



Corporate Parenting Board

Date: Thursday, 25 May 2023
Time: 3.00 pm
Venue: Council Chamber, County Hall, Dorchester, DT1 1XJ

Members (Quorum 3)

Kate Wheller (Chairman), Richard Biggs (Vice-Chairman), Ryan Holloway, Carole Jones, Stella Jones, Cathy Lugg and Mark Roberts

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 will open the meeting and will 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 formal meeting held on Thursday 24th November 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@dorsetcc.gov.uk by 8.30am on Tuesday 23rd May.

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-ambule 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. INTRODUCTION AND SCENE SETTING

Theresa Leavy, Executive Director for People and Children, to set the scene of the meeting.

7. CORPORATE PARENTING DATASET

5 - 22

To receive a report from Louise Drury, Head of Service Children in Care.

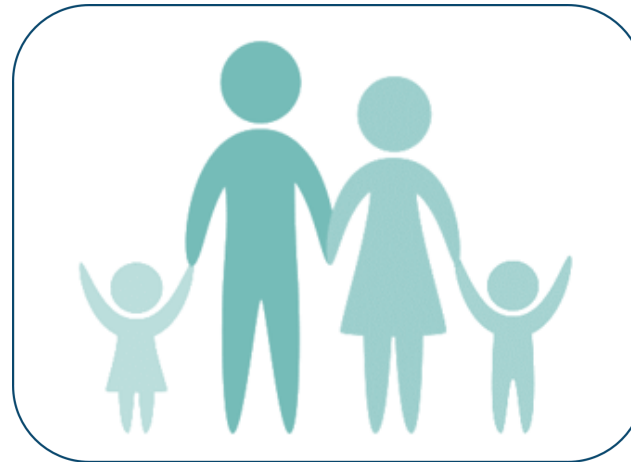
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|------------|--|-----------|
| 8. | FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT AND REPORT FROM PANEL CHAIR | 23 - 50 |
| | <p>Gerry Connell, Fostering Services Manager, to report.</p> | |
| 9. | ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT | 51 - 130 |
| | <p>Allan Charlton, Aspire Manager, to report.</p> | |
| 10. | CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT | 131 - 144 |
| | <p>To receive a report from Louise Drury, Head of Service Children in Care.</p> | |
| 11. | CHILDREN IN CARE AND CLICC STRATEGY AND PLAN | |
| | <p>Simon Fraiz-Brown, Service Manager Young and Thriving, to report.</p> | |
| 12. | BIRTH TO SETTLED ADULthood | 145 - 152 |
| | <p>Mark Rogers, Independent Chair, to report.</p> | |
| 13. | CARE LEAVERS ANNUAL REPORT | 153 - 166 |
| | <p>To receive a report from the Service Manager Corporate Parenting & Care Leavers.</p> | |
| 14. | DATE OF NEXT MEETING | |
| | <p>To confirm the details of the next formal meeting which is due to be held on Thursday 23rd November 2023.</p> | |
| 15. | URGENT ITEMS | |
| | <p>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.</p> | |
| 16. | EXEMPT BUSINESS | |
| | <p>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 3 of schedule 12 A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).</p> | |
| | <p>The Live Meeting will end before Members consider the following item.</p> | |

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Corporate Parenting Performance Report

Business Intelligence & Performance Team - People

March 2023



Corporate Parenting Board: Performance

Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

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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.

RAG Rating and Performance Direction

Where a target has been set, indicators are RAG rated in the 'Status' field 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 the icons indicating direction of performance as shown below, based only on whether the figures has increased or decreased since the previous month. Please note, 'Direction of Performance' field is not related to targets and should be used to see where performance is changing and not to judge overall status of the measure; the RAG ratings in the 'Status' field identify where measures are in relation to the target for the latest months performance.

- ✓ improved performance compared with previous month
- ✗ decline in performance compared with previous month
- ! same 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.

Summary of Measures



Corporate Parenting Data Set: Summary

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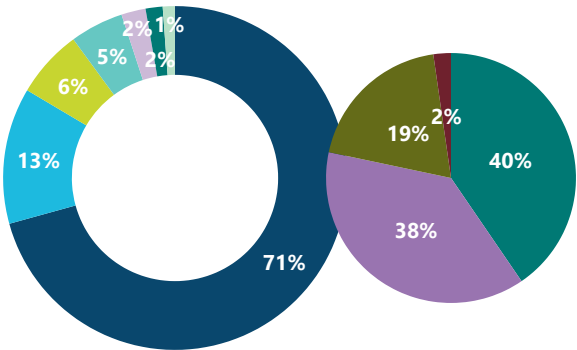
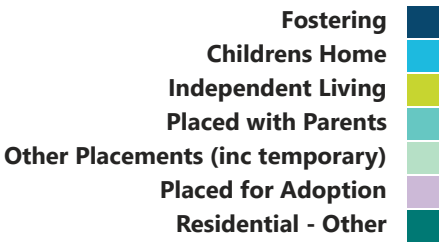
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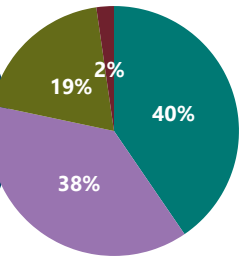


A full list of indicators including 6 months of data is included in Appendix A.

Child Placement Type



Placement - Fostering Breakdown



Care Leavers



We have **6** care leavers (active, aged 16-25 yrs) in bed and breakfast accommodation. In the previous month we had **6**.



96 % of our care leavers are living in suitable accommodation (active, 19-21 yrs). Last month this was **97** %.



58 % of our care leavers are in employment, education or training (active, 19-21 yrs). Last month this was **59** %.



91 % of our care leavers with an up to date Pathway Plan and end of month (active, 17-25 yrs). Last month this was **85** %.



96 % of our care leavers are in in touch with us (active, 19-21 yrs). Last month this was **97** %.

Adoption



26 children were adopted in the last 12 months.

Number of CIC



We have **437** children in care (rate of **65** per 10,000), **34** of them are unaccompanied asylum seeking children. In the previous month we had **444**, (**66**) and **36** respectively.

Distance from Home



42 % of our children in care live over 20 miles away from home (excluding our unaccompanied asylum seeking children). Last month it was **42** %.

Placement Stability



Of our children in care who have been in care for 2.5 years (aged 16 or under) **65** % have been in their placement for 2 years or more. Last month it was **66** %.



8 % of our children in care had 3 or more placements in the previous 12 months. Last month it was **8** %.

Health



Of our children who have been in care for at least 12 months (aged 4-16), **64** % have had a strengths & difficulties questionnaire completed. Last month this was **63** %.



Of our new children in care last month, **50** % had their initial health assessment within 20 days. In the month prior to that it was **50** %.

Education



The average attendance for this academic year for our children in care is **88** %, (**88** % up to last month).



100 % of our children in care have had their termly personal education plan completed on time.

Corporate Parenting Board Performance Measures

Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

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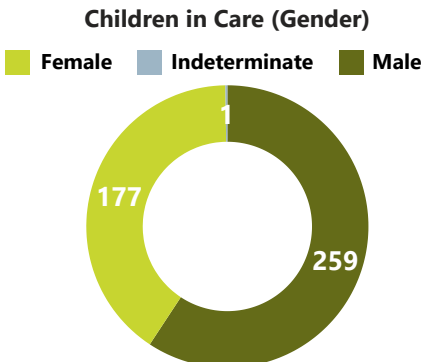
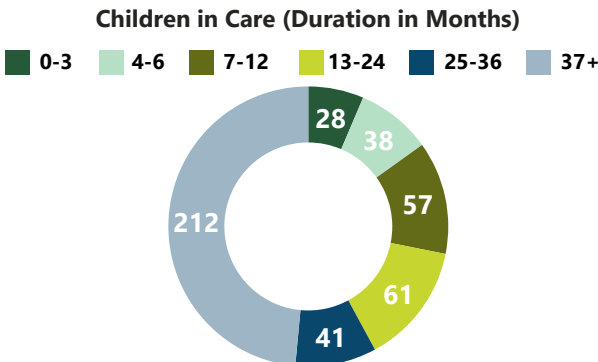
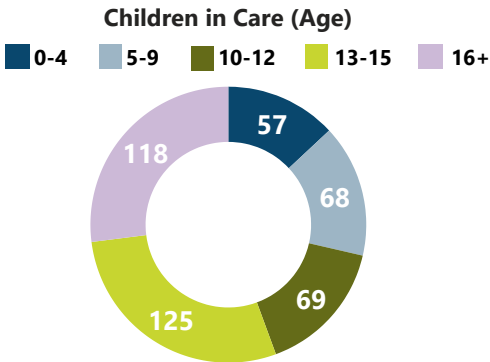


Data is extracted from MOSAIC on the 4th of the following month (or nearest working day after), as at the last day of the reporting month.

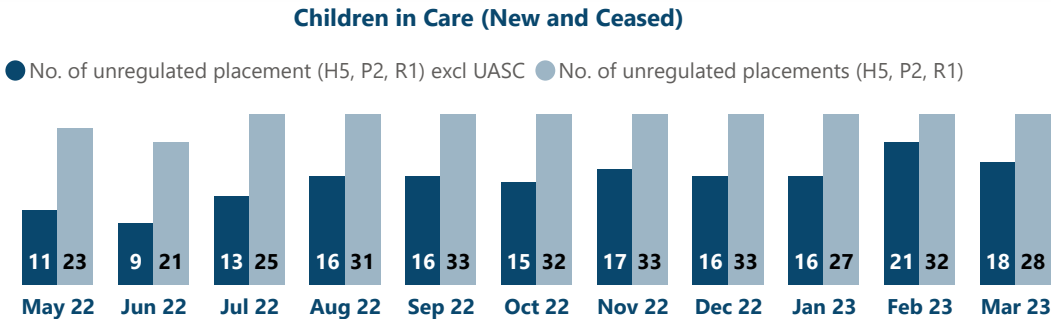
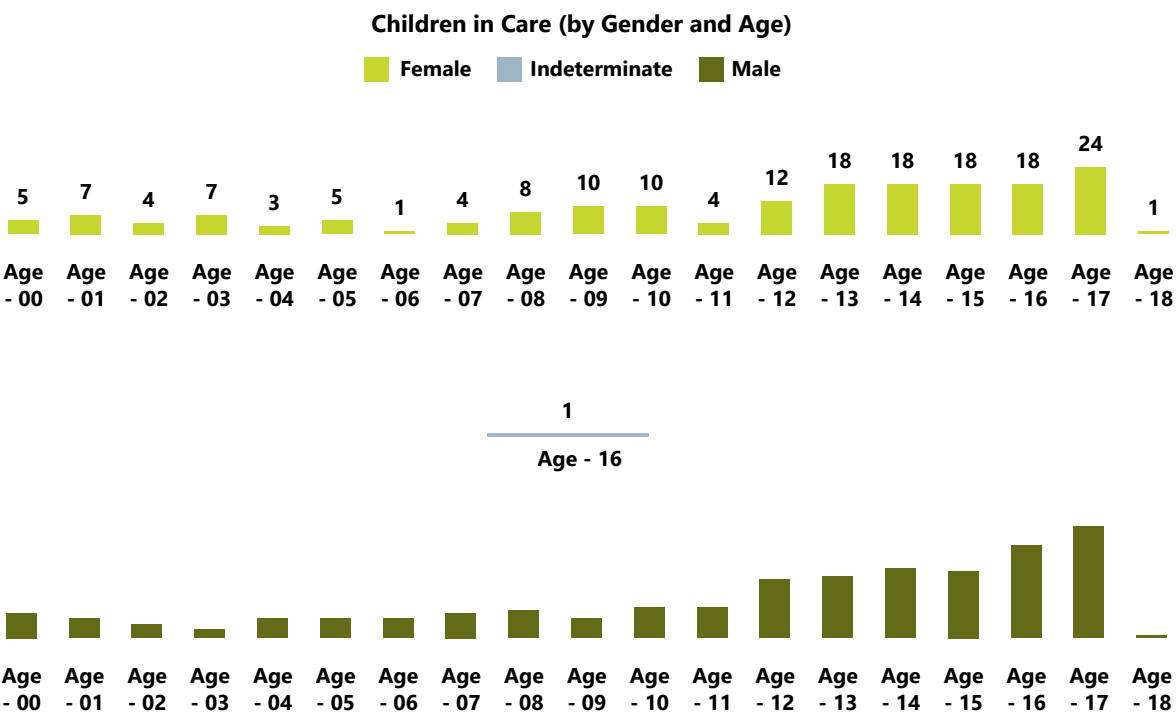
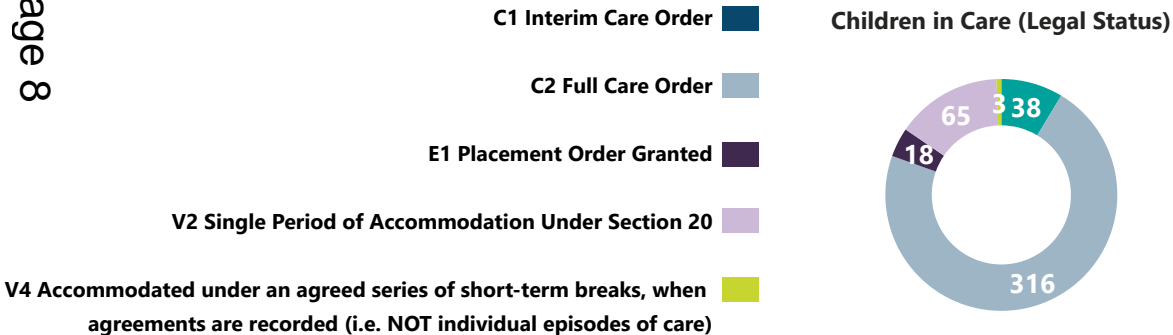
Good+ SN and England figures are the latest available in each instance.

Number of Children in Care
437

Number of Care Leavers
516
Of those, number receiving a service
290



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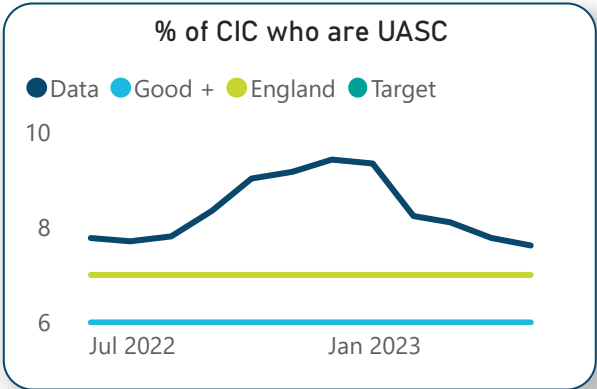
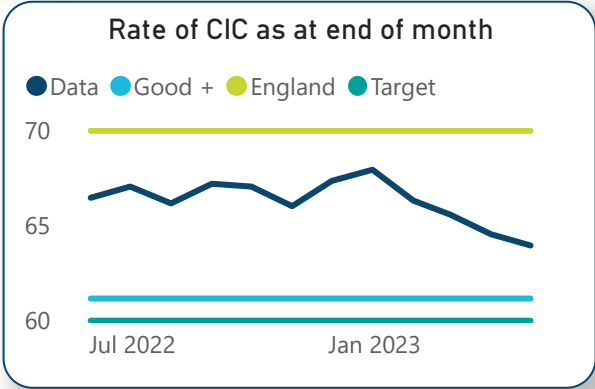


Corporate Parenting Board Performance Measures - Profile

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Indicator	Good Is	England Av.	Good + SN	Target	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Latest D.O.T.
No. of CIC at end of month	Low			420.00	449.00	444.00	437.00	Improving
Rate of CIC as at end of month	Low	70.0	61.2	60.00	66.32	65.59	64.55	Improving
No. of CIC who are UASC at end of month	-				37.00	36.00	34.00	
% of CIC who are UASC	-	7.0	6.0		8.24	8.11	7.78	
No. of children who became CIC	Low			10.00	8.00	5.00	3.00	Improving
No. of children who ceased to be CIC	High			13.00	14.00	13.00	11.00	Worsening

Profile

We have seen a further reduction in the number and rate of children in care to 437. If we exclude unaccompanied children our number of children in care was 403 which is the lowest since April 2018. In March we saw even lower numbers of children coming into care including adolescents. All children entering care did so in a planned way. We saw slightly less children ceasing to be in care. At the time of writing the number of children in care has reduced further to 434. This is the lowest number since February 2022.

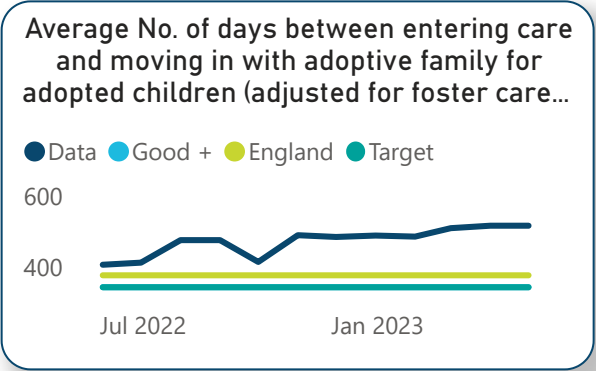
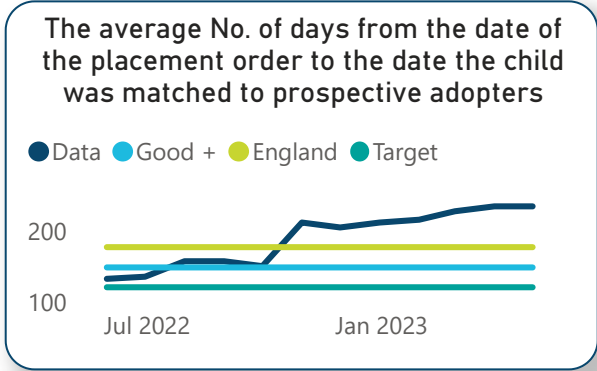
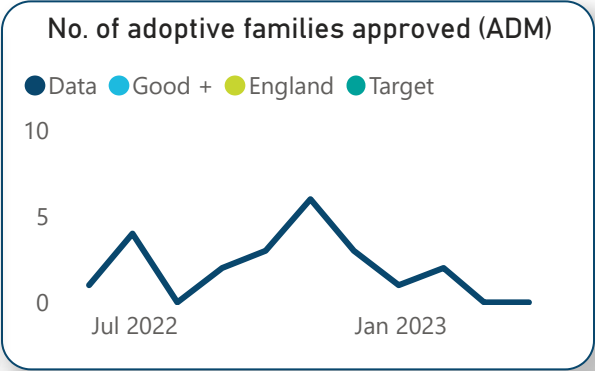
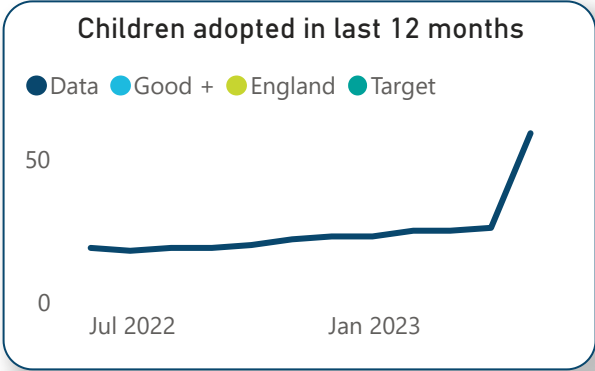
Corporate Parenting Board Performance Measures - Adoption

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Indicator	Good Is	England Av.	Good + SN	Target	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Latest D.O.T.
Children adopted in last 12 months	High				25.00	25.00	26.00	Improving
No. of Adoption placement order revocations over last 12 months	Low				4.00	7.00	5.00	Improving
No. of adoptive families approved (ADM)	High				2.00	0.00	0.00	Same
The average No. of days from the date of the placement order to the date the child was matched to prospective adopters	Low	178.0	149.2	121.00	217.00	229.00	236.00	Worsening
Average No. of days between entering care and moving in with adoptive family for adopted children (adjusted for foster carer adoptions)	Low	376.0	342.2	342.00	486.00	510.00	517.00	Worsening
No. of adoptive Families in assessment	High				27.00	28.00	25.00	Worsening

Adoption
<p>There continues to be delays in reaching the targets, and this relates partly to the length of time for Care proceedings to conclude. the Aspire Service Manager has undertaken a deep dive into the current cases of children in their adoptive placements and provided a report with the case file reviews for consideration and further discussion between Aspire and Dorset. The ambitions that Dorset have for their children has led to an increasing number of children with a plan for adoption who fall into the should be harder to place cohort of children, those aged over 5, those with complex needs, sibling groups and minority children. There are currently 10 children waiting for a match however, 2 are booked onto matching panel, in May and there are links for 2 more children, this then leaves 2 sibling groups one of 4 children and one of 2 children. Whilst we strive to match and place these children, it does remain a challenge. Aspire do undertake external searches via Linkmaker and other RAA/VAA's, however national there is a shortage of adopters for those deemed harder to place. To assist with addressing this, Aspire have reviewed their procedures and will be providing and offering a much more proactive offer for the family finding role where case responsibility is not held by Aspire. This will be shared with all Teams at the beginning of May 2023. There were a total of 26 adoption orders made in 22/23 and increase of 12 over the total number of 14 for 21/22. Aspire currently have 25 available adoptive families available, with 44% of these willing to undertake Early Permanence. As Aspire continue to place with their own adopters, the pool does reduce. There has been a decrease in the number of enquiries received and work is being undertaken to understand this and start a recruitment drive which again we are looking to commence in May - this will be focussing on sibling groups and older children, whilst also remaining aware we do require adopters for those younger children. Our locality teams are revising their permanency tracking arrangements and working hard to reduce the time it takes to complete care proceedings.</p>

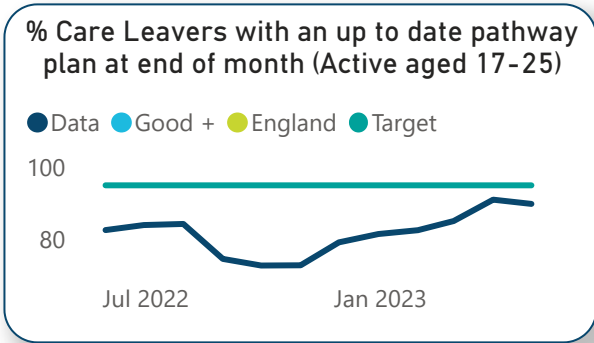
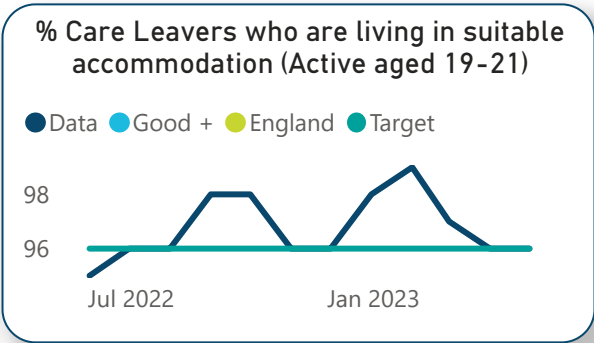
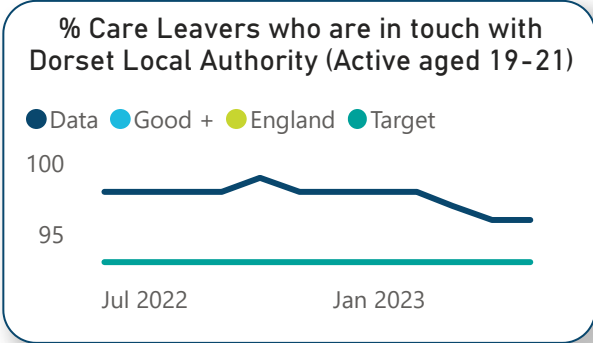
Corporate Parenting Board Performance Measures - Care Leavers

Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

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Indicator	Good Is	England Av.	Good + SN	Target	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Latest D.O.T.
% Care Leavers who are living in suitable accommodation (Active aged 19-21)	High			96.00	99.00	97.00	96.00	Worsening
% Care Leavers with an up to date pathway plan at end of month (Active aged 17-25)	High			95.00	82.59	85.12	91.03	Improving
% Care Leavers who are in touch with Dorset Local Authority (Active aged 19-21)	High			93.00	98.00	97.00	96.00	Worsening
% Care Leavers who are in Employment Education or Training (Active aged 19-21)	High			60.00	59.00	59.00	58.00	Worsening
No. of Care Leavers (Active aged 17-25) in unsuitable accommodation at end of month	Low			11.00	11.00	9.00	8.00	Improving
No. of Care Leavers (Active aged 17-25) in Bed and Breakfast accommodation	Low			0.00	4.00	6.00	6.00	Same
% Care Leavers aged 19-21 in EET (OC3)	High	55.0	58.7				51.98	Worsening
No. of health passports completed (2 months in arrears)	-				6.00	6.00	2.00	
No. of Health passports due within the month (2 months in arrears)	-				6.00	6.00	2.00	

Care Leavers

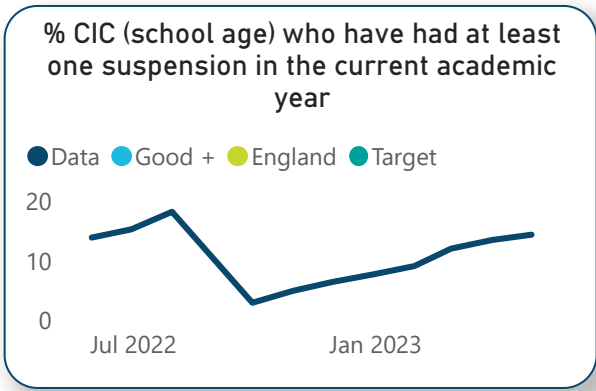
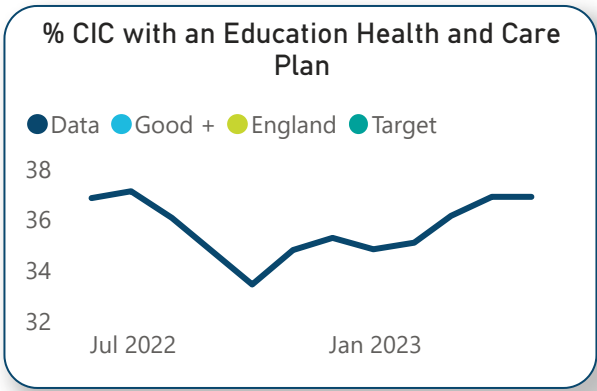
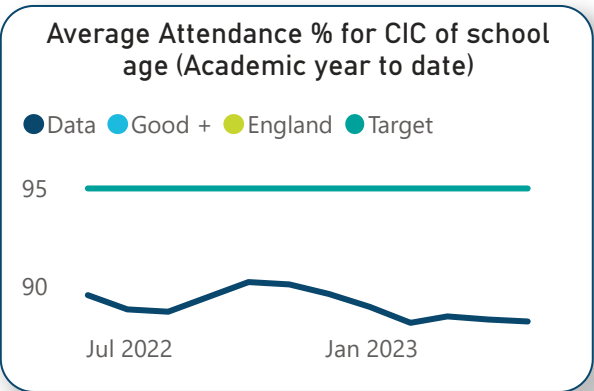
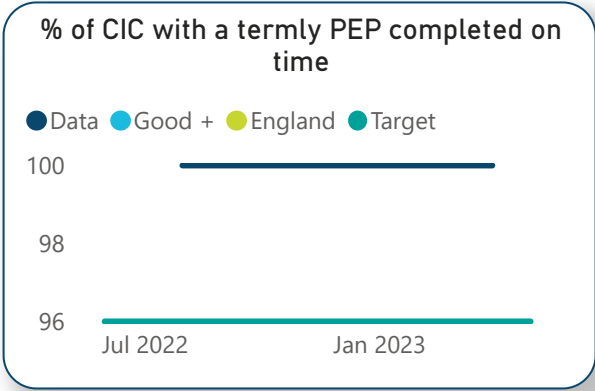
We continue to work with partners to deliver move on plans for our young people in B&B. Of the new young people accessing B&B's in March one young person's separated from a partner and was living out of area returning to Dorset and accessing emergency accommodation. The second young person was discharged from prison and wanted to live out of area closer to family support. We have seen a slight improvement from the previous month and a significant improvement from a year to date in young people accessing unsuitable accommodation. We know our young people accessing this accommodation and continue to work with them and professional round them to support transitions from this accommodation. Of the 8 young people in unsuitable accommodation 6 are in B&B and 2 are in custody. We are in touch with 96% of our young people aged 19-21 and 91.03% for our young people aged 17 to 25 have an up-to-date pathway plan. Whilst this is positive, we aspire for 95+ %. In relation to the annual DfE measure of EET for 19 to 21 year old care leavers we have improved our performance by 8% from 43% last year to 51% this year 2022/23

Corporate Parenting Board Performance Measures - Education

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Month Ending
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Indicator	Good Is	England Av.	Good + SN	Target	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Latest D.O.T.
% of children that are NEET	Low			28.00	30.23	24.80	23.30	Improving
% CIC (school age) who have had at least one suspension in the current academic year	Low				9.12	12.05	13.49	Worsening
% CIC with an Education Health and Care Plan	-				35.09	36.15	36.90	
Average Attendance % for CIC of school age (Academic year to date)	High			95.00	88.11	88.44	88.28	Worsening
% of CIC with a termly PEP completed on time	High			96.00			100.00	
% of children with a PEP within 20 days of coming into care	High			100.00			100.00	

Education

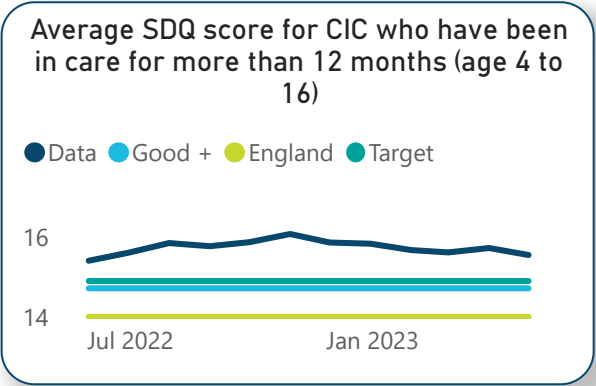
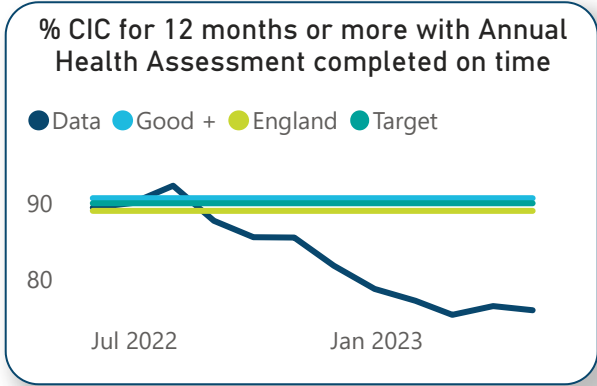
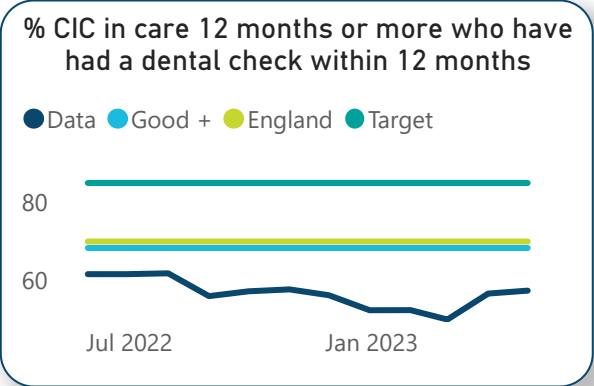
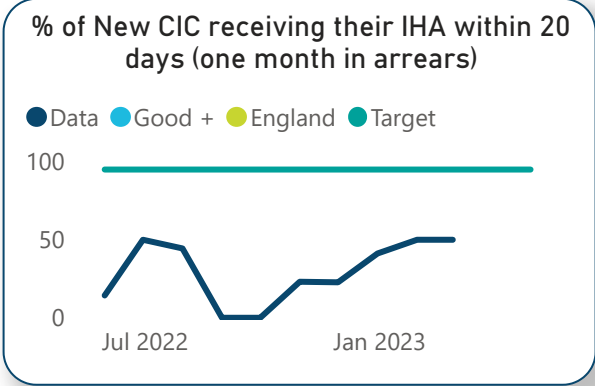
In the Spring term 100% of PEPs were completed on time for and 100% of PEPs were completed within 20 days of coming into care. At the end of March, attendance for the Virtual School stands at 88.28%. All year groups with the exception of Key Stage 4 are above 90% attendance. Year 10 have 83% and year 11 have 71.5% to date. March also saw an increase in overall attendance to 87.3% from a dip in February to 85.4%. Fortnightly meetings are held with the Service Manager and Specialist Teacher to scrutinise attendance of those below 90%. For those children with below 90% attendance, we work with families and education settings to understand the unique context of each child. In collaboration with schools, we are developing a menu of support to ensure that appropriate intervention is available, to ensure each child is getting support to improve school attendance. 36.90% of the children in care have an EHCP with 38.8% of children of school age having an EHCP and 32.6% of young people post 16 having an EHCP. 13% of children within the Virtual School have had at least one suspension in this academic year to date. Virtual School Leads attend all reintegration meetings to discuss alternatives to suspensions. The Virtual School have undertaken a joint project with University College London on a knowledge exchange programme to produce a toolkit. Alternatives to suspensions are a key focus of this work. The percentage of children who are NEET has decreased to 23.30%. This includes 30 children who are NEET and 10 children who are in employment without training. Two young people are accessing tutoring and 13 have a planned reengagement with education in the Summer term. Five young people are looking for employment currently. The remaining young people are working with the team around them to reengage with education, training and employment. Analysis was undertaken by the Virtual School to understand the extra-curricular activities that our school age children engage with. There are a wide range of clubs, sports and arts activities that our children partake in. 84% are engaged in such activities. Of the 16% (89 children) who are not accessing an extra-curricular activity, 25 are in primary education and 64 are in secondary education. We are now developing an offer of activities to match children's aspirations and interests so that more children benefit from enriching activities.

Corporate Parenting Board Performance Measures - Health & Emotional Wellbeing

Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

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Indicator	Good Is	England Av.	Good + SN	Target	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Latest D.O.T.
% of New CIC receiving their IHA within 20 days (one month in arrears)	High			95.00	50.00	50.00		
% CIC for 12 months or more with up to date Immunisations	High	85.0	87.3	85.00	85.85	83.97	87.00	Improving
% CIC in care 12 months or more who have had a dental check within 12 months	High	70.0	68.3	85.00	52.41	50.00	56.66	Improving
% CIC for 12 months or more with Annual Health Assessment completed on time	High	89.0	90.7	90.00	77.17	75.32	76.47	Improving
% of children for CIC for at least 12 months age 4-16yrs with completed SDQ assessment	High	77.0	67.8	80.00	67.71	63.29	64.38	Improving
Average SDQ score for CIC who have been in care for more than 12 months (age 4 to 16)	Low	14.0	14.7	14.90	15.68	15.62	15.73	Worsening

Health & Emotional Wellbeing

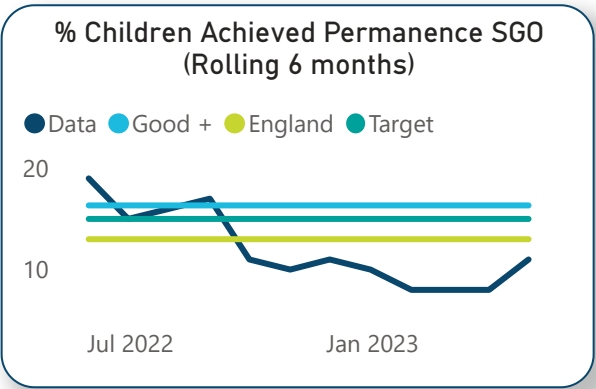
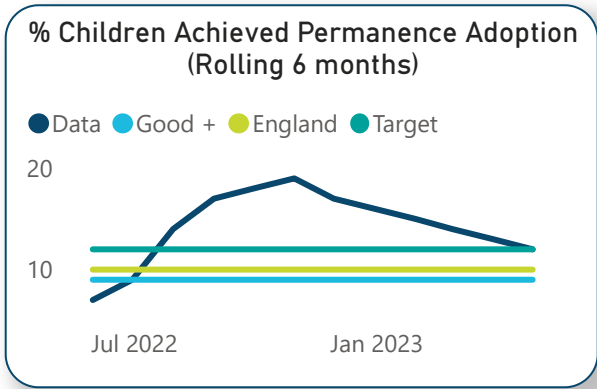
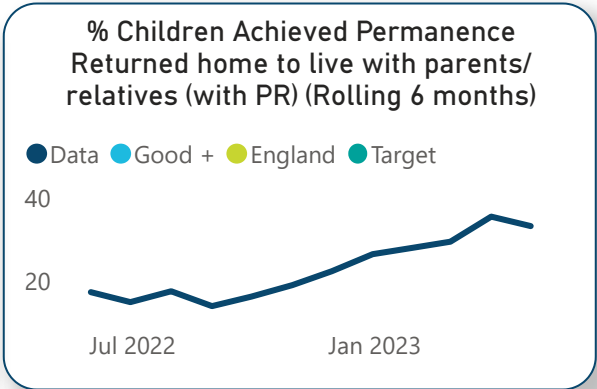
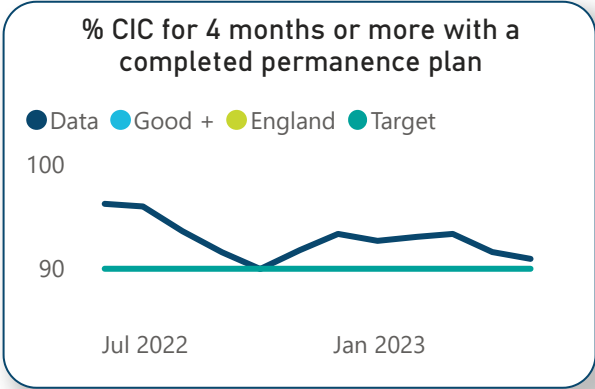
% IHA on time in December (month in arrears) has increased although still low at 50%. A review of the service offer for IHA's has commenced with NHS Dorset with a meeting taking place 29th March 2023. There has been improvement in annual dental and health assessments, although the capacity of NHS dentists continues to impact on performance. NHS colleague have given assurance that NHS dentists in the South West Region are prioritising children in care. Further improvement has been evidenced for children in care for 12 months or more with up to date immunisations. The completion of SDQ assessment has slightly increased and the increase in average SDQ score indicates that our young people continue to experience poorer emotional wellbeing and mental health than good and outstanding statistical neighbours. The Health and Wellbeing of our children in care has been raised at the Strengthening Services Board and there has been agreement and following an escalation to the System Quality Surveillance Group chaired by the ICB. A deep dive is planned for the next meeting in June 2023 and the Corporate Director for Commissioning and Partnerships is facilitating a group of commissioners and providers to strengthen outcomes for our children.

Corporate Parenting Board Performance Measures - Permanence

Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

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Month Ending
March 2023



Indicator	Good Is	England Av.	Good + SN	Target	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Latest D.O.T.
% CIC for 4 months or more with a completed permanence plan	High			90.00	93.07	93.35	91.61	Worsening
% CIC at month end with long term fostering as plan and achieved permanence	High				54.03	54.22	53.17	Worsening
% Children Achieved Permanence Returned home to live with parents/ relatives (with PR) (Rolling 6 months)	High				28.09	29.54	35.63	Improving
% Children Achieved Permanence Adoption (Rolling 6 months)	High	10.0	9.0	12.00	15.00	14.00	13.00	Worsening
% Children Achieved Permanence SGO (Rolling 6 months)	High	13.0	16.3	15.00	8.00	8.00	8.00	Same

Permanence

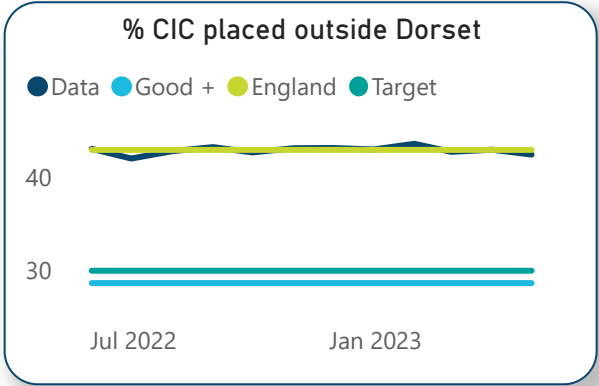
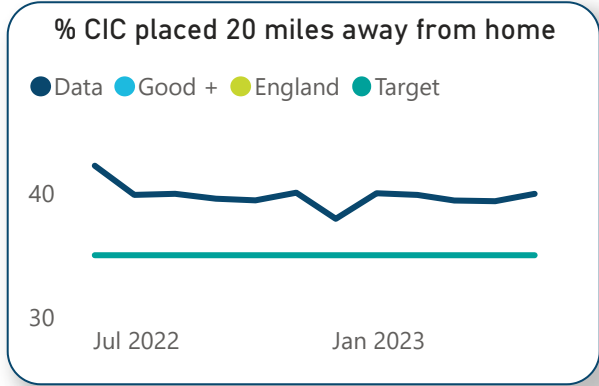
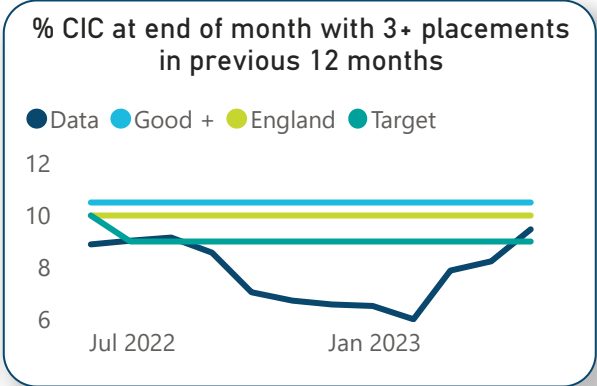
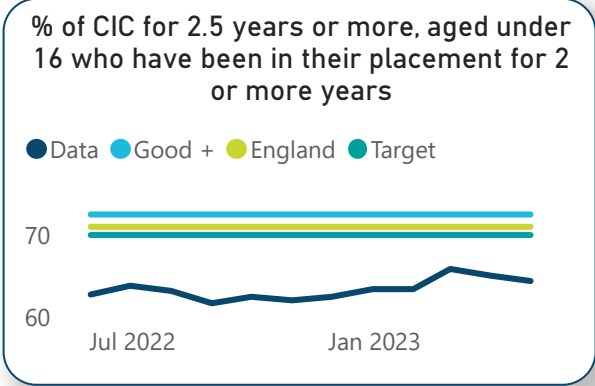
Achieving permanence for children is supported well by the completion of permanence plans (91.061%). Over the last 3 months there has been a continued increase in the number of children safely returning home to live with their parents. The % of children achieving permanence through adoption remains above target and above the national and statistical neighbour averages, but we are tracking this closely due to numbers declining for the 4th month running. We are reviewing adoption timeliness as performance has dipped considerably and we have undertaken a deep dive to understand the performance at all stages of the adoption process to reduce unnecessary delay. % of children achieving permanence through SGO has remained at 8% in the last rolling 6 months. We continue to have a low number of care applications which will impact on this. While permanence through adoption and SGO has continued reduced since November, this has been more than offset by the proportion of children securing permanence through reunification with parents.

Corporate Parenting Board Performance Measures - Placement

Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

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Month Ending
March 2023



Indicator	Good Is	England Av.	Good + SN	Target	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Latest D.O.T.
No. of CIC placed with parent(s)					22.00	20.00	22.00	
% CIC at end of month with 3+ placements in previous 12 months	Low	10.0	10.5	9.00	6.01	7.88	8.24	Worsening
% of CIC for 2.5 years or more, aged under 16 who have been in their placement for 2 or more years	High	71.0	72.5	70.00	63.43	65.88	65.06	Worsening
% CIC over 20 mile away from home excl UASC	Low	21.0	34.3	35.00	42.96	42.40	42.18	Improving
% CIC placed outside Dorset	Low	43.0	28.7	30.00	43.65	42.79	43.02	Worsening
No. of unregulated placements (H5, P2, R1)	Low			10.00	27.00	32.00	28.00	Improving
% CIC living in foster placement	High	70.0	71.4		73.00	72.00	71.00	Worsening
% CIC in private provision	Low				44.54	44.82	44.62	Improving

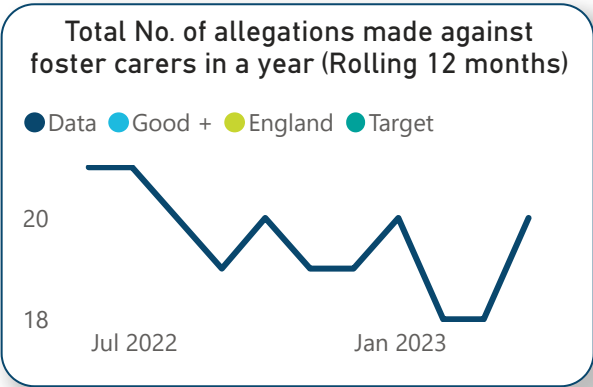
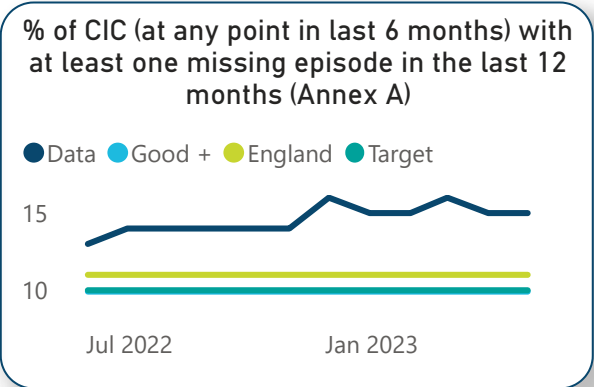
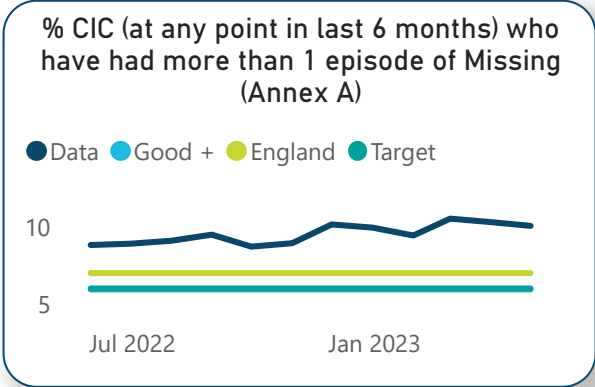
Placement stability has slightly decreased although remains stronger performance than the national average and in good+ authorities. The number of children living in foster care has slightly decreased although is in line with Good+ authorities and higher than national average. While not yet at target, more children are living closer to home. However, the % children who are placed outside Dorset has slightly increased and of those placed outside Dorset, there has been an increase from 65% to 68% are living with foster carers, 9% being a connected carer, and at least 55% are placed in a local authority bordering Dorset. The number of children living in supported accommodation is reducing but still remains high. Most are unaccompanied children. We have been reducing the % of children placed more than 20 miles away – March 2022 it was 45% and March 2023 it is 42%

Corporate Parenting Board Performance Measures - Safety

Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

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Month Ending
March 2023



Indicator	Good Is	England Av.	Good + SN	Target	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Latest D.O.T.
No. of allegations made against foster carers that were substantiated	-				0.00	0.00	2.00	
No. of formal IRO escalations	High				5.00	5.00	3.00	Worsening
% CIC (at any point in last 6 months) who have had more than 1 episode of Missing (Annex A)	Low	7.0	5.9	6.00	9.43	10.53	10.30	Improving
% of CIC (at any point in last 6 months) with at least one missing episode in the last 12 months (Annex A)	Low	11.0	9.9	10.00	15.00	16.00	15.00	Improving
Total No. of allegations made against foster carers in a year (Rolling 12 months)	Low				18.00	18.00	20.00	Worsening

Safety

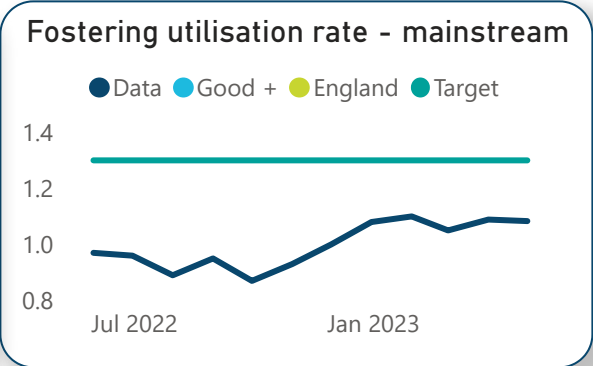
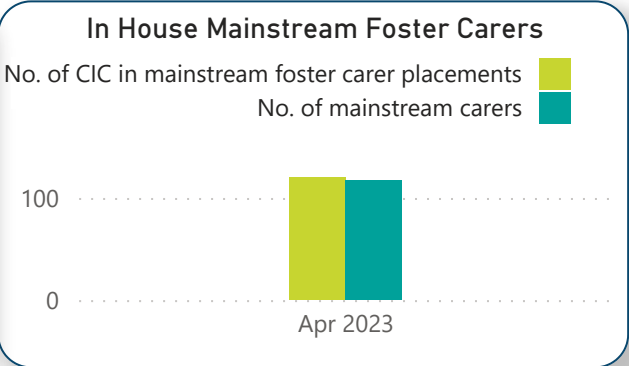
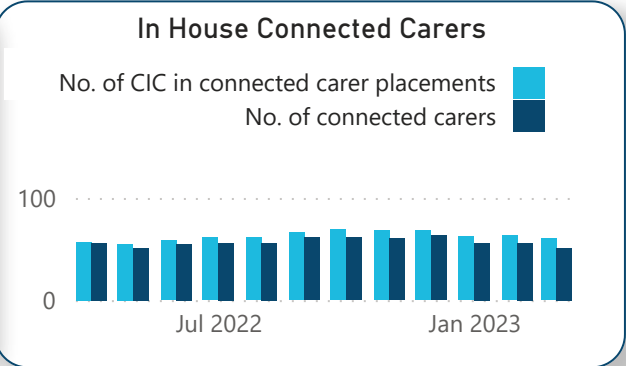
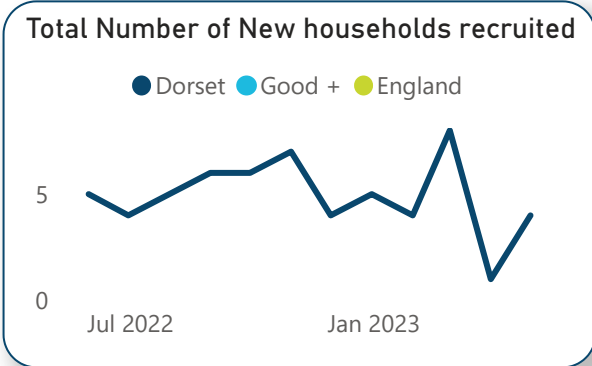
In March 2023 there were 8 children in care with more than 1 missing episode aged between 14 and 17 years. All children were offered a return home interview with all young people engaging with more than 1 return home interview. 4 young people were residing in supported accommodation, 3 with foster carers and 0 in residential children’s homes, 5 living in supported accommodation. The overriding reason for being missing was contact with family and friends % CIC is an areat we are starting to show an impact of changes to reporting and being clear on which young people are absent or missing. RHI’s are being completed and there is regualr oversight and enhanced QARO oversight for those who have high missing episodes. A thematic audit by the QARO service of the quality of care planning for our children in care that go missing will be undertaken in Q2 to take forward learning from good practice and understand where we can do better. In March 2023 there was a total of 19 escalations, the majority informal. There were 29 esculations concluded (21 infomal, 6 at stage 1 and 2 at stage 2). There continues to be a drive to improve oversight and regular reporting and challenge from QA manager to all QAROs to formally escalate in respect of health needs of our CiC not being met as well as delays in the progression and completion of care planning and permanence. A new process of “Performance and Practice meetings” with IROs to support with upskilling them in terms of their oversight, tracking and escalations of the quality of practice for our children in care. We expect this focus on QARO practice to impact on improvement in quality of consultations, tracking the progress of care planning and consequently where applicable increased informal and formal escalations that support improved outcomes for our children in care. There has been 2 referrals that resulted in substantiated outcomes for Dorset Carers in the last 12 months. The outcomes have been reviewed & evaluated by QA Service manager, with outcomes being verified. No. of referrals that went to IEM is: 2 Substantiated, 2 Unfounded and 6 Unsubstantiated. To ensure quality and suitability of fostering referrals to the LADO a meeting will now be scheduled for each referral relating to a Dorset foster care to review the referral with fostering to discuss and clarify the threshold for IEM and standards of care in understood. Furthermore there will be a schedule of training to the Fostering on managing allegations to be delivered in Q2. Important note: Dorset have had external validation of the LADO service from the Devon LADO (21.2.23) and received positive feedback from this.

Corporate Parenting Board Performance Measures - Sufficiency

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Month Ending
March 2023



Indicator	Good Is	Target	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Latest D.O.T.
No. of Foster carers at end of month	High	200.00	174.00	174.00	169.00	Worsening
No. of mainstream carers	High	138.00	117.00	116.00	116.00	Same
No. of connected carers	High		56.00	56.00	51.00	Worsening
No. of CIC in mainstream in house fostering placements	High		127.00	122.00	117.00	Worsening
No. of CIC in connected in house fostering placements			62.00	63.00	60.00	
No. of applicants undergoing assessment (Foster Carers - Mainstream)	High		11.00	9.00	9.00	Same
No. of new households recruited – Mainstream	High	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	Same
No. of new households recruited – Connected Person	High		2.00	4.00	0.00	Worsening
No. of new households recruited – Foster to Adopt	High		0.00	1.00	0.00	Worsening
No. of new households recruited – Temporary	High		1.00	2.00	0.00	Worsening
No. of households deregistered/resigned – Mainstream	Low	2.00	3.00	0.00	1.00	Worsening
No. of households deregistered/resigned – Connected Carers	Low		6.00	3.00	1.00	Improving
Fostering utilisation rate - mainstream	High	1.30	1.10	1.05	1.09	Improving
% Foster Carer visits up to date	High	80.00	86.78	86.21	94.08	Improving

Sufficiency

In relation to the whole population of children in care, the proportion placed in foster care has decreased from 72% last month to 71% this month. Of the total cohort of children in care, the proportion in commissioned placements has increased from 56% to 57% this month. In March 2023 there were a total of 169(174) foster carers – 116(116) mainstream carers and 51(56) connected carers. The total number of fostering households has reduced from 192 in March 2022. In March 2023, there were fewer resignations/de-registrations with 1 mainstream foster carers resigning and 1 connected carers deregistered with 1 child moving on. The current utilisation rate of 1.09 has increased from previous month of 1.05. At the end of March 2023 there were 9 assessments underway for mainstream foster carers. The team are focusing on reducing the time taken from start of the assessment to panel. Mockingbird constellation 2 and 3 have launched. We would also like to highlight the improving and very strong performance on visits to foster carers at 94%. We monitor the quality of external placement provision through a range of mechanisms including through the monitoring of Ofsted judgements. For our children in external fostering or residential provision (excluding those receiving short breaks provision), 94% are in good or outstanding provision (19% outstanding, 75% good), with 5% in provision that requires improvement to be good and less than 1% in provision that has been judged inadequate – this has been thoroughly risk assessed and is being closely monitored.

Appendix A - Full List of Corporate Parenting Board Performance Measures



Corporate Parenting Board Performance Measures: Appendix A

Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

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Month
Mar 23



Indicator	Unit	Good Is	England Av.	Good + SN	Target	Oct 22	Nov 22	Dec 22	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Latest D.O.T.
No. of CIC at end of month	No.	Low			420.00	447.00	456.00	460.00	449.00	444.00	437.00	Improving
Rate of CIC as at end of month	Rate	Low	70.0	61.2	60.00	66.03	67.36	67.95	66.32	65.59	64.55	Improving
No. of CIC who are UASC at end of month	No.	-				41.00	43.00	43.00	37.00	36.00	34.00	
% of CIC who are UASC	%	-	7.0	6.0		9.17	9.43	9.35	8.24	8.11	7.78	
No. of children who became CIC	No.	Low			10.00	14.00	25.00	18.00	8.00	5.00	3.00	Improving
No. of children who ceased to be CIC	No.	High			13.00	18.00	14.00	13.00	14.00	13.00	11.00	Worsening
% CIC for 4 months or more with a completed permanence plan	%	High			90.00	91.79	93.35	92.68	93.07	93.35	91.61	Worsening
% CIC at month end with long term fostering as plan and achieved permanence	%	High				56.90	55.28	52.78	54.03	54.22	53.17	Worsening
% Children Achieved Permanence Returned home to live with parents/ relatives (with PR) (Rolling 6 months)	%	High				18.99	22.37	26.51	28.09	29.54	35.63	Improving
% CIC at end of month with 3+ placements in previous 12 months	%	Low	10.0	10.5	9.00	6.73	6.58	6.52	6.01	7.88	8.24	Worsening
% of CIC for 2.5 years or more, aged under 16 who have been in their placement for 2 or more years	%	High	71.0	72.5	70.00	62.07	62.50	63.43	63.43	65.88	65.06	Worsening
% CIC over 20 mile away from home excl UASC	%	Low	21.0	34.3	35.00	42.86	40.92	43.41	42.96	42.40	42.18	Improving
% CIC placed outside Dorset	%	Low	43.0	28.7	30.00	43.18	43.20	43.04	43.65	42.79	43.02	Worsening
No. of unregulated placements (H5, P2, R1)	No.	Low			10.00	32.00	33.00	33.00	27.00	32.00	28.00	Improving
% of New CIC receiving their IHA within 20 days (one month in arrears)	%	High			95.00	23.08	22.73	41.20	50.00	50.00		

Corporate Parenting Board Performance Measures

Produced by Business Intelligence & Performance (People)

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Month
Mar 23



Indicator	Unit	Good Is	England Av.	Good + SN	Target	Oct 22	Nov 22	Dec 22	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Latest D.O.T.
No. of CIC placed with parent(s)	No.					28.00	32.00	26.00	22.00	20.00	22.00	
% CIC for 12 months or more with up to date Immunisations	%	High	85.0	87.3	85.00	87.38	85.30	83.49	85.85	83.97	87.00	Improving
% CIC in care 12 months or more who have had a dental check within 12 months	%	High	70.0	68.3	85.00	57.73	56.23	52.38	52.41	50.00	56.66	Improving
% CIC for 12 months or more with Annual Health Assessment completed on time	%	High	89.0	90.7	90.00	85.49	81.79	78.73	77.17	75.32	76.47	Improving
% of children for CIC for at least 12 months age 4-16yrs with completed SDQ assessment	%	High	77.0	67.8	80.00	72.16	71.67	68.94	67.71	63.29	64.38	Improving
Average SDQ score for CIC who have been in care for more than 12 months (age 4 to 16)	No.	Low	14.0	14.7	14.90	16.08	15.87	15.84	15.68	15.62	15.73	Worsening
% CIC living in foster placement	%	High	70.0	71.4	71.00	70.00	70.00	71.00	73.00	72.00	71.00	Worsening
% Care Leavers who are in touch with Dorset Local Authority (Active aged 19-21)	%	High			93.00	98.00	98.00	98.00	98.00	97.00	96.00	Worsening
No. of Care Leavers (Active aged 17-25) in Bed and Breakfast accommodation	No.	Low			0.00	3.00	3.00	2.00	4.00	6.00	6.00	Same
No. of Care Leavers (Active aged 17-25) in unsuitable accommodation at end of month	No.	Low			11.00	15.00	12.00	9.00	11.00	9.00	8.00	Improving
% Care Leavers who are living in suitable accommodation (Active aged 19-21)	%	High			96.00	96.00	96.00	98.00	99.00	97.00	96.00	Worsening
% Care Leavers with an up to date pathway plan at end of month (Active aged 17-25)	%	High			95.00	72.89	79.23	81.53	82.59	85.12	91.03	Improving
% Care Leavers who are in Employment Education or Training (Active aged 19-21)	%	High			60.00	57.00	57.00	59.00	59.00	59.00	58.00	Worsening

Corporate Parenting Board Performance Measures

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Month
Mar 23



Indicator	Unit	Good Is	England Av.	Good + SN	Target	Oct 22	Nov 22	Dec 22	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Latest D.O.T.
No. of households deregistered/resigned – Foster to Adopt	No.	Low				0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	Same
Fostering utilisation rate - mainstream	Rate	High			1.30	0.93	1.00	1.08	1.10	1.05	1.09	Improving
% Foster Carer visits up to date	%	High			80.00	85.95	92.82	86.81	86.78	86.21	94.08	Improving
No. of formal IRO escalations	No.	High				2.00	4.00	3.00	5.00	5.00	3.00	Worsening
Total No. of allegations made against foster carers in a year (Rolling 12 months)	No.	Low				19.00	19.00	20.00	18.00	18.00	20.00	Worsening
No. of allegations made against foster carers that were substantiated	No.	-				0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	
% of children with a PEP within 20 days of coming into care	%	High			100.00			100.00			100.00	
% of CIC with a termly PEP completed on time	%	High			96.00			100.00			100.00	
Average Attendance % for CIC of school age (Academic year to date)	%	High			95.00	90.08	89.59	88.93	88.11	88.44	88.28	Worsening
% CIC with an Education Health and Care Plan	%	-				34.80	35.28	34.83	35.09	36.15	36.90	
% CIC (school age) who have had at least one suspension in the current academic year	%	Low				4.98	6.47	7.74	9.12	12.05	13.49	Worsening
% CIC that are NEET	%	Low			28.00	23.38	25.98	23.25	30.23	24.80	23.30	Improving

Corporate Parenting Board 25 May 2023 Fostering Panel Chair's Annual Report 2022 - 2023

Choose an item.

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: Lianne Chorley

Tel: 01305 228382

Email: Lianne.Chorley@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public

Recommendation:

Members of Corporate Parenting Board are requested to note the content of the report and the activity that has been undertaken during the reporting year and the impact for children.

Reason for Recommendation:

To be assured that the report had identified the strengths and areas for development and that steps are being taken for further improvement.

1. Fostering Panel Chair's Annual Report

Introduction

1.1. This report covers the year from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023. This has been a busy year, with 34 panels having been held, hearing a total of 139 cases. We have noted a number of areas of significant progress:

- Consistency in the quality assurance of panel papers provided by the advance practitioner advising panel.
- Embedded new process to support panel members in their preparation for panel.

- Embedded independent quality assurance feedback provided by panel to social workers and fostering social workers.
- Expanded our central list of panel members.
- Appointed a panel vice chair.
- Attachment training and IT training delivered to panel members.
- Annual appraisals completed.
- Updated panel members' profiles which are shared with foster carers prior to attendance.
- Panel members have adopted a trauma informed approach to their questions.
- Strengthened performance in timeliness and quality of minutes.
- Moved back to hybrid/face to face panels.
- Utilising Teams more effectively – digital Dorset.

2. Panel meetings and membership

- 2.1. Fostering panel meets 4 times a month, on the first and third Tuesday and Wednesday, with the availability to add or cancel panels if so required. 34 panel meetings were held over the reporting period out of a potential 46 booked dates. 139 cases were heard in total averaging 4.1 cases per panel. 1 extra ordinary panel was arranged as requested by Corporate Director of Care & Protection and 12 panels cancelled due to lack of panel business/paperwork.
- 2.2. This reviewing period has seen a new panel vice-chair appointed, 15 new panel members added to the central list and changes to panel administration. The consistent advance practitioner has proved invaluable and has further added to the stability and positive panels we now experience. Change is always a challenge, and it is with credit to both the service and panel members that panel has continued to strengthen, in line with Regulations and National Minimum Standards and in the best interests of the children and young people of Dorset.
- 2.3. Last year's focus on improving processes and professional relationship between panel and the fostering service has resulted in a strength based and solution focused panel, which is a positive experience for all who attend. High challenge and high support in a respectful and empathic approach has led to a high level of professional independent scrutiny. This is expected to continue in the next year.
- 2.4. 2023/24 will see a further expansion of central list members which currently sits at 14 members including panel chair. Whilst there is an undoubtable wealth of experience and professional knowledge held by current panel members, the aim is to diversify central list membership and increase breath of knowledge and experience available for the service to call on. Dorset is a large area, with a high number of panels per month – the central list should have a minimum of 20 members.
- 2.5. We have facilitated a hybrid approach and returned to face-to-face meetings. These allow for both in person and virtual attendance (if needed) to allow for an increase in active participation for all involved in each case. Panel have seen

children attend connected care approvals and appropriate portions of annual reviews to hear their voice and views directly. Supporting children to being involved in the conversation about their lives is something panel would welcome more of.

3. Training, development and appraisals

3.1. There has been continued investment in both Panel Members and the meeting itself, in varying forms. There has been commitment shown from all involved to provide an effective and efficient service:

- April 22 - March 23 - monthly feedback meetings with head of service and panel chair as well as monthly meetings with team manager and panel chair.
- April 22 – Oct 22 - appointment, inductions and observations of the 15 newly appointed panel members.
- June 22 - panel chair appraisal completed (positive).
- July 22 - face to face/ hybrid panels commenced.
- August 22 - interviews and appointment of vice chair.
- August 22 - extraordinary panel held on 31st at the request of Corporate Director.
- September 22 - new panel member profile distributed with panel invitations.
- November 22 - annual appraisals for all panel members carried out by panel chair and advanced practitioner. These were a positive experience, which allowed for reflection and future development actions to be discussed, all panel members have received a written account of their appraisal. There is a strong pool of knowledge and experience, both professional and personal.
- December 22 – development of independent quality assurance feedback. This includes identifying strengths, exemplary reports and social work practice, identifying the individual for internal recognition. It also highlights any practice concerns, areas of vulnerability for the applicants and service, and identifies any gaps in paperwork or statutory checks which may have been missed, offering advice and highlighting themes and trends.
- January 23 - IT training morning – Teams
- February/March 23 - planning underway to commence Children in Care fostering panel.
- March 23 - attachment ½ day training for panel members
- March 23 - panel chair attended fostering team meeting further building on partnership/ relationship building.
- March 23 developing a training programme for workforce development on role, function and values and behaviours at panel.

4. Case type and recommendations

Case Type	Total Presented	Positive Recommendation	Deferments	Negative Recommendations
New Approvals	35 Mainstream - 12 Connected Persons - 23	34 Mainstream – 12 Connected Persons – 22	0 Mainstream – 0 Connected Persons – 0	2 Mainstream – 0 Connected Persons - 2
Regulation 25 Extension	20	5	0	0
Resignations	33 (plus 3 deregistration)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Foster carer reviews 1 st and 3 rd year, review after allegation	1 st year - 26 3 rd year - 19 Allegation - 13	1 st year – 26 3 rd year - 19 Allegation – 11	1 st year – 0 3 rd year – 0 Allegation – 2	1 st year – 0 3 rd year – 0 Allegation – 0
Other – reviews change to status, ADM requested early reviews.	Change of status 8	Change of status 7	Change of status 1	Change of status 0
TOTAL CASES	139			

5. Strengthening opportunities identified in previous reports

5.1. Pre-panel preparation sheets are now completed jointly in Teams and submitted to the chair in advance of panel to enhance the effectiveness of panel's questions and timings to be respectful of proceeding presentations. This is shared on the morning of panel with those attending and is very much a flexible working document- these have been a great success and have had the additional benefit of supporting business support with minutes.

- 5.2. Independent QA feedback sheets – these are now being completed completely independently and distributed appropriately via advanced practitioner to team managers, ADM and fostering services manager– I have been advised that they are used by some workers and evidence for their professional registration as well as their one-ones and appraisals which is great.
- 5.3. The working relationship has gone from strength to strength. Communication and transparency has improved greatly and will remain a priority focus.
- 5.4. There have been a number of panels cancelled in these 12 months, but the ones that have progressed have utilised panel time better with more cases coming to each panel, particularly noticeable since December 2022. We are anticipating that with the new reviewing officer in post this will improve further in the coming 12 months.
- 5.5. Panel is currently without a permanent panel coordinator and wanted to praise the business support team for the way in which they have supported panel developing at pace and supported the induction of new members alongside ensuring all documents and panel requirements were met during some challenging times.
- 5.6. Minutes are now reaching panel members within 48 hours. They are concise, accurate, full and generally great quality which is a significant improvement from where they were last year. They are finalised by panel chair and with Agency Decision Maker (ADM) generally within 7 days – this has a positive impact for all awaiting ADM Decisions.

6. Themes and Observations

- 6.1. Delays in the presentation to panel of reviews post allegation or standards of care, has been highlighted this year by the panel chair. Panel remain determined that Standards of Care should be presented to panel without delay, to ensure that the focus remains on the child and the care they are receiving. I believe this is being proactively addressed, with the service managing this, alongside the need to prioritise current reviews. The recently appointed second reviewing officer should help in the timeliness of reviews reaching panel.
- 6.2. On the occasion where a deferral or return to panel has been advised, better tracking is required to ensure timely return to panel.
- 6.3. 'Voice of the child' being evidenced in panel documentation could be strengthened further; this is not just what is written by a child but can be evidenced in a variety of ways. It is planned that this will be an area for development at a panel planning day to look at new ways of gathering this feedback both directly and indirectly in the future, this is ongoing and continues to be explored.
- 6.4. A recent observation, in particular of the final 4-6 months of the year, panel have noticed reports from some foster carers describing ways in which children could

be better supported by their social workers through strengthening communication and working together so that children are not needing to re-tell their story.

- 6.5. Reports that are being presented are consistently improving, as is the internal quality assurance of paperwork prior to panel receiving it. These are generally excellent.
- 6.6. Panel are working with the childcare teams to ensure that there is good communication and that connected carer applications and viability assessments are timely following the placement of a child. In addition to ensure that the Independent QA feedback is utilised more efficiently to serve both teams in getting the feedback they need
- 6.7. There have been 3 differing ADM decisions. Helpful discussions with ADM and panel members for learning purposes have taken place post ratification. Panel remain confident in their reasoning for a negative recommendation and respect that the final decision lies with the Agency. This evidences openness for challenge and learning.
- 6.8. Previous challenges with panel members receiving minutes post panel have been resolved and the challenges of getting these to be ADM ready i.e. fullness and accuracy have also been resolved. This process is now efficient and correct. As chair, I continue remain mindful of care leavers making a subject access request to see how recommendations about their life were made and with what evidence, language, comments, or lack of information can have a lasting and detrimental effect on care leavers.
- 6.9. Panel are impressed with how well all the social workers have adapted to our additional questions which focus additionally on therapeutic practice, mindfulness/wellbeing, equality and diversity as well as contextual care i.e online safeguarding, with most building this into their reports as standard practice now. We are also impressed with how well prepared fostering social workers are to present to Panel, often answering our questions in their opening summary.
- 6.10 During this review period we have had 12 panels cancelled, but this is no longer happening last minute or when paperwork has been sent out. I believe this is due to the diligence and forward planning of the advanced practitioner and business support colleagues who remain determined that further progress is made.
- 6.11 I have found managers to be transparent and accessible, valuing the input of panel observations as well as having a keen and proactive desire to ensure strength-based working with panel chair, whilst enabling panel meetings to retain the independent quality assurance. There is a commitment to continue to strengthen communication, have clearly documented policies and processes to avoid reactive working. The provision of loving, safe, stable and secure homes for all children remains at the forefront for all.

7. Developmental work & future plans

- 7.1. There is a commitment from the panel chair to continue working closely with senior managers, to continue developing open and strength-based communication, and feeding back to panel members on this work regularly.
- 7.2. Now the panel members profiles have been updated and are more accessible to applicants prior to panel, the next step is to share these with Children in Care so they can feel part of the process and understand the backgrounds and experiences of panel members who are making their recommendations about their lives.
- 7.3. The panel chair is working with Dorset's Children in Care Council to establish a pre-approval panel meeting for applicants (Mainstream) to attend, replicating the format of fostering panel, but with Children in Care as chair, vice chair and panel members asking questions. This could be part of the assessment process, and their feedback could be included with the information fostering panel receives. We aim to run 4-6 annually during half terms – first one in August 2023.
- 7.4. Recruitment of a second vice chair and advertise for more central list members.
- 7.5. Ensure foster carers have access to a warm drink etc whilst they are waiting to meet with panel members.
- 7.6. Pilot therapeutic assessments for both mainstream and kinship care – I believe Dorset is the first Local Authority in England to pilot this, this is excellent and shows how much Dorset cares for its children and values/champions its foster carers.

8. User feedback

- 8.1. Business support are currently emailing for feedback post panel. I have received feedback during regular check ins with managers this includes:
 - 33 pieces of written feedback have been received from carers and applicants and professionals. These identified their experience at panel as being sensitively treated, experiencing empathy, being helped to feel at ease, feeling valued, listened to and being asked skilful relevant questions, receiving 4/5 across the board for overall experience at panel.
 - Social workers are generally feeling positive about attending panel and improvements in process are being noted.
 - Observations from head of service *'it was a real privilege to have been able to join Fostering Panel - it is clearly well led and there was so much attention given to ensuring carers feel welcome and comfortable. Panels members are really*

invested in making the best decisions for children - it was a really great experience'

- New social workers observing – they have found this opportunity rewarding and appreciated being able to witness the whole process report-formulating of recommendations and rational.

9. Conclusion

9.1. Stability has been achieved, relationships have been built, the processes are more efficient and generally panel is a positive experience for all who attend. There is a mutual respect. This is now a strength based panel which has high challenge and provides robust and thorough independent overview and scrutiny. I wanted to thank the advanced practitioner in particular – her robust and skilled quality assurance of paperwork, understanding of the legal framework , best practice and regulations is an asset to Dorset Council.

9.2. In conclusion, I would like to thank all of Dorset's fostering panel members, the business support team, ADM and senior managers for their commitment to ensuring that the most vulnerable children in our care are provided with the highest quality foster care possible, showing continued dedication in striving to achieve best outcomes for all children.

10. Financial Implications

None identified.

11. Well-being and Health Implications

None identified.

12. Environmental Implications

None identified

13. Other Implications

None identified

14. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as: Low
Current Risk: Low
Residual Risk: Low

15. Equalities Impact Assessment

N/A

16. Appendices

None

17. Background Papers

None

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Corporate Parenting Board

25 May 2023

Fostering Service Annual Report

For Recommendation to Council

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: Gerry Connell, Service Manager for Fostering and Supported Lodgings.

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 require that the Fostering Services provides written reports on the management, outcomes, and financial state of the fostering service. This Annual Fostering Service Report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the Fostering Services in the Dorset Council area as required by statutory guidance. The Annual Fostering Service Report must be presented to Corporate Parenting Board.

This report details the advancements that the fostering service has made over the 2022 / 2023 reporting year, particularly with the launch of Mockingbird, but also with the embedding of Dashboard which has seen a marked improvement in compliance and key performance indicators. The service has also been able to recruit permanent staff which has provided stability and continuity and has led to foster carers and in turn children and young people feeling more supported.

The national challenge of recruitment of foster carers caused by the cost of living crisis, the Ukrainian crisis (potential carers providing homes to refugees) and the hangover from the pandemic has impacted upon Dorset. but the service has risen to the challenge by providing an uplift to foster carer skill fees and with the speed that the Mockingbird project has been built there are positive signs for 2023 that enquiries and interest in Fostering in Dorset is rising.

Recommendation: Members of Corporate Parenting Board are requested to note the content and actively consider and comment upon the strengths and future recommendations.

Reason for Recommendation:

To be assured that the report had identified the strengths and areas for development that will strengthen the work we do as Corporate Parents and ensure that children and young people in Dorset will be happy and safe and have opportunities to reach their goals.

1. Introduction and synopsis

- 1.1. The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 require that the Fostering Services provide written reports on the management, outcomes, and financial state of the fostering service. This report provides an overview of activity from the last financial year, April 2022 to March 2023 and the plans from the service for the forthcoming year (April 2023 to March 2024).
- 1.2. The service has had a very busy year and has also been faced with the challenges resulting from the cost-of-living crisis, the continued issues arising from the pandemic and also the Ukrainian crisis. The service has however continued to develop with a focus upon the support provided to our wonderful carers whose commitment, resilience, and skill to ensure that children's needs are met remains outstanding. Performance data has evidenced the strengthening of the service which has also seen near capacity staffing with permanent members of staff (95%).
- 1.3. However, the highlight of the year has been the commencement and implementation of the Mockingbird Program which saw the first constellation 'Pegasus' launched on the 12th November 2022 and the second 'Orion' launched on the 25th March 2023.
- 1.4. Excitingly the third constellation is due to launch on the 29th April with the fourth and fifth to follow later in the year. The program has moved with pace with the evidential knowledge that Mockingbird provides placement stability, retains foster carers, and improves the outcomes for children. This also evidences the ambition of Dorset Council and the fostering service.
- 1.5. With the ongoing cost of living crisis providing such a challenge Dorset Council has responded by agreeing a 15% uplift from the 1st April 2023 in foster carer skill fees and coupled with a 12.43% rise in national fostering allowances, will ensure that Dorset Council remains competitive when recruiting new carers. With the implementation of Mockingbird, the future looks positive.
- 1.6. The transformation program for fostering continues with a focus upon:
 - Improving outcomes for children through placing more children locally enabling them to maintain relationships with friends, family, and community.

- Delivering value for money, reducing spend on external placements.
- Ability to compete in the market, increasing the number and range of local foster carers with the skills and competencies required to meet our needs.
- Supporting foster carer resilience through the delivery of high-quality supervision and training and access to specialist support when needed.
- Ensuring there is a sufficient number of foster carers with the right skills in the right location to enable appropriate matching.

1.7. The development of the service has continued with:

- The embedding of the Fostering Dashboard with access granted to both managers and social workers which has led to significantly increased compliance to KPI's in respect of such areas as:
 - Foster Carer Supervision
 - Unannounced visits
 - Safer care plans
 - Reviews
- The fostering service had a vigorous staff recruitment campaign to meet its sufficiency needs which has resulted in a workforce that is both permanent and sufficiency led.
- The completion of a review of fostering regulations to ensure that there was full compliance of national minimum standards.
- The implementation of both regular in-service dip sampling and safeguarding dip sampling occurring with every fostering review.

2. Recruitment, Assessment, Approval and De-registration.

2.1. On 31st March 2023 there were 169 Dorset Council fostering households, of which 116 were mainstream households, 52 were connected persons (approved and temporary approved) and 1 household was foster to adopt/early permanence.

2.2. On 31st March 2023 there were 179 children and young people living in 169 in-house fostering placements which included mainstream, approved and temporary approved connected persons.

3. Recruitment

3.1. In this reporting period 2022/23, the Fostering Assessment Team has recruited a total of 59 fostering households of which 10 were new mainstream fostering

households. There were 47 connected persons recruited and 2 foster to adopt placements. This equated to 21.54% of newly approved foster carers being mainstream.

4. Enquiries, Assessments and Approvals

4.1 In the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 there were 62 enquiries from the public seeking information about becoming a foster carer. From these enquiries the team completed 41 Initial Visits and 10 new fostering households were approved. This equated to a 16.1 % conversion rate from enquiry to approval which compares to an estimated conversion rate of 10% nationally. (Fostering Network). To ensure that this high conversion rate is achieved the following actions are undertaken.

- Enquirers are welcomed positively, provided with a personal service, and responded to within 24 hours.
- Prospective carers are given clear, engaging verbal and written information that highlights what Dorset Council Fostering can offer at every touch point with a consistent message.
- The application process is smooth and efficient with fostering carers approved as standard within 26 weeks.

4.2 As of 31st March 2023, there were a further 22 new fostering assessments in progress which includes 9 mainstream households and 13 Connected Persons. Of the mainstream fostering assessments, all, (subject to positive assessments) will be approved by June 2023.

5. De-registration

5.1 Nationally 13% of the foster carer workforce are retiring or leaving every year.

5.2 In this reporting period, 29 mainstream fostering households (compared to 26 in the previous year), and 47 Connected Persons were deregistered from fostering. Reasons for deregistration are as follows:

- Mainstream

27 resigned from fostering.

2 initiated by the fostering service.

- Connected

42 children moved on either returning home or becoming independent.

14 SGO's awarded.

1 carer resigned.

This has resulted in an overall loss of 21 fostering households (19 Mainstream and 2 connected persons).

6. Recruitment and Marketing

- 6.1 Recruitment has proved to be a significant challenge for fostering nationally with the government responding to this through the publication of 'Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation' February 2023. The recruitment of foster carers nationally is currently a significant issue with OFSTED statistics from 1st April 2021 - March 2022 indicating that 5435 fostering households deregistered compared to 4035 that were approved with 1 in 8 fostering households leaving.
- 6.2 The aims of the Recruitment Strategy are:
- To improve local placement choice and stability for children and young people in Dorset, particularly for teenagers.
 - To increase the number of black and minority ethnic foster carers.
 - To recruit carers for our children and young people with disabilities.
 - To recruit carers to the Harbour.
 - To increase the number of in-house placements and reduce the usage of independent fostering agencies and residential care.
 - To provide an effective, high quality and best value fostering service to meet the needs and numbers of the looked after population.
 - To ensure that all people who are interested in becoming foster carers are welcomed without prejudice, responded to promptly and given clear information about recruitment, assessment, approval, and support services.

7. Marketing

- 7.1 The year saw the implementation of a new fostering image with an external marketing agency working in tandem with the fostering service and colleagues from the communications team. Alongside this is a new standalone micro-site which is both dynamic and informative. The external marketing agency has also been used to support targeted Google advertising and this has provided focussed and informed campaigns. This has been particularly useful when highlighting the benefits of fostering with Dorset Council, with such innovations as the Mockingbird Project. The service has been made more competitive and a platform has now been provided to attract both individuals interested in fostering for the first time and foster carers currently with other agencies.
- 7.2 The service now has the ability to monitor all digital marketing activity and to allow focussed and targeted advertising. This level of detail also allows for the fact that many foster carers take a prolonged period to decide on fostering, sometimes over a number of years and it is vital that their interest is maintained. This is supported

through the provision of good information and the sharing of current foster carers experiences.

- 7.3 The service is currently finalising planning for the Foster Care Fortnight campaign which runs from the 15th May – 28th May. This is an annual campaign started by the Fostering Network and is designed to raise awareness around fostering and the extraordinary role of carers.

8. Face to Face Recruitment Events

- 8.1 Face to face recruitment has been built upon over the past 12 months with attendance at events across Dorset. This has ranged from shows and events to family friendly venues. Information stands have been setup at supermarkets, coffee shops and other areas where a significant footfall is located. Significantly this has been developed with our foster carers who have been able to provide the service with their local knowledge, expertise, and time. Word of mouth still remains the primary means of recruiting new foster carers.
- 8.2 In all the team undertook 68 face to face events across Dorset from March 2022 – March 2023.

Further engagement includes:

- Monthly online drop-in events hosted on TEAMS. These have been open to the general public and advertised via our social media formats, alongside invites being sent to potential carers that have made an early enquiry with us. The drop-ins are hosted by the Enquiries Officer and are supported by current Dorset foster carers and social workers from the Fostering Assessment Team. These are held in the evenings to ensure they are accessible for potential applicants who may be working during the day.
 - Initial Enquiry Calls and Home visits- These are an opportunity for potential carers to have a 1:1 discussion and to gain further information about fostering to see how it will fit for their family.
 - Social media campaigns via our online formats- Facebook, Instagram and magazine advertising in local magazines delivered to households.
- 8.3 All of our events are shared via the communications team to ensure members of the public know where we are and where they can attend to gain further information. We are also working in partnership with Dorset Foster Carers Association to hear the voice of current carers and their views on areas we could develop to support our recruitment program.

9. Fostering Panel

- 9.1 Under the Fostering Service (England) 2011 Regulations Fostering Services are required to appoint a foster panel. Under Regulation 25 the fostering panel is required to:

- To make a recommendation as to whether the applicant is suitable to be a foster carer and the terms of the approval.
- To consider the first annual review for newly approved foster carers, as well as reviews following the managing allegations process, and where foster carers are seeking a change in the terms of their registration status.
- To recommend whether a person still is suitable to be a foster carer, and whether the terms of their approval (if any) remain appropriate.
- To give advice or make recommendations on other matters or cases referred to by the fostering service provider, including terminations of approval.
- The fostering panel must also advise, where appropriate, on the procedures under which reviews in accordance with Reg. 28 are carried out by the fostering service provider, and periodically monitor their effectiveness.

In addition, the National Minimum Standards 2011 requires that:

- Panels provide quality assurance feedback to the fostering service provider on the quality of reports being presented and the timeliness of assessments and decisions.

- 9.2 Fostering panel continues to be held on consecutive days once a fortnight on Tuesday and Wednesday every other week.
- 9.3 There are currently 16 members on the central list including the panel chair. A panel is quorate when at least 5 members are in attendance. This must include the Chairperson, a social worker and at least three other members. The increase in the number of central list members has provided resilience and most significantly a wide breadth of experience and knowledge.
- 9.4 The panel during the reporting period of 2021 – 2022 had been meeting virtually but positively meetings are now held in person. The panel has developed during this time period led by our wonderful chair Lianne Chorley and with the strong partnership built with the panel advisor the feedback from both professionals and foster carers is very positive.

10. Dorset Approved Fostering Households and Beds

- 10.1 As of the 31st of March 2023, there were 437 children who were being looked after by Dorset Council. Of these 307 or 70% of all children in care were being looked after by foster carers either through an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) or with Dorset's own in-house fostering service.
- 10.2 Of the 307 children in foster care, 180 or 59% were placed within Dorset Council Foster Carers and 127 or 41% were placed with IFA carers.
- 10.3 The table below shows the number of approved households by type, the optimum number of registered placements and the number of placements used by type.

Type of Fostering Household	Total Number of Fostering Households	Total Number of Beds by approval	Total Number of Children Placed
Mainstream Including Parent and Child	116	268 (This includes respite and short break carers)	126
Connected Persons	52	52	52
Foster for Adoption	1	1	1
Total number of Households	169	321	179

- 10.4 The combined number of all types of approved fostering households including Short Breaks, Connected Persons, and Foster to Adopt is 169. The optimum number of placements provided through the Fostering Service is 321, and the number of fostering beds used was 179.
- 10.5 The current utilization rate of foster children to mainstream fostering households is 1.09.
- 10.6 Fostering households may be approved for one, two or three children. Often the approval can be for one or two if siblings. This is usually due to bedroom space available and in Dorset we allow siblings (if appropriate) to share bedrooms. For the purpose of reporting the number of beds approved, the maximum number is reported. On the 31st March 2022 there were 142 fostering beds not in use which remains equitable with the figure of 143 last year.
- 10.7 There may be a number of reasons why fostering beds are not in use which may range from matching to being on hold due to ill health, personal or family circumstances. Foster carers may also be placed on hold by the service due to complaints or safeguarding concerns. It is also common for fostering households not to be used to the maximum number of beds they have available because of the needs of children already placed with them.
- 10.8 It is important to differentiate between fostering households that have vacancies and have no foster children placed (primary vacancies) and those that have vacant beds but do have other foster children in place (secondary vacancies). Likewise, fostering households that are on hold without any foster children placed have primary beds on hold and those that have children in placements but have additional unused beds have secondary beds on hold.

11. Fostering Reviews

- 11.1 The foster carers annual review of approval addresses all relevant aspects of the National Minimum Fostering Standards and Regulations 2011. The reviews are initiated by the Fostering Social Worker with a written summary of achievements and significant events within the foster carers home over the preceding year.
- 11.2 A Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer convenes and chairs an independent annual review meeting. A report is then either presented to Panel and endorsed by the Fostering Panel Agency Decision Maker or submitted to the Senior Manager for Fostering who is the Agency Decision Maker for non-Panel reviews. All the completed reviews are quality assured by the relevant Team Managers who monitor compliance with the regulations before final agreement.
- 11.3 Over the last 12 months, the Fostering review process has continued to be developed with 81% of annual reviews completed which has shown a marked improvement of 20% compared with the figure reported last year. This has primarily been achieved through the strong partnership working with the fostering reviewing service. There is a weekly meeting between the two services with oversight from the service managers ensuring that outstanding or delayed annual reviews can be tracked and individual action plans completed. The fostering review service manager provides quarterly reports to QPAG (Quality Assurance Performance Group) to share progress and to further strengthen practice and performance in this area.
- 11.4 Of significance is the improvement in quality assurance which has been built upon every review now being audited by the fostering reviewing officers. This has in turn led to an overall improvement in fostering household compliance and data and the quality of review reports.
- 11.5 The priorities remain within the service to:
- Complete fostering reviews within 11 months to improve timeliness and meet statutory requirement.
 - Ensure the understanding and commitment from supervising social workers, QAROs and childcare social workers to contribute and inform the statutory review. This includes providing all the relevant information within the required timescales.
 - Maintain high expectations in the standards of fostering reviews to ensure our foster carers have the skills, training, and support to meet the individual needs of our children & young people.
 - Embed the audit framework within the FRO process to regularly highlight areas of strength and development. This will enable learning and improvement in practice from any emerging themes.
 - Establish regular feedback from foster carers as part of the review process.
 - Use the escalation process to drive standards and highlight key areas for managers and senior management oversight.

12. Foster Carer's Support

- 12.1 Ensuring that foster carers feel valued is vital to maintain a strong service and to ensure that foster carers are retained. The Dorset Foster Carer Association stated in March that 99% of Dorset Council foster carers felt supported by the fostering service. Both the DFCA and the service will continue to strive together in partnership to ensure that every foster carer feels their needs and in-turn the needs of their children are met.

13. Support Groups

- 13.1 Support groups are now conducted face to face. These groups provided a regular opportunity for carers to come together supported by fostering social workers to discuss a range of topics.
- 13.2 One of the key developmental areas of the service is to further develop the scope, availability, consistency, and attendance of support groups.
- 13.3 Groups are now due to launch across Dorset with venues including the North, South, West, Poole and Weymouth and Portland. Significantly rather than groups being run by one or two social workers there will be attendance by all social workers involved with that group of carers and managers will also be attending on a regular basis.
- 13.4 It has also been identified that consistency is a key requirement of the groups so in partnership with our foster carers a single agenda will be agreed which will include information sharing, training and development and keynote speakers.

14. Foster carer Forums

- 14.1 November 2022 saw the launch of the first forum just outside Dorchester with a further forum taking place in the North and 3 additional forums booked for 2023. The feedback from foster carers has been very positive with an opportunity to listen to service development and updates, partake in service planning and speak directly to senior managers from across children's services. This has allowed the service to listen to foster carers and incorporate their views and ideas into ensuring that the needs of children in Dorset continue to be met.

15. Therapeutic Support

- 15.1 The Fostering Team, work in partnership with the Clinical Commissioning Group to promote the emotional wellbeing of fostered children and young people. A total of 18.5 hours of Clinical Psychology support continues to be provided through 2 part time clinical psychologists.

15.2 There has been a focus upon developing a service that is proactive rather than reactive and in order to achieve this the following pieces of work have been undertaken.

- The development of a working group to improve and redesign therapeutic provision for all looked after children.
- Regular meetings between the fostering service and the clinical psychologists to continue to adapt provision to meet both the needs of children but also our foster carers.
- The commencement of working alongside Sarah Naish (National Association of Therapeutic Parents) to trial a new strengths based therapeutic assessment for mainstream foster carers and also to develop and pilot a strengths based therapeutic assessment for connected persons.

16. Child's Voice

16.1 Listening to children's voices is key to improving fostering care practice. Throughout March 2023 the fostering service took part in the Coram Voice Bright Spots survey. The survey has three underlying principles:

- Focus on what children and young people say about their lives and what is important to them.
- Ensure the views and experiences of children influence service development and strategic thinking.
- Share good practice between local authorities by encouraging opportunities for learning and development.

16.2 The Fostering Service actively supports children and young people to share their views about how they are being cared for and supported by the Fostering Service.

16.3 This includes support for keeping in touch with their family and friends, support with education, hobbies and interests and planning for the future. Views are shared ahead of child in care reviews and as part of the foster carer's annual review.

16.4 Children in foster care also have access to a children's advocate. This service is provided independently through NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service) who are also exploring the potential of using digital workflow to improve their capacity and raise the profile of advocacy with children, young people, colleagues, and our partners. NYAS are also helping us to understand the "distance travelled" by children and young people by monitoring how they use advocacy over time to share their views – this feedback will also be used to inform how we can change the way we work to make it easier for children and young people to share their views as directly as possible.

16.5 The Youth Voice Team are also working closely with our Fostering Service to take a 'whole family approach' to engagement, where foster carers, their birth families,

and the children they foster are able to attend events together, creating an opportunity to engage with foster families at the same time.

- 16.6 The Christmas event at Carey Camp Wareham was one of many successful activities undertaken which saw wonderful participation from foster carers but most of all saw children and young people simply enjoying themselves.

17. Delegated authority

- 17.1 Dorset Council Children's Services continue to work to ensure that foster carers have delegated authority to make certain decisions for the children they care for. A delegated authority agreement is completed at the point of the initial placement planning meeting which provides clarity and enables foster carers to make common sense, everyday decisions about the children and young people they care for, for example allowing them to go to friends' houses for sleepovers, signing consent forms for school trips and even arranging haircuts. Completion of delegated Authorities is tracked weekly at Leadership Oversight to ensure timely completion by social workers.

18. Dorset Foster Carer's Association (DFCA)

- 18.1 The Dorset Foster Carer's Association was formed in March 2021 by a number of the foster carers from Dorset with the aims of:

- Providing strong channels of communication between the Fostering Service and the Association
- Working in partnership with Corporate Parenting and Fostering Services
- Seeking to improve all aspects of fostering
- Promoting good practice
- Representing foster carers as a group
- Organizing and supporting social events for foster carers

- 18.2 The DFCA have continued to be instrumental in supporting the fostering service and they have worked in partnership to challenge, provide innovative ideas and work alongside the team.

This has included:

- Supporting with Forums
- Regular meetings with senior managers
- The August Fair
- Partaking in a training working group
- Being involved in a recruitment working group and supporting with activities.

19. Long Service Awards

- 19.1 The foster care award ceremony on the 29th April 2022 was according to the foster carers who attended 'sensational and brilliant'. The keynote speaker was Yvette Stanley, Ofsted National Director – Social Care. The event saw the celebration of the outstanding love, care and kindness Dorset council foster carers provide to Dorset children and their longevity of service. This year will see the event repeated with over 30 carers being recognised including a new pioneering award and the Councillor Andrew Parry Award for outstanding services.

20. Fostering Service Compliance

- 20.1 An improvement and strengthening of the management team has seen a marked rise in compliance particularly in respect of supervision visits which are currently at 95% timeliness and also ensuring that all households are reviewed in case supervision every 8 weeks. In addition to this dip sampling on a monthly basis and fostering reviewing audits undertaken on every review have meant that there is a greater scrutiny of the support being provided to our foster carers.

21. Complaints and Allegations

- 21.1 The Fostering Service always takes any complaints and allegations against foster carers very seriously and all complaints and allegations are thoroughly investigated. Wherever possible we will attempt to resolve complaints informally, but these can be escalated should the complainant remain dissatisfied.
- 21.2 All Allegations against foster carers are referred to the LADO and are thoroughly investigated.

22. Complaints

- 22.1 Between 1 April 2022 and 3 March 2023 there were 13 complaints about the fostering service, 6 of which were upheld.
- 1 complaint was from a child which was not upheld with the matter being informally resolved.
 - 8 complaints were made by foster carers, 4 of which were upheld.
 - 1 complaint was made by an 'other professional', which was not upheld.
 - 2 complaints were children and young people's parents, none of which were upheld.
 - 1 complaint was made by 'others' which was not upheld.
 - No complaints were received from children's social workers.
- 22.1 The themes from these complaints identify the need to pause and consider the wider impacts of making decisions to move children from foster placements and

strengthen communication. The focus of the Fostering Service in response to complaints made is to build rapport and heal relationships whilst delivering the best possible outcomes for children and young people in care. As an authority which constantly wants to listen, learn and develop, our approach is to promote the best relationship with our foster carers, young people, and their families by learning from complaints.

23. Allegations

- 23.1 During this reporting period there were 20 referrals to the Designated Officer (aka LADO) concerning foster carers during this reporting period. 13 of these allegations were by children and 7 were from other sources.
- 23.2 After deliberation with the LADO 19 had no further action and 1 case was referred to the fostering panel. 0 cases were referred to DBS, the child protection team or had section 47's undertaken. Whilst 95% of the referrals led to no further action because the criteria were not met for all those situations, additional training and development was identified to ensure that both the foster carers and supporting social workers learnt from the situation.
- 23.2 These 20 referrals were further broken down by the following allegations:
- Physical 6
 - Sexual 1
 - Neglect 6
 - Emotional 7

24. Foster Carer Training

- 24.1 Foster carers have access to a comprehensive learning and development offer through the Foster Carers Training Handbook. During the period 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023 154 training courses were delivered to 317 foster carers. The majority of courses have continued on-line but there have been a number of face to face courses including joint training with the fostering service social workers.
- 24.2 To support the training and development of foster carers they subscribe to The Training Hub which has a wide range of specialist e-learning modules targeted specifically at foster carers. The Foster Carer Training Hub offers the UK's largest cohort of online subjects. All their online training is built upon scientific evidence. This means it is engaging, interactive, and is supported by unique modules which include assessments, course-related handbooks, and an in-depth learning outcome review to ensure the learning outcomes have been met by our carers.
- 24.3 This has been further enhanced by the development of the 'Fostering Together' portal and with foster carers now provided with their own Dorset Council e-mail address there is greater opportunity to access resources from Research in Practice.

- 24.4 2023 has seen the commencement of a review of training and development and leading this is a working group containing foster carers. The focus has been upon developing the service even further in respect of being therapeutically based and in conjunction with health partners a proactive and resilient service is being developed.

25. Budget

- 25.1 The 2022/23 budget for Inhouse Fostering Fees & Allowances totalled £5,320,883 funding an average of 220 placements during the year.
- 25.2 There was an expenditure of £3,995,295 leading to an underspend of £1,325,558.
- 25.3 As previously stated, the cost of in-house placements compares incredibly positively with the costings for both residential and independent fostering agency placements. An in-house placement costs approximately £450 a week less than an independent fostering agency placement.
- 25.4 It is anticipated that usage of in-house provision will increase going forward through the recruitment of foster carers and implementation of Mockingbird.

26. Mockingbird

- 26.1 The standout achievement of the fostering service has been the launch of the Mockingbird Project. Mockingbird is a pioneering programme delivered by The Fostering Network in partnership with 62 fostering services across the UK. The programme nurtures the relationships between children, young people and foster families supporting them to build a resilient and caring community of six to ten satellite families called a constellation.
- 26.2 Relationships are central to Mockingbird. The hub home carer builds strong relationships with everyone in the constellation, empowering families to support each other and overcome problems before they escalate or lead to placement breakdown, which increases protective factors around the children.
- 26.3 Being able to support a diversity of placement types has met the needs of different care-experienced populations and embraces the ethos of the model with child-centred practice, maintaining relationships, emphasising an extended family network, and reducing bureaucracy. The model also offers supportive peer relationships for sons and daughters of foster carers.
- 26.4 The support and encouragement of Fostering Network has allowed the project to move with pace and the service was thrilled to launch the first constellation 'Pegasus' on the 12th November and the second 'Orion' on the 25th March. Excitingly the third constellation 'Draco' is due to launch on the 29th April with at least a further two to follow later in the year.

- 26.5 Pegasus is composed of one hub carer and 10 constellation carers with Orion containing 8 constellation and 1 hub. With the launch of a further 3 constellations, it will mean that over 25% of all Dorset Foster carers will be part of a constellation.

27. Service Developments for 2023 - 2024

27.1 Mockingbird

- 27.1.1 To continue building Mockingbird with a target of 10 constellations by the end of 2024.

27.2 Therapeutic Service

- 27.2.1 The continued development of a therapeutic service through both the work already undertaken with health partners but also through evaluation and the potential embedding of an assessment process for both mainstream and connected persons currently being undertaken with Sarah Naish (Centre for Excellence in Child Trauma).

27.3 Strengthening Foster Carer Recruitment

- 27.3.1 To build upon the significant advantages that the service has gained through the foster carer fee uplift, the implementation of the Mockingbird Project and therapeutic support.
- 27.3.2 The recruitment strategy to focus upon approving local Dorset foster carers with skills in the following areas:
- The Harbour
 - Children with disability
 - Older children

28. Financial Implications

The impact upon Dorset Council financially is significant as having low numbers of in-house foster carers means that there is a reliance upon expensive independent fostering and independent residential provisions.

29. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications

None identified.

30. Well-being and Health Implications

Having a sufficiency of foster carers to provide caring and loving family homes to children and young people means that this is positive for their health and

wellbeing. It is also key to be able to place children within Dorset so that they remain local to their families and known environment. Therefore, having a good and well invested in fostering service means good health outcomes for children and good outcomes for the council budget. We must stress this – we are an essential and very valuable service.

31. Other Implications

None identified.

32. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: N/A

Residual Risk: N/A

33. Equalities Impact Assessment

N/A

34. Appendices

None

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Corporate Parenting Board

25 May 2023

Aspire Adoption Statement of Purpose 1st of April 2023 to 2024 and Annual Report 1st April 2022 to 31st of March 2023

Choose an item.

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: Allan Charlton
Title: Aspire Adoption Statement of Purpose and Annual Report
Tel: 0300 123 9868
Email: allan.charlton@aspireadoption.co.uk

Report Status: Public

Brief Summary: Dorset Council has a duty under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 to establish and maintain an adoption service for its area.

Dorset Council along with BCP Council discharges this duty through a delegation of functions to Aspire Adoption, a Regional Adoption Agency. Dorset retains overall responsibility for its adoption and special guardianship services, continuing to have parental responsibility for its own Children in Care but most adoption and some special guardianship functions are delegated to Aspire Adoption.

The appended report is the sixth annual adoption report presented by Aspire Adoption, summarising the work of the agency in the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023. It has been written to ensure and provides the Council with an opportunity to satisfy itself that the requirements of the Statutory Adoption Guidance 2013 and the Adoption Minimum Standards 2014 are met.

This report provides a summary of the comprehensive self-evaluation of Aspire Regional Adoption Agency

Recommendation: The Corporate Parenting Board Approve Aspire Adoption Annual Report and Statement of Purpose

Reason for Recommendation: The Corporate Parenting Board is satisfied that the Aspire Statement of Purpose accurately describes the activities that the agency discharges on behalf of Dorset Council and the Annual Report satisfies the report that these activities were discharged to a high standard in the last year.

1. Report

1.1 Please see the reports attached.

2. Financial Implications

2.1 **Aspire Adoption Agency delivered services for the financial year 2022 to 2023 over the agreed budget. Aspire Executive Board will have access to the full financial report.**

3. Climate Implications

None

4. Well-being and Health Implications

None

5. Other Implications

None

6. Risk Assessment

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

Current Risk: **LOW**

Residual Risk: LOW

7. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

The service promotes permanence for children through Special Guardianship and Adoption and services to support adopters and Special Guardians. It commissions an independent birth parent service.

The statement of purpose outlines the services commitment to dignity, equality and respect for all who come into contact with the service.

8. **Appendices**

None

9. **Background Papers**

Aspire Adoption Annual Report 2022 to 2023

Aspire Adoption Statement of Purpose 2023 to 2024

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Aspire Adoption Annual Report for Dorset Council

1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023

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- 3. Adopter Recruitment**
- 4. Post Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Services**
- 5. Adoption Panel**
- 6. Birth Parent Services**
- 7. Special Guardianship Assessment**
- 8. Finance**

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- A. Local authority statutory responsibilities in respect of adoption**
- B. Division of roles and responsibilities between Aspire and the local authorities.**
- C. Aspire Organisational Structure and Staffing**
- D. Governance of Aspire Adoption**
- E. Adoption Panel**

1. Introduction

This is the sixth annual report for Aspire Adoption Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).

During the year 2022-2023 there have been significant changes within Aspire, there was a permanent appointment to the Service Manager post in October 2022, following a period of Interim service managers and two changes of Team Manager, and a partner Voluntary Adoption Agency closed.

2. Children's Adoption Performance Data

SBPA

	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Total
Dorset	8	5	6	6	25

Placement Orders

	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Total
Dorset	5	5	3	6	19

Children Placed

	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Total
Dorset	3	6	1	6	16

Adoption Orders

	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Total
Dorset	9	6	9	2	26

Children with PO waiting for a match

	Jun-30	Sep-30	Dec-31	Mar-31
Dorset	11	7	7	10

Children with PO linked to adopters

	Jun-30	Sep-30	Dec-31	Mar-31
Dorset	7	3	0	1

**Children with PO
not yet linked**

	Jun-30	Sep-30	Dec-31	Mar-31
Dorset	4	4	7	9

More children had a Local Authority Should Be Placed for Adoption (SBPA) plan this year, which meant that there was an increase in placement orders made. Dorset have made a total of 25 SBPA decisions in 2022/2023 which is an increase of 127% over the 11 made in total in 21/22. Dorset have had 19 placement orders made in 2022/2023, an increase by 72% from last year's 11.

We have observed that some placement Orders were taking longer to achieve through the Courts, however, since January 2023 the Courts have, begun to refocus on the 26-week timescales for Care Proceedings, which should avoid delay in the placement orders being made.

There has also been an increase in adoption orders made. There were 26 adoption orders granted in 2022/2023 an increase of 85% compared to 14 in 2021/2022.

Aspire has worked hard to increase the range and diversity of adopters enabling children labelled the 'hardest to place' find loving adoptive families, by prioritising the assessment of those families wishing to consider sibling groups and older children. There are currently 11 prospective adopters who will consider older children and sibling groups, and 2 would be happy to explore older children with additional needs.

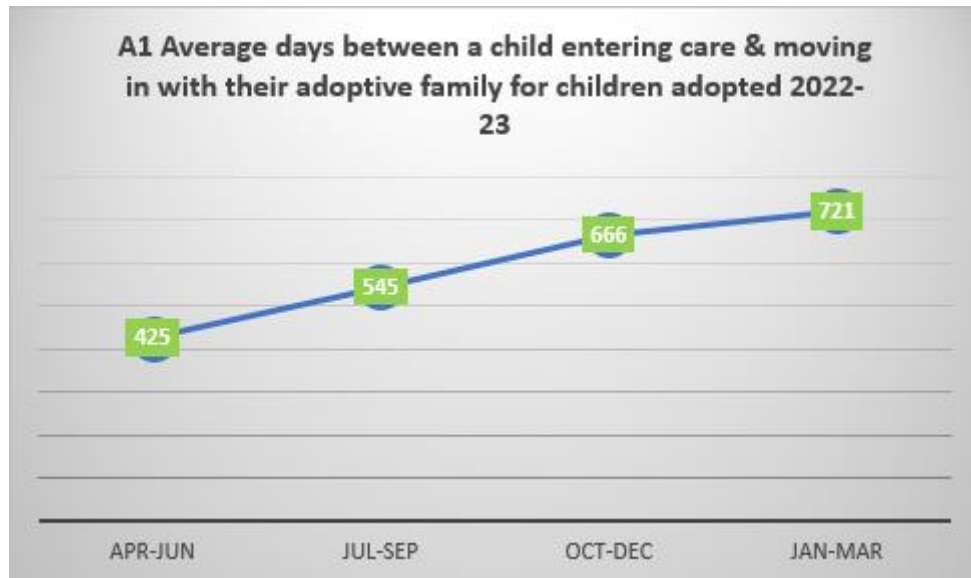
At the end of 2022/2023 there were 9 children with Placement orders not matched to adoptive families. However, since Quarter 4, there are 2 children booked onto matching panel, and 2 children 'linked' to adopters. The remaining children fall into the 'harder to place' category of children, which is defined by the ASG as *as a child who is any of the following: 5 years or over, with an Ethnic Minority (excludes White minorities) background, disabled, or part of a sibling group.*

2.1 Timeliness of adoption

2.1.1

The most up to date comparator figures available at the time of writing are the Coram BAAF quarter 3 figures to the 31st of December. The England average was 478 days and Dorset 666

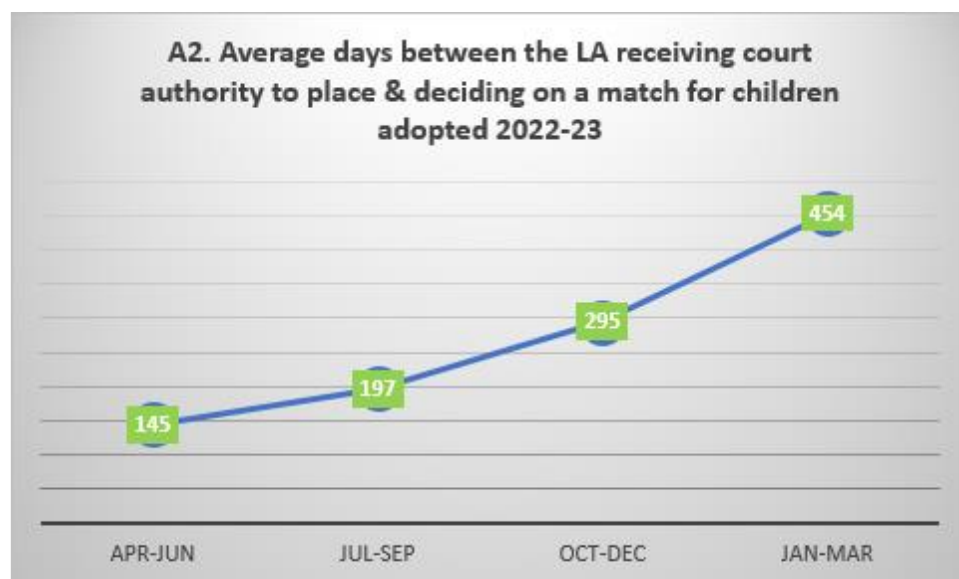
At the end of quarter 4 the Dorset average increased to 721 days .



2.1.2

The most up to date comparator figures available at the time of writing are the Coram BAAF quarter 3 figures to the 31st of December. The England average was 199 days and Dorset 295 days

At the end of quarter 4 the Dorset average increased to 454 days.



While the significant increase for Dorset appears to be worrying, it is due to two children, one of whom experienced an adoption breakdown, being placed in an early permanence placement and going on to be successfully adopted and a child who was placed but required significant support within placement, but has now been adopted. . Figures about timeliness therefore need to be treated with a degree of caution because figures can appear excellent when only placing easier to place children and less positive when children who have been challenging to place have good outcomes.

Aspire have reviewed The Family Finding Team services and have consolidated and updated their offer of Family Finding support to provide a much more consistent service to the cases where they do not hold case responsibility, as this has been identified as an area for development. This was launched in May 2023.

2.2 Early Permanence

EP

	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Total
Dorset	1	0	0	1	2

Early Permanence is where children are placed with prospective adopters on a fostering basis. If the courts decide that adoption is the right plan, they become their adopters. This avoids the additional trauma children suffer from changes in their primary carers.

Early Permanence has generally been used for babies. Aspire has placed babies direct from hospital so there are Dorset children who have only known the one carer. We have also been far more creative in our use of Early Permanence with older children to reduce placement moves to avoid delay.

Previously our adopters have proved that with the right support and information they can manage a high degree of risk, uncertainty, and contact. Two children ended up being returned to their birth families. They worked incredibly hard to make it a smooth transition for the child.

There has been a decrease in the use of Early permanence placements for 2022/23, and whilst discussions have taken place regarding using this approach, they have not always resulted in the child being placed within an Early Permanence Placement.

Aspire have been part of a Pan regional Early Permanence project to develop a range of training packages for different audiences including Local Authority social workers, IROS/QARO'S, CAFCASS and the judiciary. The conference was held on the 19th April 2023 and this was attended by Aspire and members of Dorset's legal services and QARO's.

Aspire also provided an Early Permanence workshop at the Family Justice Conference held on March the 3rd 2023 to raise awareness and 'myth busting' which had a high attendance and received positive feedback from those attending and the designated Judge for Dorset.

To continue to promote the use of Early Permanence, Aspire are arranging Early Permanence workshops/training for Dorset staff, which will be included on the training schedule. It is hoped this training will dispel some myths, raise awareness of the purpose and use of Early Permanence, and increase confidence in using this approach.

Currently 44% of our adopters will consider Early Permanence

Greg's story

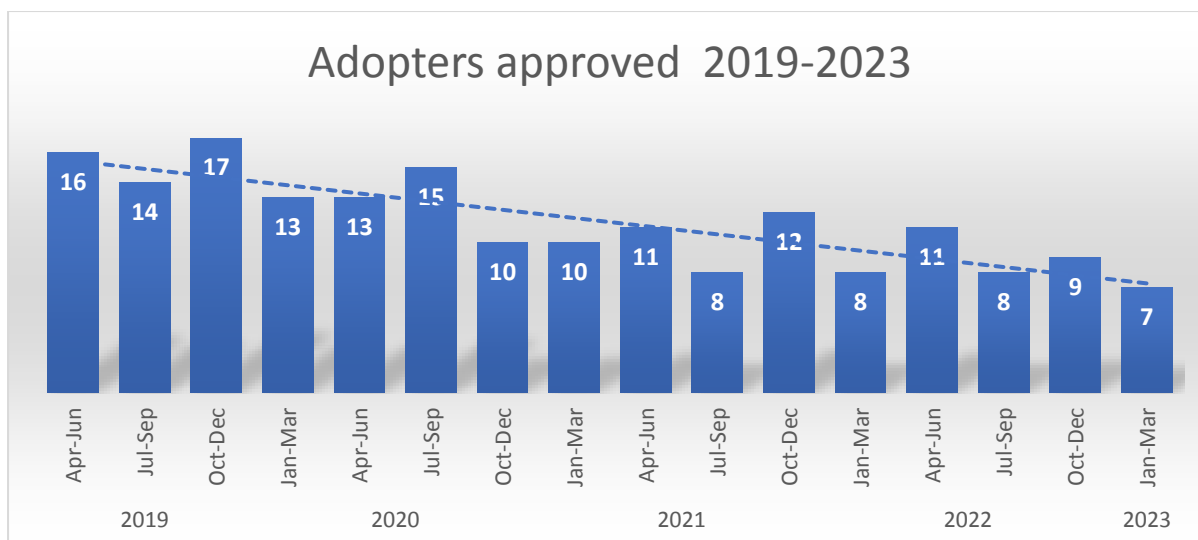
Greg was initially placed in his adoptive placement in July 2021. Unfortunately, this placement was ended in February 2023, following intensive support provided relating to 'blocked' care. To avoid further trauma work was undertaken to identify suitable potential Early Permanence adopters to avoid additional placement moves. Greg was placed with his Early permanence carers in February 2023, and then matched and placed with his Early Permanence adopters in August 2022. Greg was adopted in January 2023.

3. Adopter Recruitment

Aspire recruits a great range of diverse adopters. At any one time, we try to have around 25 - 30 families available to meet the needs of Dorset and BCP children.

Subtle changes to our social media messaging and changes to the induction programme have helped attract adopters for older children, sibling groups and children with additional needs that we require.

We have fine-tuned our messaging and work with adopters to flex around the needs of local children. We do adopt some babies, but we are mainly looking for adopters who will consider older children, sibling groups and children with additional needs.



At any one time we have approximately 25-30 available approved adoptive households. If adopters are not matched with Dorset or BCP children, we support them to explore children nationally.

However, there has been a gradual decline in adopter enquiries and approvals, which is a national trend.

The ASG secretariat report “The number of adopter registrations and approvals have continued to decline, together with the numbers of adopters not yet approved, and adopters approved and waiting to be matched”. They report there were “ 660 Registrations, a decrease of 20% (160n) from Q2 2022/23 and a decrease of 18% (140n) when compared to Q3 2021/22 – 560 Approvals, an increase of 4% (20n) from Q2 2022/23 and a decrease of 27% (210n) when compared to Q3 2021/22” (Adoption and Special Guardianship Quarterly Data Collection Headline Measures: Q3 2022/23)

The closure of Families for Children impacted upon the ability of the Recruitment and Assessment Team to complete some assessments as immediate, and in some cases, intensive work had to be undertaken due to an influx of adopters at various stages of matching and children in placement. In one case this involved completing the support plan and amendments to the

Aspire are improving their website to recruit more adopters, this will include videos from current adopters, and up to date case studies relating to children and sibling groups. Aspire are also aiming to release recruitment information on Social media sites in collaboration with Dorset.

Aspire have also made links with Homes for Good, a faith organisation within Dorset, and we hope to develop this partnership to aid recruitment.

Of the 25 adopters available, 11 are happy to be considered for those older children and sibling groups, and 2 would be happy to explore older children with additional needs.

Interagency adoptions

Aspire supports national adopter sufficiency adopters.

This year Aspire spent £92,934 on adoptive placements and sold £221,629 on placements.

The close relationship and tracking we undertake with Dorset means that by the time the placement order is made, we will know whether Aspire has suitable adopters or not, and immediately look elsewhere to avoid delay for children.

Our relentless focus on finding families for children means that almost all children with a plan for adoption are found families.

4. Post Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Services

Aspire offers support to Dorset adopters and Special Guardians until their children reach adult hood. This is a service that families choose to access. We have worked hard over the last year to eradicate the waiting list and offer an immediate response to families at the lower tiers through a daily duty system.

The cumulative increase in the number of adopters and special guardians eligible for this support continues to be challenge. This is a small team consisting of just under 3 FTE social workers and 4 and half family support workers. We have maximised capacity by reducing bureaucracy.

The service has undertaken a review and introduced a new tiered approach to services, which consists of a duty system, universal support and a targeted Intervention

The duty system is managed by experienced Family Support Practitioners who are able to give advice and guidance and signpost to other services if needed.

The Universal support offer which is inclusive and provides regular newsletters and information via the mailing list and support groups and workshops/training.

A Targeted Support offer for those families needing more than universal services an assessment of need will be carried out. This will be done via a consultation with one of the experienced social workers.

For those families that need targeted support, a worker will be allocated to the family to carry out the identified work on the plan.

Allocations will be on a short-term basis (approx. 3 months) to provide an intensive package of support, to build a parents/carers skills, resilience and confidence to parent the child/ren in their care.

86 parents (Dorset and BCP) attended Aspire training and workshops over 2022-2023. with many more attending the support groups.

The service has strong links with and Early Help and universal services who offer bespoke services for our families.

167 Children (Dorset and BCP) are currently receiving direct social work support, with an allocated worker. It generally takes about 5 days to be allocated.

The Department for Education Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASF)

The post support team help adopters and special guardians to access the ASF fund completing the required assessment and sourcing the therapists using our procurement framework. This has become increasingly important for our families. and the current service, has meant we have been able to support significantly more Dorset families access therapeutic services. The annual claimed funding is.

2019 /20	57 Families	£32,845.99
2020/ 21	130 Families	£186,183.91
2020/22	261 Families	£243,265.26
2022/23	369 Families	£473,685.50

Have the changes to the post support service had a positive impact for families?

Changes were made In consultation with the Adopter and Special Guardianship Forum. While they understood what the service wanted to achieve, there was some anxiety that moving away from a mainly allocated service would reduce the support available to families. However, feedback received has been positive.

The forum conducted an independent survey in January 2022, which their key findings of preference for support were.

- **Social events** (e.g., walk, picnic)
- Therapeutic **support for the whole family** is more important than therapy for the child or support (e.g., self-care) for parents.
- The **monthly support groups** are highly valued.
- The next most preferred support is **Access to ASF, Therapy for the child, and Help with educational settings.**

These key findings have been embedded within the services provided and Aspire are continually working to develop their workshops/training packages available for Adopters and Special Guardians.

There are now Special Guardianship support groups arranged in schools throughout Dorset to enable the Special Guardians to meet up and form links within their local area.

Clive and Harry (4 and 2 years old)

They are living under a SGO with their grandparents.

They called into ASPIRE asking for advice and guidance on parenting two children that have witnessed DV and alcohol/drug misuse in their early years.

The Special Guardians have stated that the worker is “part of the family” and they “don’t know what they would do without the support that has been provided.” There were weekly interventions in the home to model therapeutic parenting and set clear and consistent boundaries for both boys. This has now reduced to once every two weeks and involves one outing a month supporting Nan to feel confident in parenting both young children in a social setting. Clive has a life story book which has supported the family in sharing the children’s experience and their journey. They are also on the waiting list for Foundation of Attachment training (funded by the ASF) and have attended all of the SG meet ups in the school holidays making new connections.

Demand for post support services

This service has seen a continued increase in uptake over the year.

The service has in quarter 4 of 2022/23 had 870 enquires for support.

There have been 132 referrals for ASF support made in the same quarter.

The challenge for the Post Adoption and Special Guardianship Service

It is important that Aspire continues to review post support services closely with the Forum to ensure they continue to be accessible, timely, relevant and have impact. But it is clear that an increasing cohort and increasing demand is the greatest issue for the service.

At present the current change in systems are proving beneficial, and are manageable by the Team, meaning more families are being supported.

5. Aspire Adoption Panel

5.1

Adoption panel has continued to meet virtually twice a month.

This year the panel made: -

35 Approvals

35 Matches

8 De-Registrations

5.2

The panel chair reports that the quality of Prospective Adopter Reports has remained good, as have Adoption Placement Reports.

6. Birth parent services

It is a requirement that the birth family are offered independent support when a placement order is made in respect of their child. Aspire commissioned an independent Birth Family Matters |(BFM) Support Service from Families for Children. This had been recommissioned from April 2022 to 31st of March 2024 with an option to extend for a further 2 years.

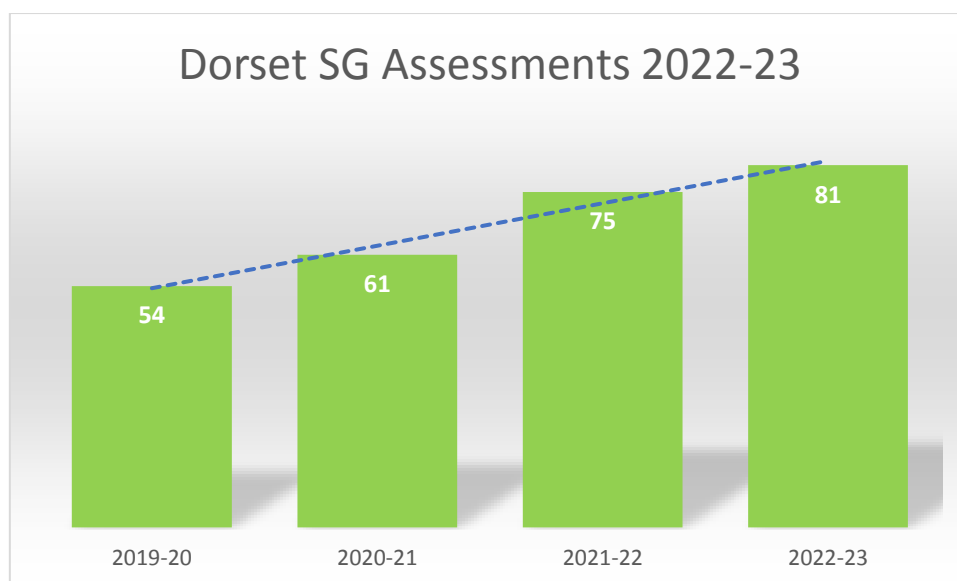
The service consists of 15 hours a week of an experienced social worker, management oversight and agency support. The social worker has at times gained additional external charitable funding to support activities.

However, Families for Children announced that they would be closing on the 31st August 2022. It wasn't possible to undertake a proper procurement exercise in the time available. It was also Important that a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) delivering the service had experience of adoption. The only VAA in the region that met this requirement was Parents And Children Together. Permission was given to consult with PACT.

BCP and PACT separately, had to consider TUPE law and the detail of the contract. A process that would normally take some months was executed in 3 weeks. Although the cost of due diligence, compared to the size of the contract, didn't make business sense PACT took the long view facilitating a larger presence in the region. The contract was let to PACT at the end of August.

The service that was provided was a seamless transition that had no impact upon the families that the worker was engaged with, and the level of service was maintained. The worker is currently engaging with 80 birth families.

7. Special Guardianship Assessment



SG Assessments filed

	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Total
Dorset	18	9	14	21	62

It should be noted that approximately a quarter of the Special guardianship referrals received did not result in a full assessment being completed. This dropout rate is to be expected for a variety of reasons. For example, the family may decide that they cannot offer permanence, they chose to remain as foster carers, more than one family member is being assessed, issues arise in the course of the assessment or the child's plan may change.

The number of Special guardianship referrals from Dorset has risen and Dorset indicate that this is likely to remain the case as it is preferred that children live with their families wherever that is feasible.

During 2022/23 there were 61 Special Guardianship assessments filed with the Court for Dorset, an increase of 97% from the 34 completed in 2021/22.

Dorset and BCP agreed to expand the service by 1 social worker at the May 2021 board. To increase capacity from 100 to 120 pa for both authorities. Aspire has taken 179 referrals assessments in total this year. The Team continues to be under pressure when the referrals increase.

8.5 Special Guardianship Referrals for both Local Authorities

2019-20 110

2020-21 140

2021-22 159

2022-23 179

There were 20 withdrawals of Special Guardians throughout 2022/23, however, these assessments had commenced, and as such workers time was used to complete them.

8.6 Where demand exceeds capacity Independent social workers are commissioned. These are more expensive, and parts of the assessment still must be completed by Aspire and the child's worker.

8. Finance

Aspire is funded 49% by Dorset and 51% by BCP. Considerable work took place to agree a 3-year budget for Aspire from 2022 to 2025.

In terms of this financial year although the figures have not been fully signed off. We are expecting to report that Aspire has come over budget due to a variety of reasons.

The previous head of service agreed an overuse of casual workers to meet demand in the Special Guardianship Assessment Team and Recruitment and Assessment Team. There was agreement for 2 Family Support Practitioners to be employed funded via the Adoption Support Fund, to enable staff to undertake training to provided therapeutic services via the ASF. However, the ASF income could not meet this demand. There were secondments of staff within Aspire to cover posts, that could have been managed without this, and Aspire staff (Social Workers and Team Managers) received additional contractual pay supplements via their host authority in January 2023.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

1. Local authority statutory responsibilities

- 1.1 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 sets out the duty all Local Authorities to establish and maintain an adoption service, to meet the needs in relation to adoption, of children who have or may be adopted, of adults who have been adopted, parents and guardians of such children and persons who have or may adopt a child in their area
- 1.2 On the 1st July 2017 Dorset County Council delegated most of those functions, along with some statutory responsibilities in relation to special guardianship, to Aspire Adoption, a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). The division of responsibilities is detailed in Appendix 1.
- 1.3 Aspire (RAA) is funded by Dorset County Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council to deliver adoption and special guardianship services.
- 1.4 Each local authority retains overall responsibility for their adoption and special guardianship services, continuing to have parental responsibility for their own

Children in Care, but delegating most adoption and some special guardianship functions to Aspire Adoption.

- 1.5 Aspire works closely with colleagues in the voluntary adoption sector, Parents and Children Together (PACT) are represented on the Aspire Partnership Board.
- 1.6 It is a requirement that elected members satisfy themselves that the Local Authority and the Regional Adoption Agency are working together to meet the needs of children requiring permanence through adoption as laid out by the Statutory Adoption Guidance 2013 and the Adoption Minimum Standards 2014.

The 2014 Adoption Minimum Standards can be accessed at
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/336069/Adoption_NMS_July_2014_for_publication.pdf

The 2013 Statutory Adoption Guidance can be accessed at
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/270100/adoption_statutory_guidance_2013.pdf

Appendix B

1. Division of roles and responsibilities between Aspire and the local authorities

- 1.1 Aspire has been delegated all of the local authority statutory responsibilities for adoption, other than the court work leading to Care and Placement Orders.
- 1.2 Aspire has responsibility for recruiting, assessing and supporting prospective adopters, for non-agency adoption work including partner adoptions and intercountry adoptions.
- 1.3 The local authorities retain overall responsibility for their Children in Care, but have delegated case responsibility for the majority of children with adoption plans to Aspire following the granting of a Placement Order.
- 1.4 Aspire is responsible for family finding for all children with adoption plans. The RAA is also responsible for preparing children for a move to adoption, for preparing moving calendars or diaries, undertaking life story work and creating life story books.
- 1.5 Aspire undertakes special guardianship assessments for court on behalf of the local authority as part of care proceedings, or in private law applications.
- 1.6 Aspire provides support to all parties affected by adoption, including adopters, adoptive families, adopted adults and birth relatives, and also to special guardians, families created through special guardianship, and to the birth families whose children are subject to SGOs.

1.7 The table on the following page sums up the division of responsibilities between Aspire and the local authorities.

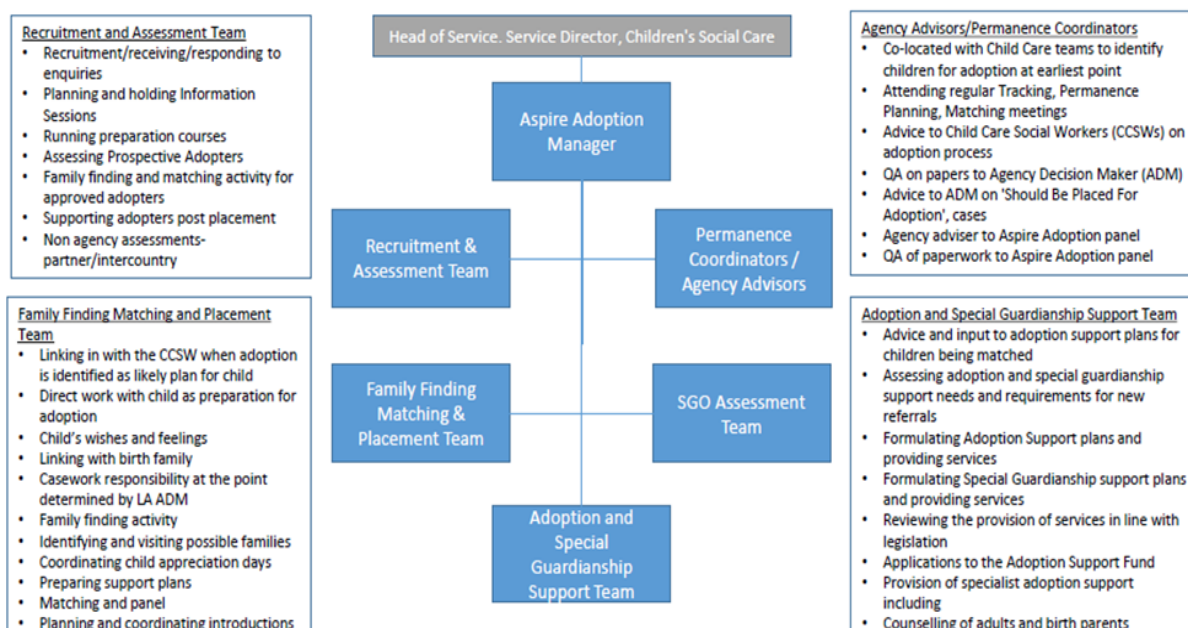
Function	Regional Adoption Agency	Local Authority
RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT		
Marketing and Recruitment Strategy	✓	
Adopter Recruitment and Enquiries	✓	
Assessment of Prospective Adopters – all Stage One and Stage Two functions	✓	
Completion of Prospective Adopter Report	✓	
Agency Decision Maker for approval of adopters	✓	
Post approval training	✓	
Matching	✓	
Post Placement training for Prospective Adopters	✓	
PERMANENCE PLANNING		
Early identification of a child possibly requiring adoption		✓
Tracking and monitoring the child possibly requiring adoption	✓	✓
Support and advice to child care social worker on the adoption process	✓	✓
Sibling or other specialist assessments if commissioned by LA	✓	
Direct work to prepare child prior to placement	✓	
Preparation of the Child Permanence Report		✓
Agency Decision Maker for “Should be placed for Adoption” decisions		✓
Case management prior to the point agreed by the LA ADM		✓
Case management from point agreed by the LA ADM	✓	
MATCHING AND PLACEMENT		
Family finding	✓	
Looked After Child reviews	✓	✓
Shortlist and visit potential families	✓	
Organising child appreciation day	✓	
Ongoing direct work to prepare child prior to placement	✓	
Adoption Panel administration and management	✓	
Agency adviser role	✓	
Agency Decision Maker for Matching prospective adopters and child	✓	
Placement Planning meeting administration and management of introductions	✓	
Support to family post placement and planning and delivery of adoption support	✓	
Ongoing life story work and preparation of Life story book	✓	
Independent Review Officer monitoring of quality of child’s care and care plan		✓
Support prospective adopters in preparation and submission of application for Adoption Order – including attending at court	✓	
Preparation of later life letter	✓	
ADOPTION AND SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP SUPPORT		
Assessment for adoption or special guardianship support	✓	
Developing and delivering adoption and special guardianship support plans	✓	
Agree and administer financial support to adoptive families pre and post Adoption Order		✓
Adoption and special guardianship support delivery including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support groups • Social events • Post adoption/special guardianship training • Independent Birth Relative services • Support with ongoing birth relative contact • Specialist Life Story practitioners • Adoption counselling and training 	✓	
Financial support to adopters and special guardians including adoption and special guardianship allowances		✓
SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS		
Receipt of application or court request for special guardianship		✓

Assessment of applicants for Special Guardianship	✓	
NON-AGENCY ADOPTIONS		
Step parent/partner adoption assessments	✓	
Intercountry adoption assessments and post approval and post order support	✓	

Appendix C

1. Aspire Organisational Structure and Staffing

Aspire Adoption - Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) – Organisation Structure



2. Staffing

- 2.1 There are 43.54 permanent full -time equivalent posts in Aspire with the permanent staffing establishment supplemented by those on casual contracts to increase capacity where needed. Many of the staff work part time, with the total

number of staff comprising of social workers, support workers, and business support staff totalling about 56.

- 2.2 The service is led and managed by the Aspire Adoption Service Manager, Allan Charlton, Allan Charlton is a qualified social worker, has a management qualification and is registered with Social Work England.
- 2.3 The Recruitment & Assessment Team comprises of a team manager, practice manager, and 7.44 social workers. There is included within this one 30hr vacancy. All are registered with Social Work England
- 2.4 The Family Finding, Matching and Placement Team comprises of a team manager, 1 FTE practice manager and 4.3 FTE social workers, all of whom are registered with Social Work England, and 3.64 FTE family support workers.
- 2.5 The Special Guardianship Assessment team has a team manager, practice manager and 5 social workers. All are registered with Social Work England.
- 2.6 The Adoption & Special Guardianship Support team consists of 1 Team Manager, 1 Assistant Team Manager, and 2.75 FTE Social Workers, all of whom are registered with Social Work England, and 4.5 FTE Family Support Practitioners. The Team has a social work vacancy of 18.5 hours following a full-time worker taking flexible retirement. One part time FSP is currently absent, one fulltime FSP will be leaving the service on the 28th April 2023.
- 2.7 There are 2 FTE Permanence Coordinators, who also act as Agency Advisers to the Aspire Adoption Panel and Aspire Agency Decision Maker, and to the Agency Decision Makers in the local authorities in relation to decisions as to whether a child should be adopted.
- 2.8 The service is supported by 7 FTE business support staff including a senior business support officer, a panel administrator, and a marketing, media and monitoring officer.
- 2.9 All of the social workers employed by Aspire are registered with Social Work England, and many of the staff, including support workers, have additional qualifications including skills in a variety of therapeutic interventions such as theraplay, Therapeutic Life story work, sensory integration, mindfulness and DDP (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy).
- 2.10 Aspire also has access to dedicated clinical psychology support for staff and service users.
- 2.11 No agency staff are employed, and any vacancies attract a high standard of applications across all areas of the work undertaken by Aspire. Casual staff add capacity for one off pieces of work in the Recruitment and Assessment Team and the Special Guardianship Assessment Team.

3. Staff training and development

- 3.1 Staff in Aspire have access to training and courses run by Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole Council as the host authority paying for these from the Aspire training budget of £8,000 a year. They have access to external courses, but only dependent on budgetary restrictions. In 2022/23 6 members of staff attended Dyadic Developmental Parenting training stage 2.
- 3.2 Staff have monthly supervision and annual appraisals, and regular team case and practice reflection sessions are facilitated by the clinical psychologists.
- 3.3 A staff forum for all staff in Aspire is held every 6 months to update on Aspire performance data, local and national issues relating to the service and to develop the team service plans.

Appendix D

Governance

The following is taken from the Inter Authority Agreement

SCHEDULE 2 – TERMS OF REFERENCE

Governance Structure



Part 1 – Strategic Partnership Board

1 Name:

The name of the Board for Aspire Adoption shall be the **Strategic Partnership Board** which is established pursuant to an Inter Authority Agreement between Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole ("the Councils") for the creation of a Regional Adoption Agency.

2 Role:

The Board will provide advice, oversight and endorsement of the strategic direction of Aspire Adoption.

3 The Board will:

- 3.1 Provide and review the strategic direction of Aspire Adoption;
- 3.2 Oversee, review and endorse budget setting and make recommendations to the Councils for Aspire Adoption;

- 3.2.1 Oversee, review and endorse the Business Plan annually and make recommendations to the Councils for Aspire Adoption;
- 3.2.2 Attempt to resolve disputes between the Councils under the terms of the Inter Authority Agreement.

4 Accountability and Responsibility:

- 4.1 Each Local Authority is responsible for ensuring that their nominated representative(s) (or named substitute) are available to attend all Board meetings, which will be scheduled in advance.
- 4.2 All members of the Board will be in a position to make decisions within their respective organisation, where appropriate.
- 4.3 All members of the Board will be responsible for reporting to their organisation, through their respective governance arrangements.

5 Meetings of the Board

- 5.1 The Board will meet every six months or at a greater or lesser frequency if it so decides.
- 5.2 The Board will elect a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson from amongst its members.
- 5.3 The Chairperson will agree the dates, times and venues for the meetings of the Board. The meeting timetable will be scheduled over the year, to reflect both planned monitoring and evaluation requirements.
- 5.4 The Chairperson shall normally preside at all meetings of the Board.
- 5.5 The Chairperson will be responsible for agreeing meeting agendas and draft minutes for circulation.
- 5.6 Agendas and papers for the meeting will be sent out at least five working days prior to the meeting in order to provide time for members of the Board to read them and identify actions for their own organisations.
- 5.7 Minutes of meeting will be circulated within 5 working days after the meeting with an action list.

6 Membership:

- 6.1 The Board will consist of:
 - 6.1.1 Portfolio Holder and Executive Director for Children's Services for Bournemouth Borough Council;
 - 6.1.2 Cabinet Member for Learning, Skills and Children's Safeguarding and Corporate Director for Children's, Adults and Community Services for Dorset County Council;
 - 6.1.3 Portfolio Holder and Strategic Director for Children's Services for the Borough of Poole Council.
- 6.2 The Board will consult (so far as it considers proper and appropriate to do so):
 - 6.2.1 Representatives from local Voluntary Adoption Agencies/Families for Children; and
 - 6.2.2 A representative from Stakeholders.

6.3 Members of the Board should:

- 6.3.1 Commit to attending the majority of meetings or nominate a suitable substitute who can attend in their place who will be expected to exercise the powers of the Member for whom they are substituting. Only Board members or their named representatives can attend Board meetings;
- 6.3.2 Uphold and support the Board decisions and be prepared to follow through actions and decisions for the Board proposals and declaring any conflict of interest should it arise;
- 6.3.3 Be prepared to represent the Board at stakeholder events and support the agreed consensus view of the Board when speaking on behalf of the Board to other parties.

7 Voting – Quorum

- 7.1 No quorum is necessary for the routine business and the receiving of reports. However where the Chairperson determines that a critical decision is required there must be a representative from all the Councils.
- 7.2 In the spirit of effective collaboration and partnership working, the Board will always seek to come to agreement through consensus and unanimity following debate and discussion where all the members will be encouraged to participate.
- 7.3 The Members of the Board will be expected to subscribe to the seven principles of public life in their work and decision making. The principles are selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.
- 7.4 Members will be expected to declare any personal interests in the business of the Board and to withdraw from participation where such interests are prejudicial or pecuniary.

Part 2 – Operational Management Board

1 Name:

The name of the Board for Aspire Adoption shall be the **Operational Management Board** which is established pursuant to an Inter Authority Agreement between Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole ("the Councils") for the creation of a Regional Adoption Agency.

2 Role:

The Board will provide support, advice and management to Aspire Adoption to ensure that statutory requirements and the Business Plan is delivered effectively.

3 The Board will:

- 3.1 oversee the implementation of the Aspire Adoption Budget and Business Plan;
- 3.2 oversee the commissioning arrangements and operational performance against agreed local priorities and targets and in line with national priorities and targets.

4 Accountability and Responsibility:

4.1 Each Local Authority is responsible for ensuring that their nominated representative(s) (or named substitute) are available to attend all Board meetings, which will be scheduled in advance.

4.2 This Board will report to the Strategic Partnership Board.

5 Meetings of the Board

5.1 The Board will meet quarterly or at a greater or lesser frequency if it so decides.

5.2 The Board will elect a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson from amongst its members.

5.3 The Chairperson will agree the dates, times and venues for the meetings of the Board. The meeting timetable will be scheduled over the year, to reflect both planned monitoring and evaluation requirements.

5.4 The Chairperson shall normally preside at all meetings of the Board.

5.5 The Chairperson will be responsible for agreeing meeting agendas and draft minutes for circulation.

5.6 Agendas and papers for the meeting will be sent out at least five working days prior to the meeting in order to provide time for members of the Board to read them and identify actions for their own organisations.

5.7 Minutes of meeting will be circulated within 5 working days after the meeting with an action list.

6 Membership:

6.1 The Board will consist of:

6.1.1 Service Director for Children's Social Care for Bournemouth;

6.1.2 Assistant Director – Care and Protection for Dorset;

6.1.3 Head of Children & Young People's Social Care for Poole; 6.1.4 Childrens Services Commissioners from each of the three Parties;

6.1.5 Adoption Aspire Manager.

6.2 Members of the Board should:

6.2.1 Commit to attending the majority of meetings or nominate a suitable substitute who can attend in their place who will be expected to exercise the powers of the Member for whom they are substituting. Only Board members or their named representatives can attend Board meetings;

6.2.2 Uphold and support the Board decisions and be prepared to follow though actions and decisions and declaring any conflict of interest should it arise;

6.2.3 Be prepared to represent the Board at stakeholder events and support the agreed consensus view of the Board when speaking on behalf of the Board to other parties.

7 Voting – Quorum

7.1 No quorum is necessary for the routine business and the receiving of reports. However where the Chairperson determines that a critical decision is required there must be a representative from all the Councils.

- 7.2 In the spirit of effective collaboration and partnership working, the Board will always seek to come to agreement through consensus and unanimity following debate and discussion where all the members will be encouraged to participate.
- 7.3 The Members of the Board will be expected to subscribe to the seven principles of public life in their work and decision making. The principles are selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.
- 7.4 Members will be expected to declare any personal interests in the business of the Board and to withdraw from participation where such interests are prejudicial or pecuniary.

Appendix E-

1. Aspire Adoption Panel

- 1.1 Aspire Adoption operates an Adoption Panel, constituted in accordance with legislation, regulations and guidance. The panel has an independent chairperson, and 22 members on a Central List from which each panel is drawn. There is no legal maximum number of panel members at each panel but in practice, a maximum of 6 or 7 attend each panel, including the panel chair and a social worker. The designated doctor for looked after children in the local authorities funding Aspire is also the agency medical adviser and is a full member of the panel.
- 1.2 The panel is serviced by a panel administrator and has access to legal advice if needed. The professional advice to the panel is provided by the two FTE Agency and Panel Advisors, one of whom attends each Panel to ensure the smooth running and to advise on policies and procedures.
- 1.3 Current membership includes individuals with personal experience of adoption as adopters and adopted adults. It also includes experienced social workers with direct experience of adoption work, a psychotherapist with experience of working in a child and adolescent mental health setting, and panel members with experience of working in an educational setting.
- 1.4 Members of the Central List from which individual panel membership is drawn reflect the diversity of modern society as far as possible, and include those who are single, in heterosexual and same sex relationships. One panel member on the Central List has personal experience of disability. There is some diversity in terms of age, with panel members in their 30s and others who are retired. Although most panel members are of white British ethnic origin, one panel members is of black African ethnicity and another is of Indian descent.
- 1.5 The functions of the panel in relation to adoption matters are.

- to recommend whether prospective adopters are suitable to adopt a child.
 - to recommend whether a proposed match between a child and prospective adopters is a suitable one.
 - In circumstances where a child is relinquished for adoption and no Placement Order is applied for, the panel will recommend whether the child should be placed for adoption.
- 1.6 The panel can also give advice about the numbers and ages of children in relation to prospective adopters, also about post adoption contact, delegated parental responsibility and adoption support. The panel has a consultative role regarding the agency's policies and procedures, and a monitoring role regarding quality assurance and ensuring that the time scales set out in the Adoption & Children Act 2002 are met.
- 1.7 The Aspire Adoption Panel makes recommendations based on detailed written reports prepared by the child's social worker and adoption social worker, and the social worker and team manager's attendance at panel to clarify points if needed.
- 1.8 When considering the approval or deregistration of prospective adopters or a match between prospective adopters and a child, adoptive applicants have the option of attending panel in person, to provide scope to discuss and clarify any issues relevant to the application. Applicants who decide not to attend in person are not disadvantaged in any way and no judgement is made from their decision not to do so although every effort will be made to assist their attendance.
- 1.9 The recommendations and advice of the panel are referred, along with the final agreed minutes of the meeting, to the Agency Decision Maker, for a decision to be made and conveyed to all parties within the time scales laid down in the Adoption & Children Act 2002.
- 1.10 The Panel chair is independent, is an experienced chair and an adopter of 2 children. He attends the Aspire Strategic Partnership Board and presents a report to the Aspire Operational Management Board and Strategic Partnership Board every 6 months in line with standard 17 of the Adoption Minimum Standards, on the quality of reports being presented to the panel. This includes whether the requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 have been met, and whether there is a thorough, rigorous, consistent and fair approach across the service in the assessment of whether a child should be placed for adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the proposed placement. His most recent report is included as Appendix 5.
- 1.11 In 2022/23 the Adoption Panels have all been held virtually to enable full participation of members and adopters.

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Aspire Adoption

Statement of Purpose

2023 - 2024

Introduction

Aspire Adoption is a Regional Adoption Agency, established in July 2017, with delegated responsibility for discharging most of the adoption functions of Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole. From 1 April 2019, because of local government reorganisation, the councils funding Aspire are Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council and Dorset Council. Aspire Adoption working in partnership with the Voluntary Adoption Agency Parents and Children Together (PACT).

Families For Children were another partnership agency, however, they closed on the 31st August 2022.

This statement of purpose has been written in accordance with the Adoption & Children Act 2002 and associated Regulations, and the Adoption Statutory Guidance 2013. It fulfils the requirements of Regulations 2 and 4 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003; Regulations 3 and 24B and Regulations 4 and 24 C of the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003; and of Regulations 5 and 6 of the Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005. It also fulfils the requirements of Standard 18 of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2014. The 2014 Adoption Minimum Standards can be accessed at

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/336069/Adoption_NMS_July_2014_for_publication.pdf

The 2013 Statutory Adoption Guidance can be accessed at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-statutory-guidance-2013>

Principles and Value Statement

The principles of the Children Act 1989, Children Act 2004, the Adoption & Children Act 2002 and accompanying Regulations and Statutory Guidance, the Children and Families Act 2014, the Education and Adoption Act 2016, the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Human Rights Act 1998, the Equality Act 2010, and the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2014, all underpin the work of Aspire Adoption. The values statement in Appendix A is adapted from the 2011 and 2014 National Minimum Standards and sums up the important principles which underpin all adoption work within Aspire and within the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council, and Dorset Council in their permanency planning for children for whom adoption is the care plan. These values are equally applicable to children for whom special guardianship is the care plan.

Aspire is committed to promoting diversity and non-discriminatory practice.

Aims and Objectives

In accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, all local authorities have a duty to establish and maintain an adoption service in their area, to meet the needs in relation to adoption, of children who have or may be adopted, of adults who have been adopted, parents and guardians of such children and persons who have or may adopt a child. Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council and Dorset Council have delegated most of those functions to Aspire Adoption, a Regional Adoption Agency. Further information can be found about this in the Schedule of Responsibilities in Annex B, part of the Inter Authority Agreement between the local authorities. It explains in more detail what functions remain in the local authority and which have been delegated to Aspire. Aspire Adoption is hosted by Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole Council.

Aspire Adoption aims to ensure that children who are unable to live with their birth family and for whom adoption or special guardianship has been agreed as the plan, can live in a permanent, stable and loving family in which their needs will be fully met throughout their lives. This can only be achieved if the needs of all of those touched by adoption are also supported, including adoptive parents, adopted adults and birth relatives of those who have been adopted or made the subject of Special Guardianship Orders

The name “*Aspire Adoption*” reflects the aspiration to learn, to build on existing good practice and achieve practice improvements in the delivery of services for children, adopters and others who benefit from or need adoption and special guardianship services in the area covered by Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole Council and Dorset Council.

Aspire’s vision and the objectives aimed for are to achieve excellent outcomes for children and adults affected by adoption and special guardianship by:

- Working closely with our partner local authorities and other stakeholders to ensure that children’s best interests are at the heart of placement decisions which will fully meet their needs.
- Targeted recruitment and the establishment of a wide and diverse pool of prospective adopters.
- Matching so that children are placed without delay in secure, loving families.
- Undertaking special guardianship assessments which are thorough, evidence based, and timely.
- Providing creative and outstanding adoption and special guardianship support services.
- Investing in our workforce to ensure they have the right skills and capacity to deliver excellent services.
- Continually seeking to apply best practice and innovation to our ways of working.

- Actively listening to and learning from children, adults and staff with whom we work to develop and improve the services provided.

The Registered Manager/Responsible Officer

The Registered Manager for Aspire under regulation 5 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 is Allan Charlton, Adoption Manager, Aspire Adoption Services.

The Responsible Officer for Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole Council is Jane White, Director of Children's Social Care and YOS Children's Services, BCP Council.

The Responsible Officer for Dorset Council is Paul Dempsey, Corporate Director Children's Services, Care and Protection Dorset Council.

There are five Agency Decision Makers (ADMs).

Jane White Director of Children's Social Care and YOS Children's Services and Aleksandra Zabielskia Service Manager CHAD are ADMs for decisions about whether BCP Council children in the care of the local authority should have a plan for adoption, and for matches for those children.

Paul Dempsey (Corporate Director Care and Protection) and Louise Drury (Head of Service for Children in Care and Care Leavers) are ADMs for decisions about whether Dorset children in the care of the local authority should have a plan for adoption, and for matches for those children.

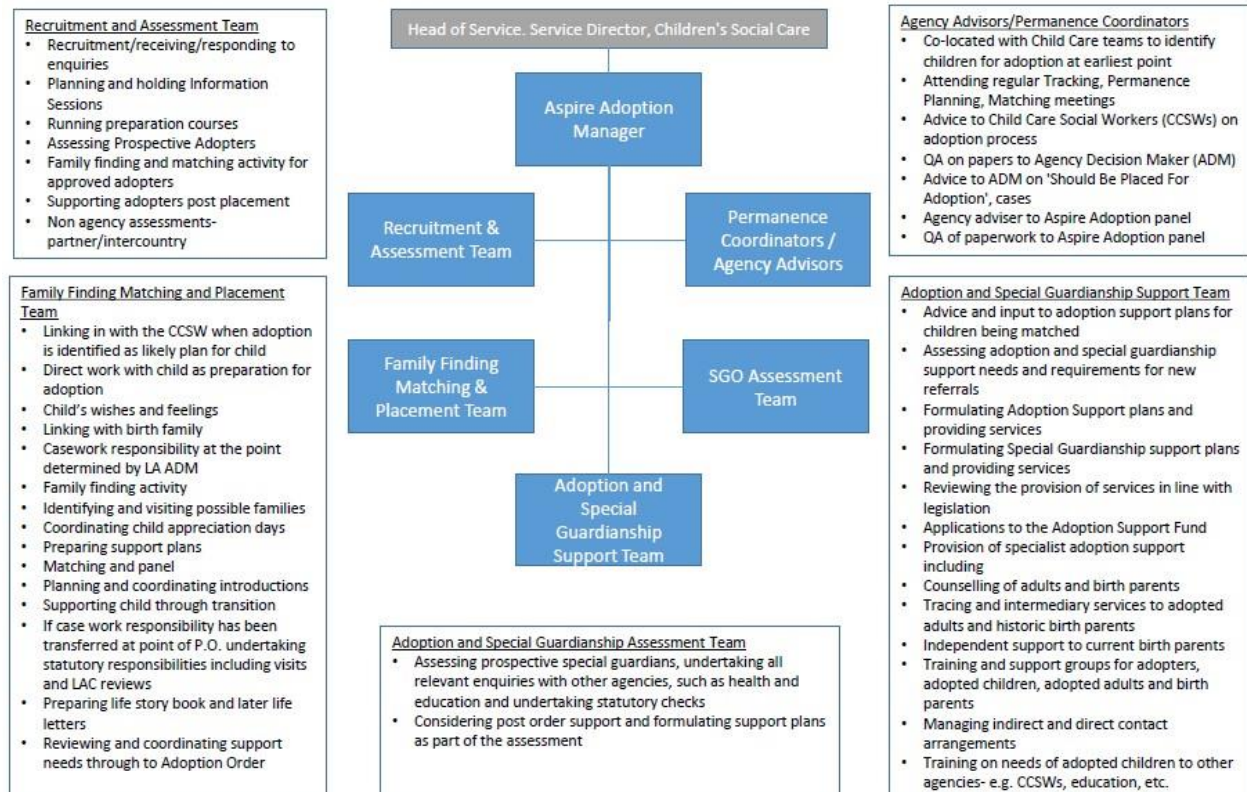
The ADMs in each of the authorities are also responsible for decision making in respect of the temporary approval of adopters as foster carers for early permanence placements.

Allan Charlton, Service Manager for Aspire Adoption, is ADM for decisions about the suitability of prospective adopters.

All have social work and management qualifications and are registered with Social Work England.

Organisational Structure of Aspire Adoption

Aspire Adoption - Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) – Organisation Structure



The service is led and managed by the Aspire Adoption Manager, Allan Charlton. Allan Charlton is a qualified social worker, has a relevant management qualification and is registered with Social Work England as a social worker.

The Recruitment and Assessment Team comprises of a team manager, practice manager, 7.44 FTE social workers. All are registered with Social Work England as social workers.

The Family Finding, Matching and Placement Team comprises of a team manager, 1 FTE practice manager and 4.3 FTE social workers, all of whom are registered with Social Work England, and 3.64 FTE family support workers.

The Special Guardianship Assessment team has a team manager, practice manager and 5 FTE social workers. All are registered with Social Work England as social workers.

The Adoption & Special Guardianship Support team consists of 1 Team Manager, 1 Assistant Team Manager, and 2.75 FTE Social Workers, all of whom are registered with Social Work England, and 4.5 FTE Family Support Practitioners.

There are 2 full time equivalent Permanence Coordinators, who also act as Agency Advisers to the Aspire Adoption Panel and Aspire Agency Decision Maker, and to the Agency Decision Makers in the local authorities in relation to decisions as to whether a child should be adopted.

The service is supported by 6 FTE business support staff including a senior business support officer, a panel administrator and a marketing, media and monitoring officer.

All staff are based at the Aspire Adoption headquarters which is at the Kinson Hub, 1599 Wimborne Rd, Bournemouth BH11 9AW. Social workers and support workers have lightweight laptops and smart phones and can work from home or from touch down points across Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset or further afield.

Roles and responsibilities

The successful delivery of the services provided by Aspire is dependent on a high level of joint working between Aspire and Aspire's partner local authorities. The table below sets out how Aspire and the three local authorities will ensure that all the agencies work together effectively in the best interests of children and families affected by or created through adoption or special guardianship. More detail is provided in Appendix B in the Schedule of Responsibilities which forms part of the Inter Authority

Agreement between the local authorities. Aspire also works in partnership with the local Voluntary Adoption Agency, Families for Children, running joint training and support groups for service users and commissioning out to Families for Children an independent support service for birth relatives, Birth Family Matters. Then voluntary adoption agencies; Families for Children and PACT – parents and children together, attend the regular 'Children Waiting Meetings' to promote prompt matching of children with prospective adoptive families.

Function	Regional Adoption Agency	Local Authority
RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT		
Marketing and Recruitment Strategy	✓	
Adopter Recruitment and Enquiries	✓	
Assessment of Prospective Adopters – all Stage One and Stage Two functions	✓	
Completion of Prospective Adopter Report	✓	
Agency Decision Maker for approval of adopters	✓	
Post approval training	✓	
Matching	✓	
Post Placement training for Prospective Adopters	✓	
PERMANENCE PLANNING		
Early identification of a child possibly requiring adoption		✓
Tracking and monitoring the child possibly requiring adoption	✓	✓

Support and advice to childcare social worker on the adoption process	✓	✓
Sibling or other specialist assessments if commissioned by LA	✓	
Direct work to prepare child prior to placement	✓	
Preparation of the Child Permanence Report		✓
Agency Decision Maker for "Should be placed for Adoption" decisions		✓
Case management prior to the point agreed by the LA ADM		✓
Case management from point agreed by the LA ADM	✓	
MATCHING AND PLACEMENT		
Family finding	✓	
Looked After Child reviews	✓	✓
Shortlist and visit potential families	✓	
Organising child appreciation day	✓	
Ongoing direct work to prepare child prior to placement	✓	
Adoption Panel administration and management	✓	
Agency adviser role	✓	
Agency Decision Maker for Matching prospective adopters and child	✓	
Placement Planning meeting administration and management of introductions	✓	
Support to family post placement and planning and delivery of adoption support	✓	
Ongoing life story work and preparation of Life story book	✓	
Independent Review Officer monitoring of quality of child's care and care plan		✓
Support prospective adopters in preparation and submission of application for Adoption Order – including attending at court	✓	
Preparation of later life letter	✓	
ADOPTION AND SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP SUPPORT		
Assessment for adoption or special guardianship support	✓	
Developing and delivering adoption and special guardianship support plans	✓	
Agree and administer financial support to adoptive families pre and post Adoption Order		✓

Adoption and special guardianship support delivery including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support groups • Social events • Post adoption/special guardianship training • Independent Birth Relative services • Support with ongoing birth relative contact • Specialist Life Story practitioners • Adoption counselling and training 	✓	
Financial support to adopters and special guardians including adoption and special guardianship allowances		✓
SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS		
Receipt of application or court request for special guardianship		✓
Assessment of applicants for Special Guardianship	✓	
NON-AGENCY ADOPTIONS		
Step parent/partner adoption assessments	✓	
Intercountry adoption assessments and post approval and post order support	✓	

Aspire Adoption Panel

Aspire Adoption operates an Adoption Panel, constituted in accordance with legislation, regulations and guidance. The panel has an independent chairperson, 21 members on a Central List from which each panel is drawn and two medical advisers who share the Panel attendance. There is no legal maximum number of panel members at each panel but in practice, usually a maximum of six attend each panel. To be quorate, the panel needs to have a minimum of five members present, which must include the chair or vice chair, an independent person (who could be the chair or vice chair) and a social worker. One of the agency medical advisers for the two local authorities attends the Aspire Adoption Panel where possible and is a full member of the panel when they do so. The panel is serviced by a panel administrator and has access to legal advice if needed. The professional advice to the panel is provided by the Permanence Coordinators/Agency Advisers, one of whom will attend each Panel to ensure the smooth running and to advise on policies and procedures.

Current membership includes adopters and adopted adults with personal experience of adoption. It also includes experienced social workers with direct experience of adoption work, a psychotherapist with experience of working in a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services setting, a former magistrate, and a social worker with experience as a CAFCASS guardian. The Central List reflects the diversity of modern society, with some panel members in a same sex or heterosexual relationship, others who are single with experience of bringing up children as single parents. Most of those on the Central List are white British, with two panel members who are from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic

(BAME) background. One panel member has a registered disability, another has a relative with Down's Syndrome. There are more women than men on the Central List, with proactive efforts being made to recruit more men.

The functions of the panel in relation to adoption matters are

- to recommend whether prospective adopters are suitable to adopt a child;
- to recommend whether a proposed match between a child and prospective adopters is a suitable one.
- In circumstances where a child is relinquished for adoption and no Placement Order is applied for, the panel will recommend whether the child should be placed for adoption.

The panel can also give advice about the numbers and ages of children in relation to prospective adopter approval, also about post adoption contact, delegated parental responsibility and adoption support. The panel has a consultative role regarding the agency's policies and procedures, and a monitoring role regarding quality assurance and ensuring that the time scales set out in the Adoption & Children Act 2002 are met.

The Aspire Adoption Panel makes recommendations based on detailed written reports prepared by the child's social worker and adoption social worker, and the social worker's attendance at panel to clarify details if needed. When considering the approval or deregistration of prospective adopters or a match between prospective adopters and a child, adoptive applicants have the option of attending panel in person, to provide scope to discuss and expand on any issues relevant to the application. Applicants who decide not to attend in person are not disadvantaged in any way and no judgement is made from their decision not to do so, although every effort will be made to assist their attendance.

The venue of the panel meeting is in a modern purpose -built building with disabled access. During the period since March 2020, in response to the Coronavirus restrictions, Aspire Panel has met virtually using Microsoft Teams.

The recommendations and advice of the panel are referred, along with the final agreed minutes of the meeting, to the relevant Agency Decision Maker, for a decision to be made and conveyed to all parties within the time scales laid down in the Adoption & Children Act 2002.

Systems for the monitoring, quality assurance and evaluation of services

The Aspire Adoption Service undergoes regular internal and external scrutiny to ensure that services are robust and of good quality. This will be achieved by:

- Collection and scrutiny of data, recording outcomes for children and adopters, including data as required by the Adoption and Special Guardianship Secretariat and Ofsted.
- Tracking systems, internally and in conjunction with the local authorities, to measure the timescales involved in providing services.

- Aspire Adoption's Operational Management Board meets quarterly and reviews outcomes against key performance indicators and national standards. It also reviews budgets and the financial state of the agency. The Board consists of representatives from both local authorities at Service Director and Service Manager level. Others attend by invitation, and there is a standard Focus on Practice agenda item at each meeting.
- The Aspire Strategic Partnership Board meets every 6 months, and membership consists of the Executive Corporate Directors in BCP Council and Dorset Council, and the lead members/portfolio holders for Children and Families representing elected members. A representative of the CCG attends, also the panel chair, a service user representative and the Service Director of the Voluntary Adoption Agency with which Aspire is partnered, Parent and Children Together. The role of the Board is to oversee and review the service from a performance and financial perspective, also, to attempt to resolve disputes between the Councils under the terms of the Inter Authority Agreement.
- The Permanence Coordinators/Agency Advisers and the Aspire Adoption Panel chair provide quality assurance feedback every six months on the quality of reports being presented to the panel. This includes whether the requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 have been met, and whether there is a thorough, rigorous, consistent and fair approach across the service in the assessment of whether a child should be placed for adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the proposed placement.
- Six monthly performance reports are provided by the Aspire Adoption Service Manager to the Aspire Strategic Partnership Board and to the executive officers of each Council. The local authorities still retain corporate responsibility for their own Looked After Children, even where they have delegated functions to Aspire. These reports address the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency, and monitor the management and outcomes of the service, to satisfy the local authorities delegating adoption functions to Aspire that the agency is effective, achieving good outcomes for children and other service users, and complying with the conditions of registration.
- Each team has regular team meetings and there are staff meetings for all of those working in Aspire every 6 months, to analyse performance across the service and take part in practice development sessions.
- Service user feedback is sought at different stages of the adoption process, and in relation to special guardianship services.
- A Service User Consultative Forum meets every 3-4 months to feedback to the agency on specific issues. The chairperson of the Forum sits on the Strategic Partnership Board.
- Second opinion visits to prospective adopters take place where there are issues arising during the assessment.
- Statutory Child in Care reviews, chaired by Independent Reviewing Officers, and planning meetings provide a structure for the agency to record progress in individual cases where a child is looked after by either of the local authorities.
- Where Aspire has case responsibility for children with adoption plans, the local authority audit schedule includes these cases. Aspire has also set up an audit schedule to audit a sample of cases in each of the four teams on a rolling monthly basis, with feedback to the case holder, team manager and Aspire Service Manager. Themes from

the audits are drawn together every 3 months by the Permanence Coordinators/Agency Advisers.

- Staff performance is routinely monitored during regular supervision sessions and appraisals with line managers.
- Appraisals for Aspire Adoption Panel members, including the chair take place annually.
- Annual updates take place of the *Statement of Purpose* and *Children's Guides to Adoption* and *Children's Guide to Adoption Support*.

Complaints and compliments

All of those receiving a service in relation to adoption or special guardianship by Aspire Adoption are advised of their right to make representations or complaints.

The complaints officer for Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole (BCP) Council collates and progresses all complaints and compliments according to Local Authority procedures and produces reports on an annual basis. The Aspire Adoption Service Manager monitors the progress of all complaints and compliments specifically relating to the service. There is a protocol in place which defines how complaints are managed which are received by or about the services provided by staff in Aspire's partner local authorities. Details of this can be found in one of the Schedules to the Inter Authority Agreement, attached as Appendix D.

A *Children's Guide to Adoption* is given to all children where the decision has been made that they should be placed for adoption. This contains local information about adoption, a summary of what happens at each stage of the adoption process, including at court, how long each stage should take, how a child can find out about their rights, how to contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, how to secure access to an independent advocate, how to make a complaint and how to contact the Children's Rights Officer and Ofsted.

A *Children's Guide to Adoption Support Services* is given to all children at the time of placement dependent on age and understanding and those in receipt of adoption support services, and contains the information laid down in the Minimum Standards about how a child can find out about their rights, how they can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, the Children's Rights Director, Ofsted, if they wish to raise a concern with inspectors and how to secure access to an independent advocate.

Contact details for Aspire Adoption

Aspire Adoption,
First Floor,
Kinson Hub,
1599 Wimborne Road,
Bournemouth BH11 9AW

Tel - 0300 123 9868

Email - enquiries@aspireadoption.co.uk

Contact details for complaints

Tel 01202 458712

acomplaint@bcpcouncil.gov.uk

Freepost RTKS-LEBR-YTAR

W. BCPCouncil.gov.uk/complaints

Contact details for Ofsted

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD

Email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

General enquiries 0300 123 1231

Contact form <https://contact.ofsted.>

Contact Ofsted about concerns on 0300 123 4666

The helpline is open Monday to Friday from 8.00am to 6.00pm.

Appendix A

The values statement below is adapted from the 2011 and 2014 National Minimum Standards for Adoption and reflects those of Aspire Adoption.

Values - children

- The child's welfare, safety & needs are at the centre of the adoption process
- Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, & benefit from excellent parenting & education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents & skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.
- Children's wishes & feelings are important & will be actively sought & fully taken into account at all stages of the adoption process.

- Delays should be avoided as they can have a severe impact on the health & development of the children waiting to be adopted.
- A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. To help children develop this, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language & sexuality need to be properly recognised & positively valued & promoted.
- The particular needs of disabled children & children with complex needs will be fully recognised & taken into account.
- Where a child cannot be cared for in a suitable manner in their own country, intercountry adoption may be considered as an alternative means of providing a permanent family.
- Children, birth parents/guardians & families & adoptive parents will be valued & respected.
- A genuine partnership between all those involved in adoption is essential for the National Minimum Standards to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes the Government, local government, other statutory agencies, Voluntary Adoption Agencies & Adoption Support Agencies.

Values- adopted adults & birth relatives

- Adoption is an evolving life-long process for all those involved- adopted adults, & birth & adoptive relatives. The fundamental issues raised by adoption may reverberate & resurface at different times & stages throughout an individual's life.
- Adopted people should have access to information & services to enable them to address adoption related matters throughout their life.
- Agencies have a duty to provide services that consider the welfare of all parties involved & should consider the implications of decisions & actions for everyone involved.
- Agencies should seek to work in partnership with all parties involved, taking account of their views & wishes in decision making.
- Agencies should acknowledge differences in people's circumstances & have established policies that provide non-discriminatory services.
- Adopted adults have their adoptive identity safeguarded & the right to decide whether to be involved in contact or communication with birth family members.

Values - adopters

- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child will be valued and respected.
- All adoptive applicants will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process. No applicant will be discriminated against on grounds of disability, ethnicity, culture, language, sexuality, gender, financial status or marital status.
- All applicants are entitled to know what issues will be considered in their assessment and will be kept informed of progress throughout. They will receive a copy of their assessment report before an adoption panel meeting, have the opportunity to comment on the report and to attend panel and be heard if they wish.

Appendix B

Schedule of Responsibilities

The successful delivery of the services provided by Aspire will be dependent on a high level of joint working between Aspire and Aspire's partner local authorities of Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole. This document summarises respective roles and responsibilities, to ensure that all the agencies work together effectively in the best interests of children and families touched by or created through adoption or special guardianship.

Aspire Adoption, Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council, and the Borough of Poole

This document summarises the respective roles and responsibilities between Aspire Adoption and partner local authorities which are Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council and Dorset Council regarding the delivery of adoption and special guardianship services.

The Vision

Aspire's vision is to achieve excellent outcomes for children and adults whose lives have been touched by adoption and special guardianship by:

- Working closely with our partner local authorities and other stakeholders to ensure that children's best interests are at the heart of placement decisions which will fully meet their needs.
- Targeted recruitment and establishment of a wide and diverse pool of prospective adopters.
- Matching so that children are placed without delay in secure, loving families.
- Undertaking special guardianship assessments which are thorough, evidence based, and timely.
- Providing creative and outstanding adoption and special guardianship support services.
- Investing in our workforce to ensure they have the right skills and capacity to deliver excellent services.
- Continually seeking to apply best practice and innovation to our ways of working.
- Actively listening to and learning from children, adults and staff with whom we work to develop and improve the services provided.

Summary of roles and responsibilities

The successful delivery of the services provided by Aspire will be dependent on a high level of joint working between Aspire and Aspire's partner local authorities which are Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council and Dorset Council. This document summarises respective roles and responsibilities, to ensure that all the agencies work together effectively in the best interests of children and families touched by or created through adoption or special guardianship.

THE CHILD

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
Case responsibility	The local authority will take primary casework responsibility for all children for whom adoption or special guardianship is being considered to the point of Care and Placement Orders. In the case of relinquished babies, the local authority will take primary casework responsibility until the formal witnessed CAFCASS consent has been obtained.	Aspire will provide specialist advice and support to help the local authority workers to understand the adoption process, influencing and promoting best practice. This will be via the Permanence Coordinator/Agency Adviser and allocated Aspire social worker and support worker.	
	The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) in each local authority may make a decision, at the time of making a Should Be Placed for Adoption (SBPFA) decision about a particular child, as to the point of transfer of case responsibility for that child to Aspire. For the majority of children, this will be at the point of Placement Order or formal witnessed CAFCASS consent.	Aspire will take primary casework responsibility for all children for whom the ADM in that child's authority has decided that the case should transfer to the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). For those children not transferring to Aspire, the role of the Aspire workers will be primarily family finding and providing specialist support and advice via the allocated workers and the Permanence Coordinator/Agency Adviser.	The funding formula used to establish the Aspire budget has been calculated on 100% of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council's children transferring to Aspire at the point of Placement Order and 20% of Dorset children. If the proportion of Dorset children transferring in to

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
			Aspire exceeds that percentage, additional funding will be required.
Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO)s	Where a child is Looked After, the IRO in the local authority will remain responsible for monitoring and overseeing the child's care plan to the point of an Adoption Order or Special Guardianship Order regardless of whether case responsibility has transferred to Aspire or not.		
Early identification of children with adoption plans	The local authority is responsible for care planning and for identifying the children who may require an adoptive family, and of then notifying the Aspire Permanence Coordinator/Agency Adviser at the earliest possible stage. For some children, this will be pre-birth.	Aspire will provide support to the local authority in the care planning process via the Permanence Coordinator/Agency Adviser. Aspire will allocate a social worker and support worker from the Family Finding and Placement team within 48 hours of notification by the local authority of a child with a possible adoption plan.	
	The local authority will keep the Aspire Permanence Coordinator/Agency Adviser informed of progress in care planning and will invite the Permanence Coordinator to relevant meetings such as legal gateway meetings, permanency planning meetings, and tracking meetings where adoption is being considered for a child.	The Permanence Coordinator/Agency Adviser will attend relevant local authority planning meetings about a child where adoption is being considered. The allocated Aspire social worker or support worker will draft a profile of the child and begin to identify suitable adopters as early as possible.	
Early Permanence	The local authority will consider whether an Early Permanent (Fostering for Adoption) placement would be appropriate for any child for whom they	The Aspire Permanence Coordinator/Agency Adviser and the allocated Aspire social worker will provide advice and support to the local	

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	are considering adoption, in line with Section 22c (9B) (c) of the Children Act 1989. If so, they will notify the Aspire Permanence Coordinator/Agency Adviser and the allocated Aspire family finding social worker.	authority in identifying which children are suitable to be considered for an Early Permanent (EP) placement.	
		Where available, a suitable family able to provide an Early Permanent placement will be offered to the local authority for a named child, with ongoing support to the carers.	In recruiting, assessing and preparing prospective adopters, Aspire will encourage those applying to adopt to positively consider the benefits for the child of Early Permanence.
	The local authority social worker will prepare the relevant paperwork for the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) in the child's authority to agree to a placement under Regulation 25a of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010. They will also progress this paperwork to the ADM in the child's local authority via the Aspire Permanence Coordinator for consideration and will be responsible for any formal notifications to their fostering service, the prospective foster carers/adopters, birth parents and court.	The Permanence Coordinator/Agency Adviser and allocated family finding social worker will support and assist the local authority social worker in completing the relevant paperwork for the ADM decision under Reg 25a. The Aspire Permanence Coordinator/Agency Adviser has responsibility for the quality assurance of reports to the ADM.	
	The local authority social worker will set up all payments to the prospective adopters/foster carers whilst the placement remains an Early Permanent one.		
Tracking	The local authority will continue to maintain tracking systems in relation to all children in care	Aspire will maintain tracking systems for all children notified to them by the	

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	proceedings or accommodated under Section 20 of the 1989 Children Act.	local authority with a plan for adoption or for whom initial information suggests that adoption may become the plan (children in the pipeline) for that child. Aspire will also maintain tracking systems of all children in placement up to the Adoption Order and tracking systems of assessments and prospective adopters approved and either waiting or with a child in placement.	
Adoption Medicals	The local authority social worker will be responsible for obtaining completed CoramBAAF M and B reports (Obstetric and Neo Natal Reports), CoramBAAF PH reports (reports on the birth parents' current and family health history) and liaising with the Agency Medical Adviser to arrange the Adoption Medical. The child's social worker should arrange with the foster carer to take the child to the medical and should also attend in person.		
Completion of Adoption Reports	The local authority social worker will be responsible for the completion of the Child Permanence Report (CPR) for the Agency Decision as to whether a child should be placed for adoption. They will also be responsible for updating the CPR following the making of Care and Placement Orders, prior to any transfer of primary responsibility for the child to Aspire. The line manager of the allocated social worker is responsible for reading and signing off the CPR	The Aspire family finding social worker will support and assist the local authority social worker in the completion of the CPR for the agency decision. The Permanence Coordinator, in their role of Agency Adviser, will be responsible for the QA of all reports being presented to the local authority or Aspire ADM, and it is for them alone to decide whether the report is adequate	It will be necessary for the local authority worker and Aspire worker to work closely and collaboratively to ensure that all relevant information is included in the CPR and that the report is of a high standard.

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	prior to submission to the Aspire Permanence Coordinator/Agency Adviser. The local authority social worker will be responsible for updating the CPR eg for matching if case responsibility remains with the local authority.	for submission to the panel and to the ADM. The Aspire family finding social worker will be responsible for updating the CPR e.g. for matching, if case responsibility for the child is transferred to Aspire post Placement Order.	Cases will not be transferred into Aspire until the Case Management System (CMS) is up to date and the CPR has been updated.
	The local authority social worker will be responsible for completing a draft support plan for the child at the point of ADM decision (SBPFA) based on the assessed needs of the child in line with the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005, and for obtaining 'in principle' agreement from the child's local authority to any financial support post placement. This plan will be reviewed and updated as further information becomes available about the child's needs.		
	If casework responsibility has not been transferred to Aspire at the point of Placement Order, the local authority social worker will collaborate with the Aspire social worker in reading Prospective Adopters' Reports (PARs), shortlisting and visiting potential families as soon as legally possible.	The Aspire social worker will lead on identifying potential adoptive families and will shortlist and visit potential families as a priority as soon as legally possible. If casework responsibility has not been transferred to Aspire at the point of the Placement Order, the Aspire worker will collaborate with the local authority social worker in shortlisting PARs and visiting potential families as soon as legally possible.	
	The local authority social worker will be responsible for obtaining agreement, prior to the	The Aspire social worker will be responsible for obtaining agreement,	The ADM in each local authority will need to

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	<p>matching panel, from the child's local authority to any financial support identified for the placement and included in the support plan, if casework responsibility has not transferred to Aspire.</p> <p>This should include any one off or setting up costs specific to the proposed placement, any ongoing financial support in the form of an adoption allowance, the cost of accommodation for prospective adopters who live too far to travel on a daily basis for introductions, the cost for the submission of the adoption application to court and any costs in relation to the management of direct contact.</p>	<p>prior to the matching panel, from the child's local authority to any financial support identified for the placement and included in the support plan, if casework responsibility has transferred to Aspire.</p> <p>This should include any one off or setting up costs specific to the proposed placement, any ongoing financial support in the form of an adoption allowance, the cost of accommodation for prospective adopters who live too far to travel on a daily basis for introductions, and the cost for the submission of the adoption application to court and any costs in relation to the management of direct contact.</p>	<p>agree to any financial support included in the support plan, or to delegate responsibility for that decision to a budget holding senior manager within the local authority.</p> <p>The funding of any finance to support an adoption placement, whether a one-off payment or ongoing payments remains the responsibility of the child's local authority.</p>
Direct work with children	The local authority social worker is responsible for all statutory duties and direct work with the child in relation to permanency planning and care proceedings.	The allocated Aspire family finding social worker and support worker will advise and support the local authority social worker in planning any direct work with the child, to ensure that they understand why they are in care and the court process (dependent on their age and understanding).	
	Post Placement Order, if the primary responsibility for the child has not transferred to Aspire, the local authority social worker will undertake all stat visits and all direct work with the child, to prepare them for placement, with advice and support from the Aspire social worker and family support practitioner.	Post Placement Order, if the primary responsibility for the child has transferred to Aspire, the allocated Aspire social worker will undertake all stat visits and the Aspire social worker and Aspire family support practitioner will take responsibility for all direct	

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
		work with the child, including life story work, to prepare them for placement.	
Life story book		The Aspire support worker will prepare the life story book for all children moving to an adoptive placement. The first draft will be handed to the prospective adopters at the latest by the second review with the final version being handed over within 10 days of the Adoption Hearing. An electronic version of the life story book will be made available to adopters as well as a paper copy.	
Later life letter	<p>If casework responsibility is being transferred to Aspire, the local authority social worker will complete the first part of the later life letter prior to transfer.</p> <p>If casework responsibility is not being transferred to Aspire at the point of Placement Order, the local authority social worker will be responsible for completing the later life letter and handing it to the adopters within 10 days of the Adoption Hearing.</p>	If casework responsibility is transferred to Aspire at the point of Placement Order, the allocated Aspire worker will complete the later life letter and handing it to the adopters within 10 days of the Adoption Hearing.	
Adoption Panel	<p>There are no Adoption Panels remaining in the local authorities.</p> <p>For quoracy, Adoption Panels require the attendance of a social worker as a member of the Panel. Social workers from the local authorities are welcome to approach the Agency Advisers if they are interested in becoming a panel member</p>	Aspire will take on all responsibility for the setting up and running of an Adoption Panel to consider the suitability of prospective adopters, matches between prospective adopters and children, and whether adoption should be the plan for the child in the case of a relinquished baby where there	

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	and should talk with their line manager in the first instance.	are no court proceedings to scrutinise the planning for the child. Aspire will appoint a Panel chair and maintain a Central List to ensure that at all times the Aspire Adoption Panel is set up and run in accordance with regulations and guidance and that it is quorate for all meetings. Aspire will take responsibility for the minuting of all panels and for the distribution and storing of those minutes securely.	
Agency Adviser	There will be no Agency Adviser post in the local authorities.	The Aspire Permanence Coordinator is a combined role with that of Agency Adviser. The Permanence Coordinator/Agency Adviser will act as the Agency Adviser to the ADM in both local authorities in relation to SBPFA decisions and matches, and to the Aspire ADM in respect of approvals and as Agency Adviser to the Aspire Adoption Panel, with responsibility for the QA of all reports being presented to the local authority or Aspire ADMs. It is for them alone to decide whether the report is adequate for submission to the panel and to the ADM.	
Panel Administrator	There will be no post of panel administrator within the 3 local authorities.	Aspire will be responsible for providing business support in the role of panel administrator to service the Aspire Adoption Panel.	

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
Formal notifications following ADM decisions	The local authority will take responsibility for informing birth parents of SBPFA decisions, within statutory timescales.	Aspire will be responsible for the written notification of birth parents in relation to BCP SBPA decisions and the referral to the independent birth parent service. Aspire will be responsible for informing prospective adopters of ADM decisions re their suitability as adopters. Aspire will also be responsible for informing birth parents and prospective adopters of matches agreed by the Aspire ADM.	
Formal notifications prior to the placement of a child		Regardless of whether casework responsibility transfers to Aspire at Placement Order, the Aspire panel administrator will take responsibility for sending out formal notifications of a child's placement in advance of that placement to health, education and to the local authority where the child will be living post placement.	
Access to child's CMS	The local authority will provide access to an individual child's record in their CMS to the Aspire Permanence Coordinator/Agency Adviser and the allocated Aspire social worker, support worker, their business support worker and team manager, for any children for whom adoption is likely to be the plan.	Aspire workers will record all activity in relation to the child on the child's CMS.	Case recording will be completed within the timescales of each local authority's policies and procedures.

ADOPTER RECRUITMENT

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
Adoption enquiries	The local authority will ensure that the Council website contains information about Aspire and a weblink to the Aspire website. The local authority will signpost any adoption enquiries which are in scope for Aspire, including enquiries about adopter recruitment, whether domestic or intercountry, adoption and special guardianship support, and partner (step-parent) adoptions to Aspire, within 24 hours.	Aspire will maintain a website giving general information about adoption and special guardianship and outlining the services which Aspire provides. The website will have clear contact details including a dedicated telephone number and an email contact address. Within office hours, a duty worker will be available to respond directly to enquiries from other professionals and from members of the public.	
Pre-assessment stage		Aspire will hold regular information events for prospective adopters at geographic locations across the Aspire region.	
Stage One	The local authority will provide all information required for statutory checks of prospective adopters currently resident in the local authority or previously resident in the local authority within 15 working days.	Aspire will carry out all stage 1 functions, including running the preparation course for prospective adopters.	
Stage Two		Aspire will carry out all stage 2 functions and be responsible for the preparation of the Prospective Adopter's Report.	
Approval of suitability		The Aspire Adoption Panel will consider the suitability of prospective adopters and the Aspire ADM will make the decision. Aspire will be responsible for all formal notifications to the prospective adopters of suitability, including where	

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
		prospective adopters are not seen as suitable. Aspire will have responsibility for appeals against qualifying determinations and for any case referred to the IRM.	

POST ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
Adoption support	The local authority will signpost enquiries and referrals for adoption support to Aspire within 24 hours. This might be an adoptive family in need of support, an adopted adult, or a birth relative.	Aspire will maintain a daily duty service to ensure that all of those making an enquiry about adoption support or requesting an adoption support assessment are responded to within 24 hours.	
	If the primary reason for the referral is that the child is at risk of significant harm and/or the child is on the edge of care, the local authority will retain primary responsibility for the case, to undertake S47 enquiries and allocate a social worker where LSCB thresholds are met.	Aspire will provide core adoption support to the family in the form of newsletters, invitation to support groups, and access to Aspire's therapeutic support services including clinical psychology support. The following are the core services on offer to all adoptive families for whom Aspire, undertaking the function as a delegated function from the local authority, is responsible for offering services to– Telephone or email advice and information services; Liaison, short-term counselling, assessment and social work or support	

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
		<p>worker support, referral to in house clinical psychology or other specialist services if appropriate;</p> <p>Access to training, workshops support groups for adopters and adopted children;</p> <p>Access to and information about resources such as DVDs, books and specialist services;</p> <p>Opportunities for networking with other adoptive families, including social events for adoptive families;</p> <p>Agency updates for adoptive families, e.g. newsletters and other communications whether digital or paper.</p>	
Out-of-hours services	Adoptive families will have the same access to the Dorset, or Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Out of Hours service, as other families living in the area.	Aspire will operate a daily duty service within office hours but will not operate an Aspire Out of Hours service.	
Indirect/ letterbox contact		Aspire will operate the indirect exchange of information between birth families and adoptive families including arrangements set up before July 2017.	
Supervised direct contact	The local authorities will remain responsible for funding any direct post adoption contact arrangements agreed prior to July 2017 but can delegate the responsibility to Aspire to supervise those arrangements in individual cases, if the funding is provided by the local authority for Aspire to do so.	<p>Responsibility for the management of direct post adoption contact arrangements set up after July 2017, provided that the funding has been agreed at the time of matching.</p> <p>Aspire will supervise direct post adoption contact arrangements made</p>	

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	Arrangements for direct post adoption contact made after July 2017 should form part of the adoption support plan at the time of matching, with the funding for these arrangements agreed by the local authority prior to presentation to the Aspire Adoption Panel for matching.	before July 2017 if the funding is provided.	
Adoption allowances and other financial support to adoptive families	The agreement to, means testing, administration, payment and review of adoption allowances or other financial support to adoptive families, including costs incurred in managing direct contact arrangements will remain the responsibility of the relevant local authority. The local authority will be responsible for setting up costs and for costs incurred during introductions between a child and prospective adopters, including the costs of providing accommodation if the prospective adopters live too far from the foster carers to travel daily, if agreed by the local authority as part of the support plan at the time of matching. The local authority will remain responsible for the costs of lodging adoption applications.		Harmonisation of adoption and special guardianship allowances across the local authorities will be undertaken at some future point.
Adoption Support Fund	The pan Dorset therapeutic provider list will continue to be maintained by Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole Council (BCP) as host authority. Any new providers will be checked out by the BCP Access to Resources (ART) team, prior to their addition to the list. The ART team will also set up and monitor contracts to providers of services funded by the Adoption Support Fund (ASF).	Aspire is responsible for all applications to the Adoption Support Fund, based on assessments of need undertaken by Aspire social workers.	

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
Independent support to birth parents	<p>The local authority will include details of the independent birth relative support service (Birth Family Matters) in their formal letter to birth parents notifying them of an ADM decision that their child should be placed for adoption. It will be an opt out approach i.e. birth parents will be contacted if they do not inform Aspire within 4 weeks that they do not wish to be contacted by the BFM worker. A copy of the letter will be sent to the Aspire Permanence Coordinator/Agency Adviser</p>	<p>Aspire commissions an independent birth relative support service (Birth Family Matters) from Families for Children. The panel administrator will refer all birth parents who have not opted out of contact with the BFM services following an SBPFA decision to the service. The panel administrator will refer all birth parents who have not opted out of contact with the BFM worker following a match. The BFM worker will contact all birth parents who do not opt out and any other birth relatives who self- refer or who are referred by other professionals, to offer support, advice and counselling.</p>	<p>The Birth Family Matters (BFM) service is a support, advice and counselling service. It is not an advocacy service. The BFM service will be funded from the Aspire base budget and is not an additional charge to the local authority.</p>
Birth Records Counselling and intermediary services	<p>All requests received by the local authority via the General Register Office or directly from a service user, for access to birth and adoption records, will be signposted by the local authority to Aspire within 24 hours, as will requests by adopted adults for counselling, advice and support or for intermediary services. Requests for independent support from birth parents or other relatives received by the local authority pre or post Adoption Order and including requests for support from birth relatives whose children were adopted in the 1950s, 1960s or 1970s, will be signposted to Aspire within 24 hours.</p>	<p>Information about access to records and services for adopted adults and birth relatives will be available on the Aspire website, with links to relevant organisations. The daily duty worker will respond to all referrals, via the General Register Office or directly from a service user, for access to birth and adoption records, within 1 working day. The daily duty worker will respond to all requests by adopted adults or birth relatives for counselling, advice and</p>	

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
		support or for intermediary services within 24 hours.	
		Aspire will not offer a tracing service unless in exceptional circumstances e.g. terminal or hereditary illness. Service users will be given advice and information about tracing and signposted to Adoption Support Agencies who undertake tracing services.	
Intermediary services	All requests by adopted adults or birth relatives for intermediary services to establish contact with their birth relative will be signposted by the local authority to Aspire within 24 hours.	All requests by adopted adults or birth relatives for intermediary services to establish contact with their birth relative will be responded to by the duty worker in Aspire within 24 hours.	
		Aspire will offer support and advice but will not offer a tracing service unless in exceptional circumstances e.g. terminal or hereditary illness. Service users will be given advice and information about tracing and signposted to Adoption Support Agencies who undertake tracing services.	

NON-AGENCY PLACEMENTS

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
Partner (step-parent) adoptions	All enquiries about partner (step-parent) adoptions and all formal notifications of intent to adopt in such cases which are received by the	Information about partner adoptions will be available on the Aspire website, with links to relevant organisations.	

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	local authority will be signposted to Aspire within 24 hours.	The daily duty worker will respond to all enquiries and referrals about partner adoptions within 24 hours.	
	The local authority will respond to requests, from Aspire or other local authorities or Regional Adoption Agencies, for local authority statutory checks on those living in their area who have applied to adopt, including in respect of non - agency placements, will be responded to within 15 working days.	Aspire will be responsible for the formal written response to notifications of intent to adopt in partner adoption applications. Aspire will allocate a social worker to counsel and advise the family, and to complete the Annex A report for court if an application is lodged.	
	If legal advice or support at the court hearing is required, the local authority legal team where the child and family live will be responsible for providing advice to or support to the Aspire social worker at the court hearing if this is required.	The allocated Aspire social worker will be responsible for attending all court hearings in relation to the application.	
Intercountry adoption	All enquiries from prospective adopters about intercountry adoption received by the local authority will be signposted to Aspire within 24 hours.	Information about intercountry adoption will be available on the Aspire website, with links to relevant organisations. The daily duty worker will respond to all referrals about intercountry adoption within 24 hours.	Local authorities will need to identify who in the local authority will respond to these requests in a timely way, as currently these are undertaken by their adoption team staff.
		Aspire will be responsible for all intercountry adoption assessments, preparation and support for prospective adopters living in the geographic area of the 3 local authorities of Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole.	

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
		The Aspire Adoption Panel will consider all applications for suitability to adopt from overseas and the Aspire ADM will make the Agency Decision.	

DATA COLLATION AND SUBMISSION, FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS AND COMPLAINTS

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
Data collation and reporting	<p>The local authority will retain responsibility for collating and reporting internally and to external bodies such as the Department for Education, Ofsted and the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board on information about children in need and children in care.</p> <p>If Aspire has primary responsibility for a child, the Case Management System (CMS) in the child's authority will be the CMS for the Aspire social worker to record any information relating to the child. This will enable reports to be run by the child's local authority from their own CMS.</p>	<p>Aspire will take responsibility for collating and reporting, internally and to external bodies such as the Department for Education, Ofsted and Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board on information about prospective adopters, adopters, adoption support.</p> <p>If Aspire has primary responsibility for a child, the Case Management System (CMS) in the child's authority will be the CMS for the Aspire social worker to record any information relating to the child. This will enable reports to be run by the child's local authority from their own CMS.</p>	
	The local authorities will identify the data they require Aspire to produce in order to fulfil their own responsibilities in relation to children in care, including those with adoption plans.	Aspire will be responsible for producing the Annual Adoption Report for each local authority in relation to adoption services within their area. This will be presented to the Aspire Management Board and to the relevant Council Boards.	

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
Freedom of Information requests	The local authority will be responsible for responding to any Freedom of Information requests relating to care planning for children and data about ADM decisions, Placement Orders and Adoption or Special Guardianship Orders made in respect of children who are or were in their care.	Aspire will be responsible for responding to any Freedom of Information requests relating to adoption assessments and adoption support.	Where a request relates to both the local authority and Aspire, an agreement will have to be reached on a case by case basis as to who is best placed to collate and respond to the request.
Complaints	The local authority will be responsible for all complaints received in relation to the child, to the point of transfer of case responsibility to Aspire.	Aspire will be responsible for all complaints relating to prospective adopters and adopters, children post transfer of case responsibility to Aspire, adopted adults, letterbox.	
	Where a complaint relates to services pre and post transfer of case responsibility to Aspire, a decision will be made following consultation with the complaints officer in the child's authority as to how to manage the complaint and as to who will take responsibility for investigating the complaint and for funding any stage 2 and stage 3 investigations.	Where a complaint relates to services pre and post transfer of case responsibility to Aspire, a decision will be made following consultation with the complaints officer in the child's authority as to how to manage the complaint and as to who will take responsibility for investigating the complaint and for funding any stage 2 and stage 3 investigations.	

SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
Special guardianship in	The primary responsibility for the child remains with the local authority in respect of permanency planning, court proceedings, parenting	Following a positive viability assessment of a family member or friend and referral into Aspire, a social worker	

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
care proceedings	assessments, and viability assessments of family or friends.	will be allocated within 48 hours to complete a full assessment.	
	<p>The local authority will refer into Aspire for a full assessment of a family member or friend as soon as possible following the conclusion of a positive viability assessment.</p> <p>To enable court timescales to be met, this could be before a full assessment is ordered by the court but where the viability assessment is positive and where the local authority is recommending a full assessment to the court.</p> <p>If the family to be assessed lives outside of England, Wales, Northern Ireland or Scotland, the assessment will need to be undertaken by an international organisation such as Children and Families Across Borders (CFAB) or via ICACU, with access to local systems for undertaking statutory enquiries and medicals, and knowledge of the local cultural and legal context. It is the responsibility of the local authority to fund this.</p> <p>Any assessments of family members from overseas if they travel to this area for a time limited period will be undertaken by the local authority social worker. In these circumstances, any assessment can only be undertaken at the level of a viability assessment, given the need to undertake statutory and medical checks of the applicants in their country of residence, to explore their home conditions and financial circumstances, and also to visit referees.</p>	<p>If the family to be assessed lives outside of England, Wales, Northern Ireland or Scotland, Aspire will offer advice and assistance upon request, but will not undertake the assessment.</p>	

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	The local authority will respond to all requests for local authority statutory checks for anyone living in their area within 15 working days. If English is not the first language for any applicants, the local authority will fund the cost of interpreters to enable the Aspire worker to undertake the assessment.	The Aspire social worker will undertake all relevant enquiries and investigations relevant to completing a full assessment. Once completed and signed off by the team manager, the report will be submitted to the local authority legal team and to the social worker with primary responsibility for the child for submission to court.	
	The local authority social worker will retain primary case work responsibility for the child and for the court case throughout.	The Aspire social worker will attend court to give evidence on their assessment if requested.	
Direct applications for Special Guardianship Orders	Enquiries and notifications about Special Guardianship Order applications, which are received by the local authority where the child is not the subject of care proceedings, will be referred to Aspire within 24 hours.	Enquiries and notifications about Special Guardianship Order applications, where the child is not the subject of care proceedings, will be responded to by the Aspire duty worker within 24 hours.	
	The local authority will respond to all requests for local authority statutory checks for anyone living in their area within 15 working days.	Aspire will allocate a social worker to undertake all enquiries and complete all reports in respect of Special Guardianship Order applications, where the child is not the subject of care proceedings.	
	If legal advice or support at the court hearing is required, the local authority legal team where the child and family live will be responsible for providing advice to or support to the Aspire social worker at the court hearing if this is required.	The Aspire social worker will attend all relevant court hearings in respect of such applications.	

FOSTER CARERS WISHING TO ADOPT OR APPLY FOR A SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDER FOR A CHILD IN THEIR CARE

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	Where a foster carer expresses an interest in adopting or applying for a Special Guardianship Order in relation to a child in their care, the local authority will contact Aspire for a social worker to be allocated to undertake a joint visit to explore further.	Upon request, Aspire will allocate a social worker to undertake a joint visit with the child's allocated social worker in the local authority to explore further.	
		Should the foster carer wish to proceed following the joint visit, Aspire will undertake either an adoption assessment within statutory timescales of 4 months, or a special guardianship assessment in line with legislation.	
	The local authority social worker will continue to take primary responsibility for the child. If the foster carer is a local authority foster carer, they will continue to support the carer in line with fostering regulations whilst the assessment is being undertaken by Aspire. If the foster carer is an Independent Fostering Provider (IFP) carer, that agency will continue to support the carer whilst the assessment is being undertaken.		
	Responsibility for funding any support including financial support post order will be held by the local authority.	Post order, Aspire will provide core support services as provided to other adopters or special guardians.	

SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP SUPPORT

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	The local authority will signpost enquiries and referrals for special guardianship support to Aspire within 24 hours.	Aspire have information about special guardianship core support services on their website.	
	If the primary reason for the referral is that the child is at risk of significant harm and/or the child is on the edge of care, the local authority will retain primary responsibility for the case, to undertake S47 enquiries and allocate a social worker where LSCB thresholds are met.	Aspire will maintain a daily duty service to ensure that all of those making an enquiry about special guardianship support or requesting a special guardianship support assessment are responded to within 24 hours.	
	The local authority social worker will be responsible for formulating a support plan where a Special Guardianship Order is the outcome for the child in care proceedings.	The Aspire Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Team will offer advice and give information about core special guardianship support services offered by Aspire to inform the support plan for the court.	
	If a Supervision Order is made alongside a Special Guardianship Order, the local authority will retain responsibility for the Supervision Order.	If a Supervision Order is made alongside a Special Guardianship Order, Aspire will offer the family access to the core special guardianship core support services of counselling, advice and information and access to support groups, but will not take responsibility for the Supervision Order.	The funding formula agreed in the Business Case did not include Aspire taking responsibility for Supervision Orders made alongside Special Guardianship Orders.
	The agreement to, means testing, administration, payment and review of special guardianship allowances or other financial support to special guardians, including the costs of managing direct contact arrangements and any costs incurred in	Aspire will take responsibility for managing direct contact arrangements if agreed as part of the support plan submitted to court, and if funded by the local authority.	Harmonisation of adoption and special guardianship allowances across all the local authorities

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	the provision of therapeutic support, will remain the responsibility of the relevant local authority.		will be undertaken at some future point.
	Where the child was not looked after immediately prior to a Special Guardianship Order, the local authority has discretion but is under no duty to offer an assessment of the need for special guardianship support services, including any assessment of need for financial support.	Where a Special Guardianship Order is made as a result of a direct application to court and not as part of care proceedings, the Aspire worker completing the report for the court will consider the need for support after the order is made. In such cases, special guardians and their families will be offered access to the core support services of counselling, advice and information and access to training and support groups offered by Aspire.	

LEGAL

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
Children	The local authority social worker will have primary responsibility for permanency planning and all court proceedings in relation to Looked After Children, including applications for Care and Placement Orders and Special Guardianship Orders. The local authority social worker will be responsible for any appeals against the making of Care and Placement Orders within the timescales allowed by the court at the time of making those	Aspire will have responsibility for the completion of special guardianship assessments referred to them by the local authority but will not have primary responsibility for the child or court proceedings.	

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	orders, even if primary responsibility for the child has been transferred to Aspire.		
	If casework responsibility is not transferred to Aspire at the point of Placement Order, the local authority social worker will be responsible for all legal challenges by the birth family to the Care and Placement Orders until an Adoption Order has been made.	If casework responsibility has transferred to Aspire, the Aspire social worker will be responsible for responding to legal challenges until an Adoption Order has been made, other than an appeal against the Care and Placement Orders within the timescales allowed by the court at the time of making those orders.	
	The local authority legal team will be responsible for supporting the primary case holder, whether this is the local authority social worker or Aspire social worker, in responding to legal appeals against or challenges to the making of Care and Placement Orders or Special Guardianship Orders, where the child was previously a Looked After Child in that authority.		
Adults affected by adoption	As host authority, any legal advice in relation to an assessment or other matter relating to prospective or approved adopters, or other service users will be provided by the BCP Council legal team.		
Adoption Panel	If the Aspire Adoption Panel require legal advice in relation to any matter under their consideration, this will be provided by the BCP Council legal team, as BCP is the host authority. The exception to this is where a relinquished child is presented to the Aspire Adoption Panel prior to		

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	a local authority decision as to whether he or she should be placed for adoption. In such cases, the child's originating local authority remain responsible for providing all relevant legal advice to enable the panel to reach a recommendation.		

ARCHIVING AND ACCESS TO RECORDS

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	<p>The local authority will retain responsibility for storing and maintaining electronic and paper adoption records archived prior to 1st July 2017, in accordance with Regulations and Statutory Guidance.</p> <p>This includes records in relation to prospective adopters and adopters, adopted adults, adoption support to families, birth parents, indirect exchanges of information (letterbox), children subject to adoption plans and adopted.</p> <p>This also includes records in relation to special guardianship assessments and support.</p>	<p>Aspire will take responsibility for storing and maintaining electronic and paper records in line with Regulations and Statutory Guidance for any case open to them and archived after 1st July 2017 in relation to prospective adopters and adopters, adoption or special guardianship support to families, adopted adults, birth parents where a separate case management record to their child's record has been opened, and indirect (letterbox) exchanges of information.</p>	
	The local authority will retain responsibility for storing and maintaining electronic and paper records archived after 1 st July 2017 in accordance with Regulations and Statutory Guidance, in relation to children with adoption plans and adopted.		
	The local authority will provide access to Aspire to any records in their archive in relation to prospective adopters and adopters, adopted	Aspire will take responsibility for the data storage and security of any information accessed by an Aspire	

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	adults, adoption support to families, birth parents, indirect exchanges of information (letterbox), children subject to adoption plans and adopted, which are required for new referrals to Aspire after 1 st July 2017 where those records are required to inform or assist Aspire in the work they are undertaking.	worker from archived records held in the local authority in line with Regulations and Statutory Guidance. Once the case is closed, Aspire will either return that information if requested to the originating local authority or will dispose of it confidentially.	

Appendix C

Protocol for the Handling of Inter Organisational Complaints in Relation to Aspire Adoption

Between

Aspire Adoption (Hosted by Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council)

Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council

Dorset Council



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Reason and Purpose for the Protocol

Aspire Adoption is a Regional Adoption Agency which has been formed through an inter authority agreement with Bournemouth Borough Council as the hosting authority. From 1st July 2017 adoption staff from Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole will be transferred to Bournemouth Borough Council under TUPE arrangements. Bournemouth Borough Council hold management responsibility for staff working within Aspire.

Aspire is responsible for the recruitment, assessment, training and support of prospective adopters, matching and placement, adoption panel and support work. In addition, Aspire staff will be undertaking Special Guardianship Order assessments and hold some case holding responsibilities post Placement Order. Please see the attached case holder timeline in Appendix 1 for further information.

Aspire is overseen by a Management Board comprising of senior management representatives from Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and Borough of Poole.

The purpose of this protocol is to provide a guide for the management of complaints, to demonstrate a commitment to work together to provide a positive outcome, ensure ownership of complaints, to reduce confusion and ensure clarity for the complainant. All complaint investigations will take place under relevant complaints legislation and guidance.

All organisations party to this protocol will ensure that any complaints arising from the joint working are handled in line with this protocol.

The Protocol

Complaint Manager Role

For each signatory organisation, the designated Complaints Manager is responsible for co-ordinating whatever actions are required or implied by this protocol.

As host authority, Bournemouth Borough Council's Complaints Manager will act as the Complaints Manager for Aspire.

They will co-operate with other Complaint Managers and agree who will take the lead role in inter-organisational complaints.

In the unlikely event that Complaints Managers are unable to reach agreement about any matter covered in this protocol, they should each refer the matter promptly to the relevant senior Manager in their respective authorities.

The Process

Single Authority Complaints – See flowchart in Appendix 2

The receiving authority will establish case and therefore complaint responsibility. Where the complaint responsibility lies solely with one authority, the responsible authority will investigate and respond to the complainant through their usual statutory processes.

If the complaint needs to be passed from one authority to another to achieve this, the receiving authority should always obtain **consent** from the complainant to pass their complaint to the responsible authority to respond. Consent should be in writing and kept by the receiving authority for their records.

The responsible authority will progress the complaint in accordance with their procedure from the point of acknowledgement onwards.

Joint Authority Complaints – See flowchart in Appendix 3

Where this document refers to joint authority complaints, it is understood that this could also refer to authority / Aspire complaints. In this case, Bournemouth's Complaints Manager will act on behalf of Aspire.

Where it is established that the complaint is jointly held between two authorities, the receiving authority's Complaints Manager will obtain consent to share with the responsible authorities.

The Complaints Managers from the responsible authorities will discuss and agree which authority is to take the lead in managing the complaint process. In determining this, consideration will be given to the number of complaint elements for each authority and the 'weight' of the complaints being made, or this role will default to the receiving authority if the number and weight of complaints is equal.

The lead authority Complaints Manager will be responsible for acknowledging the complaint and managing the complaint process at Stage 1 and in coordinating a joint response.

Should a request for a Stage 2 consideration be received, the Complaints Managers will review the aspects of complaint being brought to Stage 2 to ensure that the lead authority is still relevant. The split of investigation costs between authorities will be agreed and the lead authority Complaint

Manager will be responsible for appointing an Investigating Officer and an Independent Person at their agreed rates.

The investigation will produce a joint report and the authorities Adjudicating Officers will consider the aspects of the investigation report relevant to their authority and respond to these. The lead authority Complaint Manager will combine the responses to provide a joint response to the complainant.

Following a Stage 3 review request, the Complaints Managers will review the aspects of complaint being brought to Stage 3 to ensure that the lead authority is still relevant. The lead authority Complaint Manager will make arrangements following their own procedures. Both Adjudicating Officers will attend if complaints remain unresolved for both authorities. As in Stage 2, the cost will be split between the authorities as agreed and a joint response to the Panel's report and any recommendations issued to the complainant.

The authorities will work together where complaints are considered by the Local Government Ombudsman to ensure that joint working is maintained.

MP Enquiries

In the event of an MP enquiry, joint discussion and agreement will take place between Complaints Managers and Aspire where appropriate regarding who to take the lead with management of the enquiry. This will then follow the usual process of the lead authority.

Compliments

Each authority to process their own compliments in their usual way. Compliments for Aspire staff should be passed to the Bournemouth Complaint's Manager to record.

Recording and Learning

Each authority will remain responsible for recording and reporting complaints and learning made about its staff and service in line with the statutory guidance.

Joint complaints may be reviewed to ensure that any inter authority learning is embedded in service improvements.

Aspire Adoption**Case Holder Timeline****Aspire Adoption – pre Placement Order**

Recruitment, assessment, training and support of prospective adopters - for all authorities.

Special Guardianship Order Assessments – for all authorities

Aspire Adoption – post Placement Order involvement

Majority of children Social Worker case holding responsibility taken over from originating authority post Placement Order

Matching and placement – for all authorities.

Adoption support work – for all authorities (not financial).

Post adoption indirect contact (letterbox)

Adoption Panel - for all authorities.

Special Guardianship Order support – for all authorities (not financial).

Agency Decision Maker - for decisions about the suitability of adopters.

Placement Order Made / Special Guardianship Order Made

Originating Authority – pre Placement Order or Special Guardianship Order

Permanency planning, court process and early identification of child requiring adoption:

- all adoption case holding responsibility up to Placement Order, including Agency Decision that the child should be placed for adoption.
- case responsibility for care planning and court process for Children in Care where a Special Guardianship Order is the permanency plan.

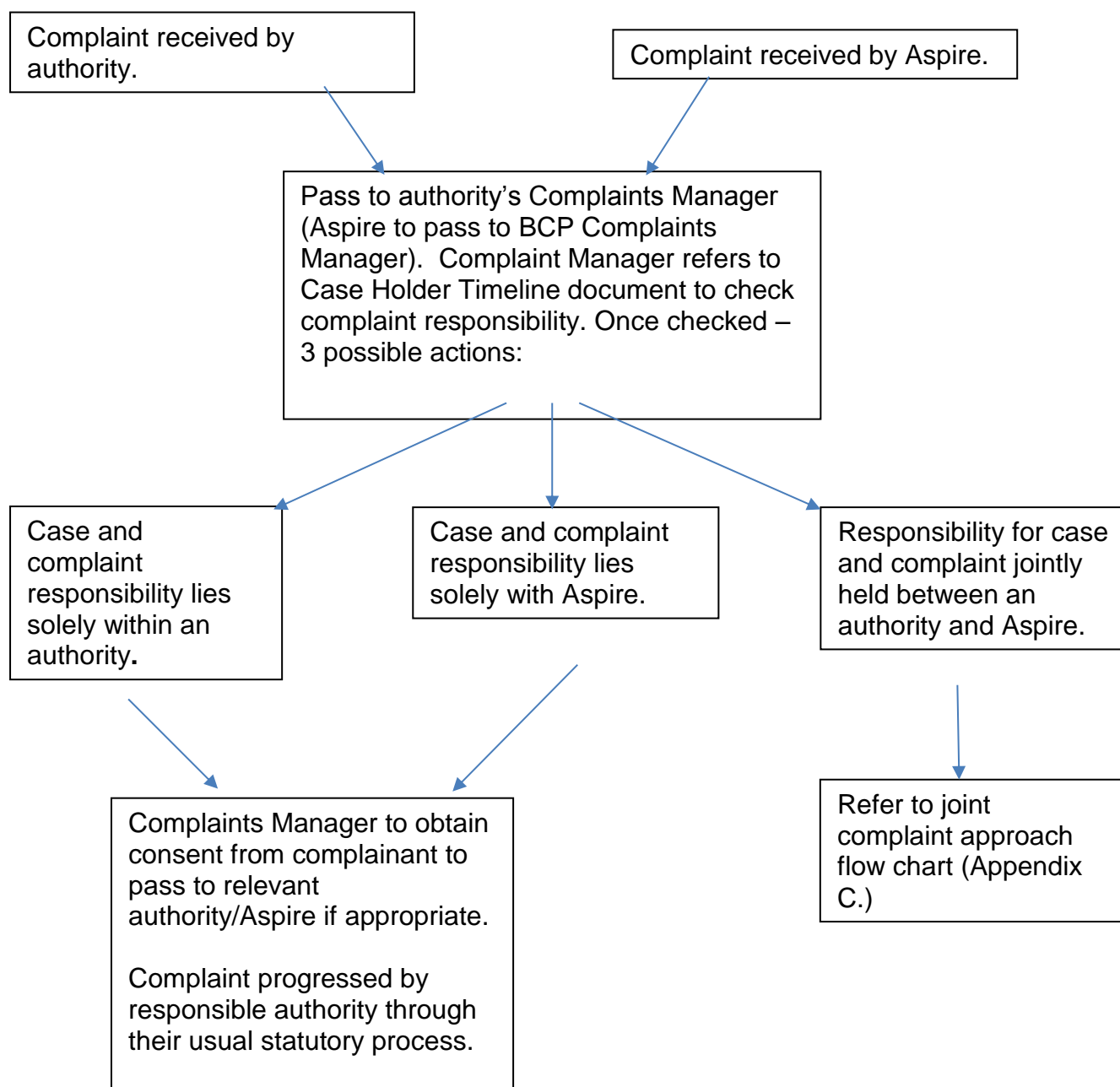
Originating Authority – post Placement Order or Special Guardianship Order

Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole – All adoption case holding responsibility transferred to Aspire following Placement Order – local authority retain responsibility for Independent Reviewing Officer/Children in Care reviews.

Dorset – Approximately 20% of adoption case holding responsibility transferred to Aspire following Placement Order – local authority retain responsibility for Independent Reviewing Officer/Children in Care reviews.

Dorset/ Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole- responsibility for any Supervision Orders made alongside a Special Guardianship Order.

**Protocol for Dealing with Complaints in relation to the
Regional Adoption Agency – Aspire and its partners
Flowchart following initial contact from
complainant**



**Protocol for Dealing with Complaints in relation to the
Regional Adoption Agency – Aspire and its partners
Flowchart following identification of joint complaint**

Responsibility for case and complaint identified as being jointly held between originating authority and Aspire.



Stage 1 process - Receiving complaints manager to obtain consent from complainant to share complaint with other authority / Aspire as appropriate.



Complaint referred to service for response within each authority by relevant Complaints Manager.

Joint discussion and agreement between Complaints Manager and Aspire where appropriate regarding who to take lead

The Lead authority will take responsibility for Stage 1 management with input from the other authority or Aspire as per their own processes.



Lead authority to monitor statutory timescales and follow up where necessary. Responses collated by lead authority.

Lead authority to send response on joint headed paper to complainant once agreed by all parties within statutory timescales. Include information on next stages and Local Government Ombudsman. Both authorities responsible for own learning and recording.



Stage 2 process – review complaint to ensure lead authority still relevant. Agree between relevant complaint managers how investigation cost will be split. Lead authority appoints investigators with agreement of other authority and provides information to complainant. Complaint to be investigated in accordance with procedure of lead authority following the Statutory Guidance. Joint report and adjudication to be issued to complainant on completion.



Stage 3 process – Same costs split as the Stage 2 process as this is a review of Stages 1 & 2. Lead authority appoints panel with agreement of other authority and provides information to complainant. Review to be completed in accordance with procedure of lead authority following the Statutory Guidance. Both authorities Adjudicating Officers to attend review. Joint adjudication to be issued to complainant on completion.



LGO Referral – Authorities to work together on receipt of Local Government Ombudsman enquiry to provide Local Government Ombudsman with information.

Contacts



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Senior Assurance Manager – Complaints Team

Julie Taylor 01305 225076 julie.taylor@dorsetcc.gov.uk

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Teresa Salmon 01202 458712 socialcarecomplaints@bournemouth.gov.uk



Aspire Adoption Manager

Allan Charlton 0300 123 9868 m@aspireadoption.co.uk

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Corporate Parenting Board

25 May 2023

Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2022 - 2023

Choose an item.

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: Louise Drury

Tel: 01305 228382

Email: louise.drury@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public

Recommendation:

Members of Corporate Parenting Board are requested to note the content of this report which captures the work of the board over the last financial year and the progress made against our priorities in the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2020-2023.

Reason for Recommendation:

As Corporate Parents, all members of the board seek to stay informed about Children in Care of the Council and Care Leavers, to offer challenge and support. The Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report provides members with an opportunity to reflect on the work of the previous year, to consider what has worked well and where there is still more to do, to plan next steps to be ever better.

1. Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report.

Introduction by Cllr Kate Wheller, Chair of Corporate Parenting Board

1.1. As Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board, I am pleased to introduce the Annual Report for 2022- 2023.

1.2. This has been a very busy year and we have seen a number of positive developments:

- Opening of College House
 - Launch of Mockingbird Constellation 1 and 2
 - Uplift in foster carer and supported lodgings carers fees coming into effect 1st April 2023
 - Investment in increasing management and staffing capacity Leaving Care Service
 - Launch of Staying Close
 - Opening of our Care Leaver accommodation.
- 1.3. The Corporate Parenting Board includes Members of the Council who come together with officers and relevant partner agencies to offer challenge and support to services for children in our care and for our care leavers. There is arguable no greater responsibility for Members than as corporate parents: to ensure that the care and support given to children and young people in the care of the authority and to those leaving our care, is as we would expect to be given to our own children.
- 1.4. In 2022/2023 we saw the Covid -19 pandemic move to an endemic virus. However, the impact both as service providers and recipients continues to be felt. Corporate Parenting Board has continued to seek reassurance in this period that colleagues in the service have been able to maintain the high standard of care that we know everyone is passionate about providing. I commend the adaptability and tenacity of our children and young people, their families, our carers and our staff and colleagues in continuing to build resilience when faced with the challenges this brings.
- 1.5. Finally, I would like to say thank you to Cllr Richard Biggs for stepping in and taking the role of the chair during my absence in January and March 2023 Corporate Parenting Board.

2. Corporate Parenting Strategy.

- 2.1. The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2023, 'Making Dorset the best place to grow up,' was updated last year with the re-freshed Dorset Promise. The Dorset Promise was co-designed with young people and published in October 2022. The Dorset Promise will be carried forward as we develop the next Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024 – 2027 later this year.
- 2.2. The development of The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-2027 will be undertaken collaboratively with young people and board members. It will also take into account the government strategy 'Stable Lives Built with Love'.

2.3. Throughout 2022-2023, Corporate Parenting Board has considered progress against the strategy's priorities. The following provides a brief update on some of the key areas of discussion by the board in the reporting period and highlights positive areas of development.

2.4. Between March 2022 – March 2023 our care population has reduced from 450 To 437, and we are now actively working with 290 Care Leavers compared to 282 last year. We have a total of 516 Care Leavers.

3. Youth Voice and Youth Participation

Increase opportunities to hear the voice of our children and young people and to take their views, wishes and feelings into account.

3.1. The involvement of children and families in learning from their experiences through consultation and commissioning, complaints and serious incidents is fully embedded in the development of services.

3.2. We are continuing to strengthen the feedback system within our audit process to evolve and learn from our practice. Our care experienced young people have taken part in the 'Your Life Beyond Care' Coram Voice survey and we have continued to work with Coram voice this year, undertaking the Bright Spots survey for Children in Care in March 2023. We are anticipating a report with findings in July 2023 which will be shared with the Board.

3.3. These comprehensive surveys have given us insights across several areas:

- Use of evidenced based 'Bright Spots' – Partnership between Coram Voice and the University of Oxford supported by The Hadley Trust
- Perceptions of social workers, IRO's, advocates and other professionals
- Perceptions of plans, including care, education and pathway
- Perceptions of processes such as reviews and complaints
- Feelings of wellbeing and support

3.4. Dorset Youth's Voice have a program of Fostering Family Fun Days which members are actively encouraged to attend to be alongside our children and their families while joining in with different activities. These have been a great way for us to hear the voice of children in our care, children who foster and foster carers.

3.5. The new governance arrangements of Corporate Parenting Board to have 4 informal Boards and 2 formal Boards has led to increased participation from young people. Feedback from young people attending informal boards which centre around a workshop has been very positive.

3.6. This year we have held workshops which have focused on the following:

- Unaccompanied young people
- Feeling safe at home and in the community
- Community Parenting
- Transitions – ‘A helping hand’
- Menu of learning for children coming into care

‘I felt as though people were really interested in what I had to say’ - AP

‘I love coming to Corporate Parenting Board – you get to talk to people who can make things happen and make a difference for a lot of young people’ - CW

4. The Health of Children in Care

Promote better physical and mental health and wellbeing through improved access to health information and services.

- 4.1. Corporate Parenting Board receives an annual report in addition to regular input to its meetings from designated professionals who work to provide services to children in care.
- 4.2. There are good working relationships between children’s social care managers, the Children in Care Health Service and NHS Dorset, with all partners committed to improving health outcomes for children in care. However, we have seen a continued underperformance reported to Corporate Parenting Board which is due to several factors and challenges which include children placed out of area.
- 4.3. Despite escalation through NHS Dorset, we have not yet been able to improve the performance in this area. We have requested a formal review of the service by NHS Dorset, and this will be a continued area of focus and scrutiny by the board.
- 4.4. Corporate Parenting Board has been concerned about being able to ensure good dental health for our children. While there have been some improvements in performance, the board has continued to seek assurance that we are working with our foster carers, carers and health colleagues to ensure that timely dental appointments are made for our children. Capacity of NHS dentists is an issue although children in care remain a priority for dentistry in the South West.
- 4.5. Members of Corporate Parenting Board have heard that the average SDQ score for our Children in Care aged 4-16 is higher than our comparator local authorities and has continued to be above our local target. The Board remains interested in the internal review of the emotional and mental health needs of our Children in Care and the aim being to bring a range of services and practitioners together to improve outcomes for our Children in Care by reducing duplication and hand-offs.

- 4.6. As part of this development and process a new guidance and procedures process has been co-produced by Dorset Healthcare, CAMHS and Dorset Council that will help frontline practitioners to develop their understanding of emotional wellbeing and mental health using the iThrive Framework. All services will adopt the prompts to improve their understanding of the child and their needs and what may be the best fit intervention.
- 4.7. Due to the rise in the numbers of requests for support, advice, and guidance from foster carers to the Children in Care Psychologists for adoption and permanence we are developing a model of practice that improves the skills of the supervising social workers to provide the direct support to the foster carers. Through consultation and group supervision, support and joint training foster carers will have an improved understanding of the emotional needs of the children in their care and how to respond to these.
- 4.8. Core CAMHS prioritises access for Children in Care, offering a 24-hour response for urgent referrals and an 8-week response for all other referrals. Digital platforms for the service were developed quickly during the initial phases of the pandemic and the website has been updated with signposting and podcasts. The service now uses a hybrid approach to support. We have established an operational monthly meeting to track children in care open to CAMHS and the Emotional Wellbeing services, both within and beyond Dorset.
- 4.9. The challenges experienced in being able to access Tier 4 provision for our children remains an area of concern.

5. Ambition for Children

Have high aspirations for children in care and care leavers in their education, training and employment.

- 5.1. The purpose of the Virtual School is to raise the educational achievement of Children in Care, promote their emotional wellbeing and improve their life chances as a more vulnerable group. Corporate Parenting Board receives an annual report from the Head of The Virtual School each year.
- 5.2. 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.
- 5.3. 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
- Delivery of the first Dorset Young Person Conference to raise ambition and aspiration.
- Production of the Handbook for Unaccompanied Young People in multiple languages

5.4. In February 2023 Corporate Parenting Board welcomed a short film from the Virtual School which showed the experiences a group of young people who had spent a residential weekend at Jamie's Farm in Wales. All the young people had a huge amount of fun and described improved emotional wellbeing and social confidence.

5.5. While the experiences of the young people were very positive, it was highlighted by the Board that Dorset County should be able to offer similar experiences closer to home, and our Outdoor Education colleagues are taking this forward in developing an offer.

5.6. The areas of focus for the Virtual School going forward include:

- Enhancing our children's voices through child led PEPs, Virtual School Council and Virtual School Newsletter Developing a mentoring system to support aspiration and ambition.
- Developing wider learning opportunities and positive experiences through extra-curricular activities
- Improving school transitions, particularly for those children with SEND
- Eradicating the use of suspensions, reduced timetables and the number of children missing education

5.7. We continue to support our young people to be in education, employment and training, with 63% 17-18yr olds and 51% 19-21 yr olds being in Education, Employment or Training at the end of March 2023.

5.8. This is an improvement from 60% 17-18yr olds and 46% 19-21 yr olds being in Education, Employment or Training at the end of March 2022.

6. Safeguarding and Permanence

Ensure safe and stable accommodation within the family home or close relatives and friends. If not possible, children are moved to a permanent placement without delay.

- 6.1. Members attended the opening of College House on 12th October 2023 and have commended The Harbour approach which continues to provide an effective approach for supporting young people to remain in the care of their families. As at the end of September 2022 a total of 153 young people have been supported by The Harbour since December 2020. Of these 100 young people who were on the edge of care were supported by outreach. Only 6 young people entered care meaning that 94% children were supported to remain at home.
- 6.2. While there has been a slight improvement in the % children placed 20 miles away from home from 43.8% in March 2022 to 42.18% in March 2023, we know that there is more work to do to increase the number of local foster carers so that our children are able maintain their links with friends, education and the local community more easily.
- 6.3. The challenges for fostering recruitment have been noted nationally within both local authority and IFA services. With the number of enquiries to be foster carers and supported lodgings for Dorset Council declining, the support Corporate Parenting Board has given to the strategic initiative, which has now been agreed by Cabinet, of a 15% uplift in the overall payment for Dorset foster carers and supported lodgings carer has been very welcome.
- 6.4. The launch of our first Mockingbird Constellation in November 2022 is supporting the resilience and retention of our existing carers. We are already seeing an impact for the foster carers and the children they are caring for and are delighted that constellation 2 and 3 launched in March and April 2023.
- 6.5. Achieving a permanent placement ensures children have a secure stable and loving family to support through childhood and beyond, to create a sense of security, continuity, commitment identity and belonging. We have continued to focus our attention in supporting our children to achieve permanence. Permanence can be achieved in a number of ways:
- Return Home to Parents – More children have achieved permanence following re-unification to birth family. At the end of March 2023 this has increased to 35.63% from 17.28% in May 2022.
 - Adoption – More children have achieved permanence following being placed for adoption. At the end of March 2023 this has increased to 13% compared to 7% in May 2022. The number of children adopted in the last 12 months has increased to 26 in March 2023 from 19 in May 2022.

- SGO – We have seen fewer children achieving permanence through the making of a Special Guardianship Order. 8% of young people who ceased being in care in the six months prior to March 2023 were placed subject to Special Guardianship Order compared to 17% in the previous year.

6.6. This year the Board received a presentation from Cllr Biggs who alongside social workers and personal advisors met a number of our unaccompanied children and young people. This resulted in wider discussion and has continued to be an area of interest as to how we can provide young people a better care and education experience in Dorset.

6.7. Through the 'Your Life Beyond Care' Coram Voice survey, members of the Board have heard about the importance for our young people to have good quality, safe and suitable accommodation. Throughout 2023 the number of young people in unsuitable accommodation has reduced to 8 young people in March 2023 from 19 in May 2022.

7. Transitions

For our children to have a good and enriching experience of care provision and to prepare for adulthood and an independent and successful life.

7.1. All young people are allocated a personal adviser at the age of 16 to provide a smooth transition and support young people with the skills they need as they move into adulthood. We have continued our focus to ensure that all young people have a current Pathway Plan which is ambitious and supports our young people to move towards increased independence. At the end of March 2023 91.03% care leavers had a current Pathway Plan compared to 82.62% in May 2022.

7.2. The Transition Panel which meets monthly, tracks the planning for young people to ensure that plans are known, understood and in place and that there is no cliff edge at the age of 18yrs.

7.3. More young people are remaining in Staying Put arrangements with 23 young people remaining with their foster carer after turning 18 yrs old. The launch of Staying Close in September 2022 is supporting our young people to maintain supportive relationships with trusted adults from their children's home.

7.4. We have welcomed our first residents at Kirtleton Avenue, in Weymouth which provides a training flat and homes for 12 young people. Alongside the Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers, an agreed guarantor offer and commitment to build relationships with the Private Landlord Association, this will support our young people to be safe and settled in accommodation.

7.5. A new framework contract for supported accommodation has been established over the last year and we will be insisting and supporting providers to register with Ofsted as required in the new regulations.

7.6. We have a protocol in place with two of our Job Centres Plus which provides:

- co-ordinated support to engage young people into Education, Employment, Apprenticeships, Voluntary Work or Training
- an early entry system and a smooth transition for those young people leaving care and needing to claim benefits.
- prompt and accurate payment of benefits where these are required.
- young people are empowered and enabled to gain sustainable paid employment through individual route ways.

7.7. Dorset Council is showing its commitment to Care Leavers through its HR procedures: all Children in Care and Care Leavers who apply for Dorset Council apprenticeships are guaranteed an interview and we are working with our HR colleagues to extend this commitment to all positions advertised by the council.

7.8. Through Corporate Parenting Board and the Care Leavers Delivery Group we continue to make use of relationships that have been developed within the business community. Hall and Woodhouse, Wessex Water and Sky have proved to be excellent partners in providing access to IT, training, employment, and accommodation for our young people.

7.9. A key interest for the Board has been to explore what more can be done to support young people as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood. Young people have asked for more help with life skills and work is underway to develop 'A helping hand' so that young people are able to access the wealth or skills, expertise and resources that colleagues of the council can offer, whether this is to put up a shelf or offer gentle words of guidance on a university application.

8. Membership and Governance

Effective governance and planning arrangements are in place to mean the Corporate Parent can be the best they can be.

8.1. Corporate Parenting Board membership includes elected members, officers of the Council and all employees, with support from stakeholders and our partners.

8.2. The membership of the Board during this reporting period was as follows:

- Cllr Kate Wheller (Chair)
- Cllr Richard Bigg (Vice Chair)
- Cllr Andrew Parry
- Cllr Ryan Holloway
- Cllr Carole Jones
- Cllr Stella Jones
- Cllr Andrew Kerby
- Cllr Cathy Lugg

- 8.3. Corporate Parenting Board met 7 times this year and going forward it is planned that the Board will meet 6 times on alternating months.
- 8.4. There have been 2 formal meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board held in public in April and November 2022 that:
- Received annual statutory reports with regard to Children in Care and Care Leavers including annual reports from IRO, Fostering, Adoption, Youth Justice, Fostering Panel Chair, Corporate Parenting, Leaving Care, Virtual School, Advocacy and Independent Visitors, Health and Wellbeing. There were also updates with regards performance and other areas of interest in relation to Children in Care and Care Leavers.
 - Agreed an annual report summarising the Board's activities.
- 8.5. All other Corporate Parenting Board meetings were held informally, engaging stakeholders and children and young people to ensure that the Board is accessible and able to encourage the very best input from everyone taking part in the meetings.
- 8.6. With these arrangements established, Corporate Parenting Board Members have been better able to understand the issues, challenges and concerns and celebrate successes as they are experienced by young people, and also enables greater challenge of the Board Members in respect of the Council's Corporate Parenting role.
- 8.7. Embracing the idea of community parenting, membership has been extended to partners and colleagues in the community to widen engagement and opportunities for Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- 8.8. Corporate Parenting Board Members have nominated themselves as a champion for a theme that is of particular interest to them and have been able to work with the lead officer and young people to contribute to the content of the workshop and act as an ambassador for young people promoting high aspirations and securing best outcomes through service development within the area of interest.
- 8.9. The Board has supported the development of a new data set which was signed off in January 2023. Following the contributions of Board members, this has a new look and feel, is more easily accessible. In addition to the anticipated performance indicators, the data set also provides commentary on some of the more softer information such as extra-curricular activities which is equally impactful on children's outcomes. The data set has been presented to each Board meeting.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1. Dorset Council have adopted a policy of committing to reduce the number of Children in Care, taking a rights-based approach, and developing services which support children to be able to grow up in a family setting.
- 9.2. However, 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.
- 9.3. The Board have been sighted on the findings of both the March 2022 Competition and Marketing Authority (CMA) study¹ and the independent review of children's social care² which have resonated with local experience, particularly in respect of the difficulties we face in the social care marketplace.
- 9.4. The challenges for fostering recruitment have been noted nationally within both local authority and IFA services. With the number of enquiries to be foster carers and supported lodgings for Dorset Council declining, the support Corporate Parenting Board has given to a 15% uplift in the overall payment for Dorset foster carers and supported lodgings carer has been very welcome.
- 9.5. The Board recognises that it is all the more important for Dorset to be the fostering agency of choice for foster carers and supported lodgings carers and are committed to being ambassadors for the recruitment of Dorset carers.
- 9.6. The Board has supported investment in the residential estate for Dorset Children in Care and Care Leavers and members have actively participated at opening events and maintained oversight by visiting throughout the year.
- 9.7. In all that we do today we aim to equip children and young people 'for life', and wherever possible reduce the likelihood of needing to support Care Leavers in vulnerable adult populations. Investment in the Care Leavers Service, which has increased management and personal adviser capacity and developed senior personal adviser roles has ensured we are in a strong position to deliver ever better services.

10. Well-being and Health Implications

- 10.1 It is reported that Children in Care are four times more likely to have a mental health difficulty than children in the general population.³ Children in Care have double the rates of urgent dental treatment and are half as likely to attend dental
-

services as the general population.⁴ This is significant as poor oral health is also associated with other chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease. We also recognise the importance of extra-curricular activities such as sports, creative arts and music lessons which contribute to a child's wellbeing and sense of belonging.

- 10.2 One of the roles of corporate parents is to ensure that with partners we are working to reduce health inequalities and support the needs of Children in Care and Care Leavers.

11 Environmental Implications

- 11.1 As Corporate Parents we strive to ensure that our children experience love and care with permanent carers, close to the people and places that are important to them, recognising the link to improved mental health and educational attainment⁵.
- 11.2 Having sufficient placements in Dorset also reduces the amount of travel undertaken by families, social workers, and other children's services staff. There are currently 150 children living in care in independent provision outside Dorset. A third of children live under 20 miles away, with 2 thirds over 20 miles. While the majority of children live in neighbouring authorities, there are some children living as far afield as Blackpool, Sheffield, Leeds and Manchester.
- 11.3 Reduced travel should result in a reduction in the associated emissions from travel which is in line with the council's priority of protecting the natural environment, climate and ecology.

12 Other Implications

- 12.1 These are considered in the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report.

13 Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as: Low
Current Risk: Low
Residual Risk: Low

14 Equalities Impact Assessment

N/A

15 Appendices

None

16 Background Papers

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-market-study-final-report>

¹ <https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/final-report/March>

¹ NSPCC (2017) 'Children in Care :Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health'

¹ https://www.gla.ac.uk/news/archiveofnews/2017/august/headline_546507_en.html

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/conditions/index.html>

¹ Children's Commissioner (2017) 'Stability Index for Children in Care: Technical Report'

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Corporate Parenting Board

25 May 2023

Birth To Settled Adulthood - Report of the Independent Chair

Choose an item.

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: Mark Rogers
Title: Independent Chair
Tel: N/A
Email: mark.rogers@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public

Brief Summary: An update to the Committee on progress with the Birth To Settled Adulthood Programme (B2SA).

Recommendation: The Committee is requested to provide feedback.

Reason for Recommendation: Birth To Settled Adulthood is a major improvement and transformation programme and the Committee has an important role to play in ensuring that it has the desired impact.

1. Report

- 1.1 As Independent Chair I made my last (and initial) report to the Committee on 24th October 2022 and committed to regular updates at that meeting. This is, therefore, the second progress report.
- 1.2 I have been in role for 12 months and the overall assessment of the work undertaken in 2022 is that it has laid the majority of the foundations for the programme to transition from 'getting ready' to 'getting going'. That is to say, the partnership between Dorset Council, NHS Dorset and the Dorset

Parent Carer Council is such that there was agreement at the start of 2023 that sufficient groundwork had been undertaken in the previous twelve months that the crucial activity of service redesign could commence.

1.3 This is an important milestone for the partnership as it represents the first significant point in the programme where parents, carers, children and young people, along with those who commission and deliver services, will start to formulate and see the shape of the future pathways and services.

1.4 There have been a number of important, positive developments that have enabled this point to be reached; and they are also conditions that the Committee may wish to re-examine at future meetings to assure itself that the rate of progress set out in the Programme Plan is maintained.

1.4.1 Firstly, whilst the programme has been ably supported by a combination of Project Officers since early 2022, between October 2022 and March 2023, a full-time, experienced Programme Director was in post. This brought to the programme a greater focus, drive and oversight that means there is a revised programme (agreed in the last quarter of 2022) with logical phasing, better defined activities and success criteria, clearer milestones and a target completion date. There is a commitment to provide further strategic capacity of this nature which will be essential in maintaining momentum.

1.4.2 Secondly, executive directors and their teams across Dorset Council and NHS Dorset organisations have invested further time in strengthening relationships, leading to a more deeply shared understanding of the programme's ambition and better mobilisation of human resources. Together, this creates a much greater confidence that there is a truly shared mission and that the capacity and capabilities will be in place to deliver on it.

There is a report (at paragraph 4) from the former Programme Director that advises the Committee of a Joint Declaration signed by Dorset Council, NHS Dorset and Dorset Parent Carer Council that sets out shared principles to be adhered to in undertaking the service redesign work. This is a welcome and positive development and reflects the strengthening partnership that is delivering this programme.

1.4.3 Thirdly, there has been consistent, constructive executive political oversight, support and challenge throughout the first

year (and it continues into the second). This is ensuring, because there is a partnership delivering this programme, that there is strong democratic oversight holding partners to account for their commitment and the progress being made.

1.4.4 Fourthly, as Independent Chair, I am better equipped to assess progress, issues and risks because the former Programme Director, supported fully by the partnership, assembled an improved programme plan, reporting process and risk assessment framework. These came into place at the end of 2022 and the Board has received most positively its first report based on the new formats in January 2023.

2. As Chair, I am able to report, therefore, to this Committee that I have confidence that the partnership's ambition, plan and commitments are strongly indicative that the programme will progress within the timeframes set out. There are, though inevitably a small number of strategic risks to delivery and, as with the (positive) conditions referred to in the above paragraphs, I would like to draw attention to the potential challenges.
 - 2.1 Firstly, focus. This a major programme and it has, in total, a 30-month timeline (January 2022 to March 2024). It will be crucial to successful completion that attention, capacity and capabilities are maintained in a time when there are many competing (and, inevitably, unforeseen) demands on people's time.
 - 2.2 Secondly, funding. This is a multi-faceted risk (e.g., savings; inflation; rising demand; etc) and, as such, the programme will need to be clear on the available resource across the whole of 0 – 25 age range both now and into the medium term. As yet, not all resources have been mapped; nor, therefore, is there an indicative funding envelope for the redesigned service for its go live date in March 2024. This will need to be addressed sooner rather than later to ensure that the partnership resources available are sufficient to deliver the new model.
 - 2.3 Thirdly, workforce. A programme of this scale means that there are many staff across multiple organisations and service areas who need to be prepared effectively for the changes that lie ahead. Good work is underway to address this challenge. I have, for example, now participated in two staff webinars, the second of which targeted relevant staff across Dorset Council and NHS Dorset and was also supported by Dorset Parent Carer Council. There is much more underway, but this area of preparation

will become all the more important as the redesign work progresses and new pathways and service models come into focus.

2.4 Fourthly, communications and engagement. Throughout this programme it is vitally important that parents, carers, children and young people are effectively communicated with about the changes. They also need to be engaged and involved in a timely, rewarding, impactful manner when there is a need for co-production. A refreshed approach is being taken to these important issues and I will be ensuring that the Board monitors impact closely.

3. I have focused this report on some of the key conditions for success and the risks most needing close attention and mitigation.

3.1 The most important message in this report is that this major programme is, at the start of 2023, on track to deliver the much needed and long-awaited improvement and transformation to the experience and services available to support children and young people with a special educational need or disability. It is challenging work, but I see the commitment to making these changes across the whole of the partnership; and, perhaps, as important, a growing and positive collaborative effort that is making this partnership stronger month-by month.

3.2 The challenges, of course, are not inconsiderable – but they are manageable – and I look forward to making further positive reports to the Committee.

4. **Update from the former Programme Director**

4.1 Dorset B2SA Partnership Joint Declaration (please see background papers).

4.1.1 The Dorset Local Area has an ambitious change programme to improve the quality of support provided to children and young people who have special educational needs or disability as they prepare for adult life.

4.1.2 To support this, the following joint declaration outlines and confirms the commitment made by Dorset Council's Children's and Adult Social Care, Dorset Council elected members, NHS Dorset, and Dorset Parent Carer Council to work in partnership towards delivering our plans and associated improved outcomes.

4.1.3 To achieve these, the partnership is committed to ensuring the following principles are applied as a minimum when considering the options available to us and when delivering the necessary improvements to our service offer:

- The partnership shares the vision for children and young people as stated in Dorset Council's SEND Strategy.
"We want our children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to be healthy, happy and safe and able to achieve their potential to lead a fulfilling life. We want them to have, and to expect the same opportunities in life as other children and young people."
'Our vision for SEND in Dorset: SEND is everybody's business.'
Dorset Council SEND strategy 2021 -2024.
- Our service offer will be compliant with statutory requirements as outlined in the Mental Capacity Act 2005, Equality Act 2010, Care Act 2014, SEND Code of Practice 2014, Children and Families Act 2014, Mental Health Act 1983 (2007) and the Health and Care Act 2022.
- The partnership is underpinned by an effective and equitable Joint Commissioning Strategy that enables us to come together in a place-based service.
- Our service offer will ensure that assessments and provision are agreed together.
- We will use inspection reports, user feedback and the 'As Is' analysis of the current pathway to resolve issues and concerns.
- Our service offer will ensure a seamless experience for Children, Young People until they reach a settled adulthood.
- Our service offer is led by our shared ambition for young people to achieve their outcomes, to have access to better life opportunities and to be the best they can be.
- Our service offer will ensure that information, advice, and guidance is accessible and available at the right time to everyone.
- Our service design will ensure that young people and parent carers know who to contact, to ensure early conversations happen in the key areas of Education & Employment, Independent Living, Health & Wellbeing and Community Inclusion.
- We will create our service offer by involving all stakeholders and partners.
- All safeguarding requirements for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are fully understood and complied with.

4.1.4 To support this, the partnership has also agreed the high-level timeline and phasing for delivery of the in-scope service re design and pathways development leading to the 'go live' date of March 2024 (please see background papers).

5. Top Three Risks and Mitigation

5.1 In paragraph 2 of this report, the Independent Chair has set out a set of potential challenges that the programme could face. As part of the programme architecture, there is a risk register and the top three risks recorded are set out below (with present mitigations)

- Risk of delay due to lack of capacity of service re-design leads

Analysis is currently underway to identify the skill sets and numbers of resources needed to free up the required 40% capacity of the 14-25 and 0-25 workstream leads.

- Risk to realisation of savings due to sources still to be confirmed.

Detailed identification/confirmation of savings and their associated timelines is currently being worked on.

- Reputational risk from out-of-scope deliverables being associated with B2SA.

A robust communications strategy is in place to ensure clear messages are delivered confirming what will be delivered by the programme and to avoid confusion between those and current day to day service delivery.

6. Financial Implications

None arising specifically from this report. It is important to note, however, that there are financial risks associated with this programme, notably the need to establish the future funding envelope necessary to deliver to redesigned service model. It will also be important to ensure that resource continues to be available for further programme director capacity.

7. Environmental Implications

None.

8. Well-being and Health Implications

None.

9. Other Implications

None.

10. Risk Assessment

None required.

11. Equalities Impact Assessment

None required.

12. Appendices

None.

13. Background Papers



B2SA-Joint
Declaration Final.pdf



B2SA Programme
Timeline Jan 23.pdf

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Corporate Parenting Board

25 May 2023

Leaving Care Service Annual report 2022-2023

Choose an item.

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

Local Councillor(s):

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

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Report Status: Public

[Brief Summary:](#)

The annual report has been drawn together to highlight to the Corporate Parenting Board members key development and performance of the Leaving Care Service in exercising their duty to our care experienced young people.

The Leaving Care Service has over the past 12 months significantly invested in staffing by increasing management capacity and personal advisor capacity as well as creating two senior personal advisor roles. The service has also opened 10 Kirtleton Avenue which has increased local housing provision for our young people and created a hub space for professional to meet with our young people.

The service has also had significant improvement in key performance areas:

- In touch: 17-18 (99%) and 19-21 (96%)
- Pathway plans completed in time (91.03%)
- In education, employment and training 17-18 (63%) and 19-21 (58%)
- Living in suitable accommodation (97.24%)

Recommendation:

Recommendation is for members to note this report.

Reason for Recommendation:

The report highlights the past 12 months for the Leaving Care Service and the impact for our care experienced young people.

1. Report

1.1 Introduction

- 1.2** Dorset Councils aims to ensure all our young people reach their potential, develop into independent, self-confident adults. We strongly believe that all Care Leavers should have a positive experience of leaving care and should continue to receive on-going support based on a model of interdependence to assist them to deal with adult responsibilities.
- 1.3** When young people are ready to leave care, we will ensure that they feel as ready as possible. We recognise they may not be fully equipped with practical independence skills or have the knowledge to access a range of services that they may need. Our model of interdependence aims to ensure that our young people have the support of the Personal Advisor to support and guide them around key areas including housing, health, employment, education, leisure, benefits and other community services. We recognise that leaving care can trigger feelings of isolation and loneliness and at this time the young person's life may become unstable or disrupted, therefore we will ensure that the services offered are approachable, accessible and treat all our young people with respect and dignity.
- 1.4** We will ensure high expectations for our Care Leavers are shared widely by involving our partners through our Care Leaver Delivery Group, we will ensure coordinated services are provided so that our young people feel safe in their homes and in the community, are able to have or maintain a trusted relationship, achieve at higher education or college, gain and sustain employment and generally have a positive experience of adult life.
- 1.5** The views and opinions of our young people are central to the planning we do for them as Corporate Parents, we will ensure that we listen to what they say and review our practice accordingly and shape the service we deliver to meet the needs of our young people. Decisions about young people's lives and future are collaborative and made with them, not for them. We aim that all our young people feel listened to and valued.
- 1.6** In the last 12 months the service has seen significant investment and has had several developments. As of the 1st of May 2023, the service will sit under a Head of Service for Leaving Care and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. We have increased staffing capacity of personal advisors and created two additional senior personal advisor roles.
- 1.7** We have accessed funding to facilitate Staying Close to support our young people stepping out of residential provision as young adults. We have seen an increase in Staying Put arrangements for our Care Leavers remaining in their foster placement post 18.
- 1.8** In addition, we have successfully opened 10 Kirtleton Avenue in Weymouth which provides local accommodation for up to 12 young people who are Dorset Care Leavers. This premises also offers a hub for Care Leavers to

drop in to see professionals such as the Leaving Care nurse. The Care Leaver Joint Housing Protocol has also been agreed and implemented.

- 1.9** Performance with service delivery has noticeably improved in key areas such as education employment and training, increased percentage of completed pathway plans in time and percentage of our young people in suitable accommodation.
- 1.10** The Care Leaver Delivery Group meets monthly and is chaired by an elected member Cllr Kerby. The Care Leavers Delivery Group is now well embedded and holds to account the council and its partners for their role in the delivery of services and statutory responsibilities to Care Leavers. The group have access to good qualitative and quantitative management information from the council and its partners, to monitor performance effectively against outcomes and track delivery of promises and commitments.

2. Context

- 2.1** At the end of March 2023, we had 516 Care Leavers in our family, 287 of these are “active” Care Leavers 44 of which are unaccompanied young people. We have 71 (16-17 years old) being supported through transition by a Personal Advisor alongside their social worker.
- 2.2** Most of our Care Leavers remained in care until their 18th birthday. Whilst the picture is improving, we know not as many of our young people are benefiting from Staying Put arrangements as we would like. As of March 2023 (7.6%) of our Care Leavers were in staying-put arrangements up from (4.88%) in April 2022. We continue to look at how we are supporting foster carers to continue to provide a safe and stable home for our young people after they turn 18 and into adulthood.
- 2.3** Personal Advisers are secondary allocated to young people on their 16th birthday secondary to provide a smooth transition from their social worker to the Leaving Care Service once they are 18. The Personal Adviser works alongside the young person’s social worker, building a relationship before they “leave care,” this enables us to support young people with their independence readiness/skills as they move into adulthood, so they are ready and confident when they leave care. We continue our focus to ensure that all our young people have current Pathway Plans that are ambitious and support our young people to move towards independence.
- 2.4** The National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied minors is 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. The rise in the quota for Dorset represents a rise from 47 young in people in 2022 to 67 young people in 2023. This has been a 400% increase in this calendar year. 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. Dorset council as of March 2023 has 44 Care Leavers who are unaccompanied

asylum-seeking children. The majority of which are in suitable accommodation with 1 in bed and breakfast and 1 in custody. Of these young people 33 live outside of Dorset Local authority area.

- 2.5** Dorset Council remains involved and working with the Care Leaver Covenant and have been recognised by the Care Leaver Covenant as a Trailblazer Authority. The Care Leaver Covenant is a national inclusion programme that supports Care Leavers aged 16-25 to live independently. Supporting meaningful opportunities for Care Leavers to access.
- 2.6** We are working with the Care Leaver Covenant through the Care Leaver to Delivery Group to use best practice and as we continuously build on our Care Leaver offers across the Council and the partnership.
- 2.7** Via the Care Leaver Covenant, we have piloted the Sky Spectra Tech Up Grants to young people. Sky Up is a new programme from Sky launched in 2022 which sets out the goal of tackling digital inequality. It is supporting our Care Leavers aged 18 to 25 from all backgrounds to succeed in a digital age, ensuring that those who are most at risk of being digitally excluded are given access to the right connectivity, skills, and technology. Providing them with connectivity, devices, and access to skills training. We are also in the early stages of working with NHS Dorset to support the NHS Care Leaver Covenant Pathfinder, which will support 25 Care Leavers into NHS scholarships/apprenticeships across Dorset.
- 2.8** The New Belongings Programme ran from 2019-2022 and worked with eight local authorities using the Your Life Beyond Care survey from our Bright Spots programme and the Baker Dixon self-assessment-framework to better understand what makes life good for their Care Leavers and how to improve the support they are offering. Using this information Dorset worked with our young people to co-produce solutions to the issues they have identified. Whilst the programme has ended in Dorset its ethos is echoed in all that we do and forms the bases of our Care Leaver Delivery Group action plan. The Leaving Care Service continues to work closely with colleagues in social care, health, education and housing to strengthen our current transitions pathway. Feedback from New Belongings and national research indicated that young people did not always feel ready or equipped to leave care at 18 years old.
- 2.9** We have reviewed our transitions pathway and we have improved our practice in working with our young people as they turn 16. To facilitate this there has been increased staffing capacity in the Leaving Care Service, enabling us to reduce caseloads, Personal Advisors are secondary allocated as the young person reaches their 16th birthday, joint planning processes take place with a clear role for the Personal Advisor, including:
- Facilitated introduction to the young person and those caring for them.
 - Invitation and attendance at all key meetings
 - Overseeing independence planning/readiness

- Feeding into post 18 accommodation plans
 - Ensuring benefit claims are in place prior to 18th birthday.
 - Handover meeting prior to young person's 18th birthday
 - Robust management oversight via the Transitions Panel
- 2.10** The ability to reach down to 16-year-olds, enables the Personal Adviser to build a trusting relationship with the young person to promote a smooth transition reaching 18 years old and leaving care. The Personal Advisor have a good knowledge of the young person's level of independence readiness and will be able to support the young person to develop the skills and confidence they need as they move into adulthood, so they confident and ready to leave care, whilst recognising that young people are not expected to be fully independent at this stage and we continue to work on a model of interdependence to support the on-going development of independence skills/resilience.
- 2.11** Our Transitions Panel reviews all young people aged 16+ to ensure transitions plans are progressing. Where there is early identification of complexity/challenge the panel as a multi-agency team can provide a multi-agency approach to solutions. The Panel ensures that Pathway Plans that are ambitious and support our young people to move towards increased independence creating maximum opportunities for living, loving, learning and working.
- 3. Work force**
- 3.1** The Leaving Care Service in Dorset has had significant investment from senior leaders through to operational staff. The Leaving Care service will now sit under a newly created Head of Service for Care Leavers and unaccompanied asylum-seeking Children as of April 2023
- 3.2** The Leaving Care Service is run operationally by the Service Manager for Corporate Parenting, Permanence and Care Leavers. There are now 2.5 x FTE Team Managers in the service with the recent addition of additional 0.5 FTE Team manager post. This additional post has been created to increase management capacity in response to the growing service.
- 3.3** We currently have 17.64 x FTE Personal Advisers in the service, which includes the additional capacity of a further 3 FTE Personal Advisors. This does not include the addition of 2 x FTE Senior Personal Advisors, which will reduce caseload numbers and increase management oversight. The service has an additional 1 x FTE Housing Project Officer.
- 3.4** We have retained an overall stable workforce over the past 12 months, with some staff exiting the service in the previous 6 months and increased the staffing complement. We identified the need to develop Senior Personal

Advisor roles in the Leaving Care Service, to lead the delivery of Staying Close and employer engagement. These lead areas correlate with those identified by young people in the New Belongings Life Beyond Care survey and offer a career development pathway in the Leaving Care Team.

4. Work force development

- 4.1** Dorset Council subscribes to the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum which provides at least 3 training events for leaving care professionals and 3 manager events per year which are well attended by staff in the service. Team Managers hold monthly workshops with Personal Advisers, delivered either by internal or external staff.
- 4.2** Through our Workforce Development Team all Personal Advisors have access to a broad and comprehensive learning and development offer including access to research tools such as Research in Practice and Community Care Inform. We have developed resources that are available on the Children's Hub or The Academy (our virtual learning and development platform) to support employees that are working with children, young people and families. This includes tool kits including Contextual Safeguarding, Domestic Abuse, Sexual Abuse. Practice Launch events are held with Managers and practitioners to launch new practice resources and we continue with our Stop the Clock programme of reflective sessions within teams which have a set resource on a particular theme identified through our quality assurance processes.

5. Young people Feedback

- 5.1** The voice of young people who are care experienced continues to provide us with learning and opportunities to make things better together. The council have worked with Coram Voice on their New Belongings Programme using the 'My Life Beyond Care' survey. The surveys have been conducted bi-annually since 2019 and this has given the whole council a significant opportunity to understand how young people feel about the services they receive, where there are 'Bright Spots' of practice and where there are areas for improvement. Their feedback has provided a structure and plan for service development as Care Leavers ranked their priorities.
- 5.2** The reports are considered by CSLT, Corporate Parenting Board, other relevant service areas and explored deeper in workshops across the workforce. Care leavers have prioritised some areas of work to be focussed on and shaped the Care Leaver Delivery Group action plan.
- 5.3** The Youth Voice Team use a variety of tools to hear feedback from young people and continue to explore and check the inclusivity and accessibility of this. There is not one preferred way for young people to share their voice and so a range of options is required. The team have several tools that help with digital interaction and undertake 1-1 phone calls or in person visits where this is preferred.

- 5.4** A Business Intelligence dashboard is currently being developed specifically for The Youth Voice Team to support them in working smarter; to hear from Care Leavers across the country and the county. This piece of work should begin in January 2023.
- 5.5** Dorset Council has commissioned Coram for a further 2 years to carry out the Your Life Beyond Care surveys.

What is most important to you?



- 5.6** In response to New Belongings feedback, the following service improvements have been delivered:

- access to the Rees Foundation “Ask Jan” membership which provides access to comprehensive, practical advice, additional benefits and access to a 24-hour counselling helpline and counselling sessions,
- young people in custody have access to a debit card.
- Revised financial policy.
- Created a personal budget for all young people.
- Increased capacity of the Designated Leaving Care Nurse
- Developed Kirtleton Avenue
- Increased capacity of the staff team
- Council tax exemption
- Ring fenced apprenticeship opportunities.

6. How we Know:

6.1 Business intelligence dashboard

- 6.2** We have an excellent suite of performance data and dashboards accessible to managers and all staff through our intranet pages and through MOSAIC, our electronic social care record.

- 6.3** Our Children's Services Monthly Performance Report is published and shared with all managers to inform performance conversations and pulls together performance indicators across a wide range of services, including Leaving Care. This report is interactive and available to all staff and provides one version of the truth. This report is used extensively to review performances on a monthly basis and support our Performance Management Framework, providing good visibility of performance across all services.
- 6.4** Our Leaving Care Business Intelligence Dashboard provides detailed management information to all managers and senior leaders on key areas of performance including suitability of accommodation, education, employment and training, pathway plan completion, Care Leaver contacts and management supervision rates. There is regular supervision of staff and management meetings to monitor performance within the team.

7. Audits

- 7.1** The Leaving Care Management team have established key data collection methods that support focus on key areas of the service. The Leaving Care Service benefits from regular dip sampling auditing with key findings being shared with the Care Leaving staff team, wider staffing group and the senior leadership team in a number of formats.

- 7.2** Audit themes from March 2022:

Care Leavers Health Passport	Mar 22
Supervision Records	Jun 22
Young people in unsuitable accommodation	Oct 22
Transitions Plans (Rising 18's)	Dec 22
Transitions Plans (18 -19-year-olds)	Dec 22
Case Recording	Jan 23
Supervision Records (revisit)	Jan 23
Young people in unsuitable accommodation (revisit)	Feb 23
PA Supervision (Eligible Children)	Feb 23
Accommodation Seen (18 -20-year-olds)	Feb 23

- 7.3** The Quality of Practice and Action Group, which is held monthly and attended by senior managers, oversees the performance of the services, which informs thematic reviews.
- 7.4** To ensure we obtain an accurate representation of the quality of practice; audits are selected at random and thematic audit is scheduled as part of testing the impact of improvements or where data and audit highlight the need for dip sampling to determine if a detailed thematic review is required.
- 7.5** In December 2022, 77% of the audits completed for Leaving Care were good/outstanding, this highlighted some good practice in supporting transitions pathways for young people; these audits reviewed rising 18's and

demonstrated good transitions planning, this was reinforced with an audit of 18-19 year olds, to review if their plan had been stable and they had remained in their post accommodation of which almost all young people had remained in their accommodation as planned.

- 7.6** The audits completed in January /February 2023 have highlighted some principal areas to strengthen practice, these is in relation to supervision and ensuring the newly revised practice standards are fully embedded in team practice.

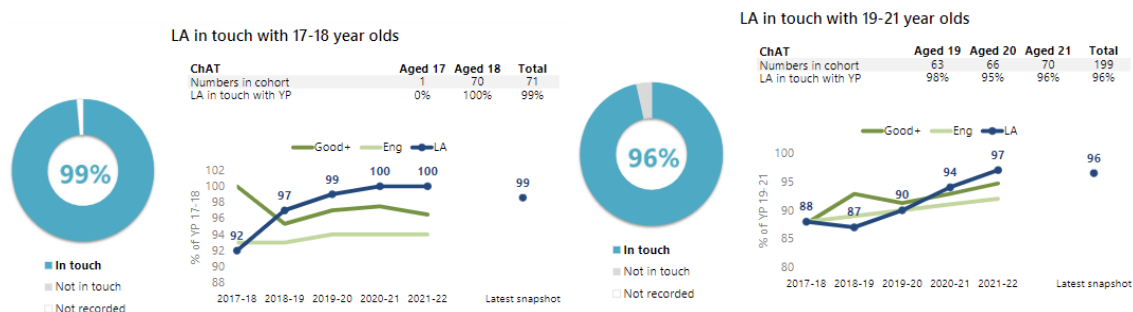
8. Key performance Indicators Performance

8.1 In touch

- 8.2** The Leaving Care Service is in Touch with our young people (Active aged 17-18) - March to 99% and (active 19-21) in touch at 96%. Relational practice is at the heart of our work with young people, building trusting, supportive relationships, this is echoed in the New Belongings findings, which found that 97% of young people found it easy to get in contact with their leaving care worker. Significantly more Care Leavers (86%) in Dorset trusted their leaving care worker 'all or most of the time' compared to Care Leavers (78%) nationally. This is one of our Bright Spot of practice.

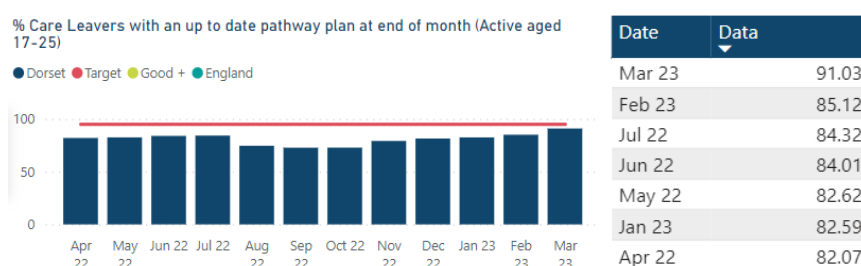
- 8.3** Personal Advisors use a variety of methods to maintain contact with young people, including minimum 8 weekly contacts with at least one face to face visit, telephone contact, WhatsApp contact, email and video contact. The team respond flexibly to young people, with a telephone duty service available Monday–Friday. Our duty service will be delivered from Kirtleton Avenue offering more face-to-face contact for young people.

- 8.4** As young people progress into adulthood, we are led by their preference for type and frequency of contact, however we will persist in maintaining open lines of communication for all our young people aged up to 21; for those young people who choose to exit the service at 21 years, we continue to contact them annually to keep in touch and remind them that the service is still able to offer support if needed up until the age of 25 years.



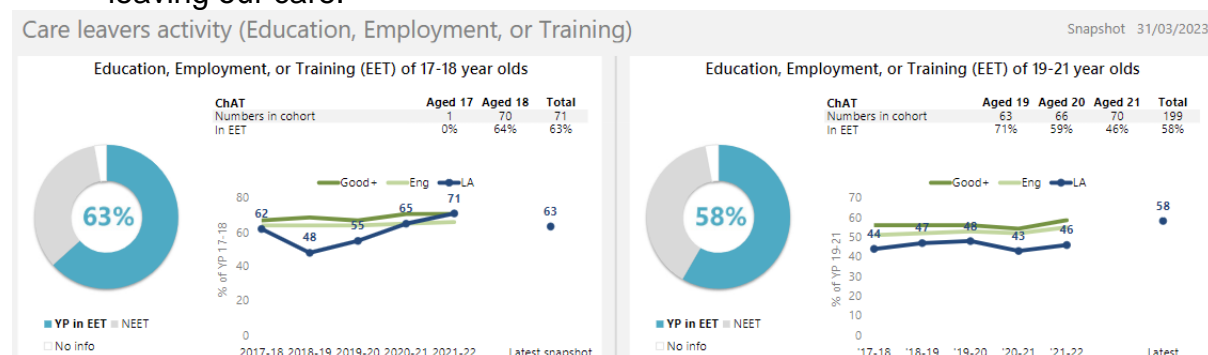
9. Pathway plans

- 9.1** Pathway plans for our young people are a valuable tool in planning for our young people's future including what actions need to be taken in the short medium and long term to support the young people we are working with. As such the Care Leaving service have prioritised this and developed our staffing resource to improve performance as shown below performance has increased from April 2022 82.07% to March 2023 91.03%). We aim for 95%+ performance in this regarding recognising the importance for our young people and planning.



10. Employment Education and Training (EET)

- 10.1** We have high aspirations for all Care Leavers and encourage them to achieve their goals and potential. 63% of our young people aged 17-18 years old are in EET and 51% of our 19-21-year-olds, which compares favourably with national statistics and an improvement from 60% 17-18 year old and 43% 19-21 year olds in March 2022, however we remain ambitious for our young people and we recognise the need to continue to further strengthen practice and work with our partners to continue to improve our offer for young people leaving our care.



- 10.2** The Leaving Care Service is working with our Young & Thriving Team and internal/external partners to deliver an overarching Education Employment Training strategy as we continue to strive to increase the numbers of young people accessing education, employment and training.
- 10.3** The Leaving Care Service has recruited a Senior Personal Advisor to lead on Education, Employment and Training, the focus of the role will be to

increase/maximise EET opportunities for young people, leading on supporting the development of opportunities internally through our Pathways to Employment Apprenticeship/Trainee scheme and working with local businesses to consider opportunities for Care Leavers; increasing opportunities for employment and enrichment via the Care Leaver Covenant.

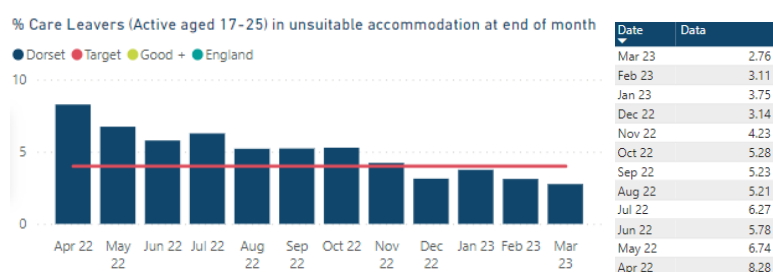
- 10.4** Dorset Council has underlined its commitment to Care Leavers through its HR procedures: all Children in Care and Care Leavers who apply for Dorset Council apprenticeships are guaranteed an interview; we are working with our HR colleagues to extend this commitment to all positions advertised by the council.

11 Suitable Accommodation

- 11.1** The majority of our young people have suitable accommodation. This remains a priority for Dorset Council, and we continue to work at pace to ensure that all our Care Leavers have safe, stable and permanent homes that meet their needs as this was the number one priority identified by our Care Leavers participating in the Coram Voice – New Belongings Survey. To this end, Dorset Council purchased accommodation in Kirtleton Avenue, Weymouth which has the capacity to house 12 young people in their own or shared flat. There is also a training flat for children in our care that will support development of independent skills in preparation for leaving our care.

- 11.2** The residents are supported by two peer landlords who also run the residents committee. At the time of writing this report there are 6 young people living in Kirtleton and we envisage being at capacity in the next 4 to 6 weeks. Feedback from residence have been positive with residence settling in quickly.

- 11.3** The Care Leaving team have enhanced practice standards and refined process for those young people in unsuitable accommodation that are now embedding into the team to ensure continues improving performance in this regard. As shown in the diagram below performance has been better than our target for the year for % of 17–25-year-olds in unsuitable accommodation with March 2023 being 2.76%. In April 2022, the percentage was 8.28%.



- 11.4** The Care Leaver Housing Protocol has been approved this year and was co-created between housing and the Care Leaving Service, both of whom are

delivering training to staff, which will come to an end in June 2023. This protocol looks to reduce homelessness for our Care Leavers and provide early access to suitable accommodation.

12. Conclusion

- 12.1** The Care Leaver Delivery Group as well as the Corporate Parenting Board oversee the service development and improvements to the Local Offer based on the priorities identified by young people. We have strong partnerships to ensure we are improving our offer to young people: Housing, Education, Employment & Training, Health & Well Being, Financial Entitlements and opportunities for enrichment and development. We have invested in staffing in the Care Leaving Service to strengthen the capacity in the team and reduce caseload numbers to enable us to deliver a high-quality service to our young people.
- 12.2** We have worked to reduce the number of Care Leavers in unsuitable accommodation. We have revised practice standards to have a greater focus on the quality and impact of support and planning for those that are in unsuitable accommodation including pathway plans, visiting arrangements, offer of practical support, exit planning and increased management oversight. We are ensuring these are embedded in practice by regularly auditing with QARO's supporting this process.
- 12.3** We have strengthened our Care Leaver Business Intelligence Dashboard to provide management information to all managers and senior leaders on key areas of performance including suitability of accommodation and management oversight of those young people living in temporary or unsuitable accommodation. The Business Intelligence Dashboard is embedded into management practice including operational management meetings within the Leaving Care Service to review areas of practice including suitability of accommodation, education, employment and training and activity status, but also to support with caseload allocation and management, monitoring of timely/completed supervision rates and pathway plans. The Dashboard provides up to date information for reporting purposes to senior management, via exception reports for unsuitability of accommodation, monitoring of transitions from Children in Care-to-Care Leavers Service.

13. Financial Implications

- 13.1** There are financial implications from this report – The investment in increased staffing capacity and the senior Personal Advisor roles have been funded through the Personal Advisor to 25 Grant and the Staying Close Grant. There has also been an uplift of 15% in supported lodgings allowance. The care leaver allowance has also been increased in line with inflation. All have been provided within 2023/2024 budget.

14. Environmental Implications

- 14.1** There are environmental factors to consider for those young people living out of the area, Personal Advisors meeting face to face with young people requiring at times long travel times.
- 14.2** We as a service try reducing our carbon footprint by using trains and linking Personal Advisors to young people near one another reducing the number of Personal Advisors traveling.

15. Wellbeing and Health Implications

- 15.1** The investment in staff within the service will support our Care Leavers wellbeing and health as staff will have the time to develop and maintain working relationships with our young people. This is highlighted by our young people feedback as there second and third highest priority (Life beyond care survey)

16. Other Implications

Not applicable

17. Risk Assessment

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

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

18. Equalities Impact Assessment

There are no Equality implications for this report.

19. Appendices

Not applicable

20. Background Paper

Not applicable.

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