voice within our work.

Virtual School headline data is reported weekly to the Children's Services Leadership Team with Key Performance Indicators reported monthly to ensure that there is a line of sight of the work of the Virtual School. Monthly child-level reporting of our most vulnerable children and young people is reported to the Children's Services Leadership Team to ensure that there is visibility and transparency around the transition and ambition for these young people. Performance is also reported on a monthly basis to the Corporate Parenting Board. The Governing Body has a forward plan of monitoring activity linked to the priorities on the School Development Plan and continues to challenge the Virtual School to ensure that it is providing all of our children with the best education possible.

Some of the key strengths this year have been:

- A reduction in the number of children on reduced timetables
- A reduction of the number of children missing education
- An effective quality assurance system for Personal Education Plans (PEPs) that has led to 93% of PEPs being good or better.
- 76% of Post-16 young people in Education, Employment or Training
- 100% of our year 13 young people who applied for university have been offered places
- 100 children celebrated at the Dorset Virtual School Exceptional People in Care (EPIC) Awards, and weekly celebrations of over 100 children and young people who have excelled in education or overcome significant barriers.
- Raising the profile of the role of the Virtual School for children previously looked after, working closely with Aspire Adoption Agency
- Introduction of Designated Teacher of the month award to share best practice within schools
- Implementation of Action Research Projects in schools with University College London to develop practice
- Delivery of the first Dorset Young Person Conference to raise ambition and aspiration
- Production of the Handbook For Unaccompanied Young People in multiple languages
- The Virtual School is highly ambitious for children in care, wherever they live; A particular strength is the impact of more aligned working in the six localities to secure creative and beneficial outcomes for children (Ofsted (ILACS) Inspection Report November 2021

We need to continue to focus on:

- Child and young person voice, through the Virtual School Council and Virtual School Newsletter to ensure that the child voice is clearly heard throughout our work
- Improving Social Worker and Personal Advisor attendance to PEPs
- Developing child-led PEPs to enhance the child's voice
- Greater representation of the cultural identity of our young people
- Developing a mentoring system to support aspiration and ambition
- Developing wider learning opportunities and positive experiences
- Improving school transitions, particularly for those children with SEND
- Eradicating the sue of suspensions, reduced timetables and the number of children missing education

Virtual School Structure and Responsibilities

The Virtual School is led by the Principal Teacher for Dorset Council who is also the Virtual School Head Teacher. During 2021/22, the Virtual School structure was expanded to include a Service Manager for the Virtual School to support the Principal Teacher and provide operational and strategic support to the Virtual School.

The Virtual School team delivers their work within the Dorset Council locality structure, enabling best practice to be disseminated within the wider Children's Services structure. This enables the best possible support and guidance to be available for our schools and children and young people.

The Virtual School team has developed this year and consists of:

- Two specialist Teachers: A Virtual School SENCo and a data and assessment lead who hold wider responsibilities for belong to build skill and capacity within the Virtual School Team and schools to meet the needs of all children.
- Nine Virtual School Leads: responsibilities are for a case load of, on average 47 children in each locality (and a share of those children out of authority), ensuring that children have a suitable and ambitious education offer, there is strong liaison with their schools and Designated Teachers, and the Personal Education Plan (PEP) is effective in supporting children's progress.

Each member of the team holds a whole school responsibility to support the priorities of the Virtual School. This enables the team to develop leadership skills and have a sense of autonomy over the priorities within the school. During 2021/22, these whole school responsibilities led to the development of a PLAC handbook aimed at supporting schools and parents of children who were previously in care and an Education Plan designed to support schools with children previously looked after, a handbook and welcome pack for our unaccompanied young people, the creation of a Virtual School Council and development of an Early Years training package to support an online PEP system.

The School Development Plan 2022/23 has set three strategic priorities (further details in appendix 1):

1. **Achieving educational stability:** To provide children and schools the right support to enable full time stable education age 2 – 18
2. **Improving how children are represented in our work:** To provide children with the best support led by them
3. **Developing opportunities for children to achieve their ambitions:** To provide high quality opportunities that lead to educational and employment success

A programme of half-termly Continuous Professional Development is in place for the Virtual School Team. CPD training themes in the academic year 2021/22 have included:

- PEP Quality Assurance
- Support and expectations for unaccompanied young people
- Support and expectations for our Early Years children
- Transitions to Post-16
- Using strength-based language
- Reintegration post suspensions

The team also have half termly group supervision with the Educational Psychologist linked to the Virtual School. This has enabled team members to reflect on their practice and leadership, bring cases to group problem solve and address team issues in a solution-focussed way.

The Virtual School Cohort

Children are in the Virtual School from the age of 2 to the end of the academic year following their 18th birthday. In this way the Virtual School can bridge the change from Social Worker to Personal Assistant (PA) and maintain advice and guidance about education from a position of best knowledge of the young person. The Virtual School ensures that the PA is involved in post 16 PEPs alongside the social worker and is well briefed with regards to the young person's ambitions and any barriers to learning. The Virtual School works closely with the Care Leaver Team to ensure that our young people continue into suitable education, training or employment.

Appendix 2 provides the overview of the 2021/22 Virtual School. This is divided into Statutory School Age cohort and Post-16 cohort.

Attendance

The Virtual School undertakes daily attendance monitoring through Welfare Call's live dashboard. This robust system provides data at a cohort, group and individual level to give an accurate view of attendance, reasons for absence and patterns of absence. This has enabled the Virtual School to monitor, analyse and respond to attendance concerns rapidly and remains a key area for improvement (priority 1 on the School Development Plan). The attendance overview for statutory school age children in the academic year 2021 - 2022 is provided in Appendix 3.

The Virtual School set an ambitious target of 95% attendance for our statutory school age children. Dorset Virtual School did not meet this target but attendance was in line with the national average (88.57% compared to the national average of 88.7%) and above 2020/21 (85.5%). The attendance of our children was also in line with the Welfare Call average of 88.4% across 201 local authorities' Virtual Schools.

There has been a slight increase in the number of children achieving 95%+ attendance for the year at 47.15% compared to 44% in 2020/21 with 53.50% achieving 95%+ attendance during the summer term. Positive reinforcement of this attendance of 95%+ is undertaken through the termly celebration system for attendance.

Monitoring identified two challenges with attendance: unauthorised absence and persistent absence in specific year groups.

Unauthorised absence was a concern at 2.91% compared to 2.33% in 2020/21. However, Dorset was significantly better than the Welfare Call average of 3.22% across 201 local authorities' Virtual Schools. A piece of work to analyse a small cohort of young people with unauthorised absence undertaken in the Spring Term ensured that Virtual School Leads met with the team and families of the identified young people to determine the causes and potential barriers to education. This intervention saw some reduction in the number of unauthorised attendance marks, but high unauthorised figures continued in year 10 and 11. Further work in September 2022 will focus on this cohort of young people and interventions to reduce the absence.

Persistent absence figures are improving. 27.05% of our children have had persistent absence compared to 44.6% 2020/21 and is lower than the national average of 30.4% in 2020/21. However, year 10 and 11 both had higher persistent absence figures. Analysis and monitoring of a group of year 10 students with persistent absence has seen some success with 50% of the group improving their attendance over the final summer term with a regards system in place for this. Further work will be undertaken to improve overall school attendance working with the inclusion team

Exclusions

Our ambition is for effective inclusive practice in our schools which leads to zero suspensions and permanent exclusions of children in care. This was an area for improvement during 2021/22 and was priority 1 on the school development plan.

Permanent Exclusions

There were 0 permanent exclusions during 2021/22. This was due to collaborative working between schools and VSLs to reduce the risk of permanent exclusions.

Suspensions

Despite a focus on reducing suspensions, 14.61% of children had at least one suspension during the academic year compared to the 11.67% national benchmark. This amounted to 51 children being suspended during the year with 86% from secondary school age (75% of these were Key Stage 4). 61% of these children had repeat suspensions during the year.

Appendix 4 gives a breakdown of suspensions in 2021/22. During the academic year, a number of steps have been taken to reduce suspensions and permanent exclusions of our children. These have included:

- There is a focus on any children who have had suspensions in Virtual School monthly pupil progress meetings, giving oversight and priority to these children, and ensuring that Virtual School staff actions are robust
- There is a wider local authority focus on inclusion with strategic support for schools to follow relational practice methods and employ the graduated approach to ensure that early intervention addresses need
- Detailed monitoring of suspensions and the schools that suspend to highlight trends and patterns has highlighted particular schools that will be supported this year
- Training for VSLs and designated teachers in relation to reintegration post suspensions that put the emphasis on what schools can do differently rather than on the child as the 'problem'.
- Further amendment to our reintegration paperwork ensured that the child voice was at the centre of the meeting.

Through monitoring, we have identified schools that repeatedly used suspensions for Children in Care and a priority for 2022/23 is to ensure that the Virtual School is putting in place support that focuses on helping the school to better understand the whole child and look at strategies that may be more effective than suspensions.

Despite the steps taken during 2021/22 to reduce suspensions, these interventions do not appear to have had the required impact. There is an inconsistency in approach to high support/ high challenge of our schools that regularly suspend. Reducing suspensions will be a priority for 2022/23 through a number of interventions:

- Further analysis of Pupil Premium + spending linked to children with suspensions is being monitored for 2022/23 to ensure that rapid support is put in place.
- Further work needs to be undertaken to respond more quickly to schools who are high suspenders from both our Virtual School Leads and leadership, using the locality leadership to respond more effectively to schools.
- Further work to share the good practice in settings where suspensions are low with other schools
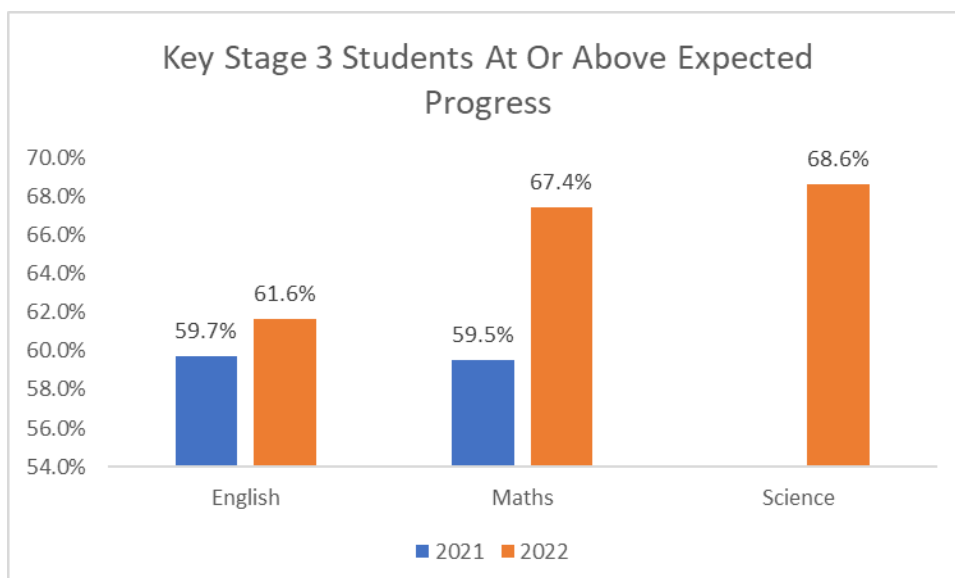
Attainment and Progress

The Virtual School worker attends all PEP meetings, ensuring that the right support and interventions are put in place to enable each child to make progress from their own starting points. The Virtual School challenges where academic expectations are too low and celebrates successes, including overcoming barriers. As a result, the academic outcomes for our children are very positive and have improved across all key stages compared to 2020/21 apart from reading progress at Key Stage 1 and 2.

Progress Towards Agreed Targets

Progress at primary age in writing and Maths has improved in 2021 – 22 compared to the previous year, with reading dipping back.

Primary Students At Or Above Expected Progress

	Reading	Writing	Maths
2021	70.1%	64.8%	65.9%
2022	61.8%	75.3%	74.2%
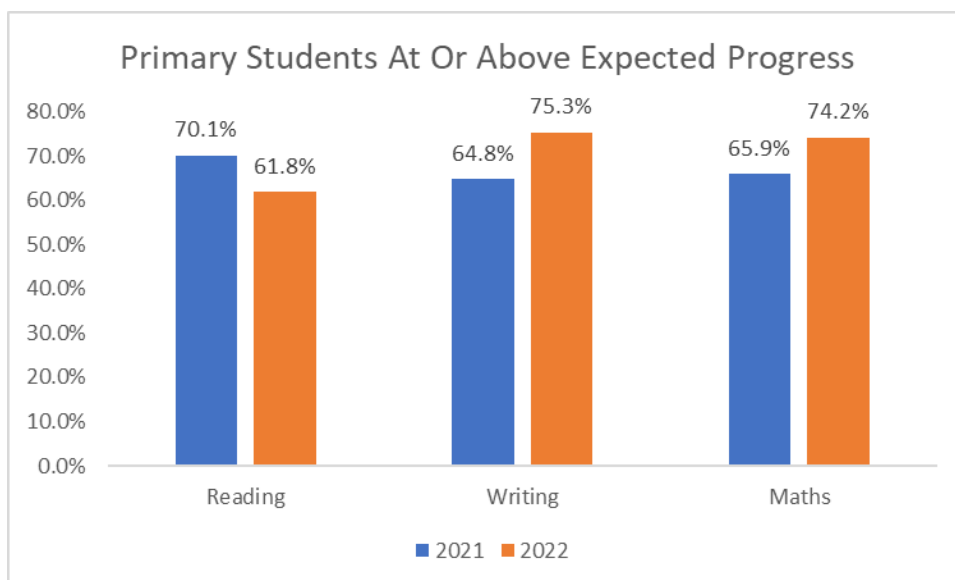
There is significant improvement in progress at Key Stage 3 this year compared to 2020 – 21, but this should be seen in the context of the pandemic, which will have impacted on progress in the previous year.

Key Stage 3 Students At Or Above Expected Progress

	English	Maths	Science
2021	59.7%	59.5%	
2022	61.6%	67.4%	68.6%

Science progress is a new measure this year.

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Phonics Screening

In year 1, ten children undertook the Phonics screening test with 50% of our children passing the screening test. Dorset Virtual School children performed better than the South-West average at 46% although slightly lower than the national trend at 59%. However, Dorset Virtual School have poorer performance in comparison to Dorset schools as a whole. However, conclusions are difficult to draw due to the small number of children within our cohort.
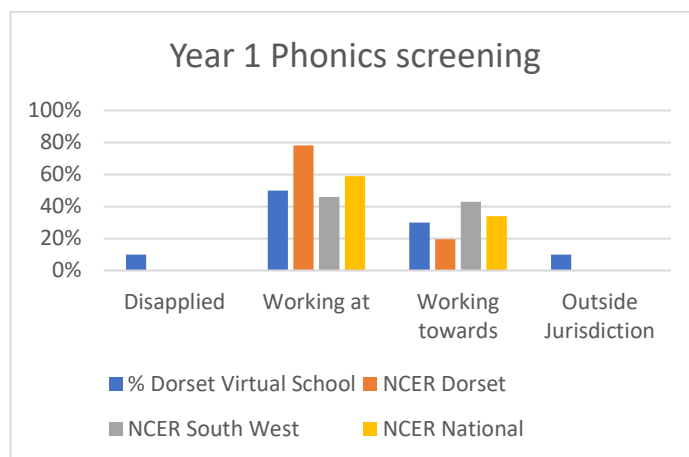
Please note that 'outside jurisdiction' is for a child in Wales.

Key Stage 1

In year 2, there were 15 children on roll. 12 of the children have an EHCP or SEN need. Five children are in specialist provision and did not sit KS1 SATs.
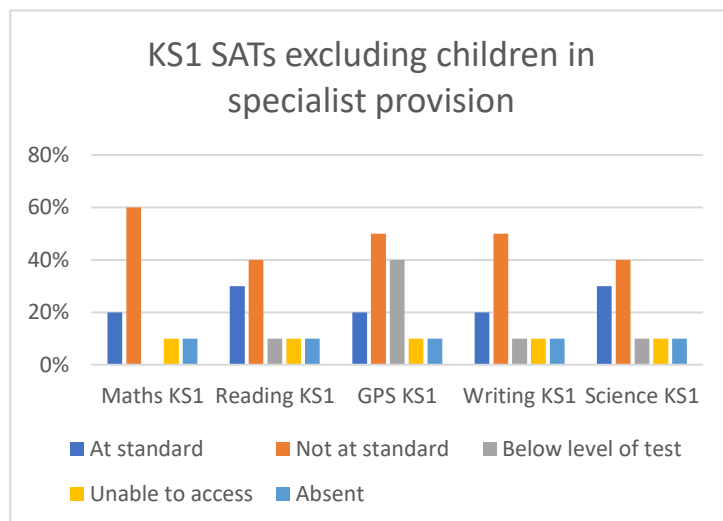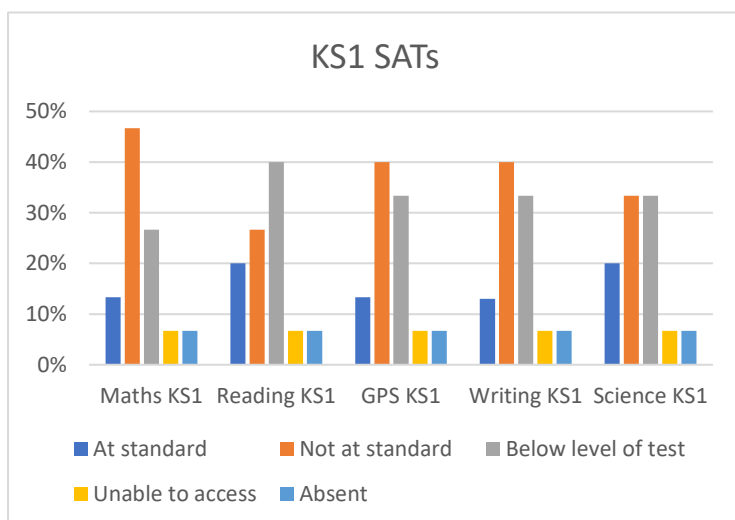
Of the children in mainstream provision, 20% are working at standard for maths and writing and 30% are working at standard in reading and science. The Virtual School plans to monitor the progress of this cohort of children during year 3 to ensure achievement.

Key Stage 2

In year 6, there were 23 children on roll. Fourteen of these children have either an EHCP or SEN need with five children in specialist provision. Three of these five did not sit assessments.
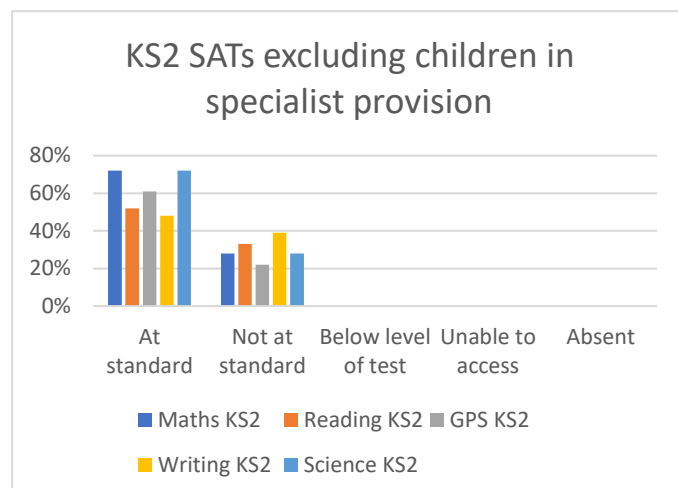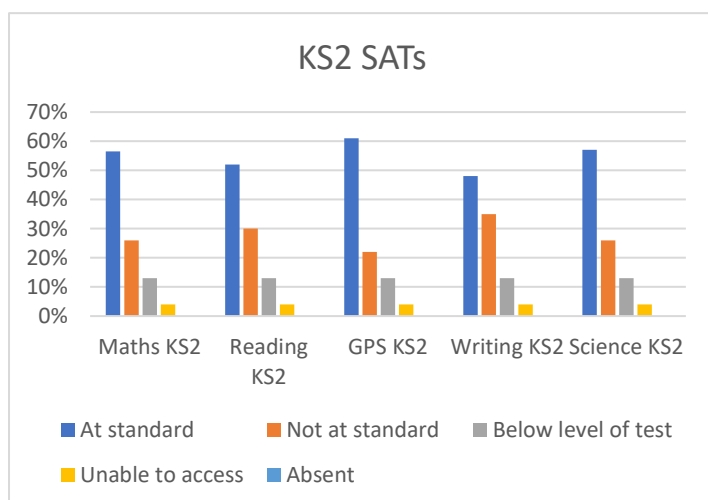
It appears that children in year 6 are performing well for spelling, punctuation and grammar but at a lower level for their reading and writing levels. This may indicate an area to support our children around creating comprehension and understanding.

Key Stage 4

In year 11, there were 56 children on roll during 2021/22, 42.86% have an EHCP and 21.42% have a SEN need. Of these 40 undertook examinations. Over half of our young people are in mainstream provision and just under 20% within specialist provision. 14% of our young people were not in education to take examinations but this does include our unaccompanied young people who may have been in pre-ESOL courses.

We have seen an improvement in achievement rates at grade 4 and above when comparing results from the previous non covid year (2018/19) and non-teacher assessed grades. We have a low proportion of young people achieving a grade 5 or above in both English and Maths (2.27%) and this is an area to focus on during 2022/23.

There is quite a high proportion of our year 11 children who are achieving a grade 3 in English (18.18%) and maths (15.91%) and this is an area for the team to work on during 2022/23 in order to support a greater number of children to achieve a grade 4 in their examinations.

Progress 8 data for our children will not be available until December 2022.

3-year trend in 4+ grades

- 2021-22 12 months + - 44 (27 mainstream)
- 2021-2022 whole cohort -56 (31 mainstream)
- 2020-2021 - 42 (26 Mainstream)
- 2019-2020 - 45 (29 Mainstream)
- 2018-2019 - 43 (27 Mainstream)

0.00% 5.00% 10.00% 15.00% 20.00% 25.00% 30.00% 35.00% 40.00% 45.00%

■ CiC achieving Grade 4+ Maths   ■ CiC achieving Grade 4+ English   ■ CiC achieving Grade 4+ EM
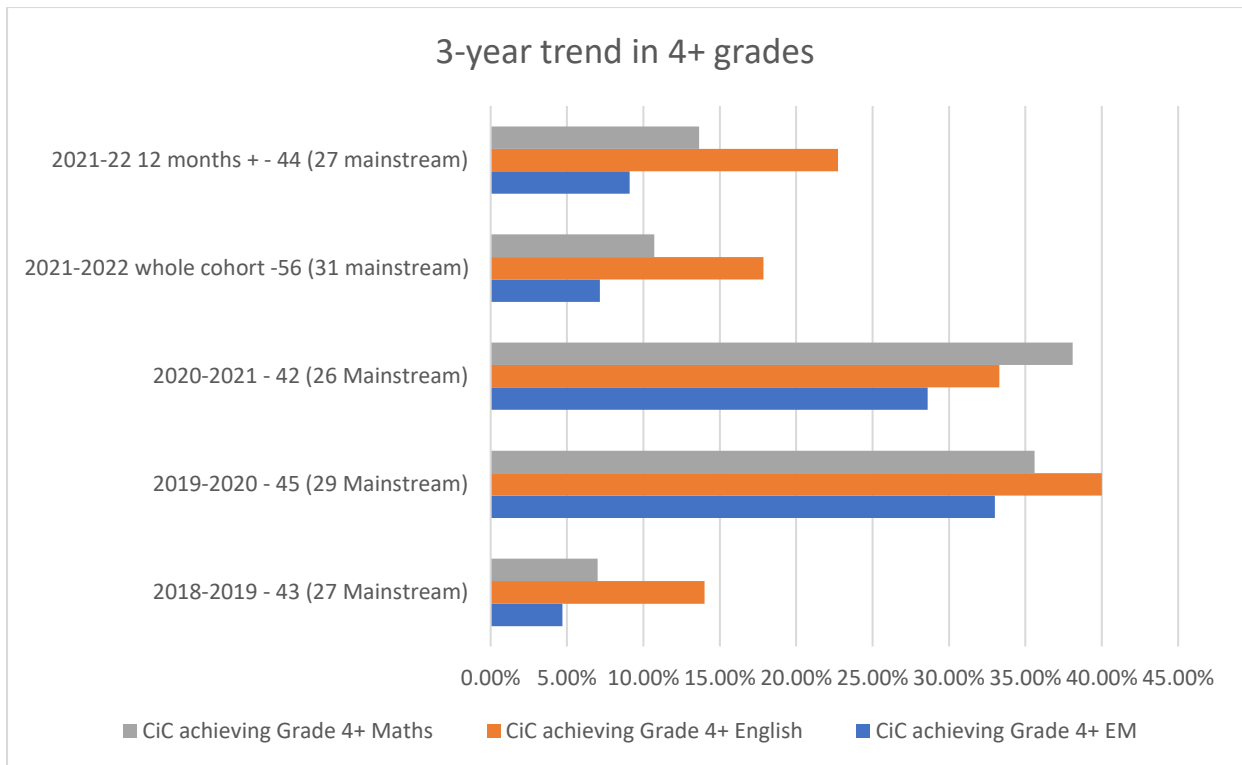
When comparing by provision, there is no discernible difference for achievement for the total cohort of year 11 and those who have been in care for more than 12 months. Achievement by stated gender highlights that females within the Virtual School have outperformed males in achievement at GCSE grade 4.

National Key Stage Measures (Key Stage 4)	CiC in Cohort	CiC achieving Grade 4+ EM	CiC achieving Grade 4+ English	CiC achieving Grade 4+ Maths
Female whole cohort	24	12.50% (3)	25% (6)	16.68% (4)
Male whole cohort	32	3.13% (1)	12.50% (4)	6.25% (2)
Female 12 months +	22	13.64% (3)	27.27% (6)	18.18% (4)
Male 12 months +	22	4.54% (1)	18.18% (4)	9.09% (2)

There is no discernible difference in GCSE results when comparing home placements with a slight increase in achievement for Grade 4+ in English and maths when living with foster carers. However, none of the young people who came into care within 12 months achieved grade 4s in English or maths.
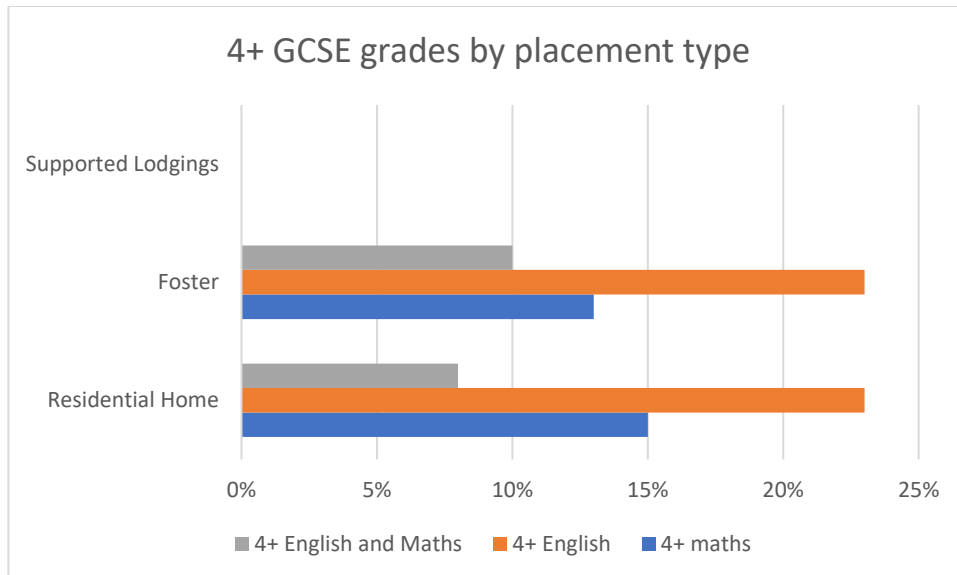
In 2021/22, 53% of the subjects that the young people took were either met or above their year 11 target grades. However, our young people in mainstream or learning centres met or exceeded their target grades in 41.37% of their subjects.
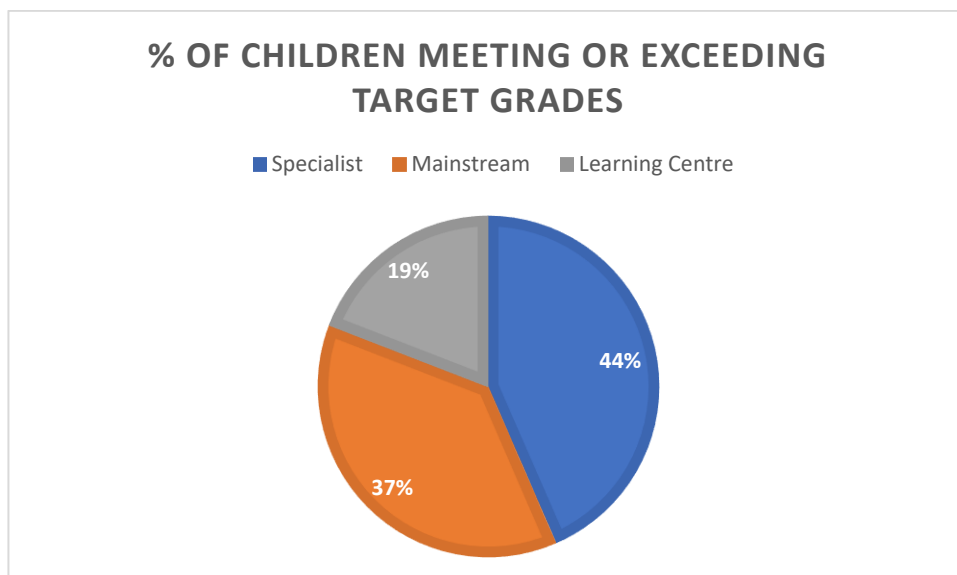
Main Qualification (year 13)

There were 66 young people on roll in year 13. Of these 31 undertook exams from Entry level qualifications to Level 3.

The school had seven young people in year 13 undertaking their final year of their level 3 qualification. 100% passed with six young people progressing to a university course, ranging from Engineering at Brunel University to Foundation degrees at local colleges.

Figure 1: Year 13 results 2021/22
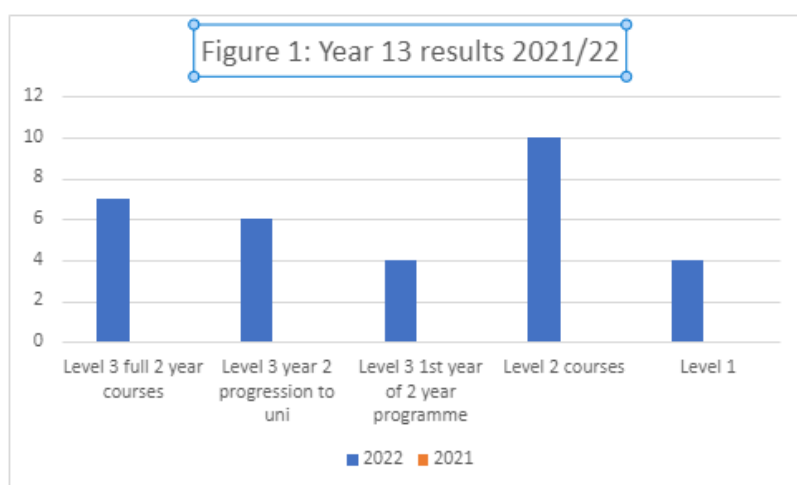
University	Course
Brunel	Engineering
Bath Spa	Music
Southampton Solent	Sports coaching
Bournemouth and Poole College	Foundation Degree
Weymouth College	Foundation Degree
Oxford Brookes	Business and Japanese

In 2021/22, there were a greater number of young people in year 13 taking functional skills English and maths in comparison to 2020/21 with no children retaking GCSE English. Year 13 saw similar numbers of young people entered at each level of full time programme although there was a slight decrease in the number of children on entry level programmes compared to previous year. The reduction in GCSE English retakes and increase in young people retaking functional skills qualifications may be due to Teacher Assessed Grades in 2020/21 and also the increase in our Unaccompanied Young People who have enrolled on ESOL courses.

National Key Stage Measures (Key Stage 5 - Year 13) 2021-2022	GCSE English (Grade 4+)	GCSE Maths (Grade 4+)	Functional Skills English (Range E1-L2)	Functional Skills Maths (Range E1-L2)	Entry Level Programme	Level 1 Programme	Level 2 Programme	Level 3 Programme Year 1	Level 3 Programme Year 2
Enrolled	0	4	10	9	10	6	12	7	7
Achieved	0	0	9	8	8	4	10	5	7

There has been a marked improvement in achievement rates for young people on level 3 courses when compared to 2020/21 (60% to 83%) and this has led to 100% of year 13s who

applied for university being offered a place. There has been a decrease in achievement on level 1 programmes (89% to 61%).
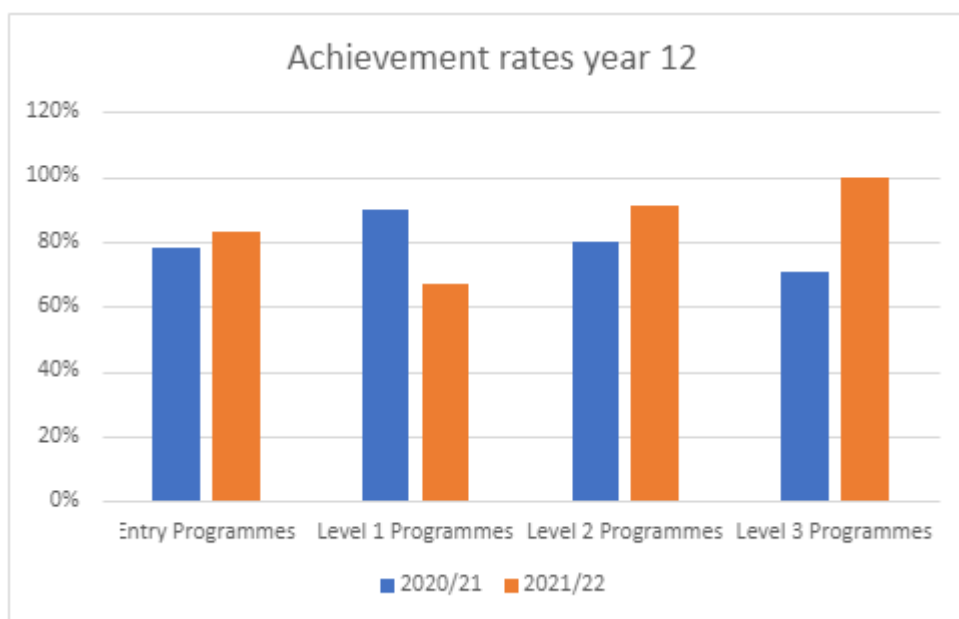
Achievement rates year 13

	Entry Programmes	Level 1 Programmes	Level 2 Programmes	Level 3 Programmes
2020/21	85%	89%	80%	60%
2021/22	80%	67%	83%	86%

Achievement rates

■ 2020/21 ■ 2021/22
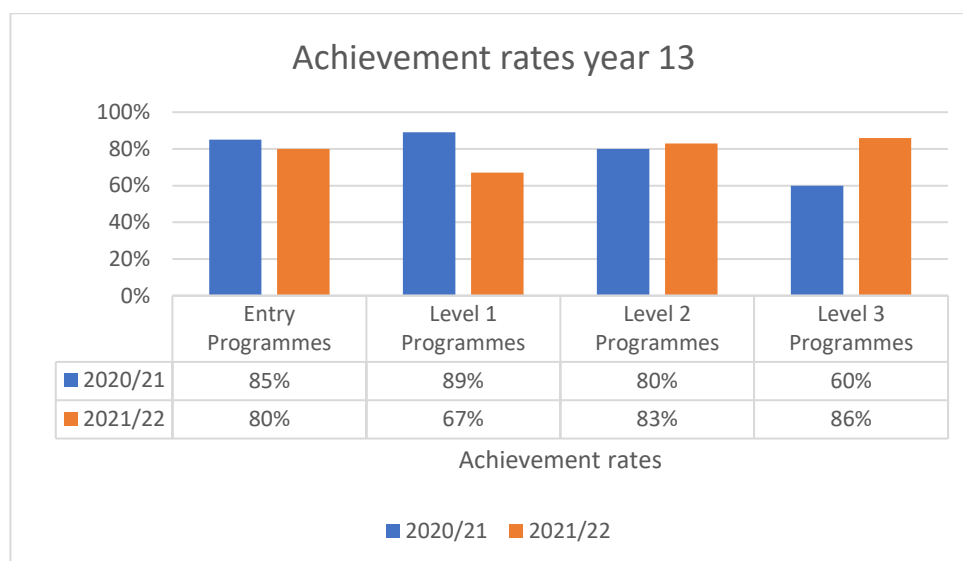
In terms of progression onto the next level of course, Twenty-two young people in year 13 completed level 2, 1 or Entry Level qualifications with eighteen young people progressing onto their next level of qualification in year 14. One young person is progressing into work related employment to their course and three are moving sideways into another level 1 course due to a chance of placement out of county and for a repeat year of ESOL.

Main qualification (year 12)

There were 50 young people on roll in year 12. Of these 39 undertook exams from Entry level qualifications to Level 3. In 2021/22, there were a greater number of young people in year 12 retaking GCSE examinations with higher achievement in GCSE English but slightly lower in GCSE maths. The Virtual School had comparable entrants on each level of full-time course but saw higher achievement rates for every level of programme with the exception of Entry level programmes in comparison to 2020/21. We have seen an increase in unaccompanied young people who have been entered for ESOL entry level programmes in comparison to 2020/21.
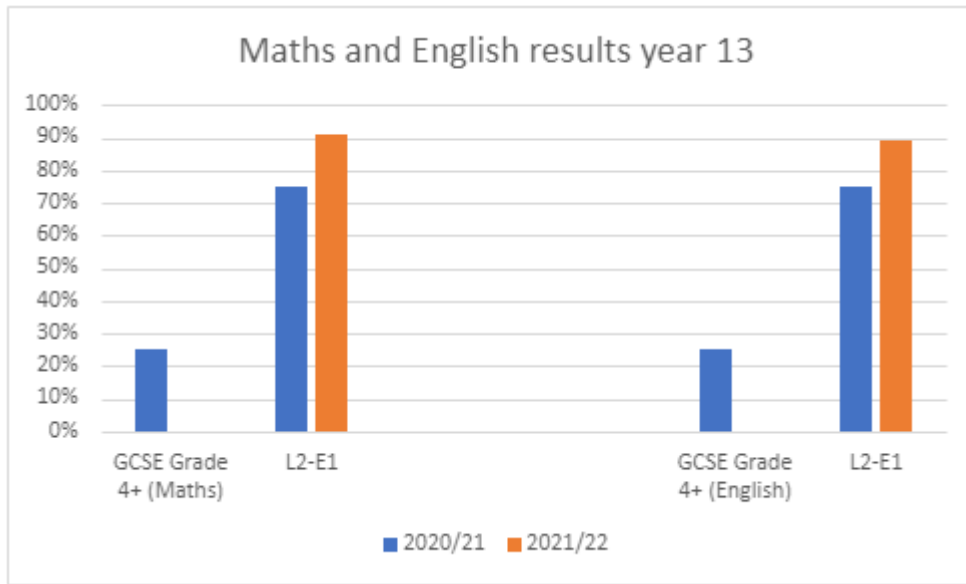
National Key Stage Measures (Key Stage 5 - Year 12) 2021-2022	GCSE English (Grade 4+)	GCSE Maths (Grade 4+)	Functional Skills English (Range E1-L2)	Functional Skills Maths (Range E1-L2)	Entry Level Programme	Level 1 Programme	Level 2 Programme	Level 3 Programme Year 1
Enrolled	8	8	10	14	12	9	11	7
Achieved	3	2	6	10	10	6	10	7

Achievement rates year 12

Functional skills/GCSE

In year 13, eleven young people undertook a retake exam for English and thirteen undertook a retake exam in maths. This shows excellent achievement for young people undertaking a functional skills qualification with a 91% achievement rate for maths and 89% for English, both seeing marked improvements from 2020/21. Four young people undertook GCSE maths retakes. However, all achieved a grade 3 and have still not met the pass standard for maths.

National Key Stage Measures (Key Stage 5 - Year 13) 2020-2021	GCSE English (Grade 4+)	Functional Skills English (E1)	Functional Skills English (E2)	Functional Skills English (E3)	Functional Skills English (L1)	Functional Skills English (L2)
Enrolled	0	2	1	4	2	2
Achieved	0	1	1	4	2	2
National Key Stage Measures (Key Stage 5 - Year 13) 2021-2022	GCSE Maths (Grade 4+)	Functional Skills Maths (E1)	Functional Skills Maths (E2)	Functional Skills Maths (E3)	Functional Skills Maths (L1)	Functional Skills Maths (L2)
Enrolled	4	2	0	3	4	1
Achieved	0	2	0	3	3	1

Maths and English results year 13

In year 12, eight young people undertook a retake exam for English and in maths and shows a higher achievement rate for GCSE English compared to 2020/21 but slightly lower for GCSE maths. There has been a decrease in achievement rates for functional skills pass rates compared to 2020/21. However, the numbers of young people taking functional skills exams is small (10 for English and 14 for maths) and have been affected by young people who withdrew from their programmes mid-year.

National Key Stage Measures (Key Stage 5 - Year 12) 2021-2022	GCSE English (Grade 4+)	Functional Skills English (E1)	Functional Skills English (E2)	Functional Skills English (E3)	Functional Skills English (L1)	Functional Skills English (L2)
Enrolled	8	2	2	1	5	0
Achieved	3	1	2	0	3	0
National Key Stage Measures (Key Stage 5 - Year 12) 2021-2022	GCSE Maths (Grade 4+)	Functional Skills Maths (E1)	Functional Skills Maths (E2)	Functional Skills Maths (E3)	Functional Skills Maths (L1)	Functional Skills Maths (L2)
Enrolled	8	2	1	3	8	0
Achieved	2	1	1	2	5	0

Maths and English results year 12
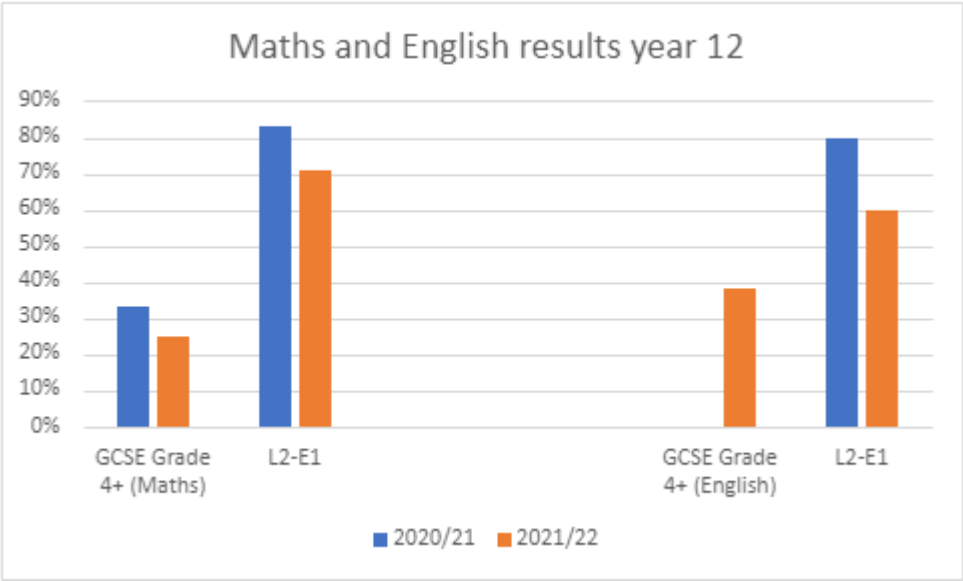
Schools Attended and Ofsted Judgements

The majority of our children (72.16%) attend settings rated as Outstanding or Good by Ofsted. We aim to support our children to attend the same school once they move into care to ensure stability and support at times of upheaval. If a child faces a change in their home arrangements whilst in care, we will ensure that we prioritise schools and settings rated as good or outstanding. In the unlikely event that a child may ask to attend a school that requires improvement, we will evaluate the suitability of each setting, considering the improvement plan in place and the progress the school has made. During 2021-2022 none of our children were moved to existing Ofsted 'Inadequate' settings. One school became inadequate during 2021/22 but the Virtual School have worked with the wider local authority education team to ensure that the monitoring and improvement plan is robust and that the education that the young person receives is of a good standard.

Reef Bugler, Year 7

Children in Care Not In Full Time Education

Reducing the number of children in care who are missing out on education (CMOOE) is within priority 1 of the development plan. In order to address this there are robust methods for identifying, supporting and tracking these children. A Children in Care Inclusion Monitoring Board is chaired by the Service Manager for the Virtual School fortnightly that focuses on actions being taken to re-engage identified children and young people in education (or training and employment if relevant post-16) with a cross Children's Services panel. The meeting gives clear oversight of these children and ensures that robust actions are in place to secure suitable full-time education.

A monthly child-level report is produced for Children's Services Leadership Team to ensure there is sufficient oversight and challenge around our most vulnerable young people.

During 2021/22 we have returned 88 children and young people to full time education. 30 of them returned within half a term. A further 21 young people have closed at the end of year 13.

The team have focussed on reducing the number of children on reduced timetables with 25 children being opened to reduced timetables and closing 19. The team have also focused on reducing the number of children who are CME with 33 children opened to the tracker during the year but closing 26.

Ten year 11 children remain on the tracker in August. 6 have enrolled on post 16 provision for September but staff wish to monitor throughout September via the tracker. Of the 4 remaining year 11s, one had a planned post 16 course but has had a placement move in August so consultations will restart. 3 children have consultations out for college places.

Development and monitoring of the CiC Inclusion Board in 2021/22 has highlighted the following:

- A significant proportion (46%) of our children who at some point have not been accessing full time education have an EHCP. Further work with the SEN team to accelerate consultation processes to be faster than the statutory timescales is being undertaken.
- We do still have a high proportion of our Virtual School cohort with an EHCP (36% compared to 27% (2019) nationally due to historic approaches taken by the Virtual School that are no longer taken as we rightly focus on effective use of the graduated approach rather than a rush to secure an EHCP when a child is struggling), so this also impacts these figures.
- A larger proportion of children and young people are in residential homes or semi-independent living rather than foster homes.
- Almost double the number of children live outside Dorset than in. The knock-on effect in terms of those with an EHCP is that it is more difficult to influence other LA's SEND teams to speed the processes up and knowledge of and relationships with the schools is at a distance when trying to arrange school placement.
- Some children stay on the tracker for a while, moving through different stages from fully CME to fully in education before they close. The progress being made needs to be clearer.
- Although our post 16 EET rates are good we have identified some misses from this year due to inexperience of the team in knowing what is available and ways to support this older age group. The team have had CPD over the last year to improve this and there are also now four team members with post 16 experience which has helped a great deal.

- The effectiveness of the CIC Inclusion Board (the fortnightly space in which these children are discussed) relies on good cross service attendance so that we are not just talking to ourselves. We have an internal Virtual School Pupil Progress meeting which takes place monthly and looks at different cohorts each month, so the two spaces achieving different things is important. We need to ensure that Care Leaver, fostering, SEND Team, EET Team and QARO representation remains consistently strong in the CIC Inclusion Board, and that social workers and PAs attend to discuss their children alongside the Virtual School Lead in order to ensure good collaborative working and joint problem solving.
- The correlation between weak PEPs and children being out of full-time education is lessening as we see the overall quality of our PEPs continue to improve to a consistently high standard (An average of 90% good or better in 2021 – 22, with 16 PEPS outstanding). PEP Quality saw an improvement from 89% in Autumn 2021 to 93% in Spring 2022 and 92% in Summer 2022. We have also been trialling writing our PEPs in the 2nd person and will be bringing this into all our PEPS during this year.
- Sometimes schools use reduced timetables when they are struggling to manage the child's behaviour. This is not an acceptable option and has been significantly reduced this year. There are times when a reduced timetable has been used as part of a transition into a new school, and this can be necessary for example when a child is suffering from emotionally based school avoidance or anxiety. Where possible we now aim to provide suitable AP to support the child in those circumstances rather than a reduced timetable, we ensure that it is time-limited and carefully monitored.
- A significant proportion of the children who have at some point in the last year not been in full time education are in Key Stage 4. The work to secure their education prior to their most important Key Stage and to keep this stable is incredibly important and has a high priority in the work of the team.

From September 2022 we will cease using the term CMOOE as it is an unhelpful acronym. Children are either in full time education or they are not, and the detail will be one of the following:

- Child Missing Education (CME): the child is not on the roll of a school
- Reduced Timetable (RT): the child is on a school roll. They spend a proportion of their 25 hours a week at home
- Alternative Provision (AP): the child is on a school roll. They spend a proportion of their 25 hours a week in AP
- Post 16 NEET: the young person is not in education or employment with training

We will also make clearer on this tracker summary when children have closed and returned to full time education. In addition, we will track whether any of the young people not in full time education have language or literacy difficulties that may make it more difficult for them to re-engage or make progress and put a support package in place.

We are eradicating the use of reduced timetables other than in exceptional short-term circumstances – the impact of this work can already be seen in the reduction of their use over the last year, and we now intend to complete this, supporting our schools to put in place more effective alternatives.

We are toughening our practice standard for returning CME children and children transferring to a new school to school from half a term to two weeks. As we are already above national with 76% post 16 EET in 2021 – 22, we are also raising our post-16 EET target to 85%. These will be challenging to meet but is an important next step to move us to 'outstanding'.

We need to continue to raise the attendance rate of social workers and PAs at PEP meetings in order to ensure that we are working in the most joined up way to support our children. Our target for 2022 – 23 is 75% attendance, following an attendance this year of 73% at statutory school age and 69% at post 16, and we will continue to increase this target as soon as it is met.

Our young people would benefit from mentoring that supports their ambitions and career plans. A mentor can provide a student with personal support throughout the ups and downs of school life. This can reinforce a student's sense of resilience. As students learn new things, they may wish to discuss their ideas with someone who shares their interests. An experienced mentor can help them understand how the concepts they learn in the classroom will translate to the workplace. We are working collaboratively with the Care Leaver and EET Teams to develop a mentoring programme, the concept for which we are bringing to CSLT for approval.

We are growing our Designated Teacher (DT) CPD to include a DT Conference which will focus on many of these key areas and include workshops from some of our Dorset schools who have delivered great work for our young people over the last year.

We are also running a residential trip this coming year for an identified group of young people who are struggling to engage with their education. The trip is designed to focus on re-engagement with education, team building and building confidence using therapeutic support around resilience.

Denni Bagwell, Year 1

Personal Education Plan (PEP) Quality Assurance

The Virtual School uses a PEP quality assurance process for all PEPs. There are clear quality assurance criteria and training has been delivered to the Virtual School Team on what a good PEP looks like. Training has also been delivered to Designated Teachers and there is a strong focus on the PEP in the Virtual School Handbook.

All PEPs are peer Quality Assurance (QA) reviewed. The QA outcome appears on the PEP so that all involved in the PEP are able to see the grading and any feedback given. The QA process grades a PEP red (inadequate), amber (requires improvement) green (good) or gold (outstanding). Themed audits of PEPs review specific aspects of the school development plan, such as the quality of the use of the child's voice through person centred planning, are a central part of link governor monitoring. QA outcomes are fed back to the Full Governing Body Meeting for oversight. Governor oversight of our work with unaccompanied young people highlighted missed opportunities to set challenging targets and to consider the child's voice effectively. CPD was provided for the Virtual School Team around these areas and a follow up audit by the governors clearly saw the impact that this intervention had on the quality of PEPs with 100% of those sampled being graded as good or better. Similar auditing of the child voice and golden thread throughout the PEP document saw an increase in the quality of PEPs across the Spring and summer term.

The impact of the work to strengthen the PEP process can be seen in the PEP QA results with 90% of PEPs found to be good or better (83.8% 2020/21). The QA process has found a sustained improved performance during the year with 93% of PEPs being graded good or outstanding during the Spring and Summer terms and an increase in the number of outstanding PEPs awarded.

Wider learning from the PEP QA process has been:
- To develop the child at the centre of planning, writing in the second person for PEPs
- To develop the number of child-led PEPs
- To consider the cultural identity of the child or young person in every PEP
- To increase the attendance of social workers and PAs to PEPs

Pupil Premium + Spend

A weekly Pupil Premium + panel evaluates the targets attached to funding for each child and young person with a robust financial tracker and monthly budget monitoring to ensure that effective practice is in place for our children and young people.

During 2021/22, £438,742 of interventions were approved with 69.59% being spent on secondary school children. The average pupil premium cost per child of PEP outcomes achieved was £898.65 (£491.31 per outcome). 57.66% was spent on academic achievement and progress, 7.62% on wider achievement, and 24.51% was spent on emotional health and wellbeing. Within the specific interventions, 42.01% was spent on 1:1 tuition whilst 11.58% were spent on social and emotional intervention.

Interventions that were set for our children during the summer term and will be fully assessed for the impact of their intervention by January 2022 so the evaluation of the impact of interventions for our children is based upon their Autumn and Spring targets.

Review

Achieved	
Partial	£116,375
Not Achieved	£54,922
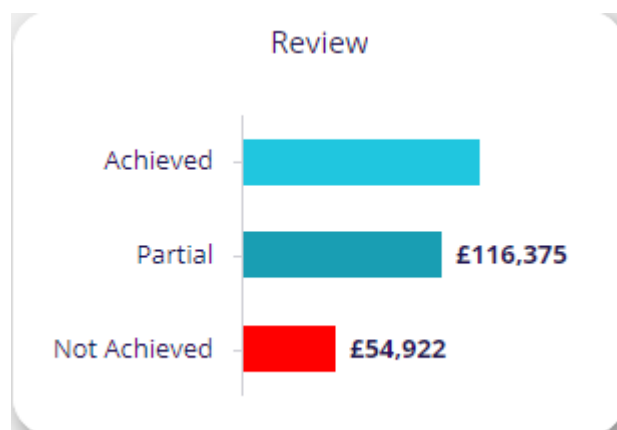
76.1% of the interventions were either graded as met or partially met during the Autumn and Spring terms. Of the targets marked as not achieved 56.53% of these were tuition targets and analysis of this with VSLs has highlighted some schools marking tuition as not achieved in order to request additional funding at the next PEP.

Of the targets achieved, 59.5% was an intervention around academic tutoring, 23.2% was based around emotional and mental well-being and 8.5% based on wider achievement including visits, trips and musical intervention.

1.45% of interventions were classed as other and after scrutiny, these were miscoded. Further work during 2022/23 will ensure that the 'other' category is not used. Just 4.10% of spending was used for behaviour interventions and this is an area for the Virtual School to evaluate during the next academic year in relation to suspensions of our children as well as detailed monitoring of those children with 0 spends.

The Virtual School receives no funding from the DfE for post 16 young people. In order to be able to allocate funding the Virtual School's policy is to allocate some of the Year 11 funding to support good transition into post 16 and to support committed post 16 students who did not achieve their Key Stage 4 English and / or Maths in Year 11. In 2021/22, this funding has supported tuition for maths and English and laptops for young people.

Designated Teacher training

The Virtual School provides an extensive training and development programme via termly Designated Teacher training, new to the Designated Teacher role training and bespoke training on themes identified from cohort need.

During 2021/22, these have included:

- Using strength-based language in PEPs
- Reintegration post-exclusion and links to targets
- Understanding Early Years
- How to interpret the SDQ and put the right educational support in place
- Coaching fundamentals
- Person-centred planning and chairing effective PEP meetings
- Ensuring the child's voice is heard

Based on feedback from designated Teachers and the Virtual School, plans for 2022/23 training are underway with a SEND focus in the Autumn term and the first Designated Teacher Conference in January 2023 that will consider alternatives to suspensions, relational policies rather than behaviour policies and support for children post care.

(Years 11 and for those achieving qualifications post 16)

This award is based on achievement of significant success based on the child's/young person's own level of progress and ability (not necessarily A* grades). Awards will be given to those in Year 11 exceeding or achieving in line with their own ability. Awards will also be given for high achievement in other qualification exams.

Young people who are in post 16 education can also be nominated for achieving their apprenticeship, BTEC, A Levels, Degree or any other significant and meaningful qualification.

Jasmine, you have shown **Exceptional achievement** in getting to a stage where you have entered examinations for Functional Skills and GCSE's against a backdrop of placement moves and personal hurdles with attending education.

Jay, you just always try your hardest at school. You achieve so high in everything you do and you are very dedicated to your education. You have progressed amazingly well through year 12 and **should be very proud of yourself!**

Completion of your first year at college studying motor mechanics at a high level in an environment away from your family. Your **enthusiasm has shone through with eveyone** you talk to about your chosen career path! Congratulations

Celebrating Child Successes

The Virtual School has a strong focus on celebrating child successes and sharing these widely including with the extended Children's Services leadership team to ensure that our children's lived experience is in everyone's minds in a positive, strengths-based way and also to celebrate good practice from teams working with our children. Children's successes are celebrated weekly within the team, with each identified child receiving a £20 book voucher. During 2021/22, 126 children and young people were celebrated for a variety of reasons, including leading their PEP, accessing education full time after missing education for one term and taking part in the Jubilee celebrations for one UASC young person.

The positive acknowledgement of children's successes in the PEP meetings was recognised in governor monitoring as a strength of the PEPs. Additional celebration of child attendance over 95% is also in place to ensure that those with positive attendance are rewarded.

The 2022 Virtual School EPIC Awards (Exceptional People In Care) took place in July 2022 at Monkey World following young people's feedback around the type of event they would like. 105 children and young people were celebrated at this event with five children and young people having an additional celebration from the Virtual School Headteacher and Director of Children's Services.

Support For Our Unaccompanied Young People

We have seen a rapid increase in the number of unaccompanied young people during 2021-22 with 34 young people on roll by the end of July 2022. Feedback from young people centred around a desire to feel a part of the community and to immerse in the English language. In response, the Virtual School designed a handbook for our unaccompanied young people with input from the wider Children's Services Team, local stakeholders supporting our young people and unaccompanied young people themselves. Analysis of our cohort of young people led to the translation of the handbook into two main languages; Pashtu and Arabic and this is available for all of our unaccompanied young people to be utilised with their social worker and family to foster a sense of belonging. An additional 'Welcome Pack' has also been produced in conjunction with local stakeholders and young people, providing language learning resources and games that can be used within the family settings to encourage immersion in the English language. Each young person is also provided with a laptop and language tuition as part of their welcome package. Our Unaccompanied young people are funded during the summer holiday to take part in the International Care Network (ICN) summer package that focuses on language learning and community visits if they live locally to Bournemouth with 100% of the children living locally taking part in this offer. As a result of these interventions, 95% of our unaccompanied young people in year 11,12 and 13 have a college course to progress onto. The one young person without a course has since enrolled at an alternative provider during October 2022.

There are plans to build on the success of the unaccompanied young people welcome pack and handbook by translating the handbook into a further two languages and to develop further the skills within the virtual school team around celebrating and sharing the cultural identity of our young people in PEPs.

Support for Our Children Previously In Care

The Virtual School aims to ensure outstanding educational achievement for our children who have previously been in care. As part of this, we have implemented two handbooks; one aimed at supporting schools and settings and one designed to support families with key support and guidance around educational success for children who have previously been in care. These handbooks were designed using feedback from families, children and Aspire (our local adoption agency). We have designed a tracking system that monitors enquiries to the Virtual School that are allocated to locality based Virtual School Leads who provide support and guidance to families, schools and settings. As part of the monitoring, we have evaluated the types of queries that arise so that we can consider how best to develop our handbooks and targeted support further. We have developed an Evaluation Plan that schools and settings are encouraged to use as part of their ongoing monitoring of our children based upon the Personal Education Plan used whilst in care. Monitoring of this Evaluation Plan was undertaken in the summer term with positive responses about it's usage. However, we would like to develop this tool further within 2022/23 to ensure its utility within all settings.

During the year, the Virtual School have supported 87 children, families and settings with initial queries around support children who were previously looked after. Attachment was found to be the biggest query followed by queries around data and funding.

There are plans to develop our work and support for our children previously in care during 2022/23 including further refinement of our tracking system so that we can ensure that our

categorisation of query allows more detailed analysis. Transition meetings for children applying for reception and year 7 are planned in conjunction with Aspire Adoption Agency and will provide support and guidance for parents with children in choosing their next steps. Further analysis and refinement of the Education Plan to ensure its utilisation will be undertaken.

Extended Role of The Virtual School

The Virtual School has extended its role to include the strategic responsibility for children with a social worker as per [Promoting the education of children with a social worker (publishing.service.gov.uk).](publishing.service.gov.uk) A Service Manager for Inclusion has been in post since January 2022. A plan has been implemented to ensure that there is high visibility of this group and that CPD is delivered to social workers and schools to help to understand this group of children's educational needs and that the robust plans for them go beyond their safety and to a focus on their educational progress.

So far, we have developed an Inclusion dashboard which highlights children with CIN and CP plans who are not in full-time education. This enables us to take swift and robust action to ensure they are returned to full-time education quickly. We hold fortnightly inclusion oversight board meetings which are multi-agency and prioritise children with a social worker. The board focuses on ensuring that rapid action is taken where a child is not in full time education. We also have weekly Inclusion Team Manager briefings where there is strong focus on children with a social worker who are not in full-time education.

We have delivered educational outcomes for children with CIN and CP Plans training to education and early help colleagues, locality social care teams and Quality Assurance Reviewing Officers. We have also completed a dip sample of CIN and CP Plans focused on educational outcomes which will inform further training. The aim is for all CIN and CP Plans to have clear educational targets alongside the safeguarding targets.

We are working with school and families to understand and resolve barriers to good attendance for families with a social worker so that legal intervention is only used as a last resort and where it is clear that it will change behaviour.

Permanent exclusions from Dorset schools reduced to 31 in the academic year 2021/22. This is a significant improvement on previous years, brought about through a whole system focus on good inclusive practice and building the skill and capacity of school staff to meet the needs of the children in their schools. This has included therapeutic thinking training, a relational practice forum and Local Inclusion Partnerships. Two permanent exclusions for two pupils with a CP Plan and three for pupils with a CIN plan were rescinded following support and challenge to the excluding schools from the extended Virtual School. Unfortunately, two children and young people with a CP Plan and six who had a CIN Plan were excluded. In the academic year 2021/22, there were 2217 suspensions involving 930 children. 26 (2.7%) of the suspended children had a CP Plan.

There are currently no children with a CP plan being electively home educated (EHE) and 13 who are identified as CIN. The children identified as CIN are prioritised for suitability checks to ensure that they are being educated in a safe environment, are receiving education that is suitable to their age and aptitude and are making progress. Where education is found to be unsuitable swift action is taken to return them to a school setting.

We have also decided to extend the role further to incorporate children who have involvement with the Youth Justice Service (YJS) to ensure that this high-risk group have strong visibility and are prioritised to ensure educational stability. A YJS officer attends the

Inclusion Oversight Board meeting to ensure there are robust plans in place for this group of children and young people.

Next steps include:

- Delivering training to schools on the teaching and learning of children with a social worker
- The development of an attendance plan to ensure that all Dorset children, including those with a social worker, have good school attendance.
- Development of an Inclusion Toolkit which will incorporate advice and guidance for schools in relation to vulnerable children
- We now hold a Learning Circle to reflect with all the practitioners following any Permanent Exclusion. The learning from these will be anonymised and shared.
- Children with early signs of risk of permanent exclusion or other off-rolling will be discussed at the Inclusion Board so that earlier intervention can be put in place. Children who have ever had a social worker will be prioritised within this process.
- We will ensure that the voice of young people with a social worker is central to their education planning.

Virtual School Projects

Young People In Care Conference

The Virtual School planned and delivered its first Young Person Conference at the Sailing Academy in Portland around aspiration, ambition and expectations. The Conference featured workshops for both the young people and their carers, enabling them to work together and also independently of each other. The growth in the young people's confidence and ability to engage with their own ambitions and strengths through the course of the day was palpable and their feedback indicated how much they all valued the day and recommended that we run it again.

The challenge we faced was encouraging families to attend. We have responded to the feedback to change the time of year, and plan to focus the next conference on Years 7 – 10. We will work more closely with schools and social workers to ensure that many more of our young people are able to access this opportunity in the coming year.

There are also plans to build on the success of these kind of events in 2022/23 with two residentials for targeted groups of young people, a creative writing week, an arts project culminating in an exhibition and an access to higher education event specifically for children in care.

Elsie-May Burgunder, year 4

Literacy Support

During 2021/22, the Virtual School supported 133 children and young people to have access to the Letterbox Literacy Club to encourage and foster a love of reading and to improve literacy. Feedback from this project was positive with one carer noting 'how thrilled and excited our young person was to receive his first Letterbox parcel yesterday. He has already started reading the joke book and has ear marked another for reading time. He has made use of most of the materials including the exercise book which he is using to record the results of the money game he insisted we play today after doing his homework'. Another child has said that ''They are good because I like the books and instruments you get. I can share them with my teachers, my friends and my mummy and daddy.''

During 2022/23, the Virtual School would like to be involved with the Imagination Library, a specific Early Years programme to improve literacy.

PALAC Project

The Virtual School partnered this year with University College London (UCL) to deliver their Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children (PALAC) Project in eight Dorset schools. PALAC is a Knowledge Exchange (KE) programme that seeks to support practice in schools to improve outcomes for students in care. It originated as a result of the dearth of evidence available to support schools in developing practice for this group of children and young people. The collaborative relationship between practitioners in school and university researchers seeks to improve our collective understanding of how students in care can thrive in school.

We identified schools that covered all phases of education to be included in the trial. The programme engaged the schools and Virtual School in a collaborative year long programme through access to research findings, a comprehensive school audit tool and regular support from facilitators with research and school practitioner backgrounds. Participants had the opportunity to share and evaluate their findings at the end of the academic year.

A set of case studies is due to be published by UCL demonstrating the impact and learning from each of the projects. These have been incredibly successful and the school lead for each project will be sharing their work through workshops in the Designated Teacher Conference in January 2023. The Virtual School is planning to replicate the project with a new set of schools and to extend it to incorporate post 16 projects.

Big Bids

Following feedback from our colleagues within schools and settings around 'dream projects' if funding was available, the Virtual School implemented its Big Bids process for schools and settings to access between January and March 2022. This initiative encouraged settings to bid for funding to implement a project or creative idea that would support our children in care as a cohort within the school to achieve and be successful.

During this period 19 bids were received with 17 successful. Projects ranged from providing resources to support a well-being room within two schools, mentors for children in care, resources for an outdoor 'calm' space for children, differentiated reading resources that include resources around being in care and care experiences to training for whole staff groups around Lego therapy, total communication and support to set up a peer mentoring programme for children in care in schools.

Feedback from settings involved has been positive with school stating that the funding for therapy training has supported their children in care to have increased self-esteem and supported relationship building. The therapy provided a good platform on which to build transitions for school upon. Further feedback around mentoring for ten young people has 'developed good relationships with our primary and KS3 children in care. It is pleasing to note that the mentor is named by pupils on their PEP as their trusted adult and is their go to person. There is also fantastic transition work going on into new schools'.

Following the evaluation feedback from the schools involved and a presentation at the designated teacher training about its impact, we are offering the Big Bids during the Autumn Term 2022/23.

Access to Trauma Informed Practice

During 2021 – 2022, the Relational Practice team carried out further training for schools regarding attachment, trauma and relational practice including emotion coaching. This increased the number of schools involved with the relational practice group to 23 schools in Dorset across mainstream, specialist and learning centres.

Through half-termly training, the relational practice network have supported schools and settings with CPD on Transitions, Play, Language, Restorative approaches, Emotional regulation and PACE training.

To support relational practice and trauma informed practice in schools and settings, the Virtual School funded 28 schools and settings to have an annual membership to the Attachment Research Community group. This provides schools and staff with access to trauma informed research and publications as well as auditing tools to reflectively use within settings to support our children. This initiative has been supported through the relational practice monthly meetings. The Virtual School is part of the Southwest ARC community and will attend the national conference in October 2022 to further develop our own understanding and practice.

Further embedding of the ARC audit tool within schools will support self-evaluation and target setting to continue to drive forward improvement in attachment and trauma informed work. Planning is underway to encourage schools within the network to take a lead in facilitating network sessions to move towards more of a partnership model of working.

Virtual School Council

The Virtual School Council started in September 2021 to further engage with our young people in care and create a forum for their thoughts and ideas on the Virtual School. Currently the Virtual School Council has 14 members with plans to develop and grow this number further. In the academic year 2021-2022 there were five Virtual School Council events including the inaugural school council workshop and outdoor learning at a local outdoor education centre. Staff members from the Virtual School also attend the Family Foster days at Avon Heath, Branksome Beach and Carey Camp to develop relationships with our young people, carers and colleagues and utilise these meetings to hold Virtual School Council meetings. These events have enabled us to gain views from our young people which have included:

- Introduction of a council newsletter
- Networking opportunities
- Things to do in the local area/ clubs that are on
- Competitions
- Opportunities for other children (not in care) in foster families to take part in events

Our children on the Virtual School Council say that they 'want to work together to share our voice, have fun and make friends. We would love to meet every week rather than every half term so that we can make a difference'.

For this academic year the Virtual School Council plan is to grow and develop to increase the number of young people involved. There will be termly newsletters and events including an evening at Dorchester Museum, an event at the Weymouth and Portland Sailing Academy and a leadership and team building residential trip to a working farm. We will also be developing the role our young people play in the Virtual School including representation interview panels and meeting with Corporate Parenting Board. We will be working with our children and young people to develop opportunities they would like to see and training they can take part in.

Priorities on a page: Dorset Virtual School Development Priorities 2022 – 23

AIM	To ensure that all Children in Care and Care Leavers are ambitious around education and are provided with the best support led by the child.		
STRANDS	Achieving educational stability	Improving how children are represented in our work	Developing opportunities for children to achieve their ambitions
PURPOSE	To provide children and schools the right support to enable full time stable education age 2 - 18	To provide children with the best support led by them	To provide high quality opportunities that lead to educational and employment success
12 MONTH GOALS	• Improve school transitions, particularly cyp with SEND • Eradicate use of reduced timetables • Eradicate use of suspensions • Eradicate number of children missing education • Develop mentoring system • Deliver Designated Teacher Conference and CPD programme	• Develop person-centred approaches • Develop child-led PEPs • Represent and utilise the cultural identity of the child • Collect and respond to child feedback • Deliver ambitious plans for children in Early Years • Provide support for settings to better meet the needs of children previously in care	• Identify and utilise most effective interventions • Raise the profile of celebration of child successes • Develop wider learning opportunities and positive experiences • Develop Virtual School Council's role • Develop strong transition support packages
OUTPUTS	• All cyp transition to new school successfully & within 2 weeks if moving in-year • 0 cyp on reduced timetables • 0 suspensions • 0 CME for longer than 2 weeks • 0 cyp in re-engagement AP for longer than 6 weeks • At least 85% Post 16 EET • At least 92% stat school age attendance	• 100% PEPs using 2nd Person • At least 50% PEPs child-led • 100% PEPs consider cultural identity of child • Child feedback to VS Council informs practice • 100% EY PEPs good or better • At least 75% attendance of SW, PA and EYSAO at PEPs • At least 50% of schools surveyed have PLAC Education Plan in place	• 0 use of 'other' category for interventions • 0 'No Spends' per child on PP+ • Every child is celebrated at least once during the year • Annual programme of events • VS Council influences and impacts on VS Development Plan • 100% year 11 have a post 16 pathway • 100% of year 13s have a university, employment or training offer

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Appendix 2: Virtual School Cohort Statutory school age and Post 16 2021/22
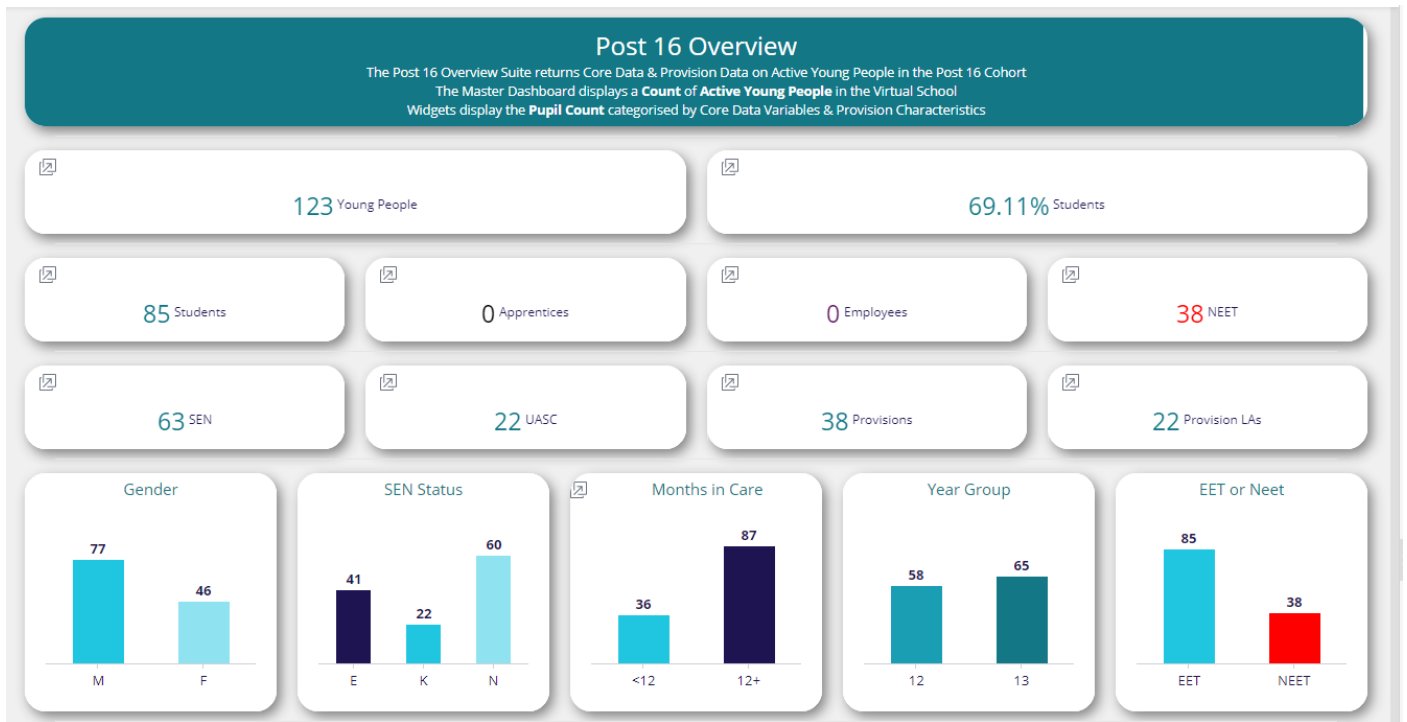
Please note that the cohort details change regularly and therefore this is a snapshot in October 2022.

Statutory School Age Cohort

298 Pupils					

SEN	UASC	No Provision	Provision Provided	Provisions	Provision LAs
186	8	7	291	159	41

Gender
- F: 121
- M: 174
- YTC: 3

SEN Status
- E: 107
- K: 79
- N: 106
- YTC: 6

Months in Care
- 12+: 215
- <12: 83

School Stage
- EYFS: 15
- P: 94
- S: 189

Location
- IB: 166
- OB: 125
- NP: 7

Year Group
- 0: 15
- 1: 12
- 2: 12
- 3: 15
- 4: 23
- 5: 16
- 6: 16
- 7: 23
- 8: 38
- 9: 36
- 10: 40
- 11: 52

Legend: EYFS, KS1, KS2, KS3, KS4

Ethnicity
- [WBRI]: 257
- [OOTH]: 14
- [WOTH]: 8
- [MOTH]: 7
- [AOTH]: 2
- [BAFR]: 2
- [MWAS]: 2
- [MWBA]: 2
- [MWBC]: 2
- [APKN]: 1
- [WROM]: 1

Placement Type
- [U4]: 108
- [U6]: 60
- [YTC]: 33
- [K2]: 30
- [U1]: 30
- [U3]: 15
- [P1]: 4
- [R1]: 4
- [Z1]: 4
- [S1]: 3
- [A6]: 2
- [A5]: 1
- [FC]: 1
- [T2]: 1
- [U2]: 1
- [U5]: 1

Legal Status
- [C2]: 187
- [C1]: 55
- [V2]: 36
- [E1]: 13
- [V4]: 5
- [YTC]: 2

Post-16 Cohort

Post 16 Overview

The Post 16 Overview Suite returns Core Data & Provision Data on Active Young People in the Post 16 Cohort
The Master Dashboard displays a **Count** of **Active Young People** in the Virtual School
Widgets display the **Pupil Count** categorised by Core Data Variables & Provision Characteristics

123 Young People	**69.11%** Students

85 Students	**0** Apprentices	**0** Employees	**38** NEET

63 SEN	**22** UASC	**38** Provisions	**22** Provision LAs

Gender

M	F
77	46

SEN Status

E	K	N
41	22	60

Months in Care

<12	12+
36	87

Year Group

12	13
58	65

EET or Neet

EET	NEET
85	38

Appendix 3: Attendance for 2021/22

Attendance Trend

Year	Overall absence (%)	National figure
2019/20	13.4%	
2020/21	14.5%	
2021/22	11.43%	9.10%

2021/22 Attendance

2021/22 (Welfare Call data)	Overall attendance
Whole cohort	88.57%
Year 11 (50)	74.4%
Year 10 (40)	80.2%
Year 9 (36)	89.0%
Year 8 (39)	94.7%
Year 7 (23)	92.5%
Year 6 (17)	94.8%
Year 5 (16)	94.9%
Year 4 (23)	95.9%
Year 3 (16)	91.9%
Year 2 (12)	91.1%
Year 1 (14)	95.3%
Reception (14)	94.8%

2021/22 Persistent absence

2021/22 (Welfare Call data)	Persistent absentees below 90% (%)
Whole cohort	27.05%
Year 11 (50)	51.79%
Year 10 (40)	39.58%
Year 9 (36)	41.03%
Year 8 (39)	8.82%
Year 7 (23)	13.16%
Year 6 (17)	16.64%
Year 5 (16)	18.75%
Year 4 (23)	0
Year 3 (16)	33.33%
Year 2 (12)	18.75%
Year 1 (14)	0
Reception (14)	7.69%

2021/22 Unauthorised absence

2021/22 Unauthorised absence (National average ??%)	
Whole year average	2.90%
December 2021	2.54%
March 2022	2.37%
July 2022	3.68%

Appendix 4: Suspensions

Suspensions 2021/22

	Year	Episodes	Children	Male	Female
Primary	0	0	0	0	0
	1	0	0	0	0
	2	0	0	0	0
	3	10	5	4	1
	4	0	0	0	0
	5	2	1	1	0
	6	2	1	1	0
Secondary	7	5	3	2	1
	8	19	8	8	0
	9	56	11	8	3
	10	39	11	5	6
	11	36	11	7	4
Total		**169**	**51**	**36**	**15**

Suspensions by Cohort Educated in Dorset Schools **(30 Children)**

	Year	Episodes	Children
Primary	0	0	0
	1	0	0
	2	0	0
	3	4	2
	4	0	0
	5	2	1
	6	0	0
Secondary	7	0	0
	8	14	5
	9	37	5
	10	37	9
	11	28	8
Total		**122**	**30**

Suspensions by Cohort Educated outside Dorset Schools **(21 Children)**

	Year	Episodes	Children
Primary	0	0	0
	1	0	0
	2	0	0
	3	6	3
	4	0	0
	5	0	0
	6	2	1
Secondary	7	5	3
	8	5	3
	9	19	6
	10	2	2
	11	8	3
Total		**47**	**21**

Suspensions with SEN detail

SEN status	% of cohort	Episodes	Children	% suspended children
Education Health and Care Plan	23%	75	24	47.05%
SEN support	27%	66	19	37.3%
No SEN	8%	28	8	15.69%
Total		**169**	**51**	**100%**

Suspensions by ethnicity

Ethnicity	% of cohort	Episodes	Children	% suspended children
WBRI – White British	21.50%	158	46	90.19%
MWAS – White and Asian	100%	3	2	3.92%
WROM – Gypsy / Roma	100%	3	2	3.92%
OOTH – any other ethnic group	9.09%	5	1	1.96%

Corporate Parenting Board
30 November 2022
NYAS Advocacy and Independent Visitor Service Report

Choose an item.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr A Parry, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s):   Cllr

Executive Director: T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

Report Author: Claire Denby
Title: Senior Advocate
Tel: 07517906472
Email: Claire.denby@nyas.net

Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

This report is designed to update young people in Dorset, the Corporate Parenting Board, Portfolio Holders, Commissioners, and other interested parties, on progress for the provision of advocacy and independent visitor service to care experienced young people from August 2021 to September 2022.

1. Introduction

1.1 NYAS became the commissioned provider of Advocacy and Independent Visitor Service for Dorset young people on the 1st of August 2021.

1.2 An advocate is allocated to young people in Dorset to ensure their views and concerns are heard, especially when they are involved in statutory processes which they may not understand, to help them to explore their options without prejudice or influence, to ensure they know their rights and to ensure they have the information to help them to make informed choices and decisions. We will ensure they are in contact with the relevant people or contact them on their behalf and accompany young people to meetings or appointments if they require it. NYAS also works with young

people to develop their self-advocacy skills and the confidence to advocate for themselves, which will grow into a lifelong skill.

1.3 The children's Independent Visiting service provides volunteers to visit, befriend and support Children who are Looked After. Those who live in foster care, residential homes and residential special schools and supported living arrangements up to the age of 18 years old. Dorset Council refers via the NYAS portal any eligible children and young people to use the service, up to a maximum of 33 Independent Visitor matches per contract year.   An Independent Visitor is an adult who has volunteered to spend time with children looked after, and are someone they can trust, and someone they can rely on. The role of the independent visitor will be to visit at least once a month, so the young person will see them regularly. They'll plan for whatever the young person wants to do and the time they spend will be all about the young person

2. Advocacy Service Report

2.1 Referrals into the service in the first 12 months (August 2021 to July 2022) totalled 842, of these, 456 were for issue-based advocacy where the young person is in care or is a care leaver, and 386 referrals were for young people needing advocacy support due to their involvement in the child protection processes.

2.2 Out of the total 456 issue-based advocacy referrals in Year 1, 194 (42%) received an advocacy service through to completion. Of the 262 referrals that did not receive a service through to completion:

- 93 were declined by the young person after the advocate explained the service and their right
- 15 young people stated they no longer wanted the service
- 31 young people were not able to be contacted
- 30 young people couldn't be contacted because there was incomplete information provided
- 94 cases during the period were declined by NYAS – the overwhelming majority of these were in August to December 2021 when an opt-out system was in place and NYAS was not able to respond to all the requests

2.3   Referrals for the first quarter of Year 2. Referrals for the first quarter of year two (July 2022 to September 2022) totalled 128, of these, 56 were for issue-based advocacy and 72 were for child protection advocacy. Out of the 56 cases referred in the first three months of the second year, 46 were allocated to an advocate with advocacy service provided and work completed on their identified work plan. Out of the 9ases where no service was provided:

- 2 were declined by the young person
- 2 where the young person disengaged during the advocacy process
- 4 where the young person was uncontactable
- 1 duplicate where referral made by social worker and the advocate.

2.4   Further detail is provided as Appendix 1.

3.   Independent Visitors service

3.1   As current matches were settled, and existing Independent Visitors completed NYAS induction and compliance training, the focus changed to recruitment of new independent visitors to increase the number of matches. The new independent visitor coordinator focus since April has been on recruiting suitable matches for the young people who were on the waiting list. By the end of August we had 22 young people matched with independent visitors and regular contact with the Independent Visitors, young people, the carers, and the independent visitor coordinator.

3.2   Between February and August we received 6 new referrals for the Independent Visitor service.

3.3   As of the end of August we had 10 young people waiting to be matched. 5 of which were placed out area. We had 3 Independent Visitor recruited and ready to be matched (1 of which had a match pending, 2 did not have any suitable matches yet). We had three candidates going through recruitment/training process.

3.4   Training and support on a group and individual basis has been completed ensuring that there are clear lines of communication and understanding of the NYAS recording and reporting systems. All IV's have completed the NYAS compliance training and quarterly best practice meetings are undertaken with all current IV's (IVs going through recruitment also have the option of attending these meetings). Best practice meetings cover a range of topics, which are chosen by the independent visitors in order to

assess training needs within the service. One to one support is also offered for independent visitors who need additional guidance.

3.5 Further detail is provided as Appendix 2.

4. Summary

4.1 Since the challenges experienced early in the contract with the high demand with the initial opt out advocacy referral process amended to have social workers to make referrals directly, things have settled down and service delivery has become more consistent.

4.2 Challenges were raised by commissioning with the capacity for NYAS to manage the referral rate with an "opt out" referral system. After the change was made to Dorset's referral process, there was a reduction during quarter 2 (Jan to March 2022) where the number of referrals from social workers initially reduced significantly. This period of low referrals also coincided with a time when the advocacy service for a period was without a Senior Advocate to lead the team and promote the changes to the referral process with Children Services. With the appointments in March of a Senior Advocate and Independent Visitor Coordinator and following their initial induction period, both have quickly got up to speed with their respective roles.

4.3 The Senior Advocate has worked closely with Children's Services leads to promote the advocacy referral process to locality teams, emphasising specific points where young people have the right to and would benefit from advocacy support i.e. child in care reviews. This approach has seen a rise in the number of referrals since April, although there is still some fluctuation in the number of referrals coming through. There has been a push within the advocate team to complete internal referral for young people once they have received a service, which removes the emphasis on the social workers needing to make referrals, thus providing a more consistent offer to young people. This approach enables children in care to build a trusting relationship with the advocate over a period of time. A future focus is to work with children services to support young people when they first come into care, so they understand their rights and know how to access the advocacy service.

4.4 Data collected by both Dorset Council and NYAS are shared mostly on a weekly basis with commissioning, which enables any case specific issues to be picked up and challenged as appropriate. Further amendments are

being made to the way in which referrals are reported to enable identification of any learning needs around advocacy within Children's Services, so that this can be addressed in a more focused manner. This will also include an internal performance dashboard that is being developed for early 2023 and will support this work.

4.5   There has been a resumption of face-to-face meeting, where the advocate will always aim to provide a face to face with a young person, including out of county young people where we have advocacy services running in their area and can offer a local advocate. New ways of working and processes have been implemented within the advocacy team, and young people are routinely being asked to provide feedback on the outcomes framework and the data can start to be used to identify trends in young people understanding of their rights regarding their care and the service can respond accordingly.

4.6   The Senior Advocate has spent time promoting the service across Children's Services, delivering presentations to the locality team meetings; care leavers' service; quality assurance reviewing officers and via the Thinking Thursday sessions. A further two training workshops will be delivered targeting newly qualified social workers and Children's Services workforce to raise awareness of the service, these will run in November and March 2023. Several drop-in surgeries have been delivered to offer social workers the opportunity to discuss caseloads and identify young people who will benefit from advocacy, and the senior advocate is currently working with service managers to offer regular drop-ins throughout the year.

4.7   As the independent visitors are volunteers, it can be challenging to recruit suitable matches particularly in more rural locations, where we have been creative in how we promote the volunteering opportunities. There is always a balance of managing our monthly visit budget on activities against the cost of travel particularly in areas where volunteers are not always able to travel long distances. The coordinator works closely with the refer and young person to manage expectation, particularly when the safer recruitment process can take longer than we would like.

4.8   Once matched, the young people and volunteers are very positive about their experiences and the impact it has on their wellbeing. It allows young people to have new experiences and have a safe space where they can be themselves and talk openly, without judgement. Appendix 4 provides some feedback from children and young people.

4.9   In January 2022, NYAS launched our new 'My Things Matter' campaign as NYAS' flagship 2022 campaign. Supported by Madlug (Make a Difference Luggage) – an award-winning UK bag brand and Dorset Council has signed the pledge. This supports young people to have good quality bags to move their belongings when in care.

4.10   Overall, following a challenging start, the service is now showing a good level of growth, whilst maintaining ongoing support for current matches.

5.   Financial Implications

5.1   The service operating within agreed contract and budget

6.   Well-being and Health Implications

6.1   All requests for advocacy support are allocated in a timely manner, ensuring that the impact on emotional well-being for children and young people are minimised as they receive a service.

7.   Climate implications

7.1   NYAS are a national organisation, so where we have request for service for children and young people staying outside Dorset, we can offer a local advocate and reduce travel.

8.   Other Implications

8.1   NYAS actively seek to raise the profile of advocacy and this feeds into Corporate Parenting.

9.   Risk Assessment

9.1   Low

10.   Equalities Impact Assessment
        Not required for this report

11.   Appendices

- **Appendices 1 NYAS Advocacy Data**

- **Appendices 2 NYAS IV Service Data**

- **Appendices 3 Young People Feedback**

- **Appendices 4 My Things Matter Campaign**

12.   Background Papers

None

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Appendices 1

NYAS Dorset Advocacy Referral Data:

Year 1 - Aug 2021 to July 2022

Quarter 1 year 2 - Aug 2022 to September 2022

	Year 1	Quarter 3			Quarter 4			Quarter 1 year 2		
Advocacy Referrals	Year 1	January	February	March	April	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sept
IBA	456	14	9	11	24	28	16	12	25	19
CPA	386	10	18	25	38	43	32	24	19	29
Totals	842	24	27	36	62	71	48	36	44	48

Legal status of the care experience young people:

	Year 1 Aug21-Jul22	Q1 Jul-Sept
S31 full care order	313	21
S20 Voluntarily accommodated	81	11
S38 Interim Care Order	32	4
Care leavers	6	3
S17 Child Protection	5	9
S17 Child in Need	16	5
S17 Family Group Conference		2
S352ZD Unaccompanied asylum seeker child	3	1

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Appendices 2
NYAS Dorset Independent Visitors Service

August 2021 to July 31ˢᵗ 2022

	Dorset Independent Visitor Service
Contracted Target No of C/YP to be matched	33
No of C/YP Matched	18
No. of C/YP waiting	12
No of matches in progress	7
No. of volunteers waiting	6
No. of Volunteers in recruitment	5
No. of matches ended	7
No. of referrals closed before being matched	5

Quarter 1 year 2 (Aug 2022 to September 2022)

	Dorset Independent Visitor Service
No of C/YP using the service at the start of the quarter	16
No of C/YP referred to the service	4
No of C/YP leaving the service	1 match ended (due to distance following a move)
No of C/YP on waiting list for Independent Visitor	9 1 on hold at request of SW, 2 moved before a match completed
No of new matches	8 (one is a rematch)
No of C/YP who have declined the service	3 decided not to continue with the service before they were matched.
Source of referrals made during the quarter	Social Workers
No of C/YP using the service at the end of the quarter	22
IVs in recruitment	3
IVs ready to match	5

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Appendices 3 Young People Feedback

Here are some feedback comments from our young people who have experienced advocacy support in the last 3 months

"Thank you again for the support you've given to k you have been a massive help to her, and she's felt very supported by yourself. "

since you have supported me I feel I have got more confident and clearer at expressing my worries and questions and I think the meeting went well because I had you to support me if I needed some help, but I think lots have improved since when I first started

R liked speaking to you before, he said you were very kind and listened to everything he said, thankyou for that and I look forward to hearing what R says now he is back at school full time

Thanks for your email today and for all the support you have provided to L during what has been a difficult period for her. It is good to note that a clear outcome has been provided to L by Dorset Council following her complaint and that Lucy confirms she feels she has been

My advocate has definitely helped me put my thoughts into words. I know what I want to say, and my advocate helps me put it into words that can be understood.

Here are some feedback comments from our young people who have had an independent visitor in the last 6 months

They have helped me understand why I have been taken into care and why things happen… the best thing about my IV is that she understands my situation more than anyone. (Young person)

My IV is fun, very relaxed and kind. We have been to football matches, fried different sports (golf). I enjoy eating out and we have a good conversation.

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Appendice 4

My Things Matter Campaign and sign up

In January we launched our new 'My Things Matter' campaign as NYAS' flagship 2022 campaign. Supported by Madlug (Make a Difference Luggage) – an award-winning UK bag brand – we are asking local authorities to sign the 'My Things Matter' pledge.

So far, **32** local authorities have signed the campaign pledge. Please see the breakdown by region below.

North	Central	South	Wales
12	**6**	**10**	**4**
Tameside	Suffolk	East Sussex	Neath Port Talbot
Redcar and Cleveland	Norfolk	Bexley	Swansea
North Yorkshire	Buckinghamshire	Hammersmith and Fulham	Torfaen
Hartlepool	Oxfordshire County Council	Medway	Vale of Glamorgan
Warrington	Rutland	Redbridge	
Wakefield (no NYAS contract)	Herefordshire	Devon	
Wigan		Southampton	
Lincolnshire		West Sussex	
Middlesbrough		Ealing	
Hull		Dorset	
Newcastle Upon Tyne			
Leeds			

On 6th October, NYAS' 'My Things Matter' campaign took home the Partnership Award at the National Children and Young People Awards 2022. NYAS were nominated alongside Madlug, as this award recognises organisations who have worked together to place children and young people at the centre of their work.

On NYAS winning the award, NYAS Group CEO Rita Waters said:

"We are delighted to have won this prestigious award, recognising the value of working together to create change for children and young people. We are incredibly grateful for the children and young people who have shaped My Things Matter and continue to be our focus, and also want to thank our partners at Madlug who are a vital part of our efforts. We

will not stop campaigning until every child has the best possible moving experience while in care."

Our flagship campaign for 2022 has also been shortlisted for 'The Children in Care Award' at the Children and Young People Now Awards 2022, which will take place in November 2022.

Corporate Parenting Board
30 November 2022
Virtual School Annual Report 2021 - 22

Choose an item.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr A Parry, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s):   Cllr

Executive Director: T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

Report Author: Lisa Linscott and Jo Smark-Richards
Title: Virtual School Annual Report 2021 - 22
Tel: 01305 228587
Email: lisa.linscott@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

This report provides a detailed analysis and evaluation of the activity of the Virtual School in the academic year 2021 – 22. The report is provided as a separate document.

Recommendation:
For Corporate Parenting Board to recognise and support the activity of the Virtual School.

Reason for Recommendation:
The annual report from the Virtual School is provided to the Virtual School Governing Body and Corporate Parenting Board each year to highlight strengths, outcomes and areas for further development in the coming year. The Virtual School is thankful to councillors for their support and in particular to those on the governing body, who participate in regular monitoring activity.

1.   **Financial Implications**

1.1   The Virtual School receives DfE funding each year to support children in care, those previously in care, and those with a social worker as per DfE guidance.

2.   **Environmental Implications**

        Not applicable

3.   **Well-being and Health Implications**

3.1   Children's wellbeing is paramount to the work of the Virtual School and is evidenced throughout the report.

4.   **Other Implications**

5.   **Risk Assessment**

5.1   HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

        Current Risk: Low
        Residual Risk: Low

6.   **Equalities Impact Assessment**

7.   **Appendices**

7.1   Appendix 1: DVS Annual Report 2021 - 2022

8.   **Background Papers**

Dorset Council:
Quality Assurance & Reviewing Officer (QARO)
Annual Report 2021/2022

Jane MacLennan, Quality Assurance Manager　　　　**September 2022**

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Contents

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 This annual report provides evidence relating to the Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer (QARO) Service in Dorset Council. The QARO undertakes the statutory function of the IRO. It covers the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, as required by statutory guidance. Overall, the information and data describe a developing and quality service which continues to support good outcomes for children and young people in care in Dorset. The report includes key information outlining the work of the service with and for children in care and the report includes case examples of QARO work with children.

1.2 A collaborative approach to working enables the service to work alongside our Corporate Parenting Board, our Children in Care Youth Voice, and the Pan Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership. The QARO service has a collaborative approach, based on an understanding that the Reviewing Officer challenge and function will add value to outcomes for children in care. The improvement journey continues to model a relational approach based upon "High Expectation, High Challenge and High Support" in our work with social work colleagues and agency partners and building upon the values and aims of Dorset Council.

1.3 We continue to believe that a person centred, relational approach is more effective in improving the experiences and outcomes for our children in care and that this can be achieved alongside robust escalations and challenge.

1.4 The QARO Service continues to contribute greatly towards Dorset's strengthening services plan, ensuring that generally children and young people in care have timely and good quality care and permanence plans. The Quality Assurance Framework is supporting the Service and Children's Services performance and improvement.

1.5 The report includes a profile of the service, which continues to see minimal staff changes throughout the year, this enables consistency for our children and young people. Sickness absence has been a challenge during some periods of 2021/2022. Despite this we have managed to maintain a consistent service of chairing statutory reviews and maintaining relationships with our children & young people. Average caseloads for QAROs are no higher than 60 for full time and 30 for part-time staff. The report identifies the importance of supervision and peer support, alongside training and reflective practice to maintain the professional development of the team.

1.6 This report considers in detail the profile of our children in care, including their age, gender and ethnic background, the length of time in care, legal status, and type of placement. In the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, the QARO service completed a total of 1,221 child in care reviews, with 96% completed

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within timescales. 89% of children aged 4 and over participated fully in their reviews.

1.7 The report highlights the continued development of our escalation process and highlights that there is still some considerable work to undertake to enable this to become fully embedded in QARO practice. The service escalated 125 concerns over the last 12 months. 22% were concluded informally (through discussions with social workers and team managers), 35% reached level 1(formal notification to team manager), 15% level 2 (service manager), 6% level 3 (Head of locality/Head of service) and 2% level 4 (corporate director). There were a total of 3 escalations which were raised with the Corporate Director and included the Executive director. One was due to lack of progress with a health appointment and two were as a direct result of children not having a suitable education provision. The escalations helped to progress regular meetings chaired by the Corporate Directors to facilitate partnership working and achieved successful outcomes for the two young people. Each quarter there are on average 5% of escalations which are not resolved in that quarter. As of 31.3.22 all escalations for the 2021/22 period had been successfully resolved. Learning, emerging themes and how we are starting to embed escalations within practice is detailed further in the report. The improvement journey continues to model a relational approach based upon "High Expectation, High Challenge, High Support" in our work with social work colleagues and agency partners and building upon the values already embedded in Dorset.

1.8 The quality-of-care planning within Dorset is informed by data and service audits. QAROs provide a level of stability and continuity for many children in care and this report provides examples of QAROs supporting children and young people through care planning and through the difficulties and uncertainties some of our children are faced with. There is increasing evidence of the 'QARO footprint' and oversight on our children's records, alongside the audit outcomes which are used to inform and improve QARO practice, as well as support wider improvements across Dorset Council Children's services. The report considers the quality-of-care planning informed by data and service audits. QAROs identified that in 98% of reviews the child had a suitable and clear plan for permanence, health, education and family and social relationships. QAROs identified that 43% of all children in care had achieved permanence.

1.9 The QAROs write a letter to the child following the child in care review detailing discussions and actions that were agreed at the review. This replaces minutes which is more meaningful for our children and something they tell us they prefer.

1.10 The QARO service, like the rest of the Council and its partners, has continued to adapt to the changing situation linked to the Covid-19 pandemic. This has resulted in a number of reviews being held remotely, alongside the QAROs visiting and seeing children and young people face to face. We are proud that despite the continued impact of Covid on our children, their families, and the service, we have been able to maintain 'business as usual' for our most vulnerable children and young people.

1.11 Throughout the report are key areas of practice and work with children and young people in their care planning that the QARO Service has identified, and these are communicated to the Extended Children's Services Leadership Team (xCSLT) through the QA Framework reporting arrangements. Key issues identified and reported through the year include:

- Challenges in the stability and retention of social work practitioners in some teams has influenced delays in effective care planning for some children, as plans are not progressed in a timely manner and or plans continue to "start again".

- Concerns about the suitability and quality of pathway planning for young people aged 16 and 17 preparing for leaving care, where many young people have pathway plans which prove difficult to fully implement.

- The need for more clarity and coherence as to permanence plans and how these will be achieved for some children.

- The understanding of and progression of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguarding Orders (DoLS) for our most vulnerable young people who require a deprivation of liberty in order to protect and safeguard.

1.12 The report highlights a range of achievements and a summary of progress in 2021-22, which include:

- QAROs have been able to access a wide range of training and development opportunities throughout the last 12 months.

- We are able to evidence progress of our practice standards in respect of engagement, and a strengths-based, approach to Child in Care Reviews.

- We continue to facilitate the meaningful involvement of Children in Care in their Reviews: Regular reporting on participation (weekly) and discussions through peer supervision has shown an increase in participation over the last few months.

- We have been able to remove the reliance for completion and distribution of recommendations and minutes from our business support colleagues, meaning that QAROs are now able to complete and send off recommendations and minutes as soon as they are completed.

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- We have worked collaboratively with our business support to develop a reporting system to identify the level of contact a QARO has with a child or young person between formal reviews.

- Observation of practice has increased through the monthly audit framework; alongside this we held practice observation week (October) where a number of children in care reviews were observed.

- QAROs are now chairing MACE (Multi-agency child exploitation) meetings. This enables an independent overview and oversight of planning for those who are considered to be at significant risk.

- We have established links with the leaving care team, with two QAROs attending team meetings and the QARO manager attending the managers meeting on a monthly basis. Dip sample auditing alongside monthly audits have focussed on the quality of pathway plans and transitional arrangements.

- Senior managers meet regularly with CAFCASS (Child & Family Court Advisory Services). We have seen increased communication and consultation between the QARO, and court appointed Guardians with Guardians being invited (and attending) both children in care reviews and permanence planning meetings.

1.13 The report concludes with our service intentions for the forthcoming year (2022/23) and a summary of achievements & progress made over the last 12 months.

2. Purpose of Service & Legal Context including the Professional Profile of Dorset Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer (QARO)

2.1 The IRO Handbook sets out the requirement for the QARO team to produce an annual report, to include its legal context, and the purpose of the service. The QAROs carry out child in care reviews within the framework of the IRO Handbook (2010), linked to the Revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance (April 2011).

2.2 The QARO has a key role in relation to the promotion and improvement of Care Planning for Children in Care and for challenging drift and delay in their care and permanence planning. A key task for the QARO is to build relationships with children, young people, family network and professionals to enhance effective decision making and care planning to establish positive outcomes.

2.3 The QARO role within Dorset is unique in that it has been developed to have responsibility for not only to independently review care planning for children in care but to strengthen the independent oversight and monitoring to support

the service in ensuring improved outcomes and our aspirations for all our children in care are met.

2.4 The functions and requirements of the QARO service are:

- All Children in Care should have a named QARO who, as far as possible, remains a consistent figure in the child's life, during their journey through care.

- There should be the same QARO for sibling groups where possible.

- The QARO should chair the child or young person's Child in Care Reviews

- Promote, and ensure that due regard is given to the voice of the child in their care plan, permanence plan and care arrangements.

- Ensure that plans for the child are based on a detailed and informed assessment, which is up to date, effective and provides a real and genuine response to each child's needs.

- Meet with the child and consult with him or her, making sure that the child understands what is happening to them, can make a genuine contribution to plans, fully understands the implications of any changes, and understands how an advocate could help, and his/her entitlement to this, and legal advice.

- Be aware of, and if necessary, take action to prevent any unnecessary delay in care and permanence planning for children in care and the delivery of services to them.

- Have an overview of the Local Authority as a corporate parent in ensuring that care plans have given proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes and feelings.

- To provide challenge and support to social workers and their managers to ensure the best life chances for children and young people.

- To have an effective means of challenging the Local Authority, including a Dispute Resolution (escalation) Procedure, with the ability to convey concerns to CAFCASS and access to independent legal advice.

2.5 The roles and responsibilities of the QARO are defined by:

- The Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 (ref section 7)
- The Children Act 1989
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002
- The Children Act 2004
- The Children and Young People's Act 2008
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010
- QARO Handbook 2010 (implemented 1 April 2011)

2.6 The QARO team sits within the Quality Assurance & Partnerships' service area of Children's Services. It has core responsibility for reviewing care plans for children in care, alongside the monitoring and challenge of the Local Authority in respect of its corporate parenting and safeguarding responsibilities.

2.7 The QAROs are independent but remain managed within Children's Services. They hold no line management responsibility for any children in care. They are qualified experienced social workers with significant children's social work and team management experience. Each QARO has a link to a locality within Dorset, which enables relational practice and consistency for all our staff and partner agencies.

2.8 Some QAROs have responsibility for chairing both child protection and child in care reviews, where this is considered to be in the child/family best interest. This does enhance the independent challenge required and strengthen the skill set of QAROs to provide a service in line with the QARO handbook.

2.9 The child in care function of the QARO service has a staffing configuration of 8.6 FTE staff at Team Manager Level (Grade 13) with a QARO manager (Grade 14), overseen by Head of Service (Grade 17). On 31 March 2022 there were 10 QAROs of mixed gender (2 males, 8 females) and ethnicity. The diversity of the workforce potentially enables a better awareness and understanding of the potential discrimination that children in care may face. The QAROs consider and promote the different needs of children, to ensure that their care plan addresses their specific identity including ethnicity and diversity needs.

2.10 Since October 2020 the workforce has remained relatively stable, with all QAROs being permanent employees of Dorset Council. One QARO retired in April 2021 and was replaced immediately with a manager from another service within the Council.

3. National, Regional and Local Links

3.1 The Quality Assurance manager meets every 3 months with IRO & child protection managers from the Southwest region. We have maintained reflective supervision and peer support, as well as sharing good practice. Over the last 12 months there have been two training events which has enabled all the IROs and QAROs across the region to meet and consider how to increase participation with a focus on feedback.

3.2 The CAFCASS manager meets regularly with the Heads of Service. Alongside this there is direct communication and liaison between the QARO and CAFCASS officers for those children where there are care proceedings. Communication between CAFCASS and QARO managers is currently informal, this arrangement works well. Where appropriate, CAFCASS officers

(Guardians) are invited and do attend child in care reviews and permanency planning meetings (PPM).

3.3 The service has sought to maintain direct working relationships and links with the social work services over the last 12 months. The Director, Heads of Locality and Service Managers regularly attend relevant senior management meetings and events held by the Council. The QA managers attend a monthly service manager meeting which also includes meeting regularly with the service and team managers of the leaving care team. Each QARO has a direct link to a locality team across Dorset and attends a team meeting at least every quarter. This has enabled them all to develop professional working relationships & improve communication between the services. The QARO can share performance data, audit outcomes, and offer consultations to a range of professionals working within the localities.

3.4 Liaison with our partner agencies in Health and Education continues to be a priority for the service. We have a professional working relationship with the Children in Care virtual schools service and the Children in Care nurses. This includes meetings between managers & attendance at team meetings to promote partnership working.

3.5 The service has monthly Quality assurance meetings (QPAG) attended by the Corporate Director of Children's services, Heads of Service, Heads of Locality, Service managers and Locality Education Leads, alongside the QA managers. This has enabled a wider awareness and understanding of the QARO role and contributes to the discussions and analysis of the Council's performance and key priorities. QAROs continue to routinely contribute to the Council's practice evaluation and learning processes.

4. Quantitative information - Children in Care Population

4.1 As of 31 March 2022, the rate of Children in Care in Dorset was 66.18 per 10,000, which is only slightly higher than the previous year end rate at 66.16 per 10K. This keeps Dorset just under the national average for Good within England (67 per 10,000) and higher than our statistical neighbours (57.6 per 10,000). As of 31 March 2022, Dorset Council had corporate parenting responsibility for 448 children and young people. This number overall has been relatively consistent throughout the 2021/2022 period. We saw a peak in June 2021, a significant decrease in July 2021 and then a steady increase for the rest of the year. We are continuing to work hard to enable children and young people to return to their birth families, when it is safe to do so. On 31 March 2022, 5% of the total children in care population in Dorset, were living at home following a successful reunification plan.

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4.2   National data as a comparison is only available for the previous year (2021).
During this year, the number of Children in Care by Local Authorities in
England rose to its highest level at 80,850, up 1% in 2020 and continuing the
rise seen in recent years. The rate of 67 per 10,000 children is the same as
the previous year and up from 64 per 10,000 children in 2018. The number of
children coming into care was consistently lower than we may usually expect
throughout 2021 but was seen to be particularly low during the national
lockdown or when restrictions were in place. Other headlines of particular
interest, suggesting an impact of the pandemic are the number of children who
were adopted has fallen 18%, continuing a fall from a peak in 2015.

Number of children in care in Dorset at end of each Month 2021-22
(Fig. 1)
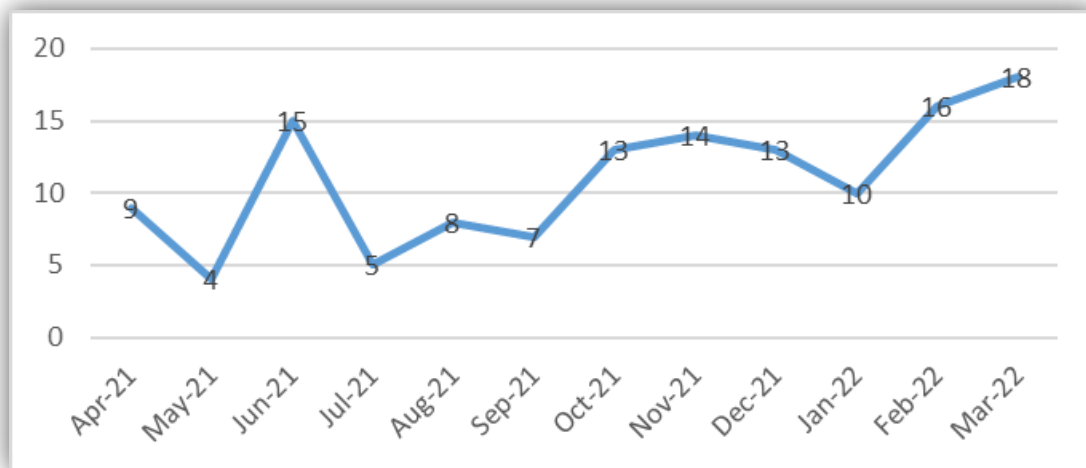
4.3   Noting the comparisons for Dorset Council with national, regional, and
statistical neighbour figures, there is also some considerable difference across
the council's locality/areas.

Numbers of children in care per locality area 31.3.22
(Fig. 2)

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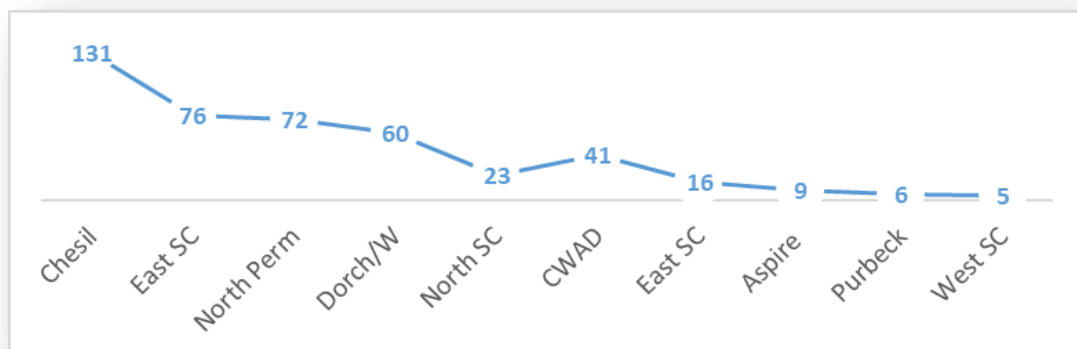
4.4   Children with a disability account for 8% (38) of our children in care population. Most are in our care through a series of short breaks or under the legal order S20 (voluntary accommodation). We continue to work in partnership with parents to provide specialist support and care packages to meet the complex and individual needs of the children.

4.5   We have a close working relationship with our colleagues in the Children with a Disabilities team and our residential home (The Cherries). A specific QARO is the link with the social work and residential team. This helps to maintain communication, the sharing of data and any legislative updates or changes. We have worked hard over the last 12 months to raise the importance of children with a disability who are in our care full time (rather than through a series of short breaks) achieving permanence, irrespective of their legal status. This has been supported by senior leaders and the parents of the children and we have seen an increase in the number of children in care through S20 that have a secure and permanent care arrangement.

4.6   30% of children and young people in our care have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) this is reviewed annually in line with statutory requirements alongside the personal education plan (PEP) which is in place for all our children in care. The QAROs work collaboratively with our colleagues in the virtual school, ensuring that children in our care receive the right education and support to achieve their full potential.

4.7   Children in Care Missing out on Education (CICMOE) meetings take place fortnightly and are attended by the QA manager and QARO where appropriate. This is a multi-agency meeting which helps to ensure a coordinated approach to providing children with appropriate support packages and identifying formal challenge where our children are not accessing the education they require.

4.8   17% of the children in care population are from black and minority ethnic groups. We have seen an increase of 3% in the last 12 months, this reflects the increase in diversity and number of unaccompanied children coming into our care over the last 12 months, particularly over the months of February and March 2022.

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Ethnicity of our children in care population (Fig. 3)

Bar chart showing ethnicity of children in care population:
- other: ~25
- mixed other: ~10
- mixed white/black: ~8
- mixed white Asian: ~5
- Black: ~2
- Asian: ~6
- white: ~390
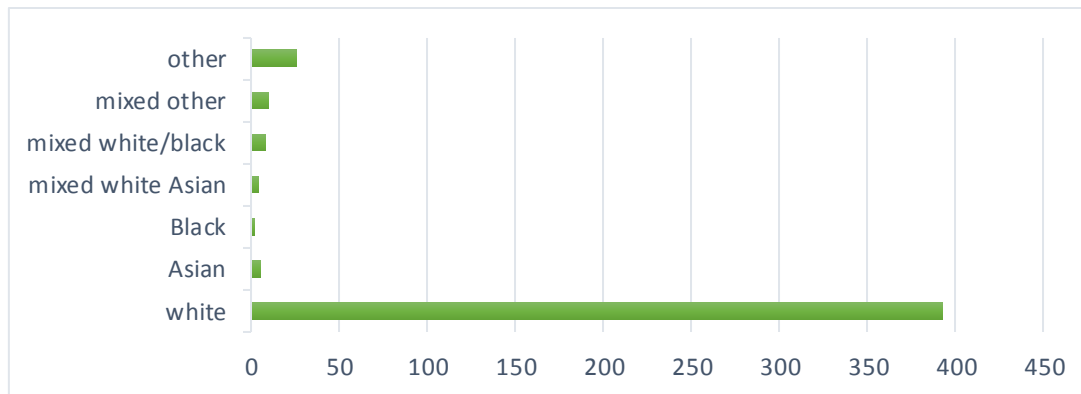
4.9 Dorset has a small (but increasing) number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children which makes up 5% of the Children in Care population. In the last 6 months we had 87 children coming into care, 20 (23%) were unaccompanied children. The data for 2020/21 shows that nationally, the number of unaccompanied children was down 20% (a total of 4,070) from the previous year (2020/21) which is likely due to travel restrictions during the pandemic in 2020/21.

4.10 Nationally, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children represent around 6% of all Children in Care and are usually male, with absent parenting identified as the main category of need. We are acutely aware that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are amongst the most traumatised & vulnerable children our service works with. The QARO provides independent oversight and challenge (where needed) to ensure the children have the right support, at the right time, to help them adjust and start to rebuild their lives. This includes the need for any specific psychological or mental health support, giving regard to the young person's age and independent living skills when considering the intensity of support and intervention required.

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The change in numbers of our (Dorset) unaccompanied asylum-seeking children over the last 12 months (Fig. 4)
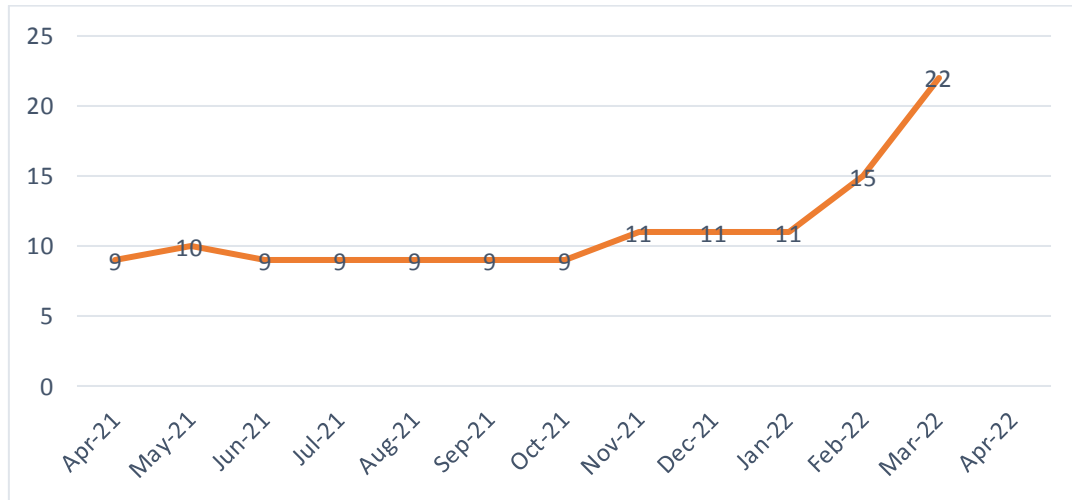
4.11   Dorset has a higher number of males (57%) in care, compared to females (42%) this has remained consistent compared to last year. Over the last 12 months we have been able to capture the data for children and young people coming into care who do not identify as either male or female. This accounts for just 1% of our Children in care population.

4.12   Of the 448 children in care across Dorset, the highest proportion of children are within the 16 years+ age range, making up 25% of the overall Children in Care population. 30% of Children in Care are age 0-9 years with 50% of the population being between the ages of 10 to 15.

Ages & percentage of children in care in Dorset on 31.3.2022 (Fig. 5)
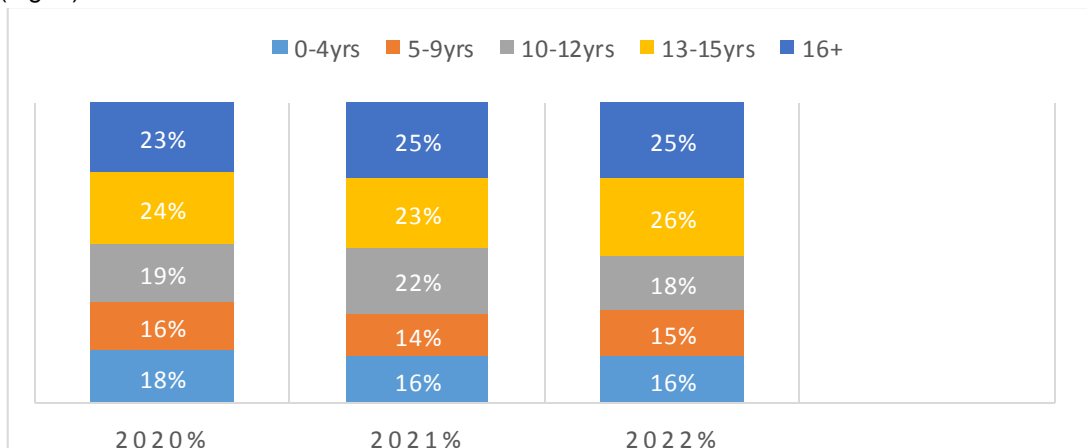
4.13   The table below (Diagram 6) and chart above (Diagram 5) show a snapshot of the Children in Care population on 31 March 2022 by legal status. This shows that most of Dorset's children and young people in care are subject to a legal order, compared to a voluntary arrangement (Section 20). There has been a noticeable change in the legal status of children in care in recent years.

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Both the number and proportion of CIC under care orders have increased, with those in care under voluntary arrangements having decreased. This reflects the family court ruling in 2015 with advice and guidance from the judiciary in respect of the use of Section 20 (S20), which is now firmly embedded in practice. We monitor closely any child under the age of 5 coming into care through a voluntary arrangement. Numbers have been low and for short periods of time. On 31.3.22 we had 15 children in care through S20, most were through a series of short breaks or a child with a disability in a specialist care provision. We had no children under the age of 5 years in care through S20.

Children in care legal orders; number, % and comparison with national average 2021 (Fig. 6)

Order Detail	March Number 2021	March Number 2022	% March 2022	National % March 2022
Interim Care Order	52	66	15%	20%
Care Order	293	297	66%	59%
Placement Order	40	30	7%	6%
Voluntary/S20	64	55	12%	15%

4.14 The total number of new admissions into care between 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 was 136, (30% of the total CiC population), this is a small increase of 2% from last year. A total of 135 ceased to be in care for the same period. This is a similar pattern to 2020/21 which saw 126 children coming into care and 134 ceasing. There is evidence of our figures remaining stable over the last 12 months despite the commitment for children to come into care only when it is considered the best and safest option and to work collaboratively with families, children, young people, and professionals for children to return to their families when it is safe and appropriate.

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New into care by category and age

(Fig. 7)

Category	Male 0-12	Male 13-18	Male Total	Female 0-12	Female 13-18	Female Total	Total
N1- Abuse/Neglect	30	6	36	31	4	35	71
N2- Disability	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
N3- Parental illness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
N4- Family in acute stress	4	1	5	3	3	6	11
N5- Family dsyfunction	7	6	13	9	5	14	27
N6- Socially unacceptable behaviour	0	3	3	0	0	0	3
N7- Low income	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
N8- Absent parenting	0	17	17	0	0	0	17
N9-Adoption	0	0	0	0	3	3	3
SP	0	3	3	0	0	0	3
Total	42	36	78	43	15	58	136

4.15   It is evident that neglect continues to be the highest category for children coming into care (52%) with family dysfunction being the next highest reason (20%). In the last 12 months, 57% of children coming into our care were male 43% female. This is similar to number of males and females coming into our care over the 2021/22 period. The general characteristics of children in care are similar to previous years, both locally and nationally. Males continue to account for 66% of children in care nationally with 39% being between the ages of 10-15 years.

The numbers of children coming into and leaving care

(Fig. 8)
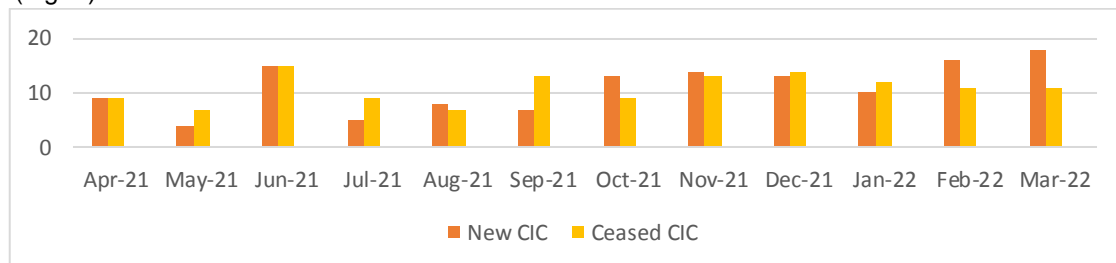
4.16   It is interesting to note that the numbers of males and females leaving care remain similar to those entering care. There are equal numbers of male and females being adopted as well as achieving permanence through special guardianship. Diagram 9 highlights that a higher number of males aged 0-12

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years (total of 17) returned home to birth family compared to only seven females.

***The number of children and category for Leaving Care***
(Fig. 9)

Category	Male 0-12	Male 13-18	Male total	Female 0-12	Female 13-18	Female total	Total
E11- Adoption unopposed	1	0	1	1	0	1	**2**
E12- Adopted	6	0	6	6	0	6	**12**
E13- Left care to live with parents	2	2	4	1	2	3	**7**
E17- Age 18	0	25	25	0	23	23	**48**
E41 - Residence Order	1	0	1	0	0	0	**1**
E45- SGO to foster carer who were relative or friend	8	2	10	9	0	9	**19**
E46- SGO to foster carer	2	1	3	0	1	1	**4**
E47- SGO to relative/friend	1	0	1	2	0	2	**3**
E4a- Return home	11	6	17	5	2	7	**24**
E4b- Return home not part of care plan	0	1	1	0	1	1	**2**
E5- Moved to independent living	0	1	1	0	2	2	**3**
E6- Moved to independent living with no formalised support	0	1	1	0	0	0	**1**
E7- Transferred to residential care funded by adults	0	2	2	0	1	1	**3**
E8 -CIC ceased for another reason	1	2	3	3	0	3	**6**
Total	**33**	**43**	**76**	**27**	**32**	**59**	**135**

4.17 When considering the impact of being in care for our children we are able to evidence that on 31 March 2022 17% of our children in care population were living with either parents, relatives or friends. This continues to be an area of focus in our permanence planning and independent oversight of Care planning.

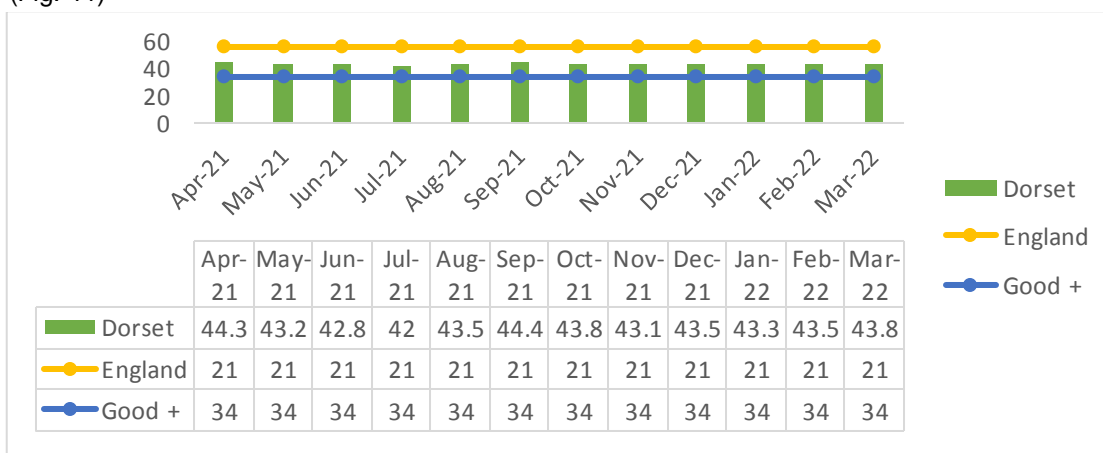***Children in care by placement with parents, relatives, or friends***
(Fig. 10)

16
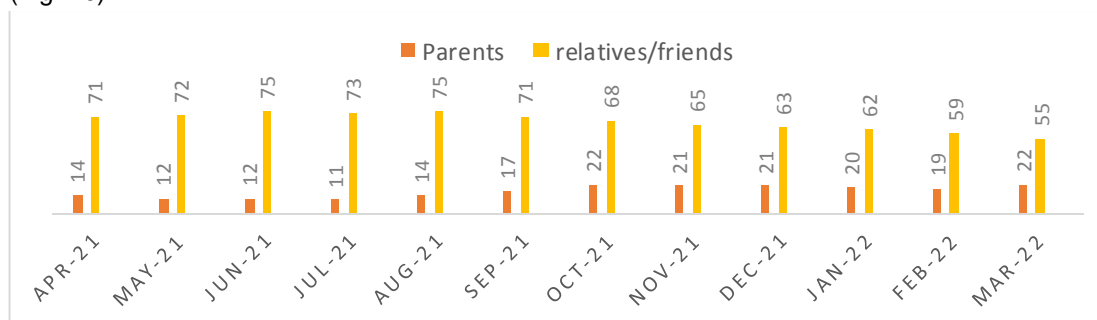
4.18 On 31 March 2022, Dorset have 43.8 % children living more than 20 miles from home, which is higher than national and our good+ statistical neighbours. A low % is good for this indicator. The current figure indicates that we have more children than comparable areas that are living further from home. However, we should also consider that as a rural county we are likely to have more living further from home (hence why our statistical neighbour averages are higher than national). This shows that we need to continue our focus on finding more placements closer to home for our children when it is the right time for them. Whilst plans have been in place for several young people, these have been delayed due to the need for some of our young people to complete their education, which would be otherwise disrupted. We are confident that this figure will continue to reduce over the next 12 months (a positive direction). Reducing the travel time for QAROs to see their children and young people and chair their reviews, will also enable increased capacity within the team. Dorset as a County is large and for some children who live in Dorset can still be more than 20 miles away from their family home.

Children in care % home to placement ≥ 20 miles
(Fig. 11)

	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22
Dorset	44.3	43.2	42.8	42	43.5	44.4	43.8	43.1	43.5	43.3	43.5	43.8
England	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21
Good +	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34

4.19 When looking at the data for our children who live outside of Dorset the number is larger than we would like (194 or 43% of children on 31.3.22) and slightly higher than April 2021 (40%). The increase in unaccompanied young people moving to Dorset from Kent from January 2022 has impacted on our increasing numbers of young people living outside of the County. Diagram 12 shows the numbers of children in care living outside of the Local Authority.

Number of children in care living outside of Dorset

(Fig. 12)
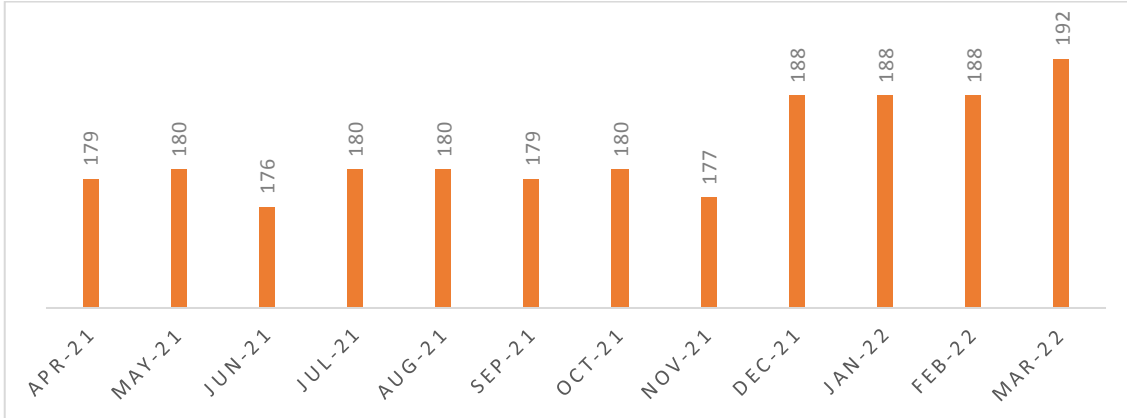
4.20 On 31.3.22, we had 23 young people were placed in an unregulated placement, this accounts for 5% of the total Children in care population within Dorset. This is reduction in four young people being in an unregulated provision over the last 12 months. These young people are over the age of 16 requiring support to live independently rather than needing full time care. For the young people in an unregulated provision (such as supported housing) there is a high visiting frequency by the allocated social worker and enhanced monitoring, contact and oversight by the QARO. This is in recognition of the additional needs and vulnerabilities for these young people. An unregulated placement is one which is not a children's home, subject to S1(2) of the care Standards Act, 2000 & does not have to be registered with Ofsted. For young people age 16+ who need semi-supported accommodation as part of transition planning into adulthood.

4.21 It is positive to note that we have no young people in an unregistered provision and continue to work closely with our colleagues in commissioning to ensure that all of our children and young people are in the right accommodation or family according to both their identified need and individual wishes. An unregistered provision is when a child (under the age of 16) who is being provided with some form of "care" is living in a placement that is not registered with Ofsted. Once a provider delivers a care element as well as accommodation, they must register as a children's home.

5. Quantitative information- The QARO Service

5.1 Between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022 the QARO service completed a **total of 1,128** child in care reviews. This is a decrease of 241 reviews from the performance data of 2021/22. This figure seems linked to an increase in

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stability and less moves for our children in care, which is positive. QAROs have continued to seek to address matters of concern through direct communication with social workers and team managers, alongside utilising the escalation process. It is important that the frequency of reviews reflects the need to review and/or change the child or young person's care plan, as opposed to using it as an opportunity for case or care planning meetings. The QAROs are aware of the need to not blur boundaries between case management, oversight and maintaining an independent view.

5.2   QAROs are required to hold a child's first review within 28 days from the date they came into care, then no later than 3 monthly and 6 monthly thereafter. For children living back with their parents where a care order remains in place; we hold reviews every 12 weeks. This is to ensure sufficient oversight and to avoid drift and delay in progressing the permanence plans for the children. An important performance measure is for children to have their reviews held within the statutory timescales.

5.3   On average there are 94 reviews held each month with peaks of 135 in November 2021 and 126 in March 2022. The less busy months being August and February 2022 where 48 and 67 reviews were held respectively.

Details number of review held
(Fig. 13)
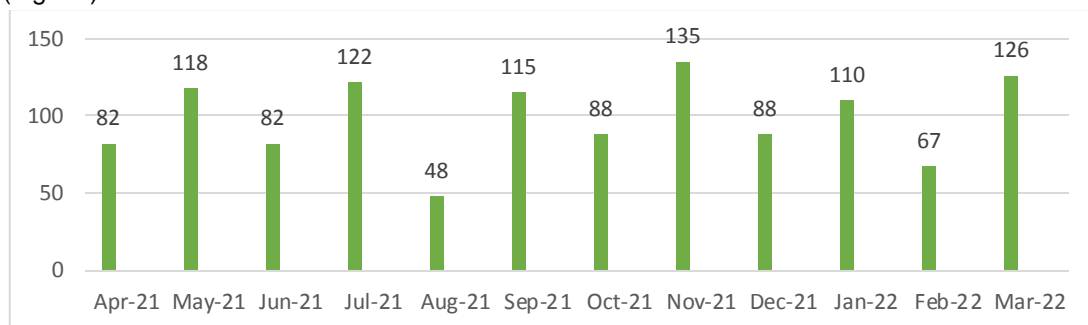
5.4   Over the last 12 months the QAROs have completed on average 96% of reviews on time, this is the same level of performance as last year. The dip in performance in January of this year is attributable to a high number of QAROs being off work due to leave and unplanned sickness. Despite some relaxation in the covid restrictions during this year the pandemic has had an impact on the health and wellbeing of our children, carers, and professionals. We continue to be proud of the continued dedication and hard work of the team.

***Reviews held within timescales (%)***
(Fig.13)

19
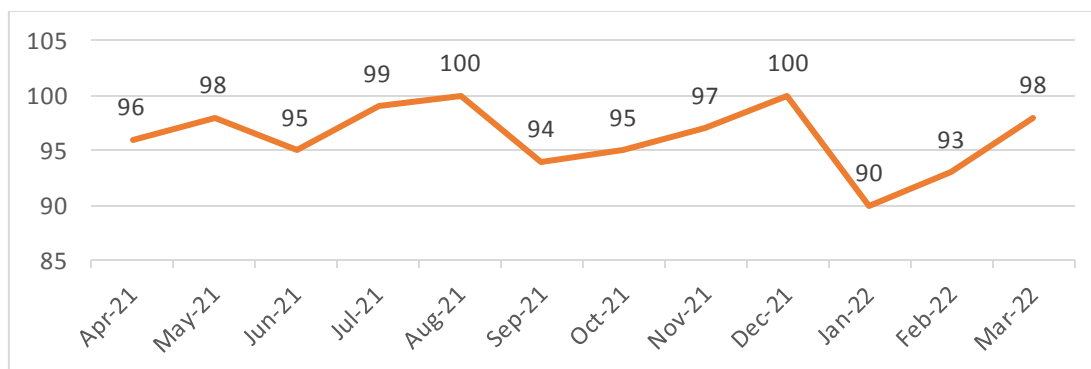
5.5   The reviews that have been out of timescale are few (4.27%). There are
       several reasons for late reviews which include changes and the sickness of
       allocated social workers, the impact of Covid (health of carers and
       children/young people), and the long term and unexpected sickness from a
       full time QARO in May. The timeliness of reviews remains a focus for the team
       and a continued priority action for the coming year.

Timeliness of Reviews
(Fig.. 15)
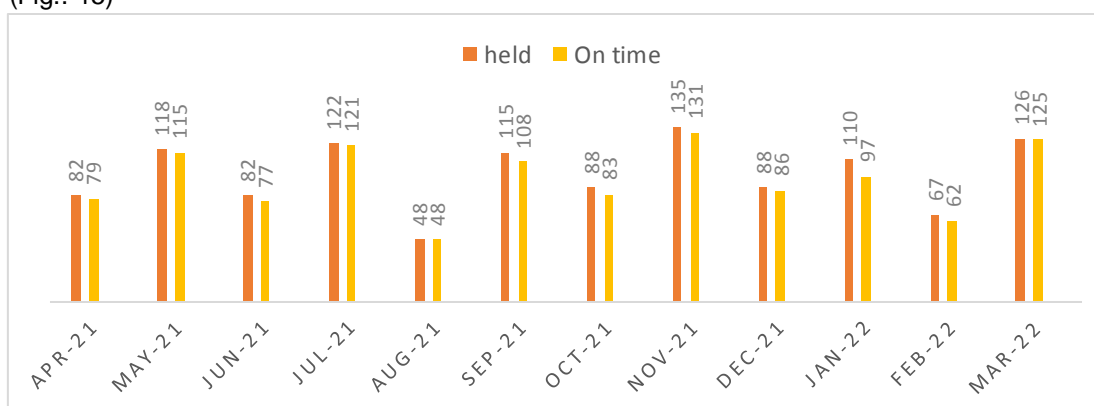
5.6   The QARO service is notified by the business support central team of children
       who are likely to or have come into care. This system works well, and children
       are allocated a QARO within 5 working days of the notification (usually the
       same day). The QARO will then liaise with the social worker to arrange a date
       and time for the review, to ensure it is held within the statutory timescale. If
       there are delays in the service receiving the notification, then this will impact
       on the timescales for allocating a QARO and being able to arrange the review
       within timescales. We have also found that delays are caused by the
       availability of interpreters for our unaccompanied young people. We continue
       to work closely with our colleagues in commissioning to ensure we have the
       right interpreters to work with our children in care where English is their second
       language. We are mindful that reviews need to be meaningful and include the
       young person and there are sometimes necessary and unavoidable delays in
       reviews taking place within timescales.

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5.7 The performance data for the timeliness of sending out review recommendations and minutes (within 5 and 20 days of the review taking place) is a continued area for improvement. We have recently changed the permission levels on our recording system (Mosaic) which allows the QARO to complete both the recommendations and minutes without a reliance on our business support colleagues.

6. Children and young people participation

6.1 A primary objective of the service is to ensure children are central to decisions made about them and that their Voice is evident in their care plans. A key element in delivering this objective is the measure of the young person's participation in the Statutory Review of their care plan and care arrangements.

6.2 Across the year from April 2021-March 2022, there was variability initially in the number of children attending their reviews. The data shows that between April 2021 and Jan 2022 there was an increase from 69% to 88% of children, & young people (age 4 years +) who had attended and participated fully in their review. Those children and young people who have not attended or contributed to their review have been seen by their QARO and offered an advocate as well as exploring other ways, they feel they would be able to contribute. The engagement and participation of all of our children and young people in the review process remains a key priority.

Percentage of children/young people participating in reviews
(Fig. 16)
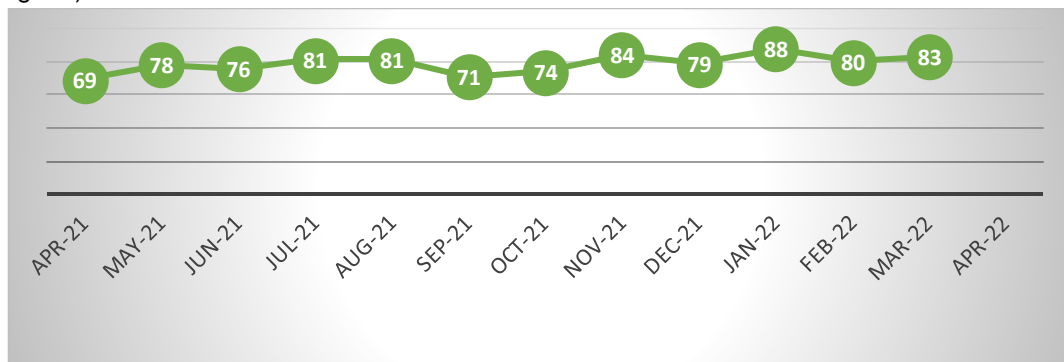
6.3 The overall figure considers the full range of acceptable methods of participation agreed by the DfE. All methods of participation add value to the review process and for some young people it can take considerable effort from them and those working with them to achieve it. The move to virtual reviews for some children and young people has enabled full participation in their reviews, when in the past they have chosen not to engage. These forced changes through Covid are areas of practice where we have been able to continue with a level of engagement for some of our children and young people.

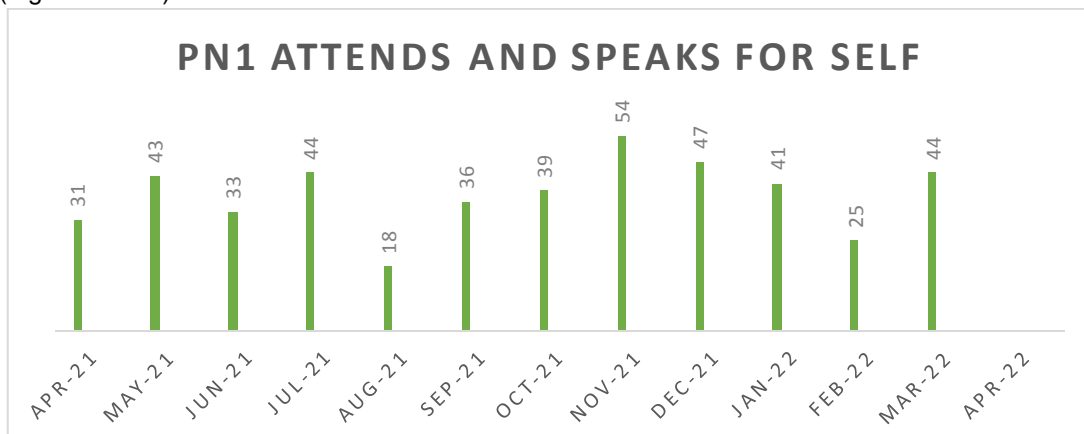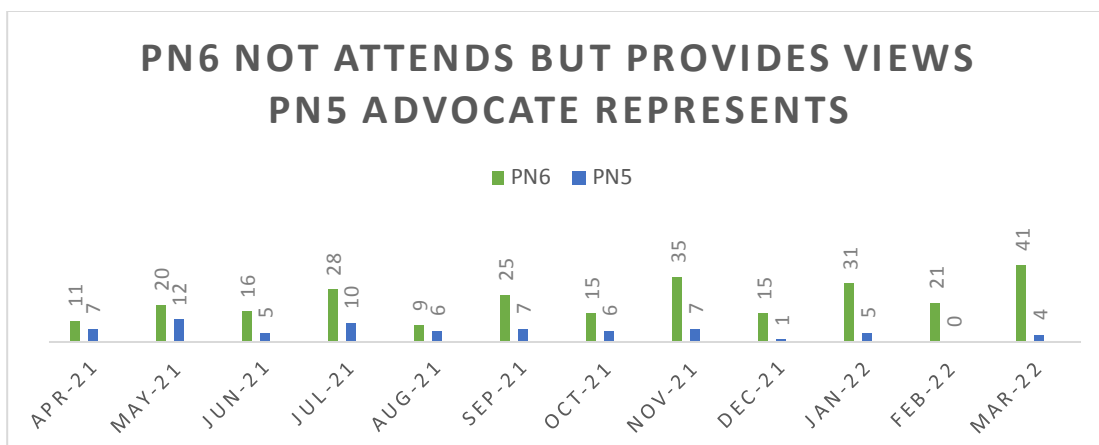21

Details of DfE participation

(Fig. 17)

Detail	Actions
Child under 4 at time of review	Observations of behaviour, interactions
Child physically attends and speaks for him/herself	Attendance
Child physically attends but advocate speaks for them.	Views represented by advocate or QARO
Child attends and conveys views non-verbally	Symbols, behaviour
Child attends but does not speak, does not convey views and does not ask an advocate to speak on their behalf	Attendance without contribution
Child does not attend but briefs an advocate to speak for them.	Through advocate or QARO Text, phone, audio, video format and written format
Child does not attend but conveys his/her feelings to the review by a facilitative medium	Text, phone, audio, video format and written format with QARO

6.4   The data shows that on average only 38% of children over the age of 4 physically attended their review between 1.4.21 and 31.3.22. With 28% not attending but providing their views or being represented by an advocate. It should be noted that Dorset's attendance figures compare favourably with other local authorities in the region.

Review participation April 21 to March 22

(Figs. 18 & 19)

PN1 ATTENDS AND SPEAKS FOR SELF

APR-21: 31, MAY-21: 43, JUN-21: 33, JUL-21: 44, AUG-21: 18, SEP-21: 36, OCT-21: 39, NOV-21: 54, DEC-21: 47, JAN-22: 41, FEB-22: 25, MAR-22: 44, APR-22

PN6 NOT ATTENDS BUT PROVIDES VIEWS PN5 ADVOCATE REPRESENTS

■ PN6 ■ PN5

Month	PN6	PN5
APR-21	11	7
MAY-21	20	12
JUN-21	16	5
JUL-21	28	10
AUG-21	9	6
SEP-21	25	7
OCT-21	15	6
NOV-21	35	7
DEC-21	15	1
JAN-22	31	5
FEB-22	21	0
MAR-22	41	4

6.5   A closer look at the ways that children & young people have taken part in their review (Diagram 18) tells us that 70% of the reviews held last year had the child and young person's views represented either through them attending and speaking themselves, providing their views independently or represented by an advocate. There is no identified single reason why young people are not motivated to participate in their reviews. QAROs have identified that where the child or young person has not attended in two thirds of these occasions, this was the child or young person's choice not to attend, and for the most part those who chose not to attend do so because they are satisfied about how the review will function and what it will do. We have identified the need to look at ways we can adapt the meetings to become person centred. The QAROs have worked in partnership with young people, social workers, education, and health colleagues to formalise the process for person centred reviews to ensure there is consistency across the service. We will continue to support all of our young people to engage in their review and a key priority remains for their views, thoughts and wishes to be central to any review meeting.

6.6   QAROs use a variety of methods to understand and establish the views and promote the voice of the child. Whilst it is understood that views of children should be established by social workers, QAROs find it important to ascertain views themselves. They often are the most consistent professional and have found that one of the best ways to understand the child's voice is to see the child and young person within their home and to spend time with them understanding their lived experiences, what's going well for them and an opportunity to raise anything that may need to be reviewed or considered changing. It is expected the child will speak with their named QARO certainly before each review, and QAROs are encouraged to visit each child and see where they live. In the period of 1.4.21 to 31.3.22 93% of all children in care had seen or had direct contact with their QARO in the last 6 months. This is an increase on the previous year where social distancing and lockdown measures made visits to children and young people challenging.

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6.7 The service continues to provide a robust approach to improving the quality of our records through quality assurance oversight. During the past year, the QAROs continue to develop the quality of their outcomes and recommendations ensuring these are SMART and based on the child's individual needs. The minutes of the meetings continue to be written direct to the child or young person as a letter. This assists in making it person centred, relevant and more accessible to our children & young people now and in the future. This will continue to be implemented to ensure we have a consistent response to our children and young people who are in care.

6.8 We recognise the need to improve participation and that further work is required. Linked to understanding the role of the QARO and reviews, as well as reflection with QAROs as to how we are doing and what evidence there is to show how we are all supporting participation and prioritising the voice of the child. We continue to explore the use of technologies to enable direct involvement. QAROs aspire to conduct reviews at times and venues that will be child focused and maximise children & young people's attendance. They are mindful for the review not to impact on the child's education or leisure activities. This is not always possible and has proved to be a significant challenge, as this involves the availability of others (including carers) for reviews outside of school hours, as well as being aware of after school time with their families & friends.

6.9 In addition to formal reviews, the service continues to embed progress updates between reviews and evidence the QARO footprint in the child's electronic records.

6.10 Feedback from children and young people is important and has been an area of focus for the last 12 months. We continue to work closely with NYAS to enable independent feedback to understand further the child's experiences, what we are doing well and areas where we need to strengthen practice.

This feedback has identified the following:

- 75% of children who were asked, know what is happening to them.
- 84% of children who were asked, understand how their social worker is supposed to help them.
- 84% of children who were asked said they had opportunities to express their views, wishes and feelings
- 73% of children who were asked said that they understand what is being said when they go to meetings about their care.
- 82% of children who were asked said they are able to tell their social workers what they think about their care.

6.11 As a result of this feedback, we have developed a pack of information for children in care, what to expect and to explain who does what. This will hopefully help children and young people who are new into care to understand the review process and improvement their engagement and contributions. We will continue to monitor the use and impact of these information packs over the coming 12 months.

6.12 From August 2021 advocacy for children in care in Dorset, has been provided by NYAS and the referral process has changed considerably. As part of the Quality Assurance work of the team we are working closely with our business support partners to explore ways of making the referral process quicker and more accessible for social workers so that we can improve the representation significantly over the next 12 months.

6.13 The use of advocates for our children in care needs to increase; the number of referrals made for children over the age of 8, compared to the number of reviews that take place are disproportionate. The data shows that out of 776 reviews (from August 2021 to March 2022) 548 children were over the age of 8 and 217 referrals to NYAS were made. This shows that 40% of children had access to an advocate over this period.

Number of advocacy referrals and reviews
(Fig. 20)

Month	Number of Reviews	How many children over 8 years old	Number of referrals made
April 2021	82	60	
May 2021	118	78	
June 2021	82	61	
July 2021	122	89	
August 2021	48	37	14
September 2021	115	78	43
October 2021	88	67	39
November 2021	135	92	66
December 2021	88	67	18
January 2022	110	73	19
February 2022	67	49	12
March 2022	125	85	6

6.13 In April 2021, the participation service is no longer commissioned having been contracted to Participation People for the previous 4 years. This service is now delivered in house and called Youth Voice. This team have hosted two whole fostering family days to get alongside and listen to younger children in care. There are a further four events planned for the rest of this year. What has been heard from the younger children so far, has helped to inform the foster carers handbook and the guide which children receive when they come into our care. The Children in Care Council is growing organically through these events and

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the team are taking the time to 'catch up' with these children to nurture relationships. The team are mindful of the trauma our children and young people have experienced and sensitively and skilfully tune in. The approach to co-production must be done in a trauma informed way.

6.14   Care leavers were involved in two workshops during National Care Leavers Week in October 2021, and They helped to co-produce how they want their achievements and successes to be recognised. They have also worked on shaping improvements to the council's web pages which host the care leaver local offer. Care leavers have been involved in two interview panels for the recruitment of senior management positions and their feedback was an incredibly helpful part of the process. 14 care leavers have been working with the Youth Voice Team in a variety of ways since August 2021.

There were twenty care leavers who contributed their digital voice in January 2022 on an activity about foster care. The Youth Voice Team continue to challenge themselves to think of ways to hear from those they find it harder to reach. Communication and collaborative working has been developed over the last 12 months. This includes regular space for QAROs to meet and chat with the Youth Voice Team and to ensure that everyone is kept up to date about the opportunities and development of the team.

6.15   The QA manager and manager of the Youth Voice Team meet every quarter to share information and discuss opportunities for engagement and participation. There are a number of exciting opportunities and activities planned over the coming months for our children in care which include:

- Launch of the Children in Care satisfaction survey

- Launch of the new WhatsApp Policy so that young people can have 'peer-to-peer' conversations in a way which is safe and can be monitored by the team, helping them to collaborate together.

- Takeover Challenge this year is taking place from the 14-18 June 2022. This will offer hybrid opportunities as we know young people like to meet in person, but it is not always possible around school/college commitments. We are specifically keen to encourage children and young people who are in our care, leaving our care, young carers and children and young people with SEND.

6.16   It remains an ongoing challenge for the Youth Voice Team to build the numbers of young people participating in children in care and care leaver activities. The team adopts the same principles as is expected of the wider children's services workforce, ensuring that trusting relationships are built making young people feel safe when participating. This remains an area of focus for the QAROs who can help support their children & young people to engage and participate.

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Case studies and quotes which evidence participation and QARO involvement with our children and young people in care

"AN – was so shy and unable to come or stay in her reviews, though would at times come at the end if enticed in with Orio biscuits! A young person so anxious about life that even within education we needed to refer to Maths as "Unicorns" as this was the only way she could manage the lessons or discussions about the subject. Over time with lots of visits and TEAMS calls along with cards sent to her, we now sit together in the same room and invite who else she wants to join her review by TEAMS. This has resulted in her staying for the whole of her meeting, being able to ask questions and share views. When we sit together AN has full control over the screen and the meeting. I`m not sure I'd say she chairs it, but she is certainly very much in control of it.

"Ch really, really appreciated your card which arrived yesterday. thank you so much. her actual words were, "The QARO does more for me than my social worker."!!

Concerns were raised about decision making of AA and her long- term carers. Carers she was very attached to and had great relationships with. This was evident in her progress at school, friendships, and connections with extended family. Her voice was not being heard by those making decisions. I (QARO) managed to get her to write her feelings, views, and thoughts on paper I then presented to the Fostering panel. AA remains in the placement and continues to do very well.

DD plan was for adoption for him. However, this had drifted, and no matches were being found. He has been with his carer for some time, he is settled and mentions lots that he wants to stay with them. Through several meetings I was able to get his voice heard, the placement order is being revoked, care order in place and permanency being gained with a plan for him to stay with his foster carers and work towards SGO.

In terms of giving children and young people choice about their reviews, when I meet the child/young person prior to the review, if appropriate in terms of their age, I ask them how they want their review to work and then plan the review with what they have said guiding me."

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7.   Caseloads

7.1   It is recommended in the IRO (QARO) Handbook that a caseload of 50 to 70 looked after children (full time equivalent QARO), would represent good practice in the delivery of a quality service and facilitate the full range of functions as set out in the handbook.

7.2   The average caseload for Dorset QAROs ranges from between 38 and 61. For those that have additional responsibilities (such as the Reg 44 visits) this is significantly lower (around 46). By having a central allocation process this facilitates and maintains a degree of equity in caseloads across the service. We allocate in terms of needs of the child, QARO capacity and worker skills mix, rather than solely on geography.

QARO caseload 31.3.22
(Fig.21)
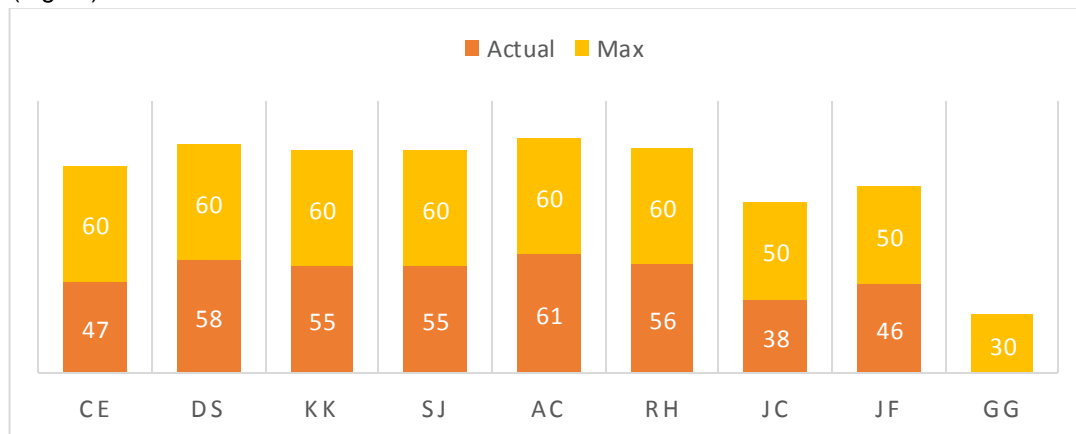
7.3   National data (taken from NAIRO benchmarking research) indicates that 16% of QAROs have between 50-60, 42% 60-70, 16% between 70-80 and 11% between 80-90. Dorset has a commitment to keeping QARO caseloads at 60 or below. This will enable the QARO to have the capacity to meet with their children and young people as and when required, depending upon the individual circumstances. It is important for the QARO to have contact with their children & young people at mid-way points and prior to reviews, working towards progression of review decisions, developing relationships, gaining feedback and overall participation in the process.

7.4   Other tasks that QAROs complete include enhanced monitoring visits and contact with young people in unregistered and/or unregulated housing provision, maintaining links with locality teams, contributing to foster carer reviews as well as auditing and moderating as part of the wider service quality assurance framework.

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8.   Escalation and dispute resolution

8.1   One of the pivotal roles of the QARO is to raise issues affecting a child's care with the social work service where, for example, performance issues, care planning, education, and resources are having a negative impact on the child, or that permanence plans are not progressing at pace.

8.2   This is an area identified as a key priority and over the last 12 months, work has taken place to continue to develop the escalation process. There are clear resolution and escalation policy and procedures in place, with a focus on how QARO escalations in respect of care planning interface with impact for the child or young person's needs not being met by partner agencies, particularly health education and housing. QAROs continue to seek resolutions informally to issues through dialogue with the team manager and social worker before and at each stage of the procedure, but if no resolution is achieved the problem can and should be escalated to the attention of senior managers and ultimately the Chief Executive and or Cafcass. The process is supported by the QA managers who oversee those proceeding outside of timescales. Whilst significant progress has been made over the last 12 months, this remains a key priority and area of focus.

8.3   Between April 2021 to March 2022, there were125 formal escalations, an increase from 104 in 2020-21 (and the largest number since we started to record numbers of escalations raised) In 2021-22 there was a 17**%** increase in formal escalations from the previous year.

Number of escalations 2021-22
(Fig. 22)
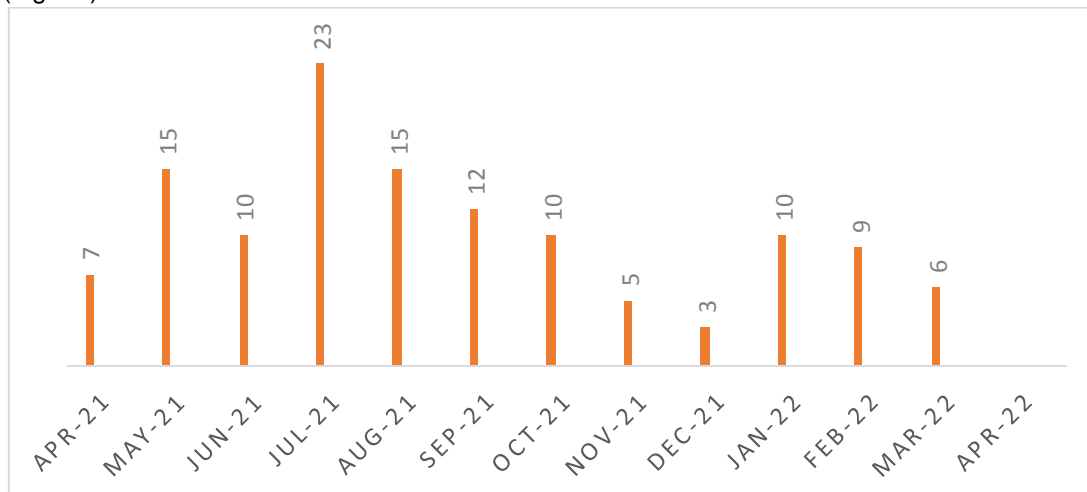
8.4   Audits of escalations have identified continuing positive outcomes for children from interventions by their named QARO and the use of the escalation process to raise issues of delay or concern. Escalations have been grouped around 4 areas:

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- **Permanency:** These made up the highest number of escalations and generally relate to lack of a permanency plan, insufficient permanency planning meetings and delays in children achieving permanency.

- **Care planning**: These concerns centre around lack of up-to-date care plans in place, insufficient transition plans & lack of progress in accessing suitable education.

- **Practice concerns**: Involved the impact of changes or lack of social workers, lack of evidence of supervision and/or sufficient management oversight on the cases between reviews and statutory visiting patterns. This was also highlighted in audits and a supervision tracker is now in place. A further audit of supervision and management oversight completed in April 2021 has shown significant improvements in this area.

- **Drift and delay**: The escalation for this area focuses primarily on delay in applications to court to revoke care and placement orders. Although this is often outside of the control of the Local Authority it is important to continue to raise so that there is evidence when discussing themes and areas of practice with legal services and the local courts.

8.5 Oversight of the escalations indicates that all have resulted in the locality teams implementing the advice or recommendations of the QARO. QAROs are working to the time agreements for resolution or further escalation, and this has resulted in a higher number of escalations being resolved at an informal level. This shows the continued working relationship and importance of communication between the QARO

service and fieldwork teams. We have had no escalations direct to the executive director, although there has been executive director oversight for those escalated to the corporate director, in line with the escalation procedures.

Resolution of escalations
(Fig. 23)

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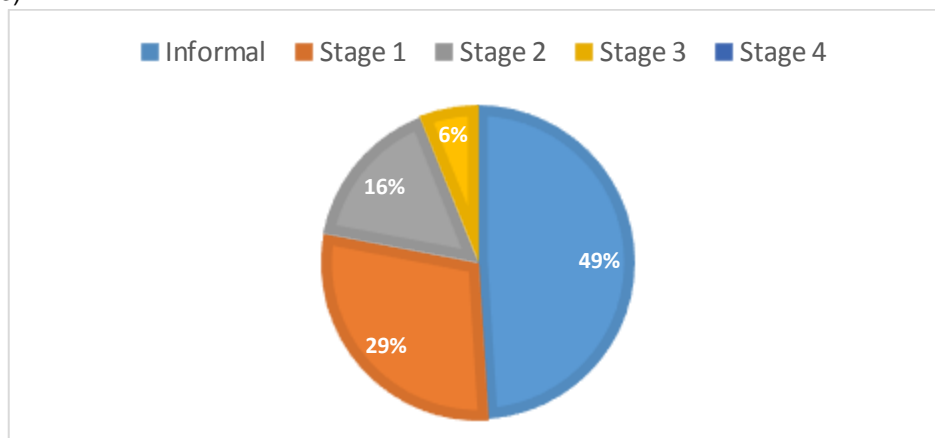
Stage	Number	%
Informal	61	49%
1	36	29%
2	20	16%
3	8	6%
4	0	0%
Total	125	100

8.6 The QA manager reviews the escalations on a monthly basis and provides detail of those remaining outstanding to locality team and service managers. Although time consuming, this process is helping to ensure the timeliness of conclusion to formal escalations. We have seen an improvement of the number of escalations resolved in the year 2021/22 compared to the previous year 2020/21 when the formal process had been implemented. As at 31.3.22 all escalations had been resolved.

8.7 The QA manager also provides a report each quarter to CPAG (children's performance action group) for additional senior leadership oversight and agreed actions to ensure we continue to strengthen our practice in this area. In addition to the formal Dispute and Escalation Process and in keeping with the service's aim of developing a high challenge, high support ethos, QAROs are encouraged to add value to planning for children by developing relationships with key partners within the localities. The aspiration is not to formally escalate disputes unnecessarily but to achieve the desired outcomes for children by positively influencing social work practice through dialogue, negotiation, and resolution meetings. Usually this will make resolutions timelier for the child.

8.8 Management audits, oversight and Practice Evaluation suggest that recording of the QARO footprint on the child's record is continuing to improve and becoming more consistent. We are working on developing a monthly report to highlight the QARO activity for each of our children in care.

8.9 The data reporting and monitoring of escalations has proved challenging over the last 12 months. The data has been reliant upon the QARO updating a central tracker, with support from the QA manager and BST. This has meant that we are not confident in the figures for our escalations being a true representation of the actual formal challenge that takes place within day-to-day practice. As a result of this we have been working closely with colleagues in our data and performance team to strengthen the workflow of the electronic recording system (Mosaic) so that escalations can be easily reported on and part of the data dashboard.

9. QARO service review and summary of priorities and actions

9.1   Summary of progress from identified actions 2020/21 report:

1. **High-level service commitment to Learning and Development opportunities for QAROs:** Bespoke training for all QAROs on restorative practice has been available. QAROs have been able to access a wide range of training and development opportunities throughout the last 12 months. This has included gaining knowledge and skills understanding the impact of trauma, the five to thrive model, domestic abuse tool kit, sexual abuse tool kit. Supervision has a focus for CPD, and reflective practice and group supervisions have been established on a monthly basis.

2. **Refresh and implement practice developments in respect of engagement, and a strengths-based, approach to Child in Care Reviews:** This continues to be an area of focus and development. We are able to evidence progress in this area through the QA framework, monthly audits, and on-going dip samples. Alongside we have the feedback from children, young people, and the Youth Voice Council.

3. **Continue to facilitate the meaningful involvement of Children in Care in their Reviews:** This continues to be a focus for the team. Regular reporting on participation (weekly) and discussions through peer supervision has shown an increase in participation over the last few months.

4. **Improve performance on the timeliness of distributing the recommendations and minutes of all our child in care reviews:** We have been able to remove the reliance for completion and distribution of recommendations and minutes from our business support colleagues, meaning that QAROs are now able to complete and send off recommendations and minutes as soon as they are completed. Performance in this area is improving but this is slow and been further impacted through some team sickness.

5. **Develop a consistent monitoring of cases between reviews to ensure timely progress of the child's plan and continuing QARO footprint:** This area of work is on-going and near completion. We have worked collaboratively with our business support to develop a reporting system to identify the level of contact a QARO has with a child or young person between formal reviews. Dip sample audits has also identified a significant increase in QARO footprint within the records which is positive to see and needs to continue to improve.

6. **Increase quality assurance of the QARO impact for the child and young person and increase in observation of practice:** Observation of practice has increased through the monthly audit framework; alongside this

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we held practice observation week (October 2021) where a number of CICRs were observed. Feedback from this has enabled the team to consider new approaches and continue to improve practice and performance. The QARO completes an audit following every CiC review held. This enables independent oversight of the quality-of-care plans and overall performance which is measured on outcomes for the child or young person being met.

7. **Development of the QARO role within child exploitation and contextual safeguarding meetings:** QAROs are now chairing MACE (Multi-agency child exploitation) meetings. This enables an independent overview and oversight of planning for those who are considered to be at significant risk. Where the risk is significant the allocated QARO will chair the meeting as they have knowledge and understanding of the young person's history and individual circumstances which helps to engage the young person in the meeting without the need to repeat information. The QA managers are responsible for chairing contextual safeguarding meetings and having discussions with partner agencies regarding the process and criteria for convening the meetings. Over the past 12 months there have been 2 face to face contextual safeguarding meetings held and consultations with a range of professionals and stakeholders.

8. **Working with Dorset Council in respect of key strategic priorities including permanence for children & considering alternative exits from care:** We have seen a significant improvement on the number of children achieving permanence over the last 12 months. This has been through the development of a clear permanence pathway alongside the drive for children and young people to return home (where it is considered safe), to discharge care orders and for children to achieve permanence through special guardianship or adoption orders. This continues to be a focus within the CICRs and challenge from the QARO to ensure assessments are undertaken and plans progressed without delay.

9. **Ensuring that young people are better prepared for leaving care by robust review and challenge around pathway assessment and transition planning:** We have established links with the leaving care team, with 2 QAROs attending team meetings and the QARO manager attending the managers meeting on a monthly basis. Dip sample auditing alongside monthly audits have focussed on the quality of pathway plans and transitional arrangements. Transition planning remains an area to strengthen for the next year. Through the in/formal challenges we have seen improvements in the quality of pathway plans and the QARO maintaining contact for some young people post 18 where there is an identified need. Our working relationship with the CWAD and adult services

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team to ensure clear and appropriate transitional plans and arrangements are in place for our most vulnerable young people has also strengthened throughout the last 12 months. This will continue to be a focus for the coming year.

10. **Develop relationship and communication between the QARO Service and CAFCASS:** Senior managers meet regularly with CAFCASS. We have seen increased communication and consultation between the QARO, and court appointed Guardians with Guardians being invited (and attending) both CICRs and PPMs.

9.2   The QARO Service is continuing to make steady and purposeful improvement on many of its key activities. We have embedded previous improvements and demonstrated that the service can sustain these.

9.3   Children and young people are being provided with a QARO within one working day of coming into care or within 2 days of notification to the service. There have been few changes in QARO allocations and where unavoidable, these have been kept to a minimum.

9.4   Most reviews (on average 96%) are being held within timescale and children are being provided with opportunities to contribute to these reviews. A significant number of review records are completed within timescales, with social work managers being advised of recommendations and decisions within the statutory timescale.

9.5   Dorset Council continues to be challenged through formal and informal escalations, whenever there are concerns about children's care plans not being effective or delays in plans being pursued. In addition to this, the QARO footprint on children's files is now visible. The escalation process is now routinely used, with the team focus being on maintaining this and acting upon disputes effectively and within realistic timescales.

9.6   QAROs continue to have a specific impact for individual children and young people in supporting them with plans and issues that arise for them. QAROs continue to work collaboratively with those with responsibilities for caring for, and working with, children and young people in care to improve their outcomes. The team is stable with a permanent QA manager and no current team vacancies (although we are aware that 1 part time QARO will be retiring in May 2022). Staff supervision is regular and provides management oversight and support, observations of practice take place across the service alongside monthly audits which helps to identify professional development and training needs.

10. Quality of Care Plan & Permanence Planning

10.1 QAROs play a significant role in monitoring permanence planning at an early stage of a child's time in care and considering all options for young people by their 2nd review, scrutinising the timeliness of family finding and preparing children for permanent placements.

10.2 Achieving permanence for all our children in care remains a priority for the QAROs and Dorset Council. To avoid drift and delay in securing permanence, regular permanency planning meetings are held along with a senior management permanence panel for all new children coming into care and/or those who have not achieved permanence after 12 months.

10.3 The figures show that on 31.3.22 the number of children who had a permanency plan was 98% with those who have achieved permanence being 43%. An analysis of the escalations found that delays occurred mostly around permanence in arranging matching of a permanent foster placement for children with a care plan of long-term fostering; delays in progressing assessments of connected persons carer; and delays in moving forward the child's agreed permanence plan. Through QAROs highlighting this informally and formally, we have made significant improvement over the last 12 months. This continues to be an area of focus for the team and weekly reporting to senior leaders will continue for the coming 12 months.

10.4 QAROs ensure in reviews that the legal status of the child remains appropriate for the child's care plan and also maintain a significant role in reviewing plans for court. This ensures that proposed plans meet children's needs and that undue drift and delay is avoided. There is a particular focus on the use of section 20, the timely revocation of Placement Orders (when adoption is no longer the plan for the child) and seeking revocation of Care Orders when children have remained safely at home in parents care. The QARO service's footprint is more visible in care plans to court and in communication with Guardians, and there are references to their recommendations in social work statements. QAROs have access to Independent Legal Advice to enable them to effectively challenge plans. The QARO service footprint is more visible in care plans to court and in communication with Guardians.

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Percentage of those achieving permanency
(Fig. 24)
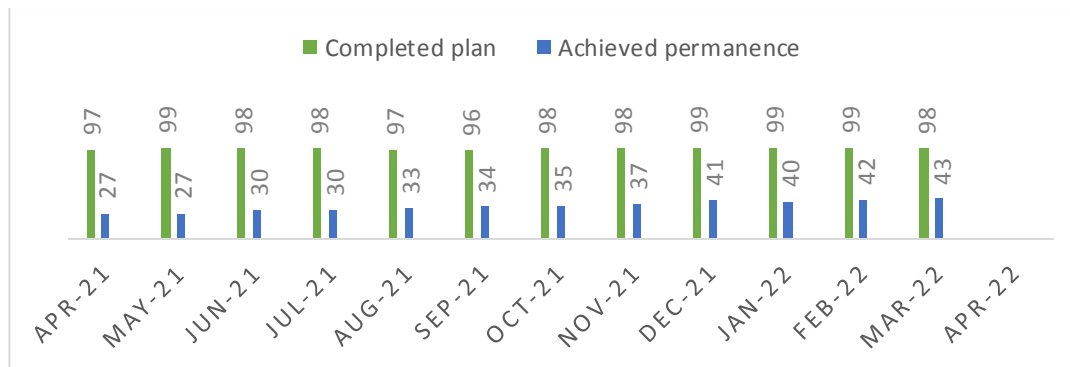
10.5 Dorset continues to work with colleagues from the regional adoption agency (Aspire) to increase the number of SGO carers with financial and practical support being maintained. There is now a panel in place to consider all SGO and Adoption Order allowances to prevent delays in the progression and agreement of bespoke support plans.

10.6 As of 31 March 2022, Dorset has a total of 20 children currently living with prospective adopters (15 families). 11 of these children (55%) have been impacted by the Somerset ruling which highlighted the need for all children to have their adoption medicals seen and agreed by the ADM prior to agreeing the best interest decision. 6 children (30%) are waiting for adoption applications to be submitted or are awaiting a court date. 3 children (15%) have been identified of needing further support and interventions before agreement to lodge the adoption application. These 3 children are over the age of 5 and have a range of additional needs.

10.7 The service continues to develop and maintain positive links with the Virtual School Service with QAROs encouraging the attainment, achievement, and progress of each child by ensuring PEP meetings are taking place and their impact is evidenced through progress in education. QAROs remain active in recognising the educational achievement of children by celebrating their successes within reviews however small these may be.

11. Quality Assurance of the QARO service

11.1 As part of the Quality Assurance Framework, the QARO Service has a data set of relevant information in respect of children in care and about the effective working of the QARO Service. Performance information is available through the Mosaic case record system and Performance data collection through Power BI.

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11.2 The data set is reported to QARO managers on a monthly basis and is reported quarterly through Quality Assurance Performance Group (QPAG) report. The QARO data set includes:

- Timeliness and timescales for CIC reviews.
- Timeliness of completion of review records and sharing of key decisions and outcomes.
- Availability of social work reports and plans for children.
- The participation and attendance of children and young people at reviews, as well as parental involvement.
- Whether the child has a suitable plan for permanence and CIC reviews and specifically at 2nd CIC reviews, whether the child's views have been suitability considered in their plans.
- Whether a midpoint check has been undertaken and progress of planning details of children in care population.
- Suitability of care plans and pathway plans being implemented.
- Details about QARO visits and footprint on case records.

11.3 There is now less of a reliance on manual trackers and spreadsheets, with performance data collated electronically through Mosaic (children's data base) Dashboards and Corius reporting system. The service works closely with our colleagues in business support to ensure the data collation and collection is correct and highlights early exceptions, potential risks, and concerns to colleagues within Children's Services.

11.4 The service undertakes regular audits of reviews, care planning and monitoring of plans following each Child in care Review. The outcome of these audits is shared with the worker and manager and where necessary escalations are made to avoid any further drift or delay. In addition to the audits following the reviews, the service contributes to the quality assurance framework within Children's Services. The team work alongside social workers and managers as auditors or moderators which also includes formal observations of social work practice and identifying areas of outstanding and good practice with agreed actions on areas where additional focus to strengthen practice is needed.

11.5 Some of the overall findings that have been identified as good practice include:

- Reviews undertaken within timescales.
- QARO stability and relationship with the child or young person.
- 98% of children having a permanency plan.
- High number of children had been visited face to face by their QARO during the last 12 months and where this was not possible, there was

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evidence of communication and representation of the child's voice within the minutes and recommendations of reviews.

11.6 The areas we have identified through the Quality Assurance framework to improve practice and outcomes for children and young people are:

- The need for improved communication between social workers and QAROs so that they are informed in a timely way of significant events and are able to respond appropriately.
- Consistent and effective use of escalation processes.
- To continue to be imaginative and creative in the way we support and encourage participation in the review process and evidence the impact this has on the child/young person.
- Increase in observations of practice and seeking feedback following monthly audits across children's services.

11.7 In June 2021 a set of QARO practice standards were approved and implemented. Below is each of the key statements with commentary from IRO observation and monitoring.

Practice Standard 1 – Voice of the child

Children need to be listened to and heard. Through the CICRs that were held in 2021-22 and the feedback detailed previously in this report we know that QAROs are helping children & young people know and understand what arrangements are in place to review and support their journey. The writing of review minutes and recommendations in a personalised letter further supports the importance of the review meeting centralising on the child or young person.

Practice Standard 2 – Children should be in the most suitable placement for them

Stability for our children & young people remains a focus for the QARO and all those involved in the care and planning for our children in care. The development of a change of placement approval group (CPAG) meeting weekly, where the QARO attends has helped to prevent unnecessary moves for our children and enabled creative thinking on support plans to help children. Young people and their carers.

Practice Standard 3 – Children need an understanding of their own story

QAROs ensure that all aspects of a child/young person's needs are fully considered within the review process. Letters from the QARO help to explain the reasons why they are in care and what the longer-term plans are. Children and young people are supported to engage with life story work once permanence plans are in place. This can be through formal or informal direct work with their allocated social worker. There is evidence of workers and

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QAROs being creative in helping children or young people with communication difficulties to engage in meaningful work. This can be through translation services and skilled workers (such as sign language, interpreters) as well as using technology to engage (such as voice and eye activated communication systems for children with a disability and adapted apps and computer programmes).

Practice Standard 4 – Permanence

Children and young people in Dorset are wherever possible provided with permanent living arrangements. The high % of children who have a permanence plan reflect this. The QARO ensures that permanence planning meetings take place for those children & young people where permanence has not been achieved and that the momentum to achieve this is maintained.

Practice Standard 5 – Transitions

QAROs ensure the right support is in place for young people to transition to adulthood. We know that this is an area of practice we need to strengthen. An increase in escalations, creating stronger links and working partnerships with our care leavers team and attending transitions meetings have been some of the recent changes which need embedding.

Practice Standard 6 – Protection

The QARO makes sure that all their children and young people feel and are safe. There is enhanced monitoring and communication with young people in an unregulated or semi-supported accommodation, as well as close links with our safeguarding and standards advisors for schools. QAROs are invited to and attend necessary LADO and strategy meetings if safeguarding concerns regarding their children and/or carers arise.

Practice Standard 7 – Independence

The QARO is independent and holds the corporate parent to account. This continues to be evidenced through the increase in escalations and completion of case and practice audits with regular reporting to senior leaders and the corporate parenting board.

12.   Supervision & Training

12.1   Supervision is an essential activity for providing support and development to individual QAROs and to work toward creating consistency across the service in terms of practice and process. The team's supervision and appraisal arrangements have been conducted in accordance with Dorset's supervision policy. Each QARO has around 10 formal supervisions a year, as well as an

annual appraisal. In addition to this there is peer supervision which takes place monthly.

12.2 Supervision covers personal matters, professional development, performance observations of practice and feedback as well as discussing the QARO standards, providing evidence of practice and discussing the high risk or need to know children and young people. Supervision is reflective and booked 12 months in advance. It takes place either face to face or virtually depending on the needs and preference of the QARO. Detailed notes are kept but are not stored on the children's records but are accessible for auditing as/when necessary. This is in line with Dorset policy and procedures.

12.3 QAROs have access to a range of training within Dorset Council Children's Services workforce development programme. This consists of formal and informal events as well as a "Thinking Thursday" and "Weekly Wordout" which will focus on themes highlighted through the monthly audits (such as completing chronologies, and the importance of permanence planning). In addition to accessing training, the QAROs also support the principle Social Worker with training and webinars sharing their skills and experience across the workforce. The feedback from these from social workers in the localities has been positive and plans are in place to further develop the links and relationships between the QAROs and locality teams across Dorset.

13. Areas for Development 2022-23

13.1 The focus of work to continuously improve in our performance will include:

➢ Continue to offer Learning and Development opportunities for QAROs, including the embedding of restorative practice to support the focus on strengths based social work practice.

➢ Develop more creative ways to facilitate the meaningful involvement of Children in Care in their Reviews, particularly those who are currently reluctant.

➢ We need to develop an improved system that will enable us to strengthen our current performance on the timeliness of completing and distributing the minutes of all our child in care reviews.

➢ Better utilise data about our QARO footprint to assure ourselves that we have strong and through oversight of our children's care, their ambitions, their future plans and ultimate success into adulthood

➢ Maintain oversight, monitoring and challenge for those young people where there is a Deprivation of Liberty (DOLs) and ensure that as an

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Authority we are acting in a legal way to protect the best interests of the young person.

➢ Ensuring that young people are better prepared for leaving care by robust review and challenge around pathway assessment and transition planning, especially those young people where there is a need for transition into adult services.

➢ To develop formal feedback following children in care reviews through our work with the Dorset Youth Council & NYAS.

➢ Ensure that our offer to our unaccompanied children seeking asylum meets their needs and they are provided with appropriate information to support them understanding what is happening to them.

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Corporate Parenting Board

30 November 2022

Policy Change – Better care and education for unaccompanied minors and Leaving Care service development.

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr A Parry, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s):

Executive Director: T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

Report Author: Stuart Riddle and Louise Drury
Title: Head of Commissioning and Head of Service Children
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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

The aim of this paper is to outline the national and local context which has led to an increase in need. The paper sets out plans to increase our capacity to care for and support our care leavers and unaccompanied minors and outline the policy change that is required to do so. To respond effectively to the needs of our young people we are proposing to do the following:

- Develop an operating model for unaccompanied minors that uses capacity in good or outstanding boarding schools to provide education and term time accommodation and uses school communities to host unaccompanied minors in school holidays as 'connected persons'.

- Seek easement of specific regulations and guidance.

- Create a Head of Service to provide dedicated leadership to a specialised service for care leavers and unaccompanied minors alongside the Resettlement Team.

- Create the role of Senior Personal Adviser within the Leaving Care Service to champion key areas of service delivery for young people and offer a career pathway within the team.

Recommendation: That the Board supports this policy change and service developments presented in this report.

Reason for Recommendation: To progress work to deliver a specialised service according to need for our care leavers and unaccompanied minors.

1. **National Landscape**

1.1.   In November 2021, HM Government decided that the National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied minors would become mandatory. Under this change all local authorities have been given legal notice to accept transfers of children into their care, providing crucial placements to unaccompanied children.

1.2.   The scheme sets a quota for all local authorities to be required to accommodate a number of children equivalent to 0.07% of the local child population. This was revised upwards in a letter from the Minister for Safe and Legal Migration on 24 August to 0.1% of the local child population. In the case of Dorset, this represents a rise from 47 young people to 67 young people. We are currently looking after 40 young people and are responsible for 33 care leavers who were formerly unaccompanied minors. This has been a 400% increase in this calendar year.

1.3.   Originally, local authorities were set a deadline of 10 days to transfer children to their care. The letter from the Minister reduced this to 5 days.

1.4.   The National Transfer Scheme has had immediate effects on Dorset Council with a sharp rise in the number of unaccompanied children in our care, and supported by us as care leavers.

1.5.   Dorset Council has sought to engage constructively with the National Transfer Scheme throughout, but this has proved difficult due to the state of the social care placements market. We were successful in placing children in Dorset initially, but over time we have struggled with a number of factors:

- We have not always been able to source accommodation for children in Dorset, so although we have responsibility and arranged accommodation, we have an associated efficiency issue because these are out of area placements and the full local offer of care, education and health cannot be delivered to these children.

- A number of young people have been unwilling to transfer to Dorset and have expressed a preference to be housed in urban centres.

1.6. In March 2022, the Competition and Marketing Authority (CMA) published the final report of the market study of children's social care. Key findings and recommendations included:

- A judgement that the market is dysfunctional

- Profits are excessive in private sector, and there are concerns about financial resilience particularly those companies financed through private equity

- Foster care is better and more cheaply delivered by local authorities and more work should be undertaken to bring fostering "in house"

- Regional and national bodies should be set up to help local authorities improve their leverage in the market place

1.7. On Monday 23 May 2022 the independent review of children's social care published its final report 'The independent review of children's social care: final report'. HM Government will publish an implementation strategy on children's social care before the end of 2022. Key areas are likely to include:

- Changes to the child protection system

- Changes to family support and early help systems

- Support for foster carer recruitment

- Regional commissioning arrangements

1.8. The findings of both the CMA study and the independent review resonated with local experience, particularly in respect of the difficulties we face in the social care marketplace. The detail of next steps from HM Government will become clearer towards the end of the year.

2. **Update to Inspection Framework**

2.1. In June 2022, Ofsted consultation was launched to consider a specific judgement within the ILACS framework re the experience of care leavers.

2.2. Research has identified that there is more to do to improve the outcomes and experiences of care leavers:

- Ofsted "Ready or Not" report (Jan 22),
- Coram Voice, "What Makes Life Good Report", (Nov 20),
- Social Care Review Recommendations, (May 22).
- National/Local New Belongings feedback

2.3. The new care leaver judgement is expected to be incorporated into the ILACS framework by January 2023 and we anticipate inspectors will focus on key areas of service delivery:

- Transitions/Independence Planning
- Accommodation and Housing
- Mental Health & Emotional Well-Being Support
- Local Offer
- Diversity

2.4. Following the full Ofsted Inspection last year we are also anticipating a Focused Visit for Leaving Care before the end of the year.

2.5. Inspectors will evaluate the effectiveness of**:**

- performance management
- management oversight
- supervision
- quality assurance
- continuous professional development of the workforce.

3. **Local context and key data**

3.1. There are currently 457 children in care in Dorset.

3.2. Since the beginning of 2022 we have seen an increase in the number of children in care in Dorset. (Fig 1)
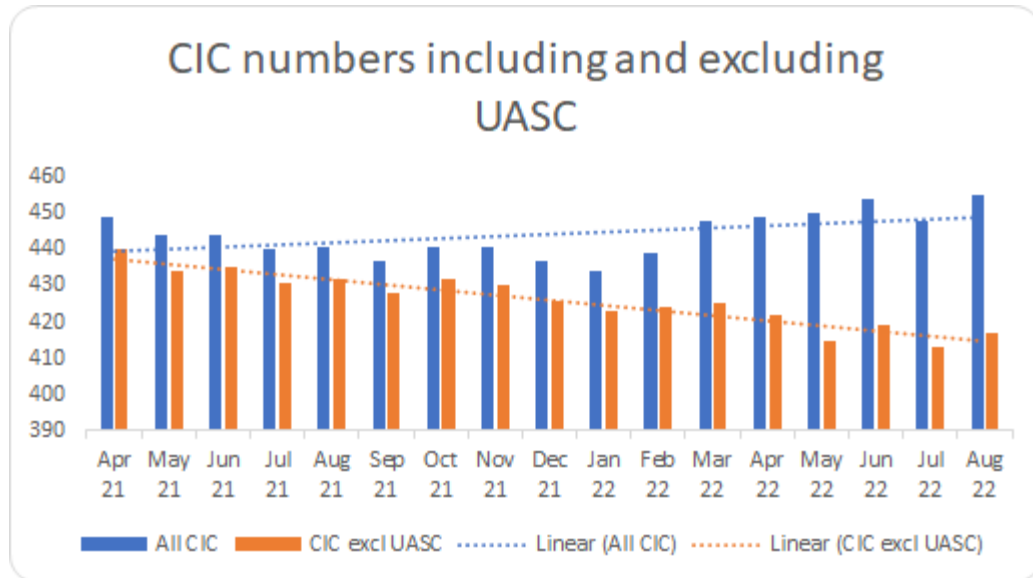
CIC numbers including and excluding UASC

Fig 1

3.3. The greatest influence of this increase has been through the National Transfer Scheme, which has had more immediate effects on Dorset Council. The rise in numbers of unaccompanied minors can obscure the fact that our underlying numbers of children in care have begun to reduce.

3.4. Within the current locality team structures and approach for unaccompanied minors the increase in numbers of children in care through the National Transfer Scheme require an increase in the number of social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers, to ensure that caseloads remain within agreed limits.

3.5. The Children & Social Work Act, 2017 extended the service offer for young people leaving care up to their 25th birthday. In Dorset there are 512 young people aged between 18-25yrs who have left our care, of these 289 young people are receiving a service from the leaving care team.

3.6. We anticipate that current number of care leavers receiving a service from the Leaving Care Team will increase from 289 to 441 by July 31st 2024.

Social Stories

3.7. *One of our 17 year old girls originally from Vietnam has had her asylum application granted. She is over the moon as it gives permission for her to work/ which means apprenticeship. She also would like to drive and now she can apply for a provisional licence. She is excelling at college and all*

aspects of her life. She spends time by agreement in London but lives happily in Dorchester with foster carers.

3.8. *MI is 16 and travelled from Sudan. He has witnessed members of his family being killed and has been imprisoned, and experienced physical abuse. When it became unsafe in Sudan, his mother gave smugglers her wedding ring to get him out of the country and into a safe place. He was imprisoned in Libya for 2 months, because he was caught travelling by boat to Italy. He was hit and still has some marks on his back. He eventually made it to France, and stayed there for 12 days, then jumped on top of a lorry to get to the UK. He wants to learn English first, that's his priority. He wants to settle in the UK, where he feels happy and safe. He would like to be a famous footballer – like a Liverpool player although he supports Real Madrid! If he cannot become a football player, he wants to become a doctor and support people in need and through the hard times.*

4. **Operating Model for Unaccompanied Minors**

4.1. The operating model has been developed in response to it not being possible to accommodate unaccompanied children in the numbers required within the current children's social care marketplace, and within the current regulatory framework.

4.2. We believe that the flexibilities that were extended to facilitate the increase in offers of accommodation for unaccompanied Ukrainian children shows a promising way forward. We wish to take forward an initiative to provide more accommodation for unaccompanied children using boarding schools and host families. This will require some easement in Children Act regulations and the regulatory framework.

4.3. We have had early conversations with independent boarding schools within Dorset which have evidenced a willingness to work together in a more imaginative way. We also have a confident business case from a local social enterprise which sets out steps to recruit hosts from the school communities.

4.4. The DfE supports the Broadening Educational Pathways bursaries scheme for looked after and vulnerable children attending independent day/boarding schools for children in care in place which is delivered by the Royal Springboard Foundation. This provides a useful precedent and evidence of the benefits to the young people who have been educated in independent schools. These include:

- 98% of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grade 4 – 9, and
- 99% of pupils achieving two or more A Levels.

4.5. The 2022 evaluation of Broadening Educational Pathways also cites various other benefits, including:

4.6. 'The human capital acquired through attending a boarding school was considered to give the child a set of personal skills and characteristics they can transfer into a range of life circumstances including interviews, attending social events going to university…' (p.18 [(royalspringboard.org.uk)](royalspringboard.org.uk))

4.7. Key principles in our model are:

- The unaccompanied minors continue to be children in care.
- Better Care and Education provision for our allocation is through a shared arrangement with a number of independent schools, voluntary organisations and specially recruited hosts. Children are matched to independent schools in the Dorset area (conversations are presently underway with Bryanston and Independent School and Shaftesbury a State Boarding School) and the extended school community then becomes a source of potential hosts.
- Unaccompanied minors are allocated to the scheme through identification by virtual school heads and their teams in Kent and other authorities. In the first instance, the scheme will establish proof of concept by improving the offer to minors who are already here, rather than new arrivals.
- This approach will be developed in partnership with neighbouring authorities, and we have started these discussions.
- We undertake express assessments of a household or households who can act as hosts and out of school destinations for those young people during the school breaks using the model of our supported lodgings scheme.
- The case management and support offer to the young people is not necessarily limited to qualified social workers but includes education /health /youth support roles. We can recruit to these roles from vacant post funding.

5. **Easement of specific regulations and guidance**

5.1. We require flexibility in the following areas of regulation:

- Placement of children in care in 'other arrangements' – many of the assumptions which underpin the Children Act do not apply to unaccompanied children, particularly around local connections and links with family. We believe the use of boarding schools can be a suitable living arrangement for unaccompanied children, and not just for 16 and 17 year olds, and the use of hosts can complement the boarding experience with the chance to live in a family based setting out of term time.
- Assessment of hosts using the supported lodgings assessment framework would follow the precedent set by the Ukrainian minors scheme in unblocking access to suitable homes for these children, while still maintaining checks and safeguards for these children.
- Lead professionals for these children could be drawn from a wider professional pool than social workers – the decision-making process around the children entering the care system is determined by their immigration status and age assessment, and their care plan is about support in their progress to settled adulthood. We believe that issues around support needs, safety, and educational progress can be reasonably managed by professionals other than qualified social workers, although we accept that it will be diligent to have social work represented in the support team management. We would initially intend upon a much more intensive level of support from education and youth work colleagues to assure the success of the placements.
- Regulation and inspection of these settings – this is an innovative plan, and we are working alongside colleagues in Ofsted to ensure that there is suitable oversight and challenge of these arrangements, however we do not believe that any existing inspection fits these arrangements.

5.3   The children would continue to be children in care with the usual reviewing arrangement for care plans, PEPs and pathway plans. This would ensure oversight and challenge from Independent Reviewing Officers and ensure that we adhered to the same framework of standards and aspiration as for the other children in our care.

6. Head of Service

6.1.   To meet the needs of our growing population of young people leaving care and our unaccompanied minors we believe that we require a new

approach for our unaccompanied minors led by dedicated Head of Service role which brings together skills and expertise with the Refugee and Resettlement Service, Leaving Care Service, Lifelong Links and Unaccompanied Minors Service (Fig 2). In doing so this will ensure sufficient capacity for the existing Head of Service for Children in Care to drive outstanding service delivery for children in care.

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                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │  Corporate Director      │
                    │  Care & Protection       │
                    │  Paul Dempsey            │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
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                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │  Head of Service (title  │
                    │  to be confirmed)        │
                    │  VACANT NEW POST         │
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| Refugee & Resettlement Manager — Kate Pryce | Service Manager Corporate Parenting & Care Leavers — Matt Chislett | UASC – Operational & Strategic Lead — VACANT | Team Manager – Life Long Links — VACANT – NEW POST |

Under Service Manager Corporate Parenting & Care Leavers (Matt Chislett):
- Team Manager Care Leavers — Kirsten Hallett
- Team Manager Care Leavers — Susan Holden

Under Team Manager – Life Long Links:
- KIT Team Leader — Margaret Elliman
- Supported Lodgings Team

Fig .2

7. Senior Personal Advisors

7.1.   We have also identified the need to develop two senior personal advisor roles in the Leaving Care Service, one to lead delivery of Staying Close which is outlined below, and the other to lead employer engagement. These lead areas correlate with those identified by young people through the New Belongings Survey and also offer a career development pathway in the Leaving Care Team. An additional three personal adviser roles are required if we are to ensure that case loads within the service support best practice.

8. **Future Developments – Staying Close**

8.1.   Dorset Council have been awarded a grant of £627,802 which runs over 3 years to deliver Staying Close. Staying Close is a model which provides enhanced support for young people leaving care from children's homes and is designed to be a comparable offer to the option to Stay Put, which supports young people in foster care to remain with their former foster carers until age 21. Staying Close focuses on the following areas:

- Accommodation stability: including access to improved housing options, reduced rates of evictions and fewer placement moves.
- Wellbeing: positive changes in both mental and physical health and reductions in antisocial behaviour, episodes of going missing and criminal activity for young people at risk of these behaviours.
- EET: increasing numbers of young people in employment, education and training, including through support gaining work experience, with application forms and advice and guidance.
- Strong relationships and support network: an increase in social connectedness and developing healthy relationships.
- Independent living skills: including improvements in cooking, budgeting, time management and practical skills.

9. **Financial Implications**

	£		**Funding source**
1x Head of Service	312,000	Three years	1 x 'Leaving Care service development' identified in the Medium-Term Financial Plan as a pressure
2x Senior Personal Advisors	312,733	Three years	Staying Close grant (627,802) *
3x Personal Advisors	132,570	Per annum	1 x 'Leaving Care service development' and 2x 'Impact of the National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Minors' identified in the Medium-Term Financial Plan as a pressure

*Funding ceases at the end three years. This may cause a recruitment, retention, and future year pressure

Care and education costs for unaccompanied minors:

	£ annum	Funding source
Term time boarding place	2,500,000	DfE and Home Office (TBC)
Holiday hosting	345,600	
LA support team	348,347	
Host recruitment and training	100,000	
Co-ordination/ management costs/set up and evaluation costs – assumes co-ordinator and business support roles, plus in kind contribution from existing LA staffing	93,978	
Clothing and pocket money	104,280	
Translation services – 1 hour per week for 13 weeks	32,500	
Training for school staff – awareness and orientation	2,000	
Total	3,526,705	

10. **Environmental Implications**

Local services and communities are able to support children which will reduce carbon footprint

11. **Well-being and Health Implications**

Children are matched with local families for weekends and holidays, children are kept safe and benefit from a holistic, rounded learning experience.

Career Pathway is developed in Leaving Care Service to support recruitment and retention.

12. Other Implications

No other implications have been identified.

13. Risk Assessment

HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium/Low
Residual Risk: Medium/Low

14. Equalities Impact Assessment

This report does not relate to new working arrangements and therefore an Equalities Impact Assessment has not been undertaken.

15. Appendices

[Appendix 1 Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2020 - 2023.pdf (dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)](dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)

16. Background Papers

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-market-study-final-report

https://childrenssocialcare.independent-review.uk/final-report/

By virtue of paragraph(s) 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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