



Corporate Parenting Board

Date: Wednesday, 28 May 2025
Time: 3.00 pm
Venue: Council Chamber, County Hall, Dorchester, DT1 1XJ

Members (Quorum: 3)

Bridget Bolwell (Chair), Duncan Sowry-House (Vice-Chair), Stella Jones, Matt Bell, Julie Robinson, Byron Quayle and Cathy Lugg

Interim Chief Executive: Sam Crowe, County Hall, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1XJ

For more information about this agenda please contact Democratic Services
Meeting Contact Tel: 01305 224450 - antony.nash@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 of the Committee to open the meeting and welcome those present.	
2.	APOLOGIES To receive any apologies for absense.	
3.	MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 April 2025.	5 - 8
4.	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.

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 antony.nash@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk by 8.30am on **23 May 2025**

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

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

6. INTRODUCTION & RECENT INSPECTION REPORT

The Executive Director for Children to share the latest OFSTED results with the committee.

7. CORPORATE PARENTING DATASET

9 - 28

To receive a report from the Head of Service Children in Care.

8. CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT

29 - 48

To receive the report from Head of Service Children in Care

9. YOUTH VOICE STRATEGY FOR CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN

49 - 62

AND YOUNG PEOPLE

To receive the report from the Youth Voice Manager

10. CARE LEAVERS ANNUAL REPORT 63 - 80

To receive the report from the Head of Service - Care Leavers & UASC

11. ASPIRE ADOPTION STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 1 APRIL TO 31 MARCH 2026 AND ANNUAL REPORT 1 APRIL 2024 TO 31 MARCH 2025. 81 - 176

To receive the report from Service Manager, Aspire Adoption Services

12. FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 177 - 198

To receive the report from the Service Manager - Fostering

13. FOSTERING PANEL CHAIR ANNUAL REPORT 199 - 212

To receive the report from the Fostering Panel Independent Chair

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To confirm details and deadlines for papers for the next meeting of the (formal) Corporate Parenting Board which will be held on 27 November 2025. The next informal meeting will be held on 31 July 2025.

15. URGENT ITEMS

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

16. EXEMPT BUSINESS

To move the exclusion of the press and the public for the following item in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the meaning of paragraph x of schedule 12 A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended). The public and the press will be asked to leave the meeting whilst the item of business is considered.

There are no exempt items scheduled for this meeting.

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CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 9 APRIL 2025

Present: Cllrs Bridget Bolwell (Chair), Duncan Sowry-House (Vice-Chair), Andrew Parry and Byron Quayle

Present remotely: Cllrs Jane Somper

Apologies: Cllrs Matt Bell and Andy Todd

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):

Paul Dempsey (Executive Director of People - Children), Louise Drury (Head of Service Children in Care and Care Leavers) and Sunita Khattra-Hall (Corporate Director for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Families)

Officers present remotely (for all or part of the meeting):

Matthew Chislett (Service Manager - Corporate Parenting & Care Leavers)

1. **Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair started the meeting and welcomed those in attendance

2. **Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2024 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

3. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

4. **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

5. **Annual Report for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People 2023-24**

The Executive Director Children Services introduced the Designated Nurse for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People who described the report and provided current statistics to provide an additional insight along with the report.

There was a ranging discussion that covered off several key areas;

Initial health assessments and the reasons why they uptake and timeliness did not meet the 20-day statutory requirement including factors such as;

- choice and consent
- extenuating circumstances
- placement out of area

The mitigations for this include partnership working, officer determination and a robust notification process.

Health passports had been developed in partnership with Health colleagues and work happened ensuring the data behind them was relevant to reporting.

Dentistry for Children in Care and is now in place to ensure access to a dentist for initial assessment and ongoing dental treatment. Current provision alongside areas still to be covered by this scheme was discussed.

Asylum seekers approach using an interpreter to support the completion of the necessary documentation, and considerations and areas of concern such as Tuberculosis (TB) diagnosis and out of county placements.

Pregnancy Pathway was discussed to ensure quality of care and outcome for those going through it and the development and inclusion of a Compassionate Pathway and the integration with the Pause programme.

Serious Violence work and the approach being taken in a preventative space and an example of this worse was described and the impact of the approach. Funding had been requested

Actions-

The Executive Director for Childrens Services wrote a statement of support from Dorset Council to endorse continued funding of the resource for Serious Violence to Community Safety Partnership.

The Corporate Parenting Board considered the opportunity to have training provided by NHS colleagues to support their role as Corporate Parents.

6. Date of Next Meeting

The next Formal meeting on 28 May 2025 and the next informal meeting were held on 31 July 2025

7. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

8. Urgent items

There were no urgent items

Duration of meeting: 11.01 - 11.59 am

Chairman

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Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

March 2025



The purpose of this report is to present the **Corporate Parenting Board** with a comprehensive overview of performance metrics. The indicators are organized by relevant categories to facilitate analysis and understanding. We will continue collaborating with managers to establish clear targets for improvement and accountability.



Overview of Performance

The report presents key indicators and evaluates performance against these metrics over the past six months. It assesses the available data as of the end of the last month, utilising snapshots for analysis. Where applicable, specific targets have been established to promote high performance and drive improvement, accompanied by a RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating for each indicator. These targets are aligned with national benchmarks and the averages of statistical neighbours, and relevant information is included in the report where available, in collaboration 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.

The latest performance is compared to the previous month, with icons indicating the direction of performance, based solely on whether the figures have increased or decreased. It is important to note that the '**Direction of Performance**' field is not related to the established targets; rather, it serves to highlight changes in performance trends. To assess the overall status of each measure, please refer to the RAG ratings in the '**Status**' field, which indicate how the latest month's performance aligns with the set targets.

- ✔ improved performance compared with previous month
- ✘ decline in performance compared with previous month
- ! same performance compared with previous month

i Benchmarking Note

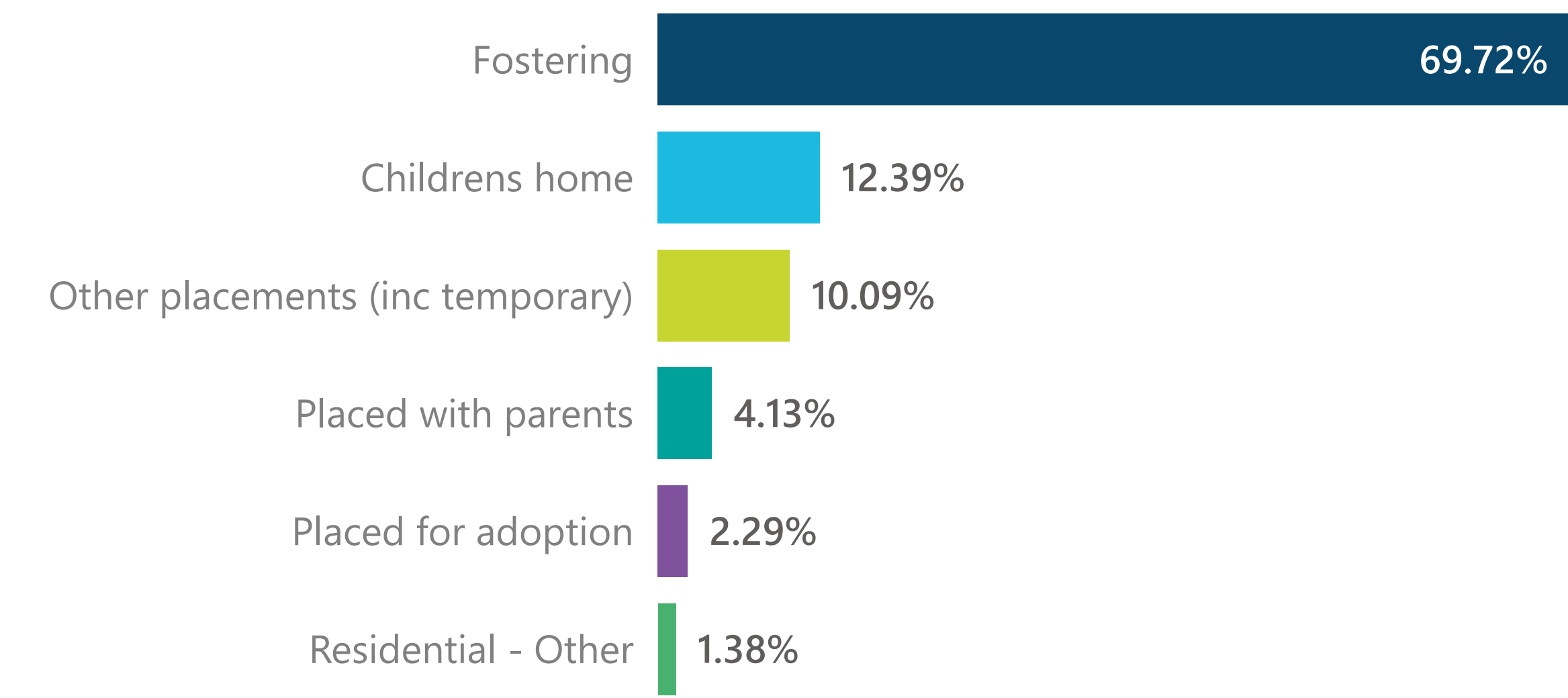
The statistical neighbours recognised for their Good and Outstanding performance include Cornwall, East Sussex, Norfolk, Shropshire, Somerset, Wiltshire, and Worcestershire. The most recent benchmarking data has been incorporated into this report for your review.



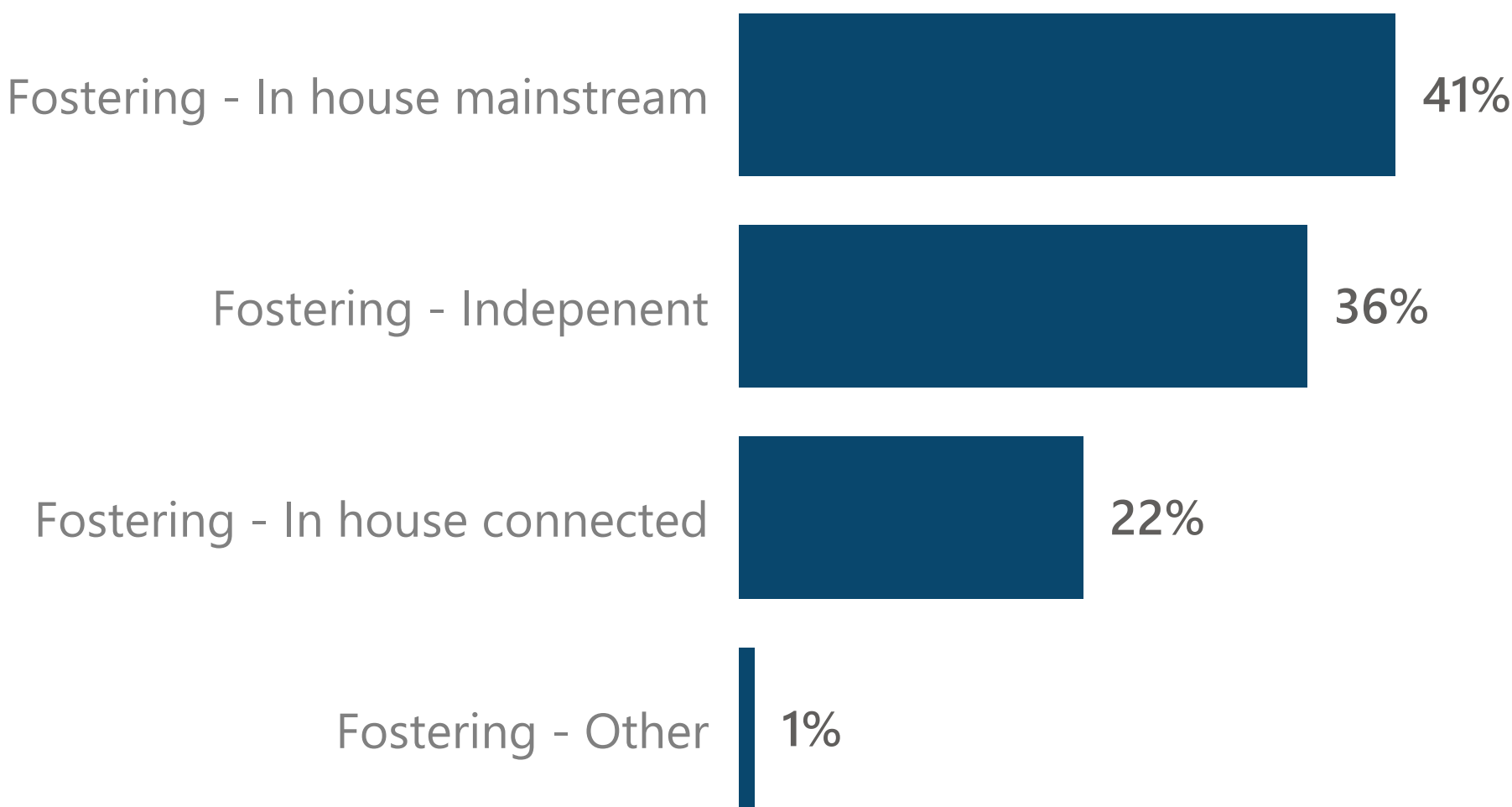
You are currently viewing data for
March 2025

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

Child Placement Type



Placement - Fostering Breakdown



Number of Children in Care

We have **435** children in care (rate of **66** per 10,000), **41** of which are unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Last month we had **433** , (**66**) and **42** respectively.

Permanence

In the last 6 months **10** % of children achieved permanence through Adoption and **5** % achieved permanence through Special Guardianship Orders (SGO). Last month this was **11** % and **1** % respectively.

Distance from Home

41 % of our children in care live over 20 miles away from home (excluding our unaccompanied asylum seeking children). Last month it was **41** %.

Placement Stability

Of our children in care who have been in care for 2.5 years (aged 16 or under) **78** % have been in their placement for 2 years or more. Last month it was **78** %.

10 % of our children in care had 3 or more placements in the previous 12 months. Last month it was **11** %.

Health

Of our children who have been in care for at least 12 months (aged 4–16), **53** % have had a strengths & difficulties questionnaire completed. Last month this was **58** %

Of our new children in care last month, **33** % had their initial health assessment within 20 days. In the month prior to that it was **22** %

Education

The average attendance for this academic year for our children in care is **89** %, (**89** % up to last month).

93 % of our children in care have had their termly personal education plan completed on time (**93** % up to last month).

Adoption

19 children were adopted in the last 12 months, compared to **16** children in the previous 12 months.

Adoption

The average number of days from the date of the Placement Order to the date the child was matched to prospective adopters was **201** (**201** last month)

Adoption

The average number of days between entering care and moving in with adopted family (adjusted for foster carer adoptions) was **334** (**334** last month).

Care Leavers

We have **2** care leavers (active, aged 16–25 yrs) in bed and breakfast accommodation. In the previous month we had **1**

Care Leavers

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

Care Leavers

68 % of our care leavers are in employment, education or training (active, 19–21 yrs). Last month this was **66** %

Care Leavers

93 % of our care leavers with an up to date Pathway Plan and end of month (active, 17–25 yrs). Last month this was **93** %

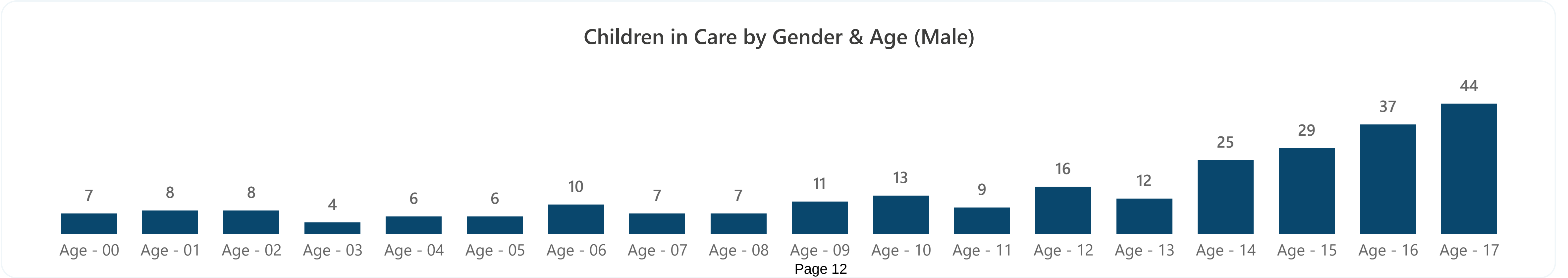
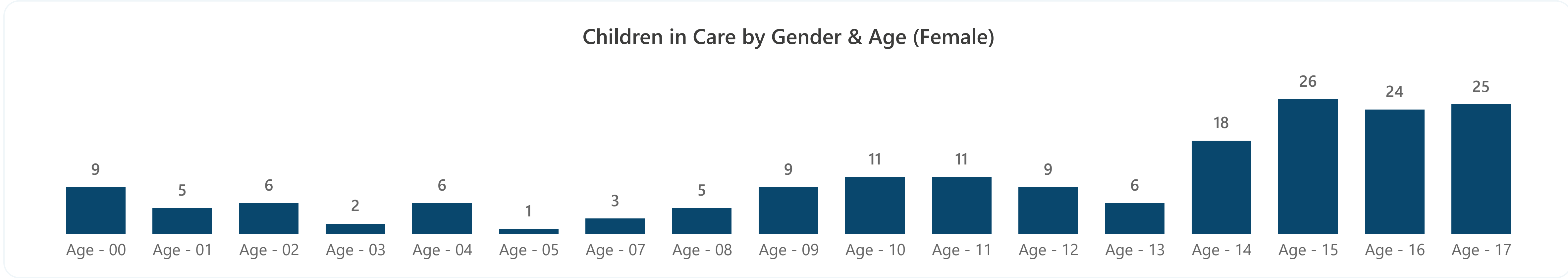
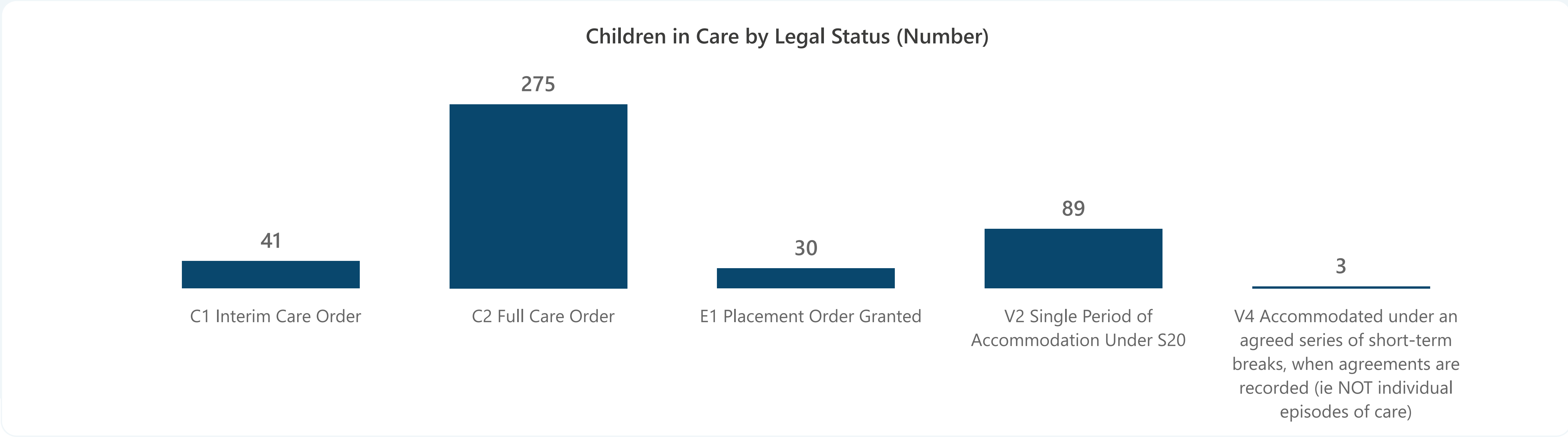
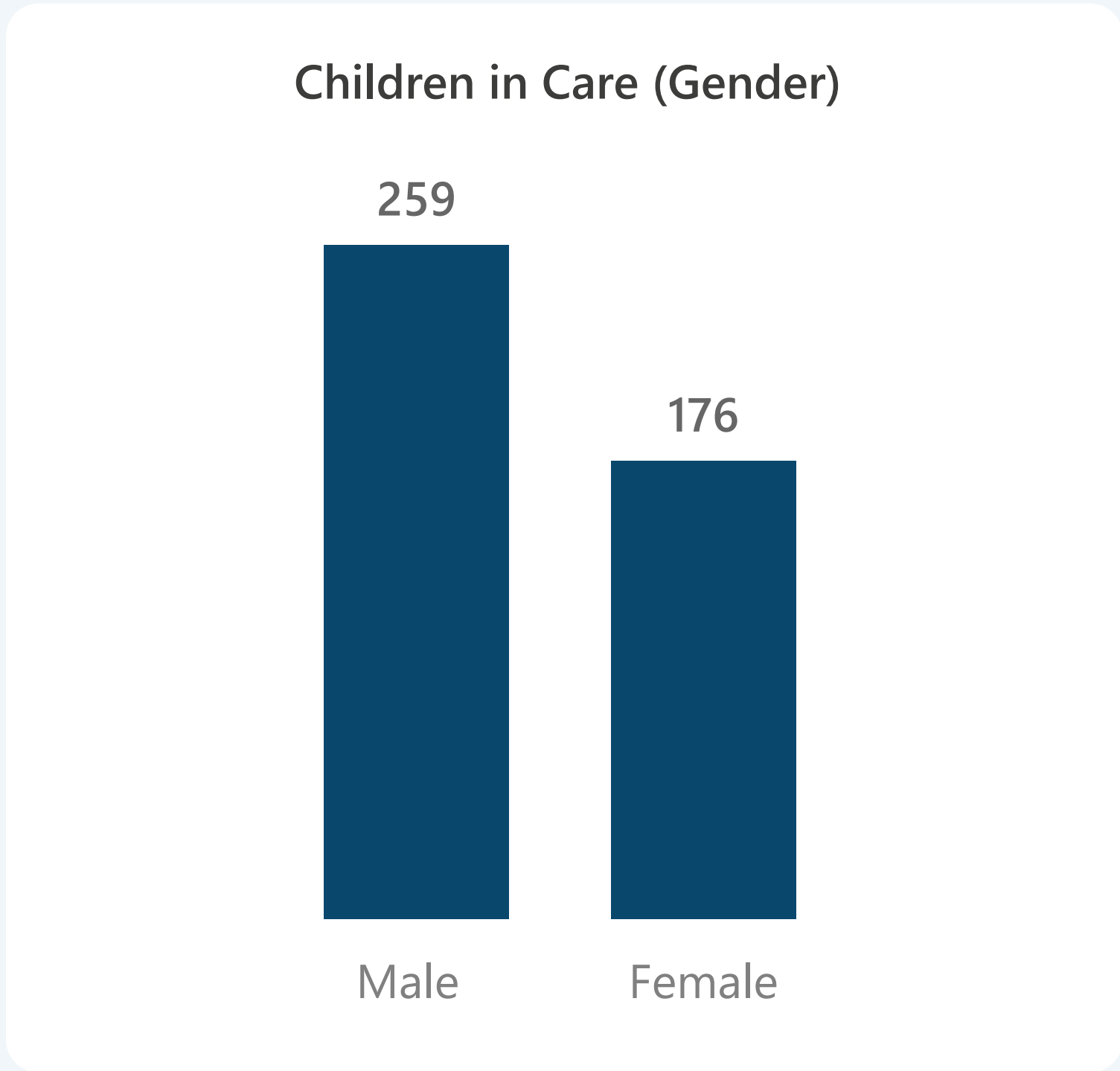
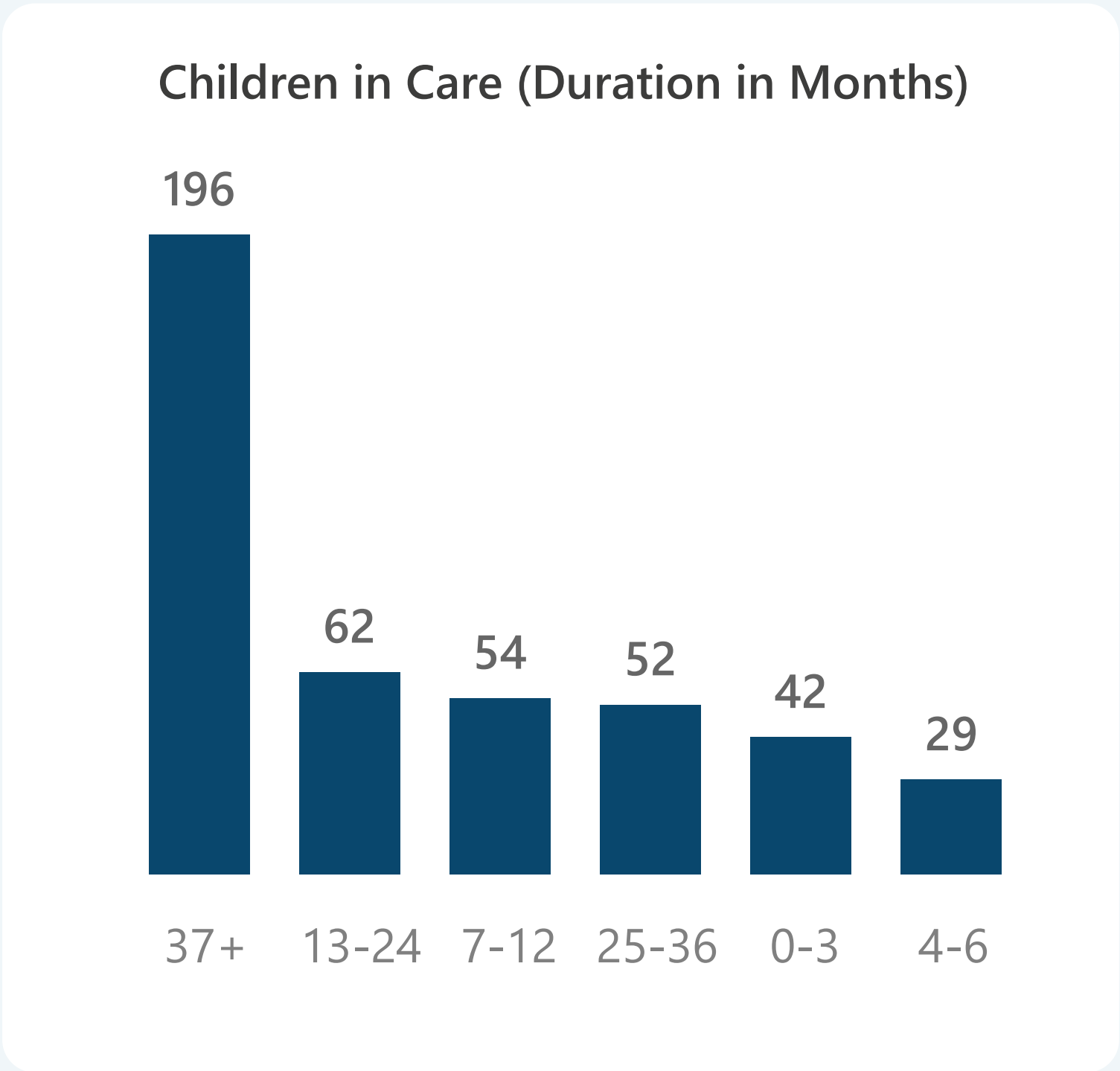
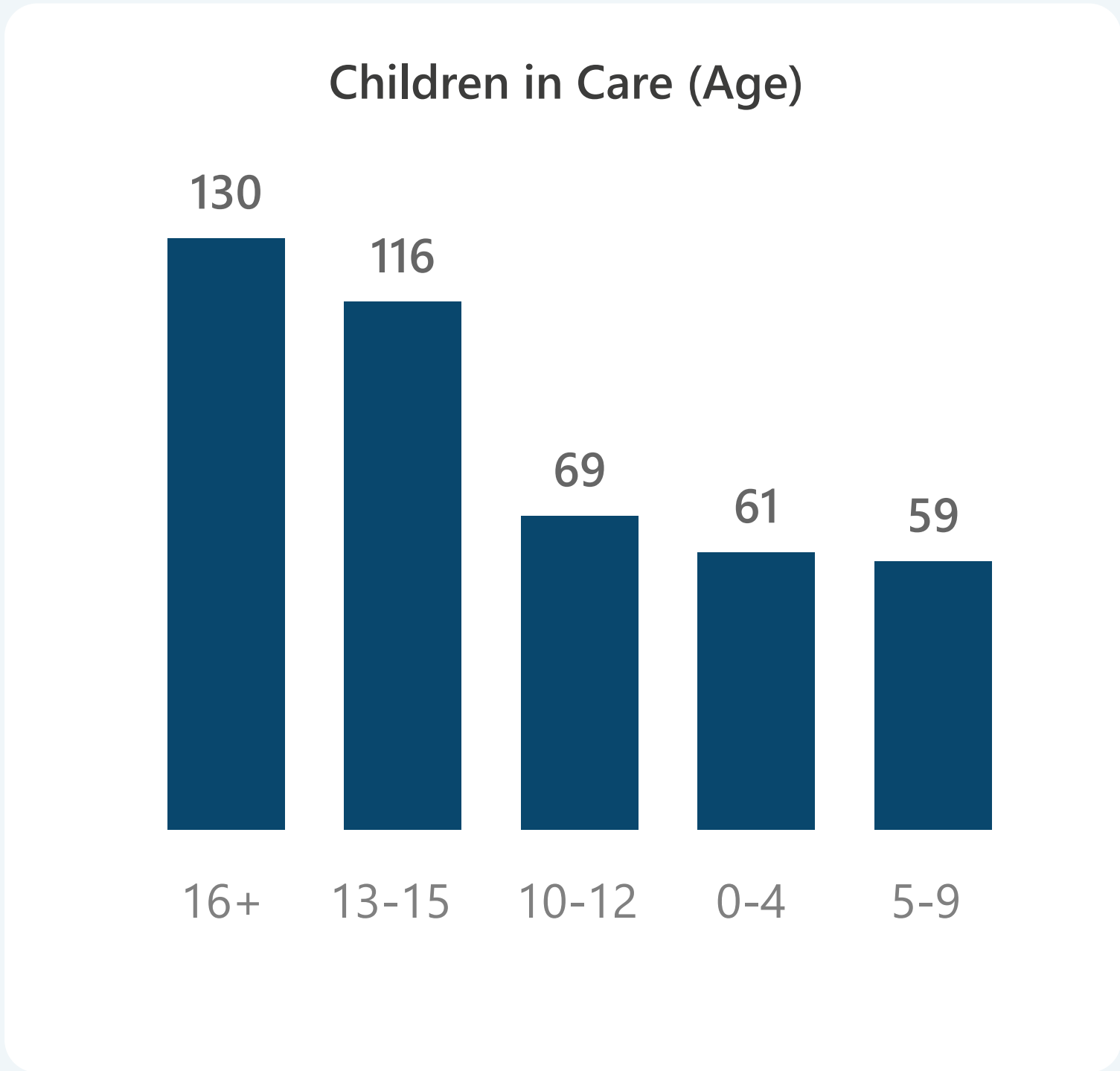
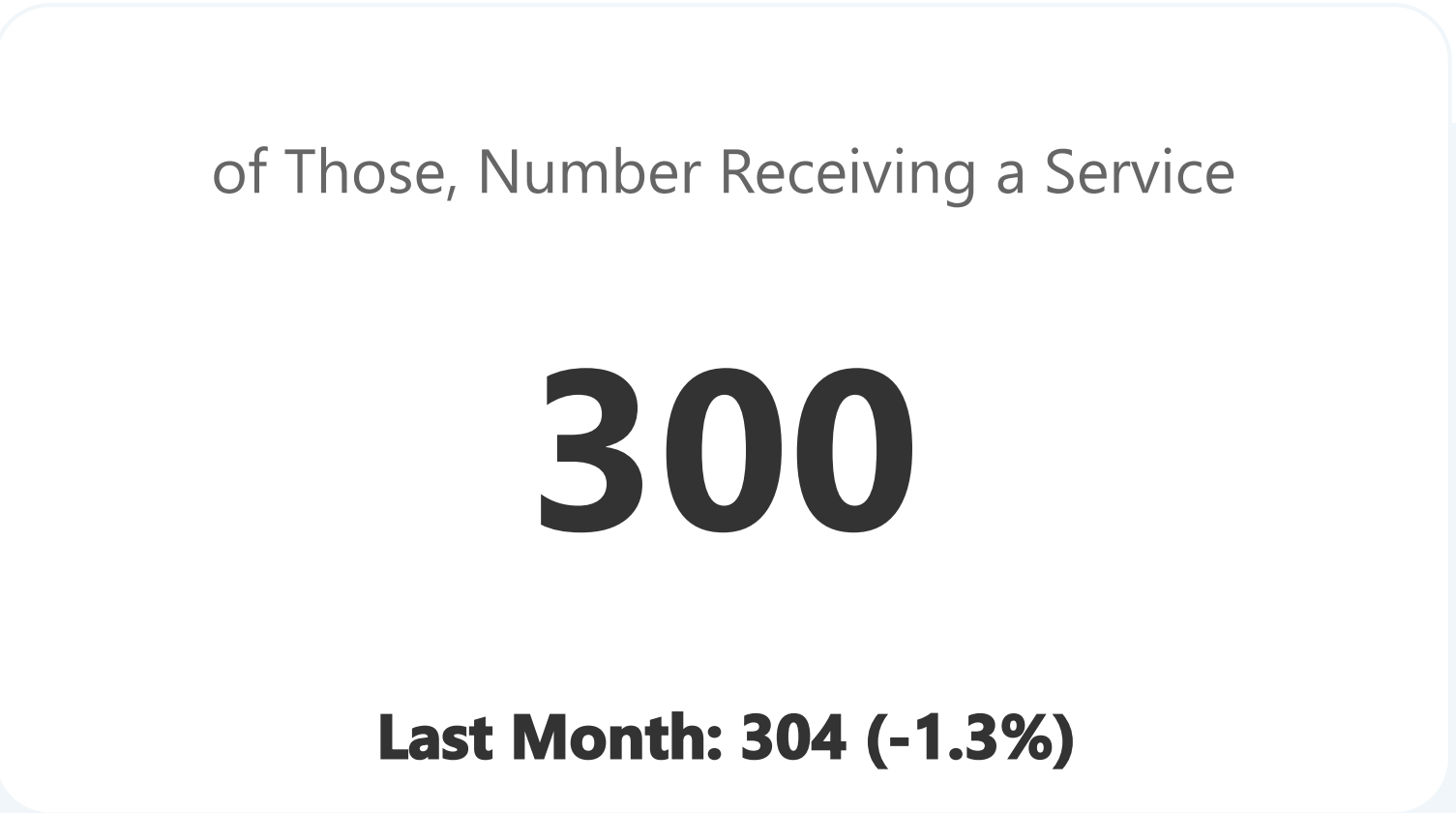
Care Leavers

98 % of our care leavers are in in touch with us (active, 19–21 yrs). Last month this was a **98** %



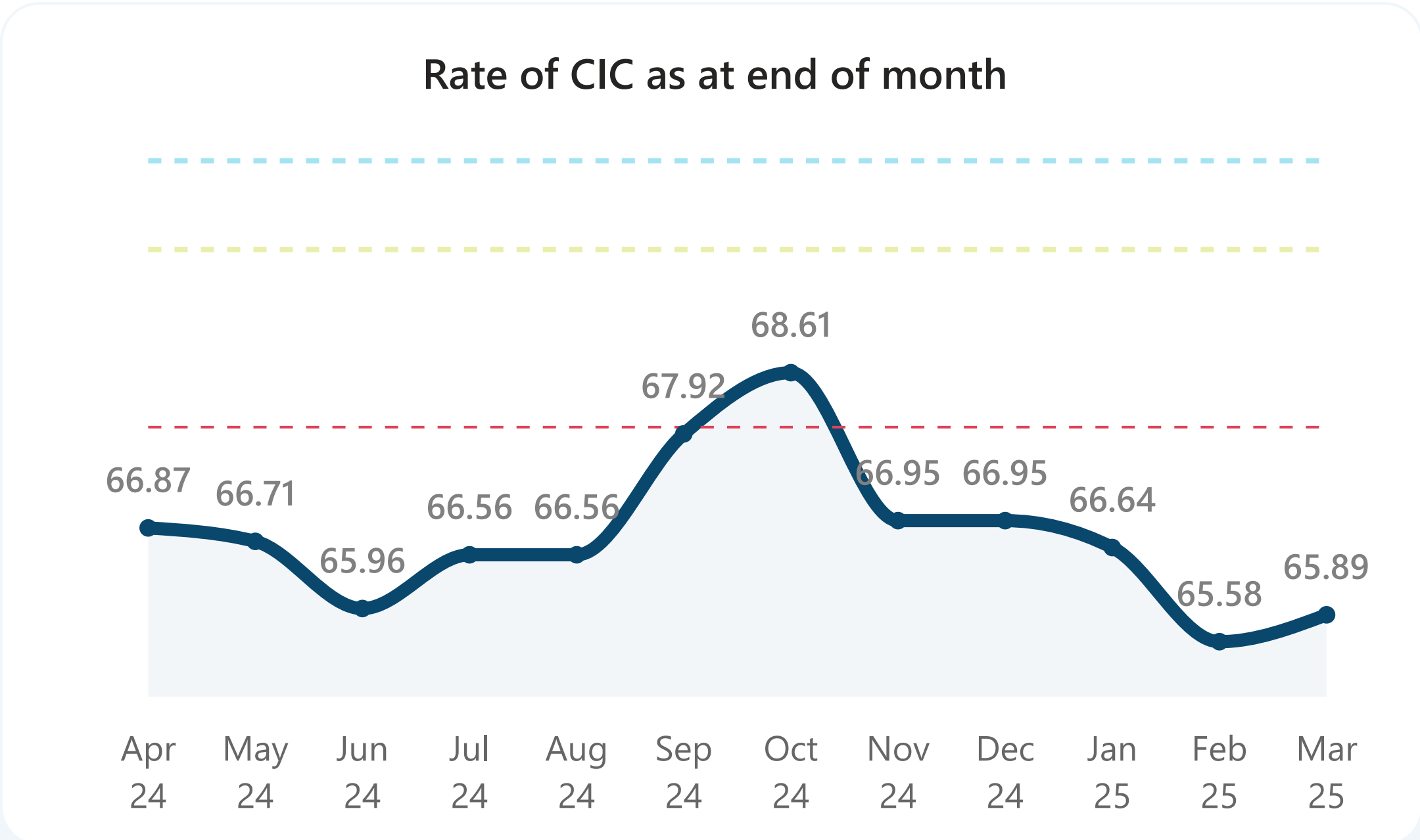
Profile Data for

March 2025

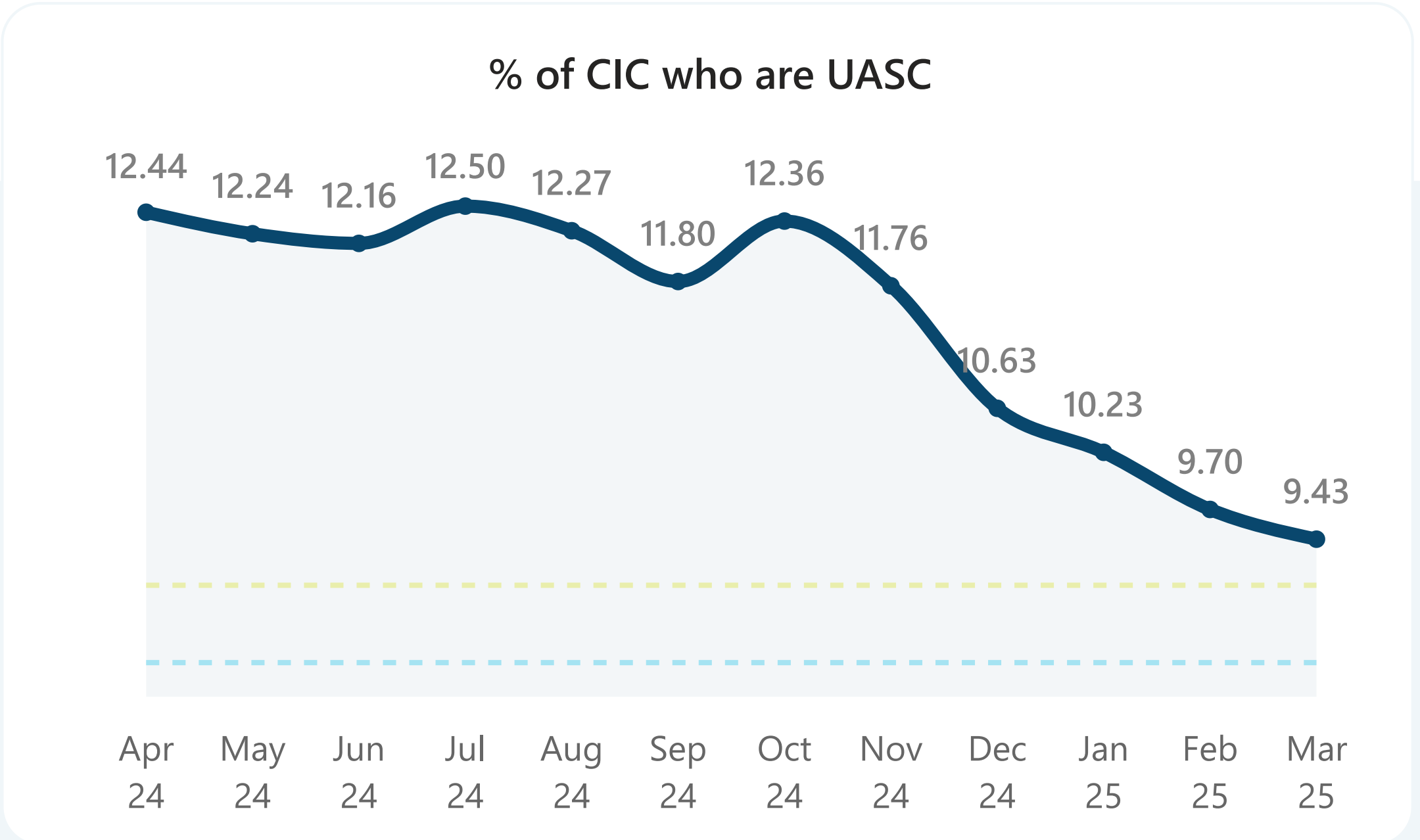


Profile Data for

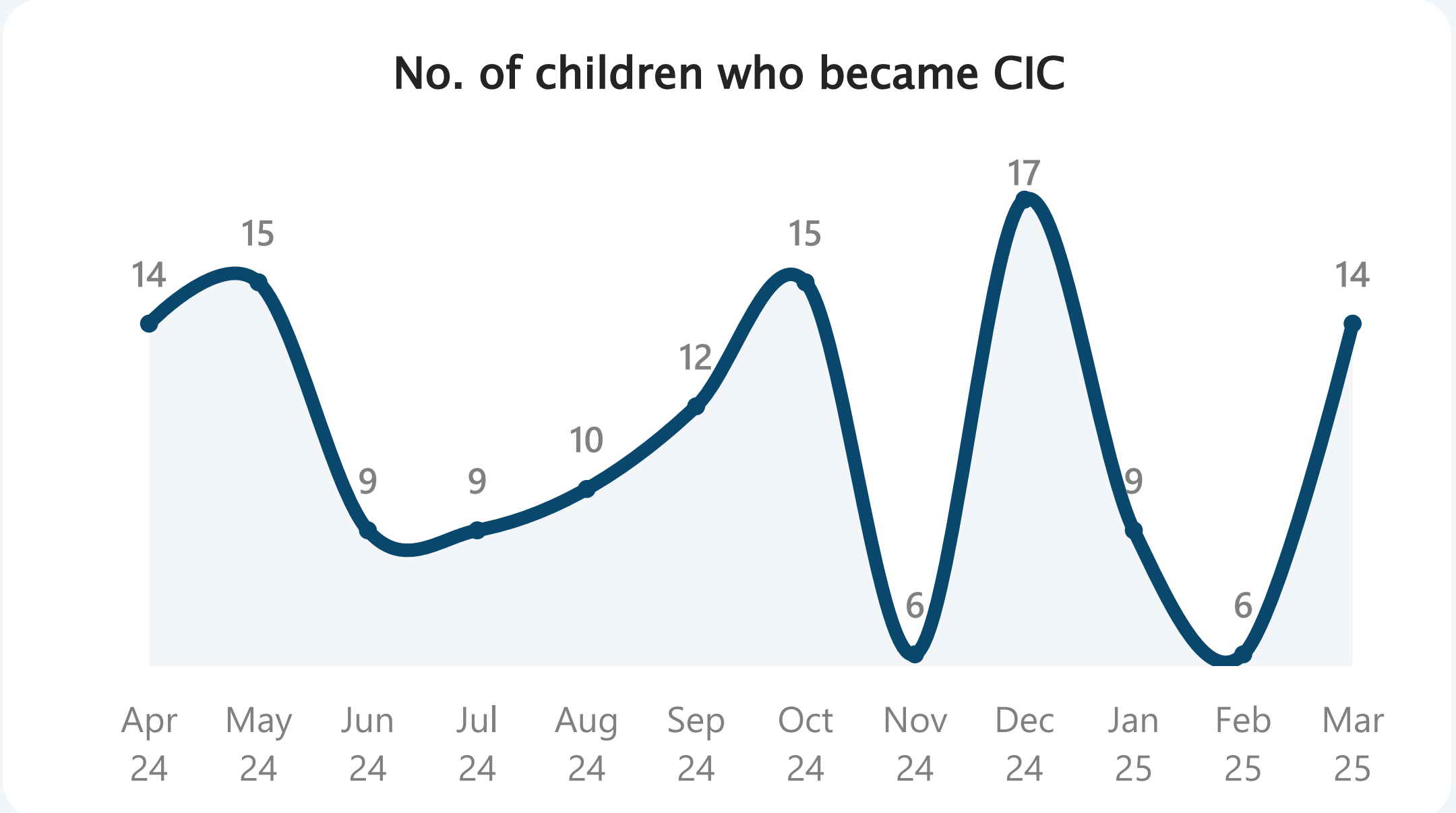
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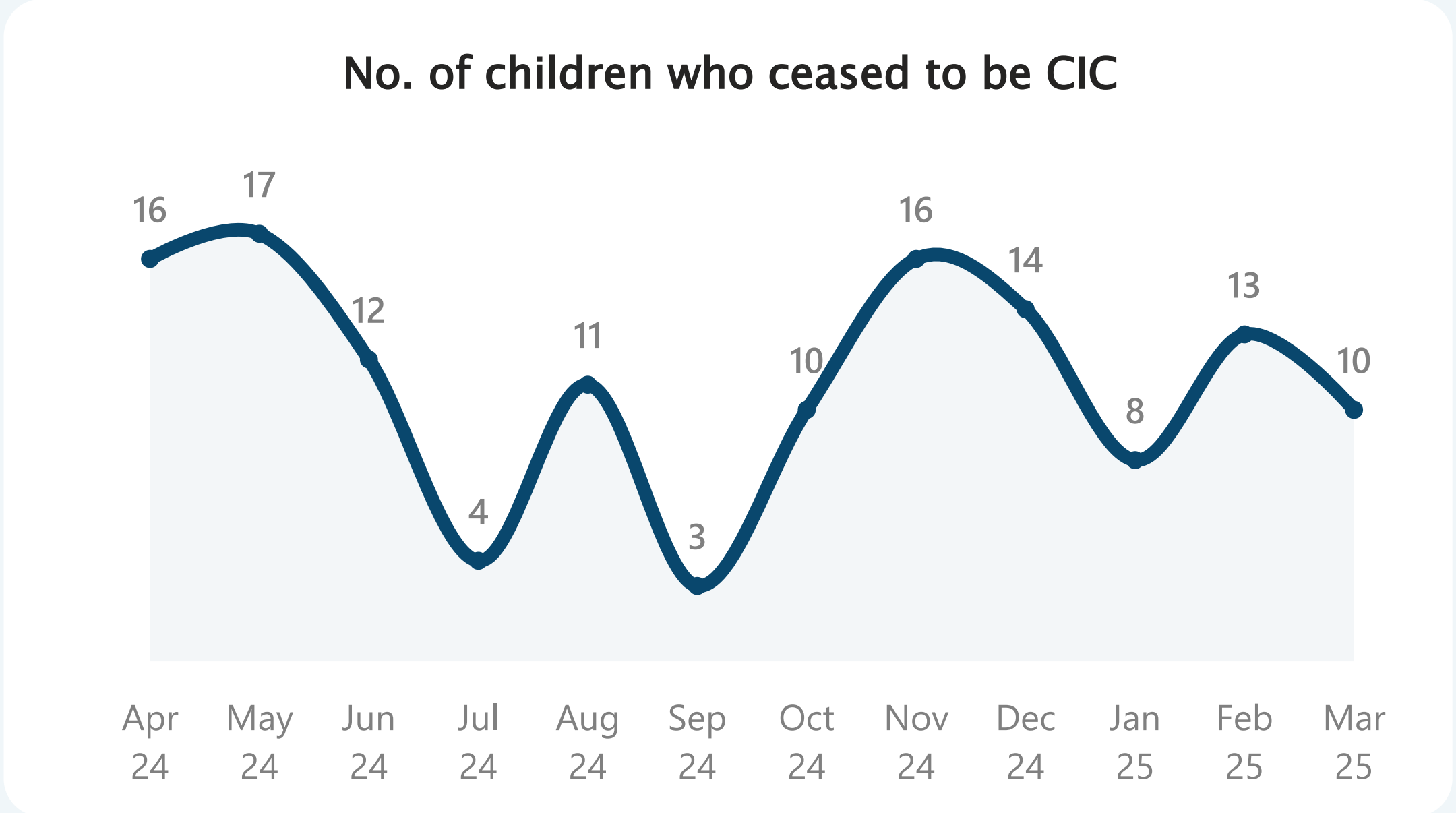
Dorset's **target** is **68**. **Good + SN** is **71** and **England** is **70**. The highest recorded rate was **68.61** in Oct 24. The lowest recorded rate was **65.58** in Feb 24.



Good + SN is **8.29%** and **England** is **9%**. The highest recorded percentage was **12.5%** in Jul 24. The lowest recorded percentage was **9.43%** in Mar 25.



In the last 12 months, there have been **136** children who became CIC. The highest number recorded was **17** in Dec 24. The lowest number recorded was **6** in Nov 24 and Feb 25.



In the last 12 months, there have been **134** children who ceased to CIC. The highest number recorded was **17** in May 24. The lowest number recorded was **3** in Sep 24.

Commentary

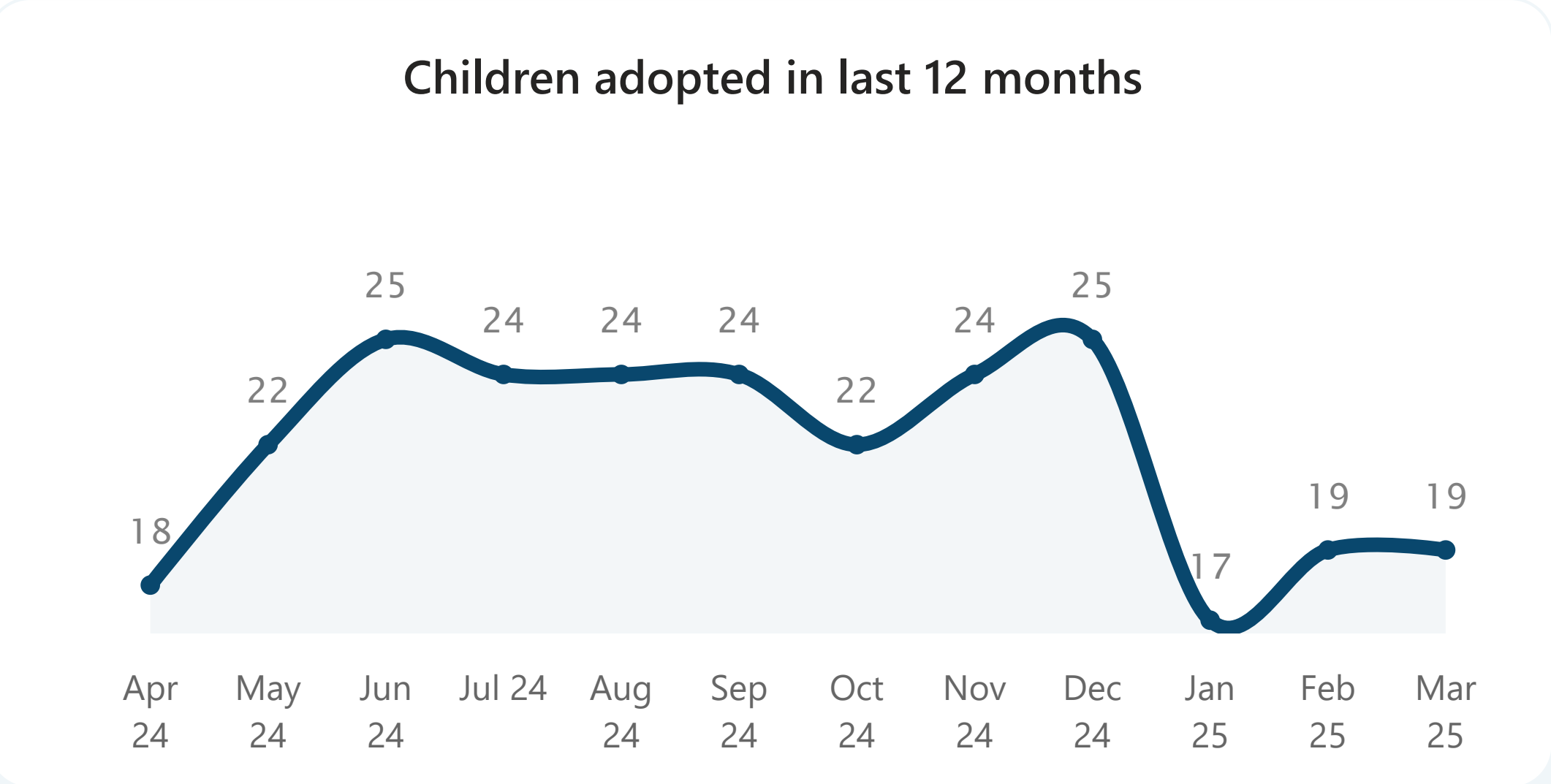
The rate of children in care is 65.89 and remains lower than good +stat nighbours and national average and keeps us firmly in the green. We have seen an increase in the number of children entering care in March 2025, 8 of which were adolescents, 2 of which returned to their family. We also saw an increase in the % of new children in care who were previously children in care.

Profie Performance Measures & Metrics

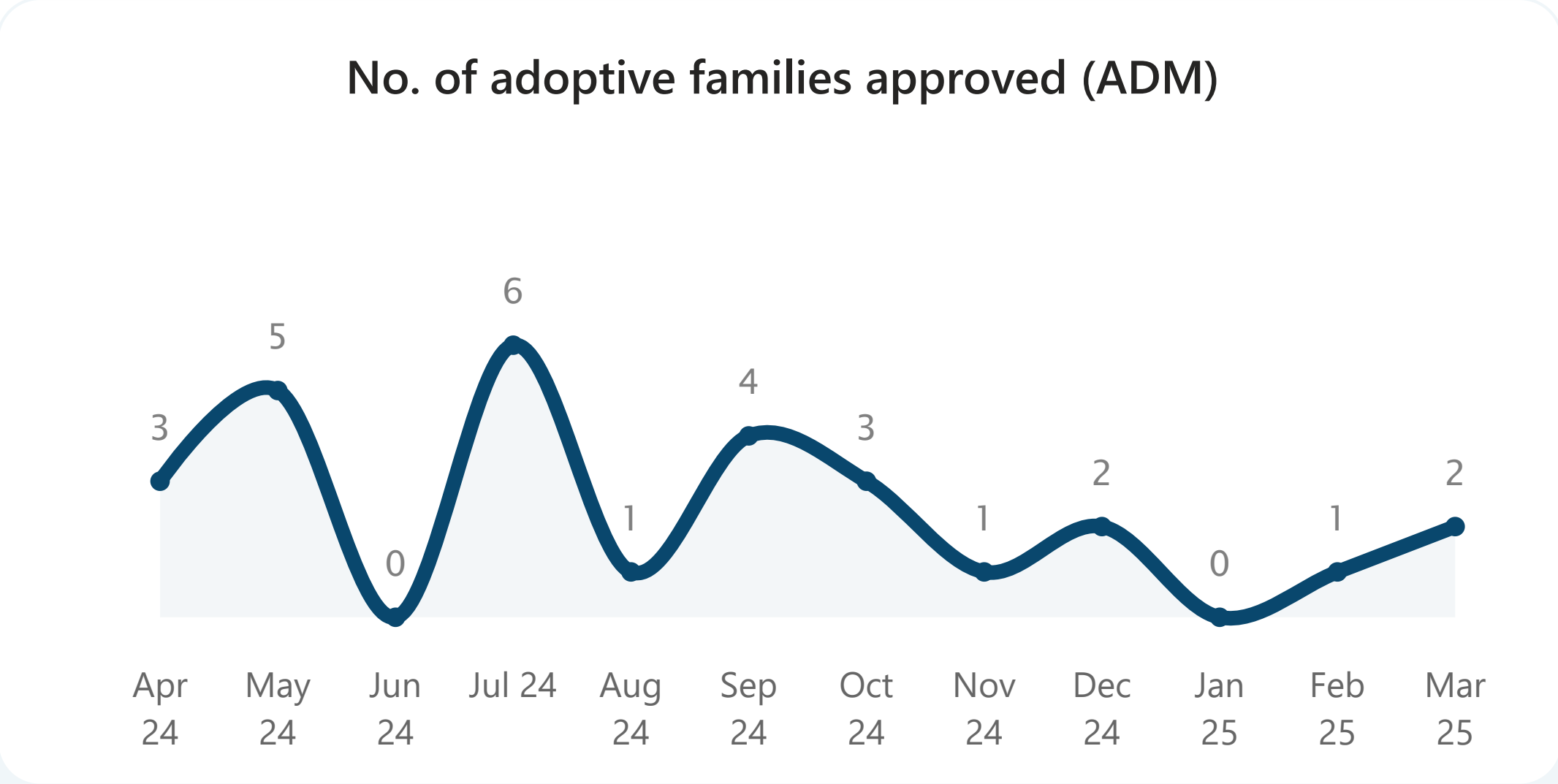
Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng. Avg	Target	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	Latest D.O.T.
% of CIC who are UASC	-	8.29	9.00		10.23	9.70	9.43	
No. of children who became CIC	Low			10.00	9.00	6.00	14.00	⊗ Worsening
No. of children who became CIC Excl UASC	Low			10.00	7.00	5.00	13.00	⊗ Worsening
No. of children who ceased to be CIC	High			13.00	8.00	13.00	10.00	⊗ Worsening
No. of CIC at end of month	Low			420.00	440.00	433.00	435.00	⊗ Worsening
No. of CIC who are UASC at end of month	-				45.00	42.00	41.00	
Rate of CIC as at end of month	Low	71.00	70.00	68.00	66.64	65.58	65.89	⊗ Worsening
Rate of CIC as at end of month Excl UASC	Low	65.08	63.55		59.83	59.22	59.68	⊗ Worsening

Adoption Data for

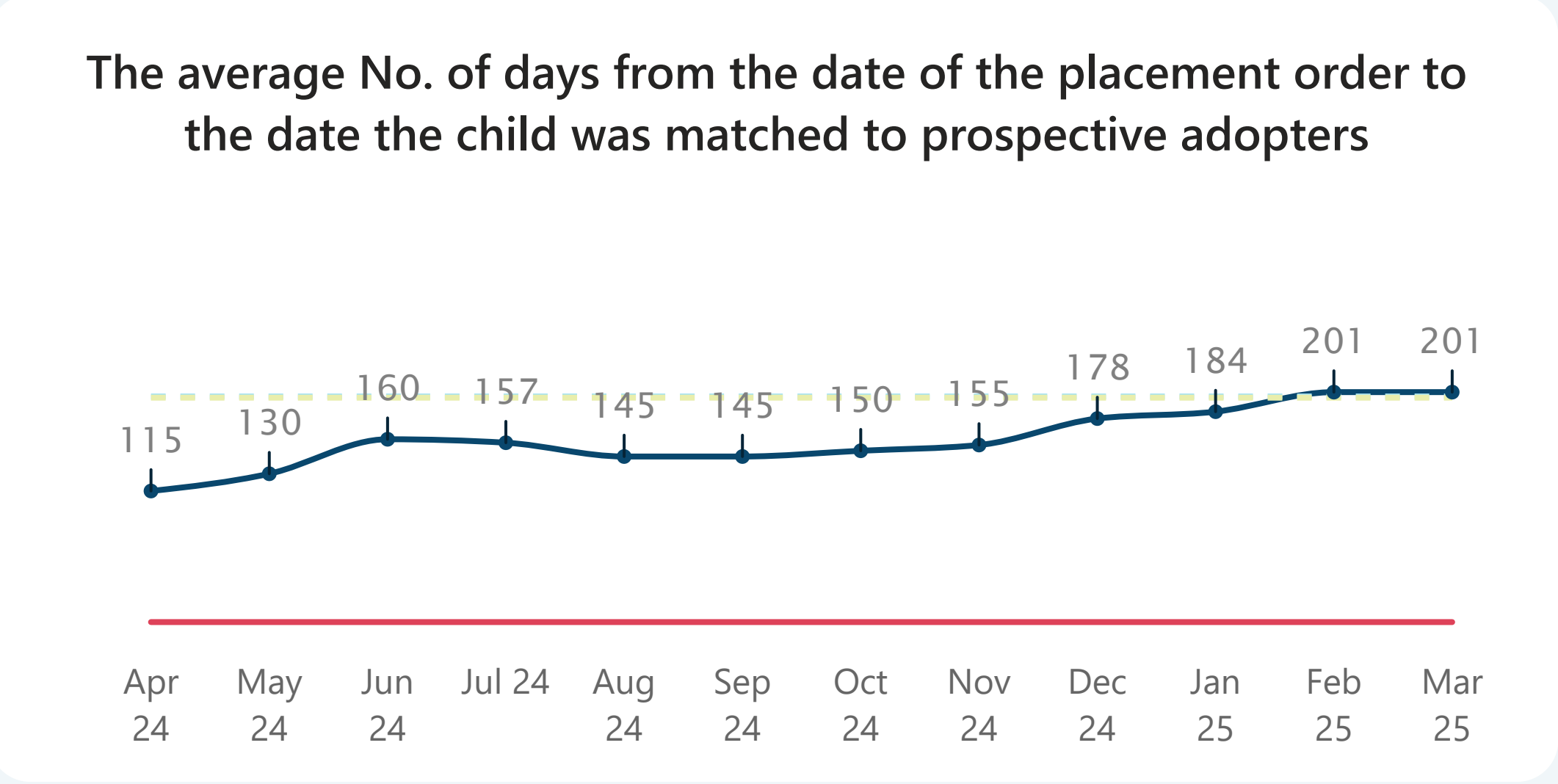
March 2025



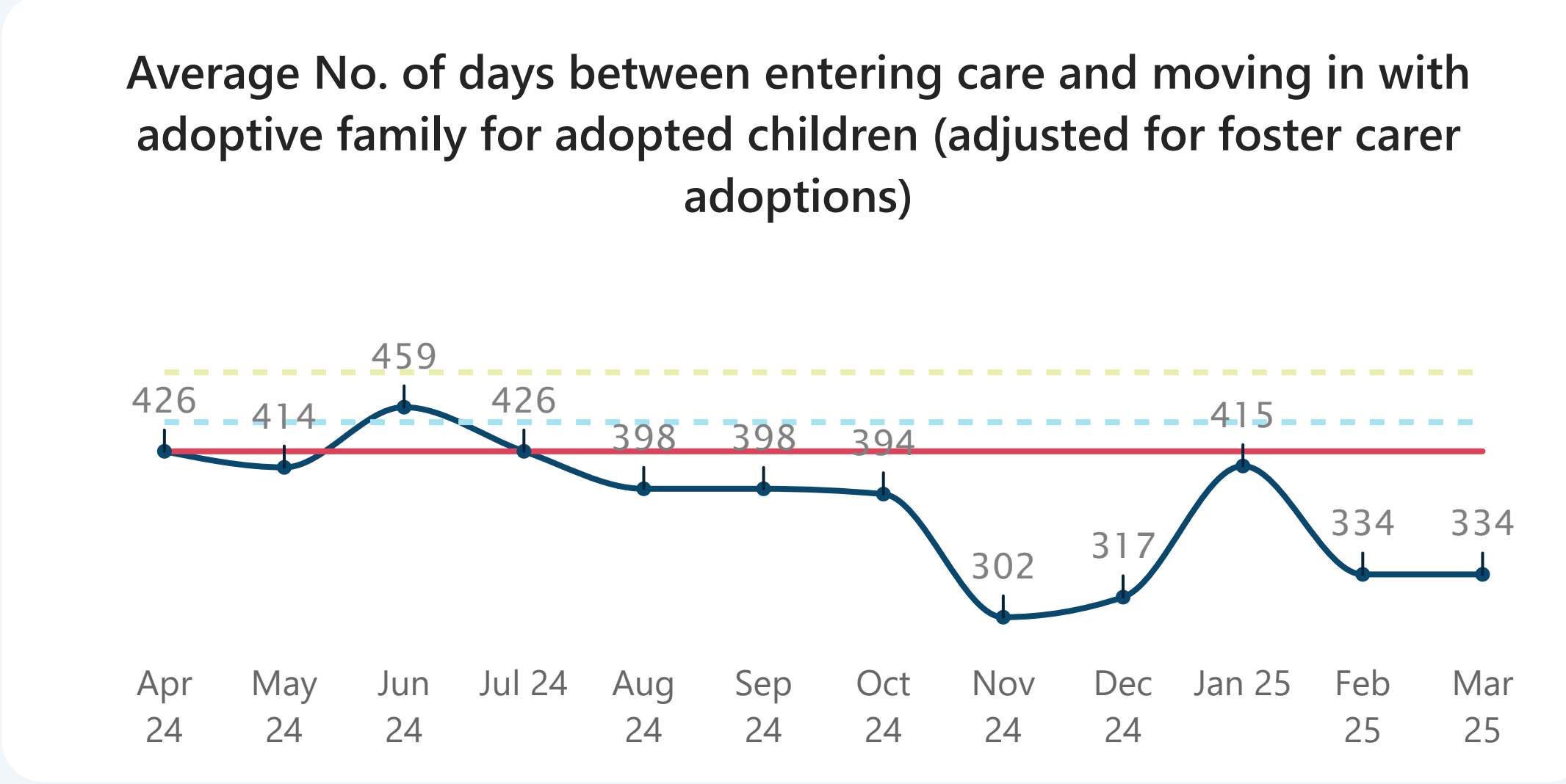
In the last 12 months, there have been a total of **263** children adopted. The highest number adopted in a month was **25** (Jun 24 & Dec 24). The lowest number adopted in a month was **17** (Jan 25).



In the last 12 months, there have been a total of **28** adoptive families approved. The highest number approved in a month was **6** (Jul 24). The lowest number approved in a month was **0** (Jun 24 and Jan 25).



Dorset's **target** is **121**. The average number of days for **Good + SN** is **225** and the average number of days for **England** is **197**. The highest average number of days for Dorset was **201** (Feb 25 and Mar 25). The lowest average number of days for Dorset was **115** in Apr 24.



Dorset increased its **target** from **342** to **426** from Apr 24. The average number of days for **Good + SN** is **460** and the average number of days for **England** is **480**. The highest average number of days for Dorset was **459** in Jun 24. The lowest average number of days for Dorset was **302** in Nov 24.

Commentary

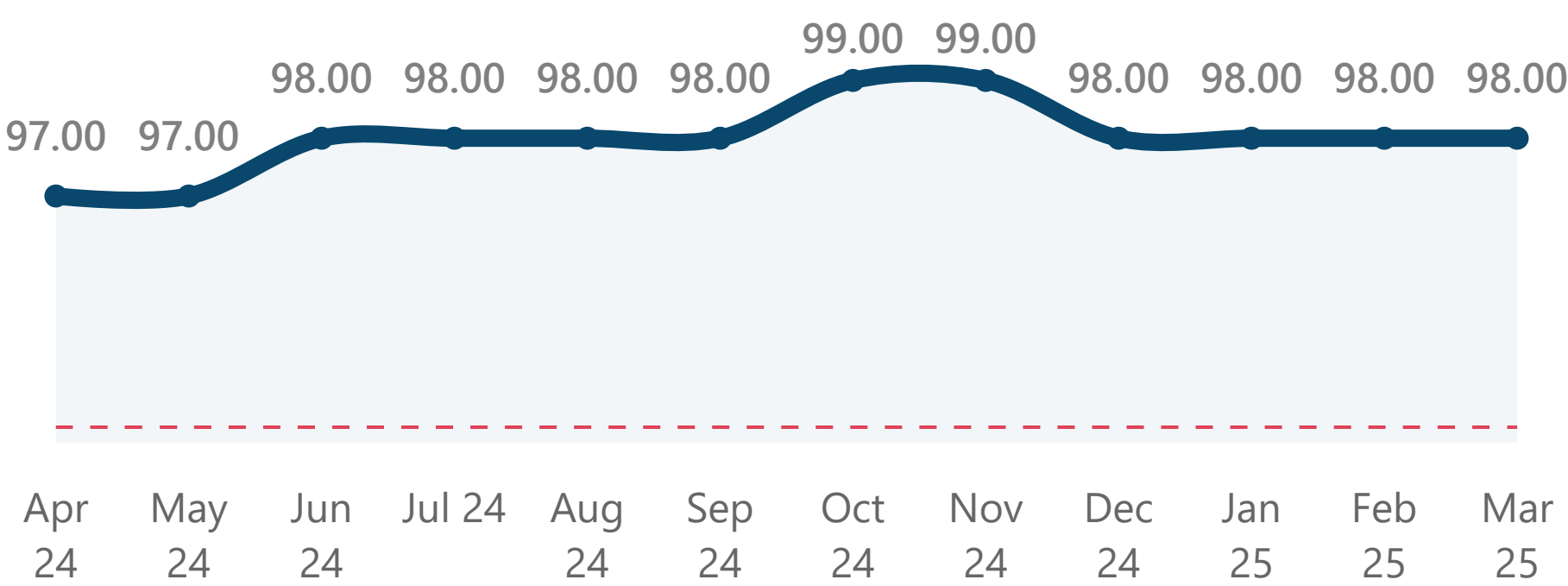
It is positive to see the number of children adopted in the last 12 months has maintained good performance, at 19 which is better than this time last year. The partnership working, family finding offer and tracking of children continues to support better performance than Good + stat neighbours and England average regarding timeliness of entering care and moving in with adoptive family. More adopters have been approved this year than in 2023/24. However, this needs to be balanced against the number of children who are waiting to be placed, and attention needs to be maintained on an ambitious recruitment strategy with particular focus on recruiting adopters for sibling groups, children who are disabled and older children. We are fast tracking those adoptive families that meet the needs of children who have those harder to place characteristics.

Adoption Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Good + SN	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	D.O.T
Average No. of days between entering care and moving in with adoptive family for adopted children (adjusted for foster carer adoptions)	Low	447.78	485.04	426.00	447.78	415.00	334.00	334.00	⚠ Same
Children adopted in last 12 months	High					17.00	19.00	19.00	⚠ Same
No. of Adoption placement order revocations over last 12 months	Low					4.00	4.00	5.00	✖ Worsening
No. of adoptive families approved (ADM)	High					0.00	1.00	2.00	✅ Improving
No. of adoptive Families in assessment	High					16.00	15.00	12.00	✖ Worsening
The average No. of days from the date of the placement order to the date the child was matched to prospective adopters	Low	197.23	196.18	121.00	197.23	184.00	201.00	201.00	⚠ Same

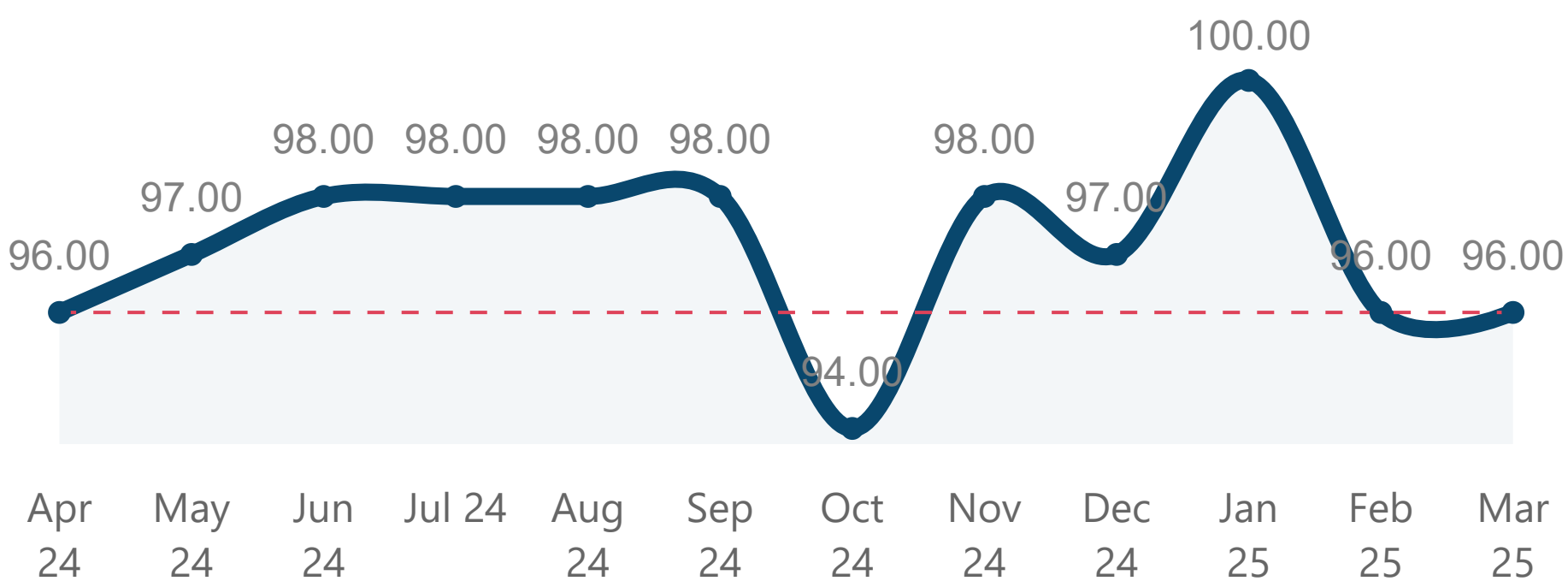
Care Leavers Data for March 2025

% Care Leavers who are in touch with Dorset Local Authority (Active aged 19-21)



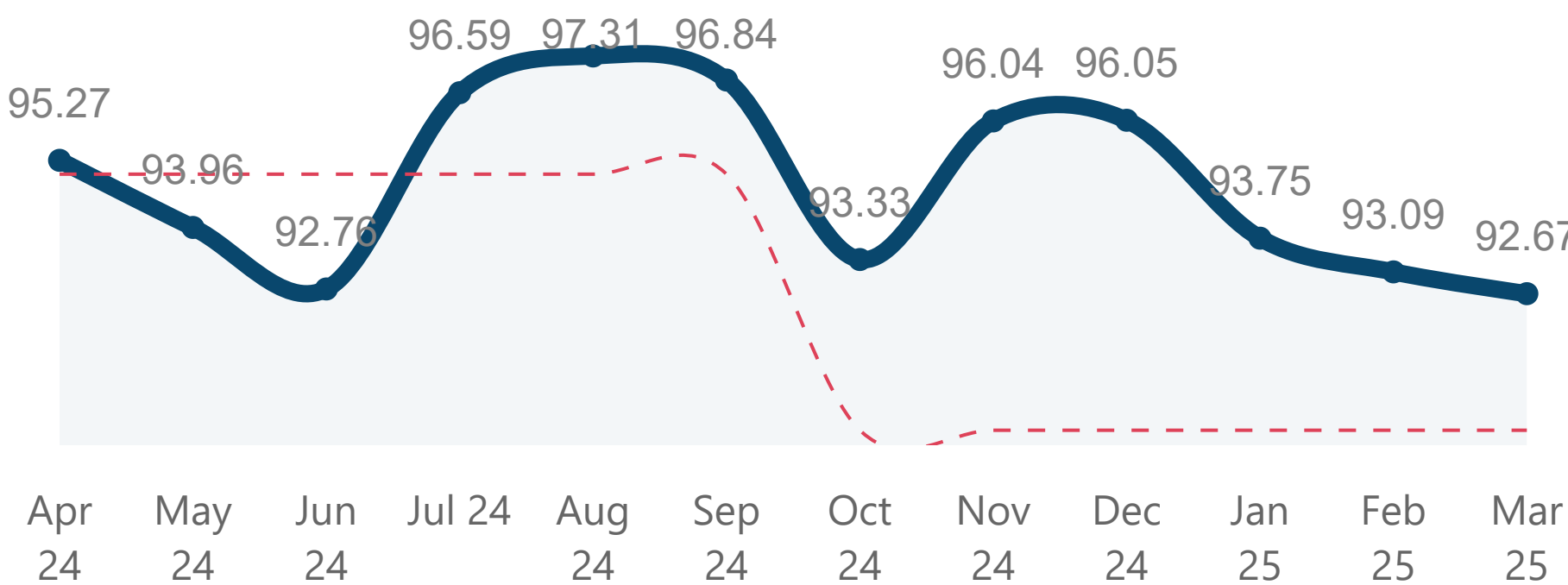
Dorset's **target** is **93%**. In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **99%** (Oct & Nov 24). The lowest percentage recorded was **97%** (Jan, Feb, Mar, Apr & May 24)

% Care Leavers who are living in suitable accommodation (Active aged 19-21)



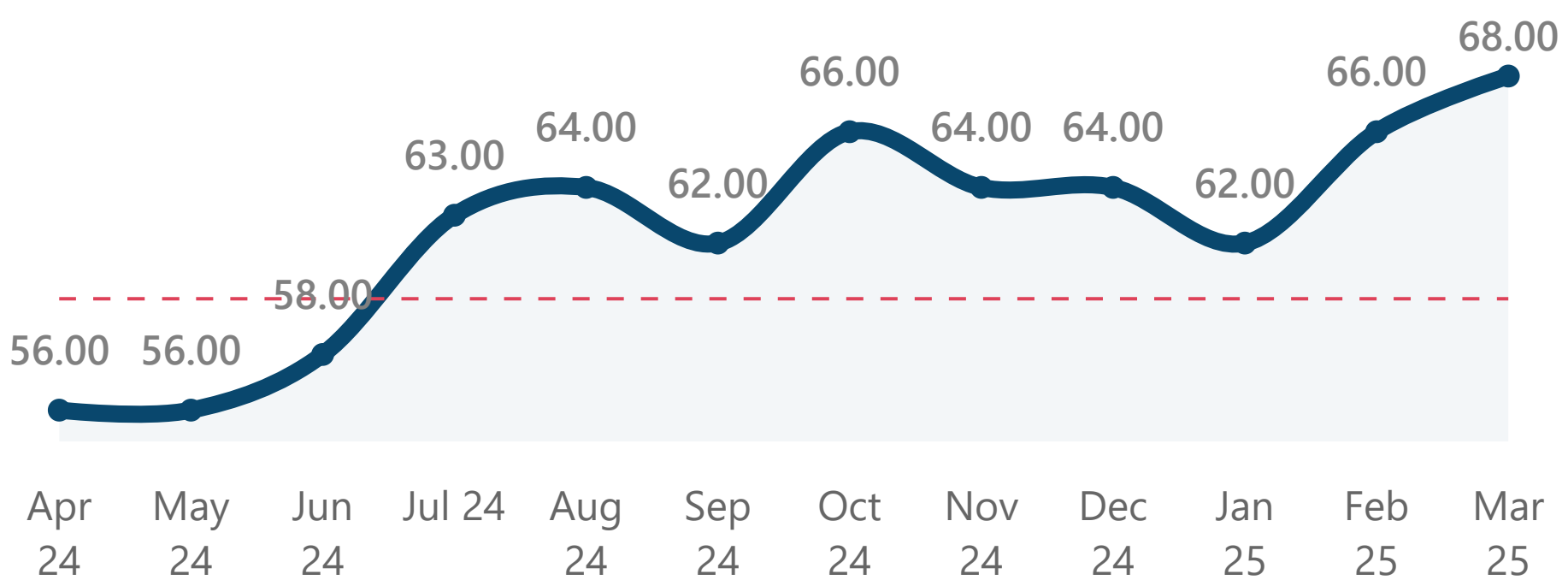
Dorset's **target** is **96%**. In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **100%** (Jan 25). The lowest percentage recorded was **94%** (Oct 24)

% Care Leavers with an up to date pathway plan at end of month (Active aged 17-25)



From Jan 24 to Mar 24, Dorset's **target** was **90%**. During Apr 24 to Sep 24 it was **95%**. From Oct 24, it was **90%**. In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **97.31%** (Aug 24). The lowest percentage recorded was **92.76%** (Jun 24)

% Care Leavers who are in Employment Education or Training (Active aged 19-21)



Dorset's **target** is **60%**. In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **68%** (Mar 25). The lowest percentage recorded was **56%** (Apr and May 24)

Commentary

At the end of March 25 we had a total of 558 care leavers in our family, of which 300 are actively receiving support and have a personal advisor. We remain in touch with 98% of our care leavers and continue to actively engage with the small % who actively choose not to access the support and services available to them. Housing remains a priority for us as a service and continues to be identified as a key priority for our care leavers. We are proud that 96% of our care leaver family are in suitable housing. The 4% who are not, we know them well and their individual situations and circumstances. We have 3 young people in custody, 1 young person who remains homeless and 2 young people who have moved out of the area and relocated to Scotland, presented as homeless and are currently in B&B whilst being assessed as to whether they are eligible for social housing in the area they want to remain. These 3 young people were unaccompanied children and are all very clear on where they want to live and what type of accommodation. We continue to support them to understand the housing processes, challenges and costs and are identifying suitable accommodation options for them regularly. We are working closely with our colleagues in housing and the young people are seen and contacted regularly. For some of our young people (34) they are living in shared accommodation which is considered as HMO. These are small shared houses of no more than 6 young people which suitable facilities, location and access to community resources and support networks. All are seen regularly and 2 of the HMO (9 of the young people) are homes owned by the care leaver service. We remain focussed on our priority to increase the access to EET for our care leavers and continue to work collaboratively with our pathway to employment team to strengthen this area of our work and develop creative opportunities for young people to engage with learning and training. We have seen an increase in EET for care leavers 19-21 to 68% which is the highest we have achieved and is a direct result of targetted training and preparation for employment workshops. We are working closely with the virtual school to understand the reduction of EET for 17/18 year olds as we know those who are actively engaged at 17 continue to seek education, training or employment once they leave care. 92% of our pathway plans continue to be completed within timescales and 8 weekly supervision remains above our target of 90%.

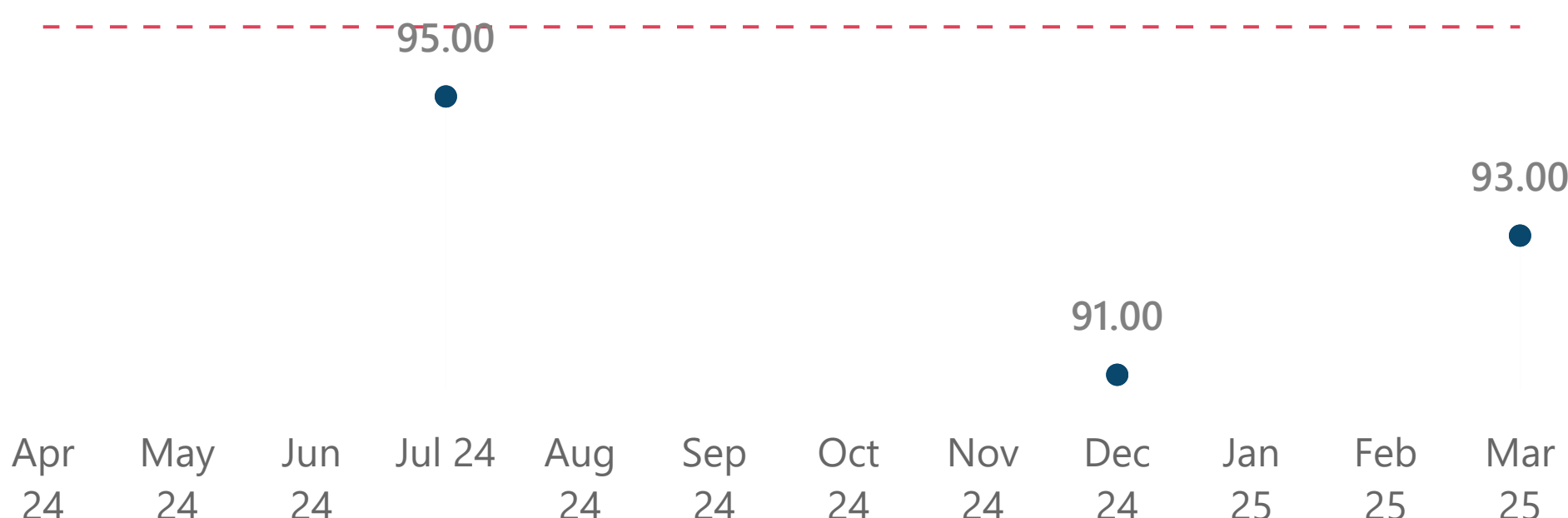
Care Leavers Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Good + SN	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	D.O.T
% Care Leavers aged 19-21 in EET (OC3)	High	56.86	54.00		56.86			59.35	⊗ Worsening
% Care Leavers who are in Employment Education or Training (Active aged 17-18)	High			60.00		84.00	85.00	77.00	⊗ Worsening
% Care Leavers who are in Employment Education or Training (Active aged 19-21)	High			60.00		62.00	66.00	68.00	⊕ Improving
% Care Leavers who are in touch with Dorset Local Authority (Active aged 19-21)	High			93.00		98.00	98.00	98.00	⚠ Same
% Care Leavers who are living in suitable accommodation (Active aged 19-21)	High			96.00		100.00	96.00	96.00	⚠ Same
% Care Leavers with an up to date pathway plan at end of month (Active aged 17-25)	High			95.00		93.75	93.09	92.67	⊗ Worsening
No. of Care Leavers (Active aged 17-25) in Bed and Breakfast accommodation	Low			0.00		0.00	1.00	2.00	⊗ Worsening
No. of Care Leavers (Active aged 17-25) in unsuitable accommodation at end of month	Low			11.00		3.00	5.00	6.00	⊗ Worsening
No. of health passports completed (2 months in arrears)	-					8.00	10.00		
No. of Health passports due within the month (2 months in arrears)	-					8.00	10.00		



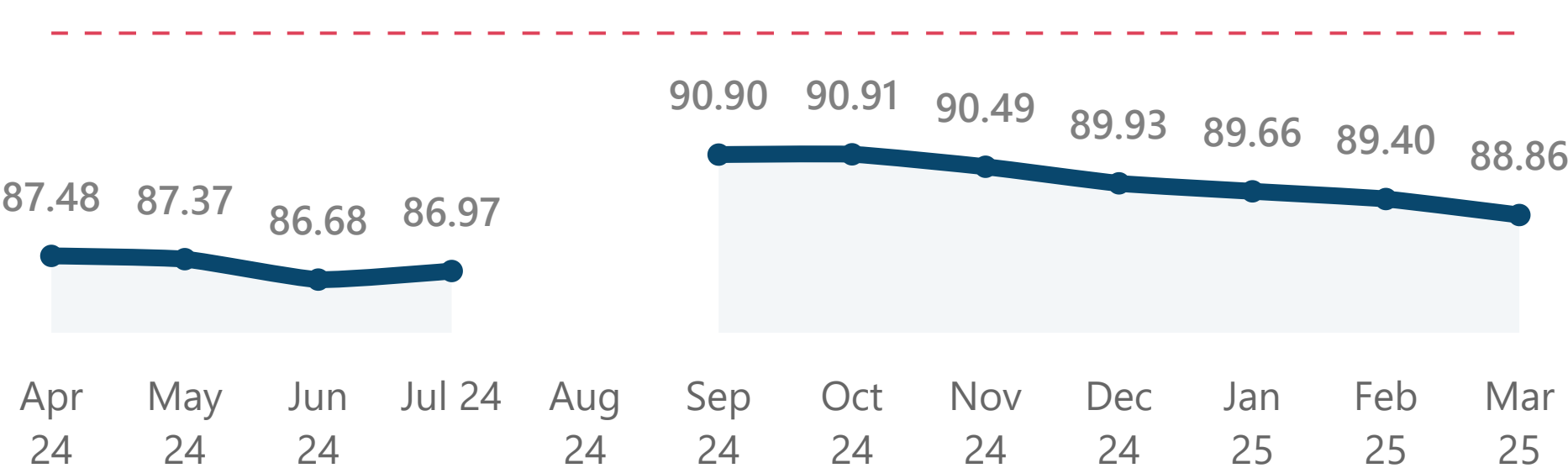
Educational Data for March 2025

% of CIC with a termly PEP completed on time



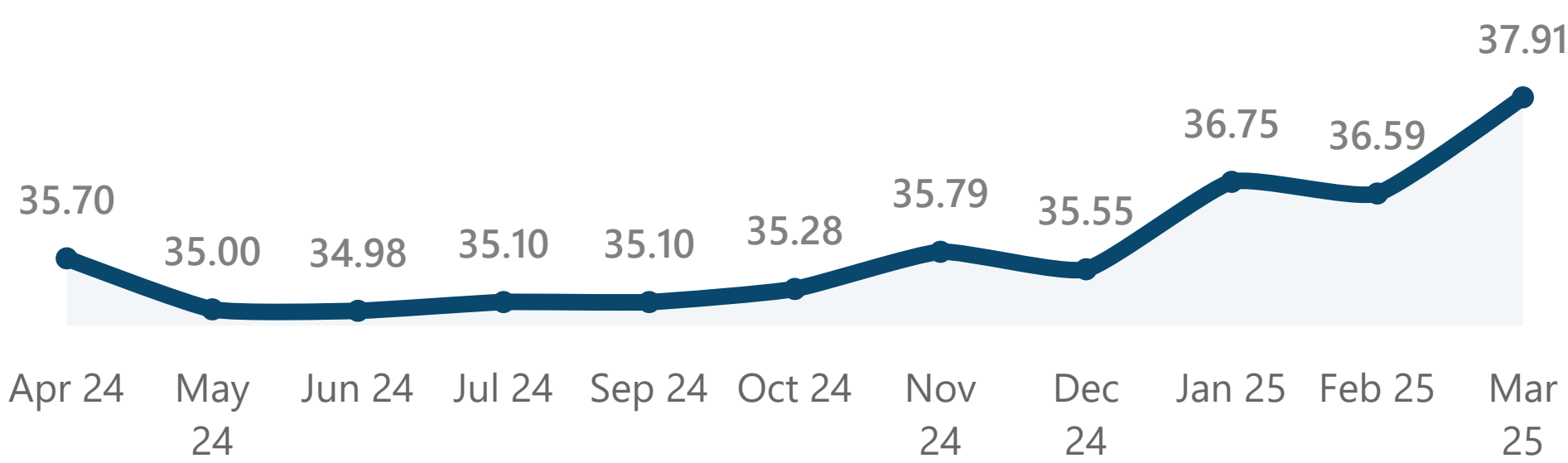
Dorset's **target** is **96%**. In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **95%** (Jul 24). The lowest percentage recorded was **91%** (Dec 24)

Average Attendance % for CIC of school age (Academic year to date)



Dorset's **target** is **95%**. In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **90.91%** (Oct 24). The lowest percentage recorded was **86.86%** (Jun 24)

% CIC with an Education Health and Care Plan



In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **39.76%** (Jan 24). The lowest percentage recorded was **34.98%** (Jun 24)

% CIC (school age) who have had at least one suspension in the current academic year



In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **15.92%** (Jul 24). The lowest percentage recorded was **2.17%** (Sep 24)

Commentary

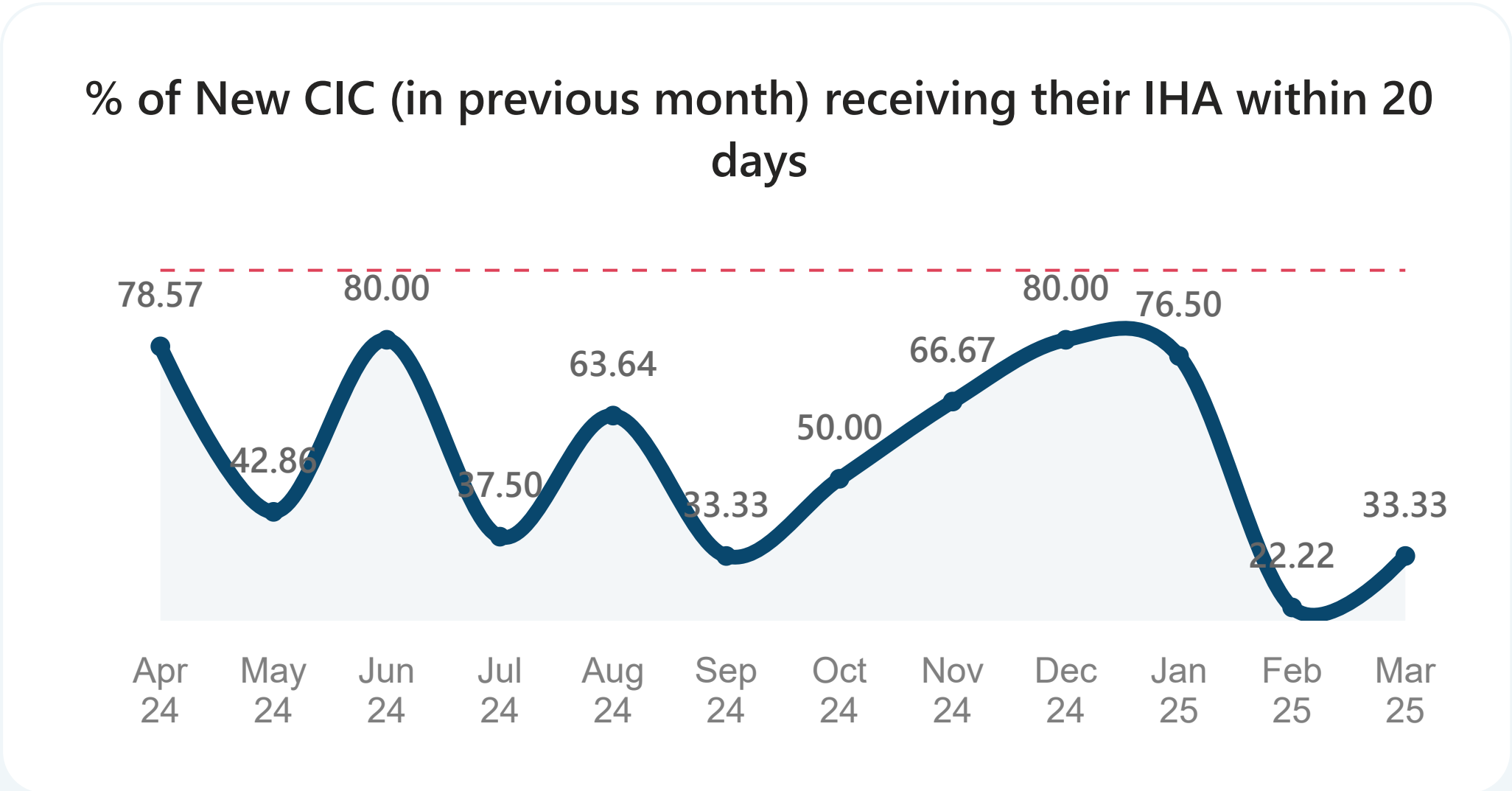
Dorset Virtual School continue to work hard to support our Children in Care and Care Leavers with their education. The Spring Term saw an improvement in the timeliness of PEP completion with 100% of initial PEPs and 93% of all PEPs completed and quality assured within the 20-day timeframes ensuring that all our children were supported educationally with robust monitoring in place where there are concerns. PEP quality remained consistently high with 96% of Spring PEPs graded as good or better (double the number of golds from Autumn term 2024). There has been an increase in attendance at PEPs for children, social workers, Personal Advisors and Designated Teachers compared to Autumn 2024. Attendance for the cohort stands at 89% year to date. Attendance is an improvement on the previous year now. Attendance for all year groups is over 90% except for year 9 (86.0%), year 10 (83%) and year 11 (79%). All children with below 50% attendance are monitored on the inclusion monitoring board and any child with a suspension is focused on during the monthly student progress meeting. Currently, 70% of our post-16 young people are in education, employment or training. All children who are NEET are monitored fortnightly on the Inclusion Monitoring Board to ensure that support is in place to re-engage with learning. 33 children have had at least one suspension in this academic year and 15 of these children have a SEN need or EHCP. All Virtual School Leads attend reintegration meetings for children who are suspended. The Virtual School Service Manager or Specialist Teachers will lean in to support any child that has had more than one suspension. Any child with a suspension in the month is discussed at the next monthly Pupil Progress meeting. The Virtual School has two planned events in place for our children and young people during May half-term, including a digital day in collaboration with Arts University Bournemouth and Bournemouth University focusing on coding, virtual reality and animation. The Virtual School is also finalising its plans for the annual Virtual School Awards to be held in July to celebrate our children and young people who have achieved this year, both in education and the wider community.

Education Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Good + SN	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	D.O.T
% CIC (school age) who have had at least one suspension in the current academic year	Low					6.91	8.47	10.78	⊗ Worsening
% CIC with an Education Health and Care Plan	-					36.75	36.59	37.91	
% of children with a PEP within 20 days of coming into care	High			100.00				100.00	
% of CIC & Care Leavers who are EET (16 to 18 Year Olds - Y12 & Y13)	High			72.00		66.90	73.79	69.66	⊗ Worsening
% of CIC & Care Leavers who are NEET (16 to 18 Year Olds - Y12 & Y13)	Low			28.00		33.10	26.21	30.34	⊗ Worsening
% of CIC with a termly PEP completed on time	High			96.00				93.00	
Average Attendance % for CIC of school age (Academic year to date)	High			95.00		89.66	89.40	88.86	⊗ Worsening

Health and Emotional Wellbeing Data for

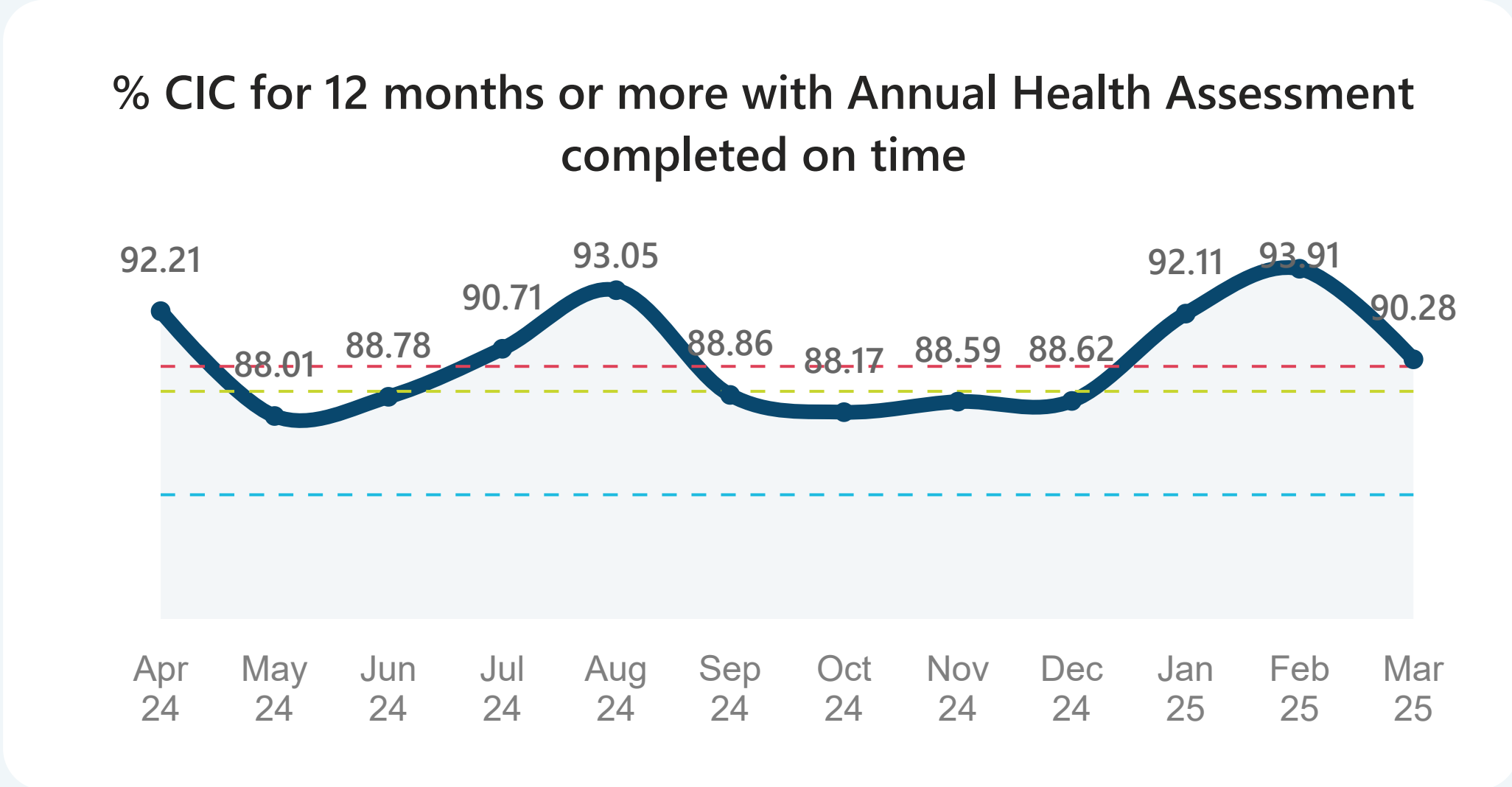
March 2025



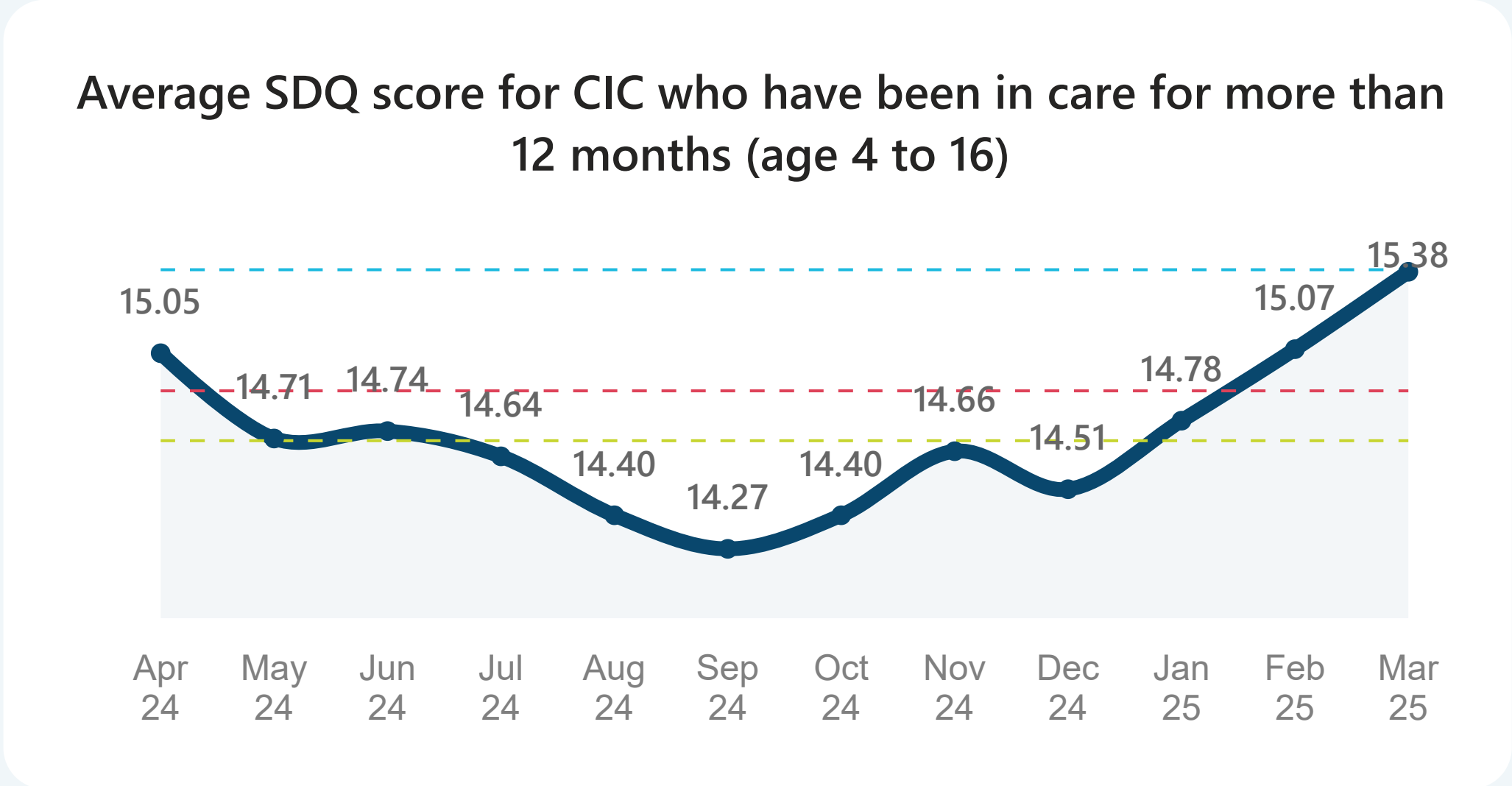
Dorset's **target** is **95%**. The highest recorded percentage was **80%** (Jun and Dec 24). The lowest recorded percentage was **22.22%** (Feb 25)



Dorset's **target** is 85%. **Good + SN** is **77.43%** and **England** is **79%**. The highest recorded percentage was **79.81%** (Jul 24). The lowest recorded percentage was **71.08%** (Dec 24)



Dorset's **target** is **90%**. **Good + SN** is **84.86%** and **England** is **89%**. The highest percentage recorded was **93.05%** (Aug 24). The lowest percentage recorded was **88.01%** (May 24)



Dorset's **target** is **14.9**. **Good + SN** is **15.39** and **England** is **14.7**. The highest average SDQ score recorded was **15.38** (Mar 25). The lowest average SDQ score recorded was **14.27** (Sep 24)

Health & Emotional Wellbeing

Noticable drop in % of new children in care receiving their IHA within 20 days which is indicative of the number of factors which impact on this indicator. This related to 6 children, 2 were completed in time, 1 delayed consent (s20) and has since returned home. 3 children placed outside Dorset all completed between 21-30 days.

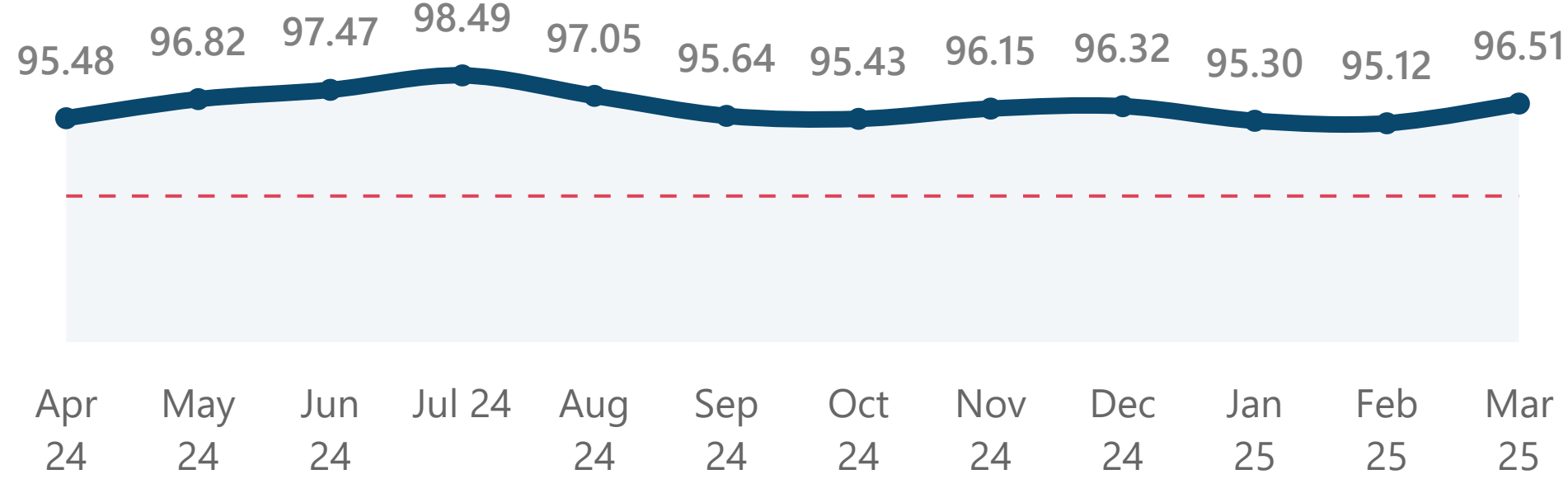
Health & Emotional Wellbeing Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Good + SN	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	Latest D.O.T.
% CIC for 12 months or more with Annual Health Assessment completed on time	High	84.86	89.00	90.00	84.86	92.11	93.91	90.28	⊗ Worsening
% CIC for 12 months or more with up to date Immunisations	High	86.29	82.00	85.00	86.29	90.85	93.91	91.54	⊗ Worsening
% CIC in care 12 months or more who have had a dental check within 12 months	High	77.43	79.00	85.00	77.43	72.24	78.53	80.56	⊙ Improving
% of children for CIC for at least 12 months age 4-16yrs with completed SDQ assessment	High	68.43	77.00	75.00	68.43	60.07	57.75	53.17	⊗ Worsening
% of New CIC (in previous month) receiving their IHA within 20 days	High			95.00		76.50	22.22	33.33	⊙ Improving
% of New CIC (in previous month) receiving their IHA within 20 days Excl UASC	High			95.00		76.50	28.57	40.00	⊙ Improving
Average SDQ score for CIC who have been in care for more than 12 months (age 4 to 16)	Low	15.39	14.70	14.90	15.39	14.78	15.07	15.38	⊗ Worsening



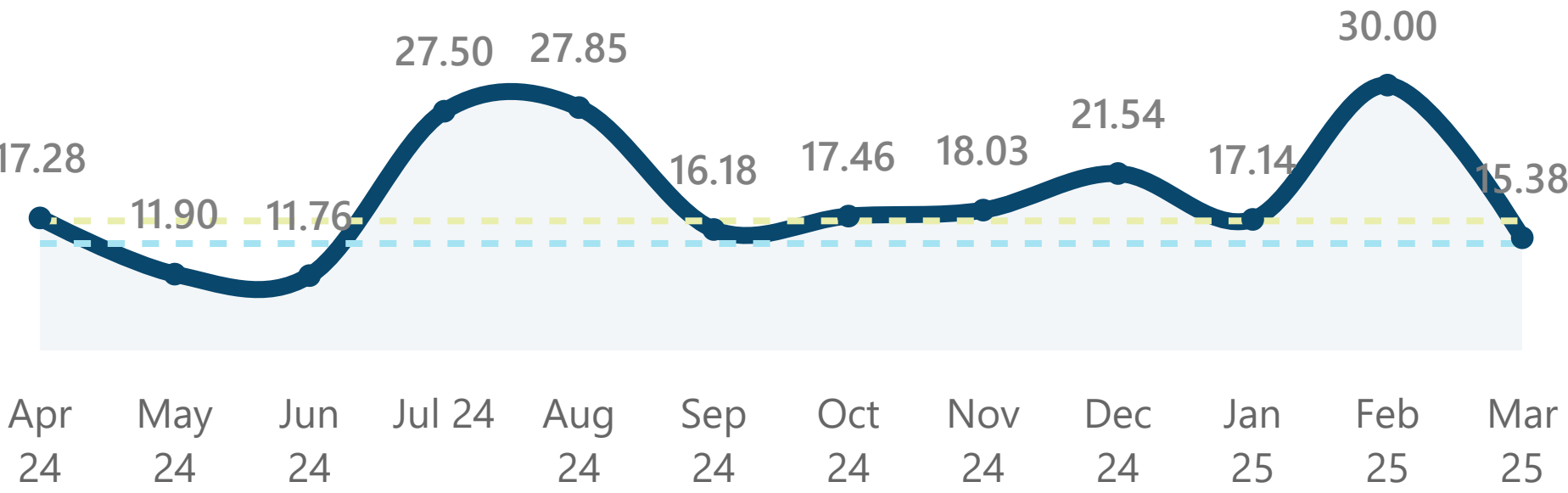
Permanence Data for March 2025

% CIC for 4 months or more with a completed permanence plan



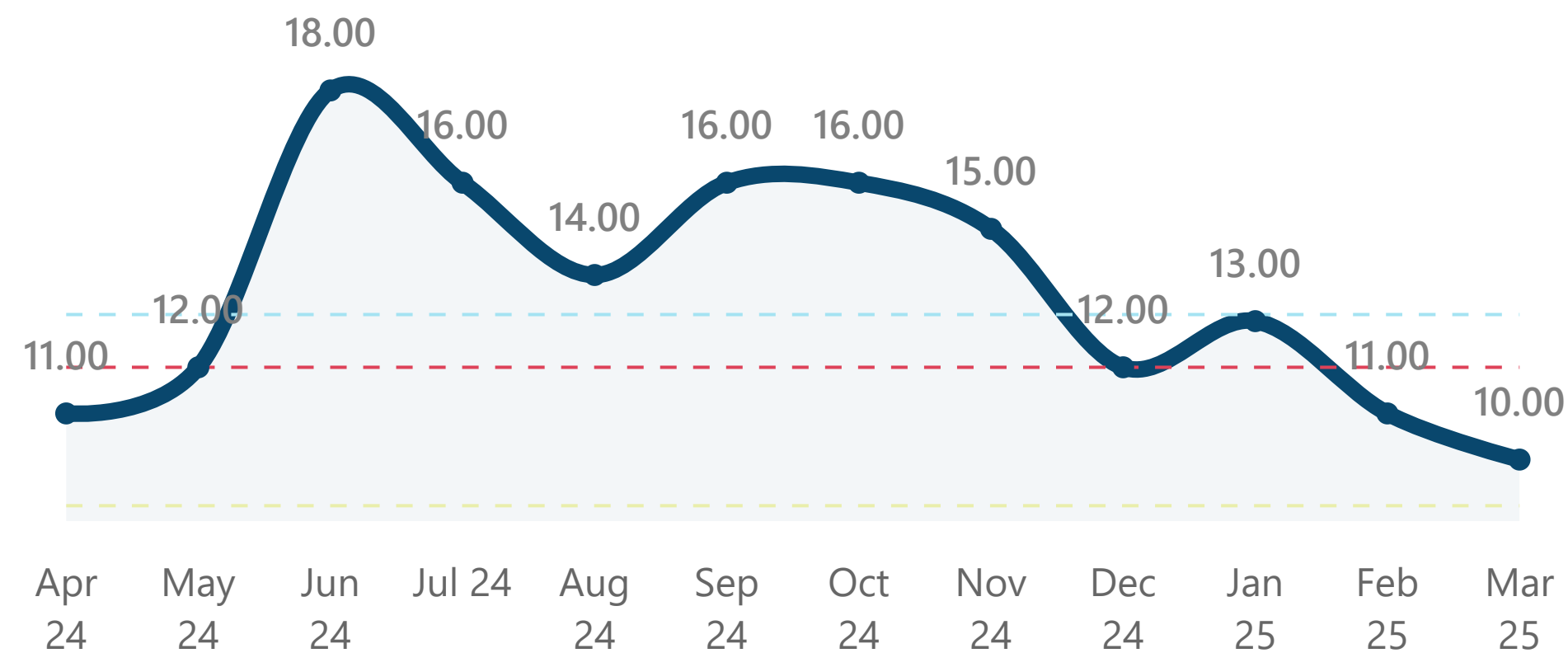
Dorset's **target** is **90%**. In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **98.49%** in Jul 24. The lowest percentage recorded was **95.12%** in Feb 25. Dorset have been above target in all 12 of the last 12 months.

% Children Achieved Permanence Returned home to live with parents/ relatives (with PR) (Rolling 6 months)



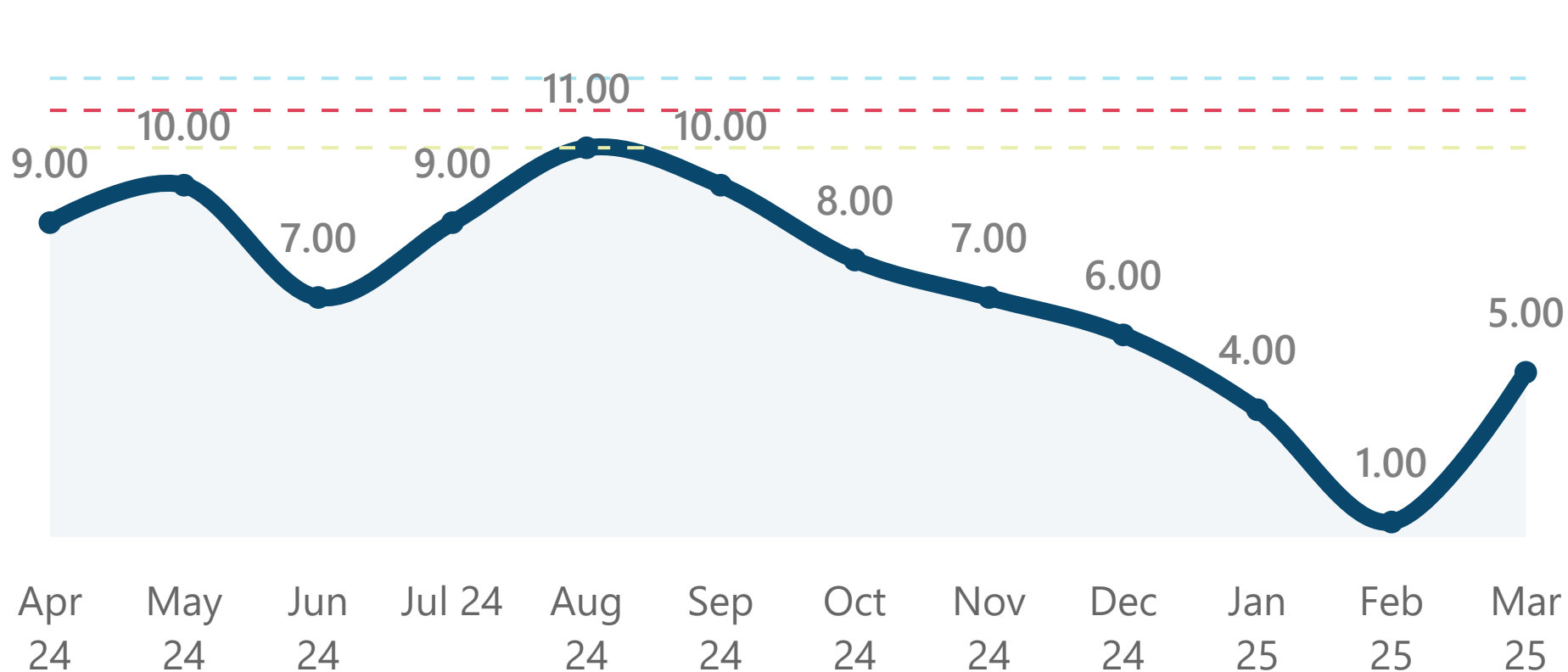
Good +SN percentage is **14.83%** and **England** is **17%**. In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **30%** in Feb 25). The lowest percentage recorded was **11.76%** in Jun 24.

% Children Achieved Permanence Adoption (Rolling 6 months)



Dorset's **target** is **12%**. **Good +SN** percentage is **13.14%** and **England** is **9%**. In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **18%** (Jun 24) The lowest percentage recorded was **10%** in Mar 25.

% Children Achieved Permanence SGO (Rolling 6 months)



Dorset's **target** is **12%**. **Good +SN** percentage is **12.86%** and **England** is **11%**. In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **11%** in Aug 24. The lowest percentage recorded was **1%** in Feb 25.

Commentary

We have seen a slight dip in the % of children achieving permanence through adoption at 11% which remains above national average. The % of children who achieved permanence through SGO has increased this month to 5% and while an improving picture remains lower than good + stat neighbours and national average. The proportion of children who have a completed Permanence Plan was 92.99 % at end of March 2025 of which 86.95 % (excl UASC) had been updated in the last 6 months (excluding Achieved Permanence). 78% children in care for 2.5 years have lived in the same home for 2 years or more. 50.45% children who have a long term fostering as a plan have achieved permanence which is at the highest point since 2021.

Permanence Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Good + SN	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	Latest D.O.T.
% Children Achieved Permanence Adoption (Rolling 6 months)	High	13.14	9.00	12.00	13.14	13.00	11.00	10.00	⊗ Worsening
% Children Achieved Permanence Returned home to live with parents/ relatives (with PR) (Rolling 6 months)	High	14.83	17.00		14.83	17.14	30.00	15.38	⊗ Worsening
% Children Achieved Permanence SGO (Rolling 6 months)	High	12.86	11.00	12.00	12.86	4.00	1.00	5.00	⊙ Improving
% CIC at month end with long term fostering as plan and achieved permanence	High					53.09	55.28	54.47	⊗ Worsening
% CIC at month end with long term fostering as plan and achieved permanence Excl UASC	High					57.92	60.00	59.64	⊗ Worsening
% CIC for 4 months or more with a completed permanence plan	High			90.00		95.30	95.12	96.51	⊙ Improving
% CIC for 4 months or more with a completed permanence plan Excl UASC	High			90.00		96.17	96.51	97.26	⊙ Improving

Placement Data for

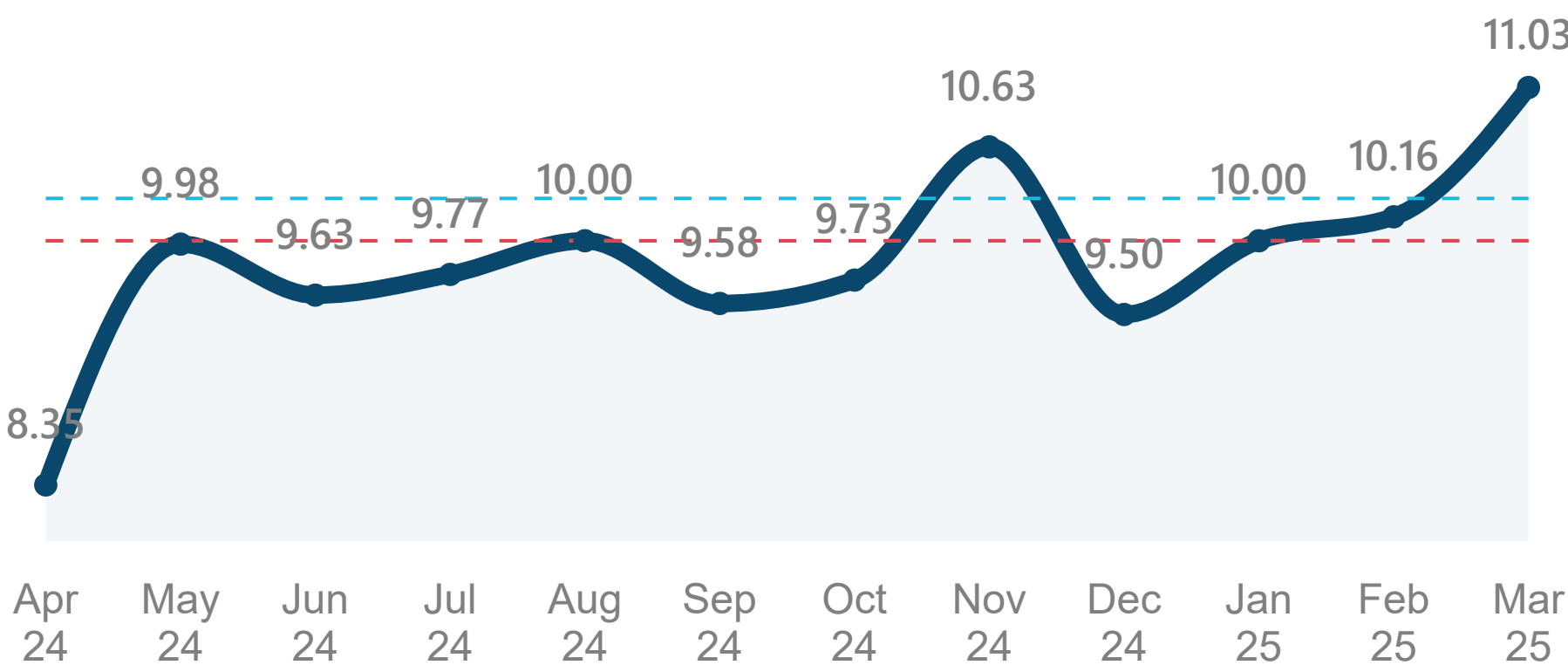
March 2025

% of CIC for 2.5 years or more, aged under 16 who have been in their placement for 2 or more years



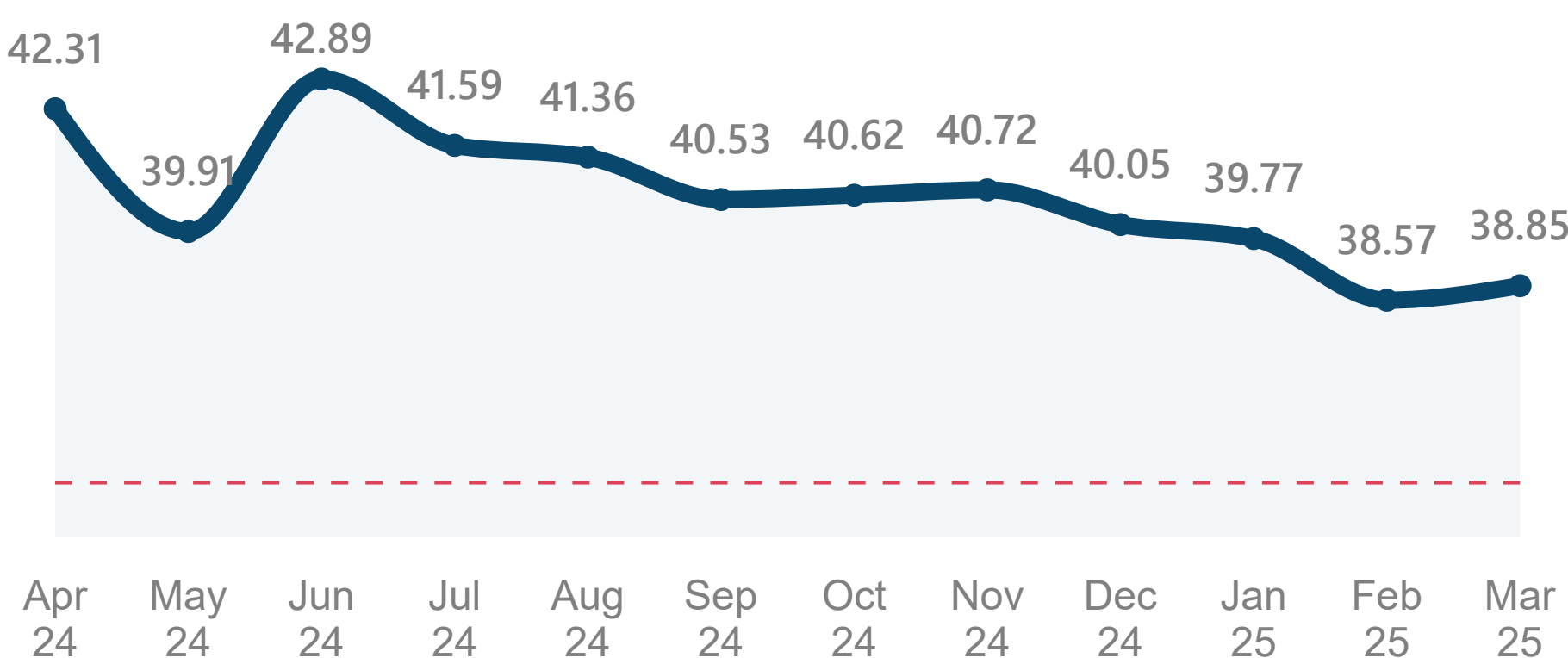
Dorset's **target** is **69%**. The highest recorded percentage was **78.21%** in Mar 25. The lowest recorded percentage was **70.51%** in Apr 24.

% CIC at end of month with 3+ placements in previous 12 months



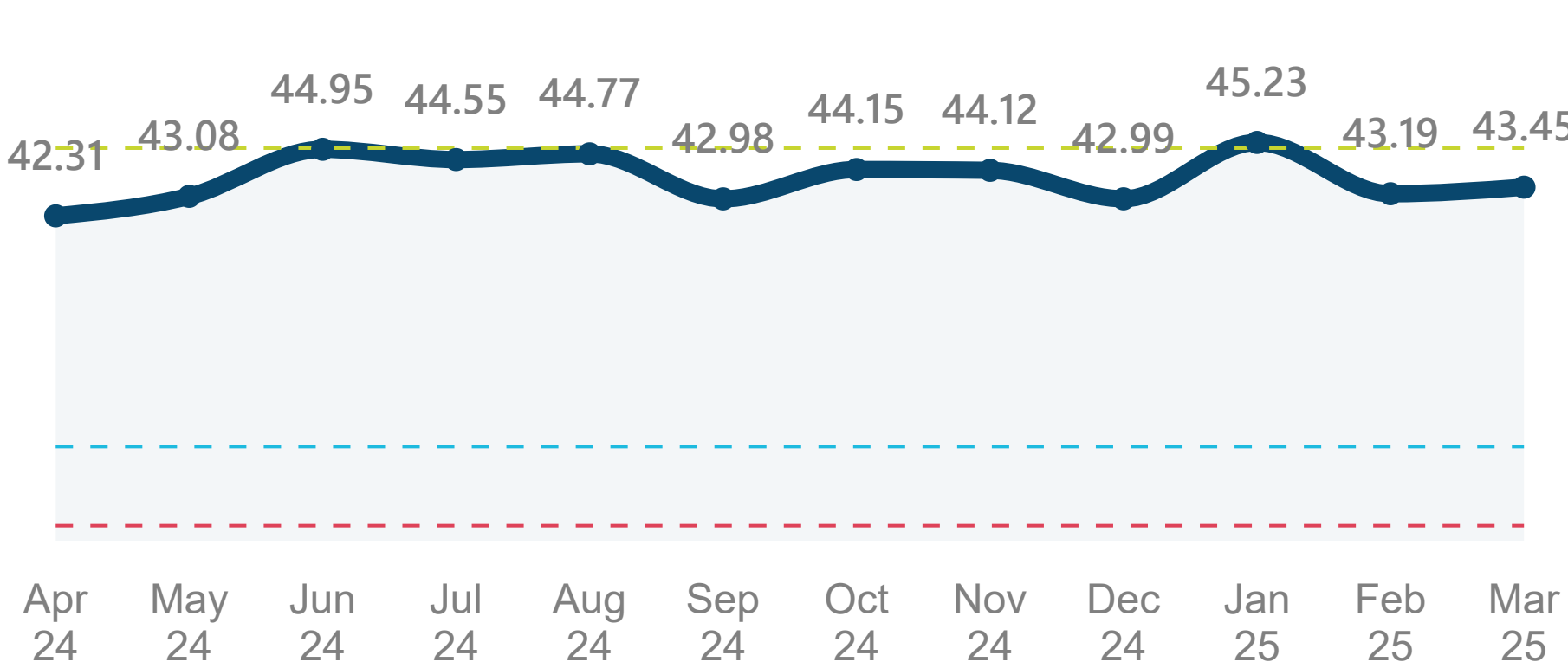
Dorset's **target** is **10%**. **Good + SN** is **10.29%** and **England** is **10%**. The highest recorded percentage was **11.03%** in Mar 25. The lowest recorded percentage was **8.35%** in Apr 24.

% CIC placed 20 miles away from home



Dorset's **target** is **35%**. The highest percentage recorded was **42.89%** in Jun 24). The lowest percentage recorded was **38.57%** in Feb 25.

% CIC placed outside Dorset



Dorset's **target** is **30%**. **Good + SN** is **33.14%** and **England** is **45%**. The highest percentage recorded was **45.23%** in Jan 25. The lowest percentage recorded was **42.31%** in Apr 24.

Commentary

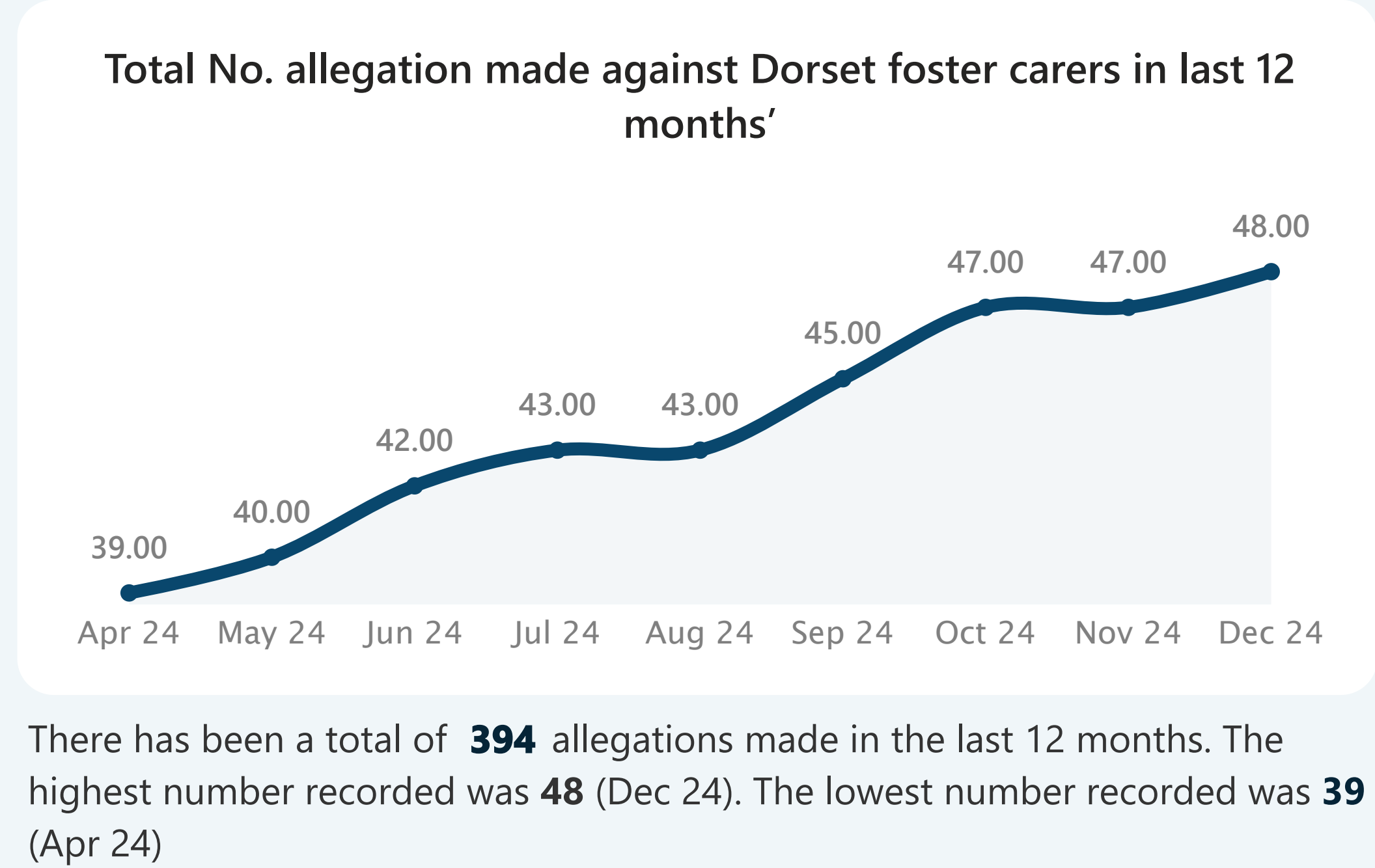
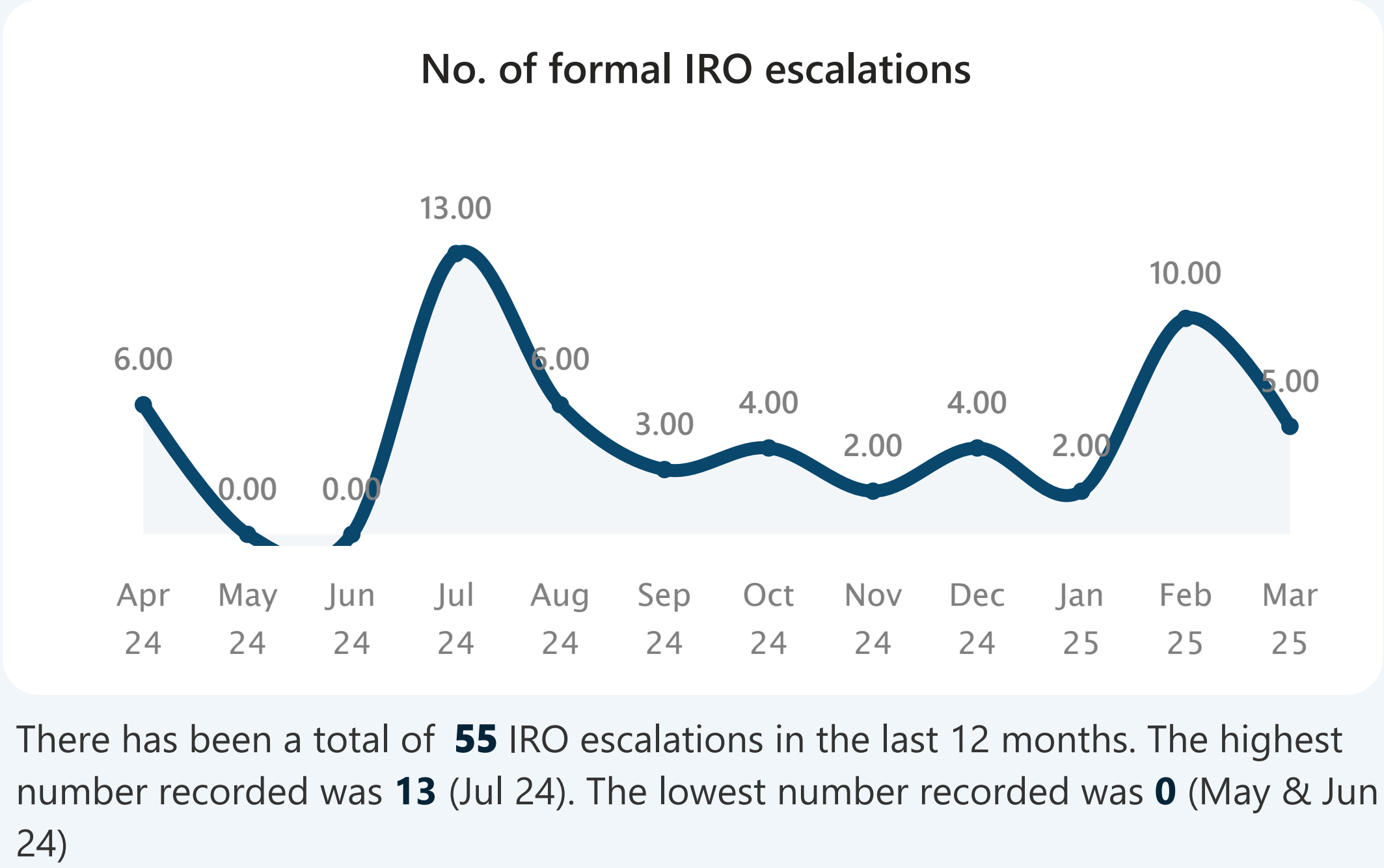
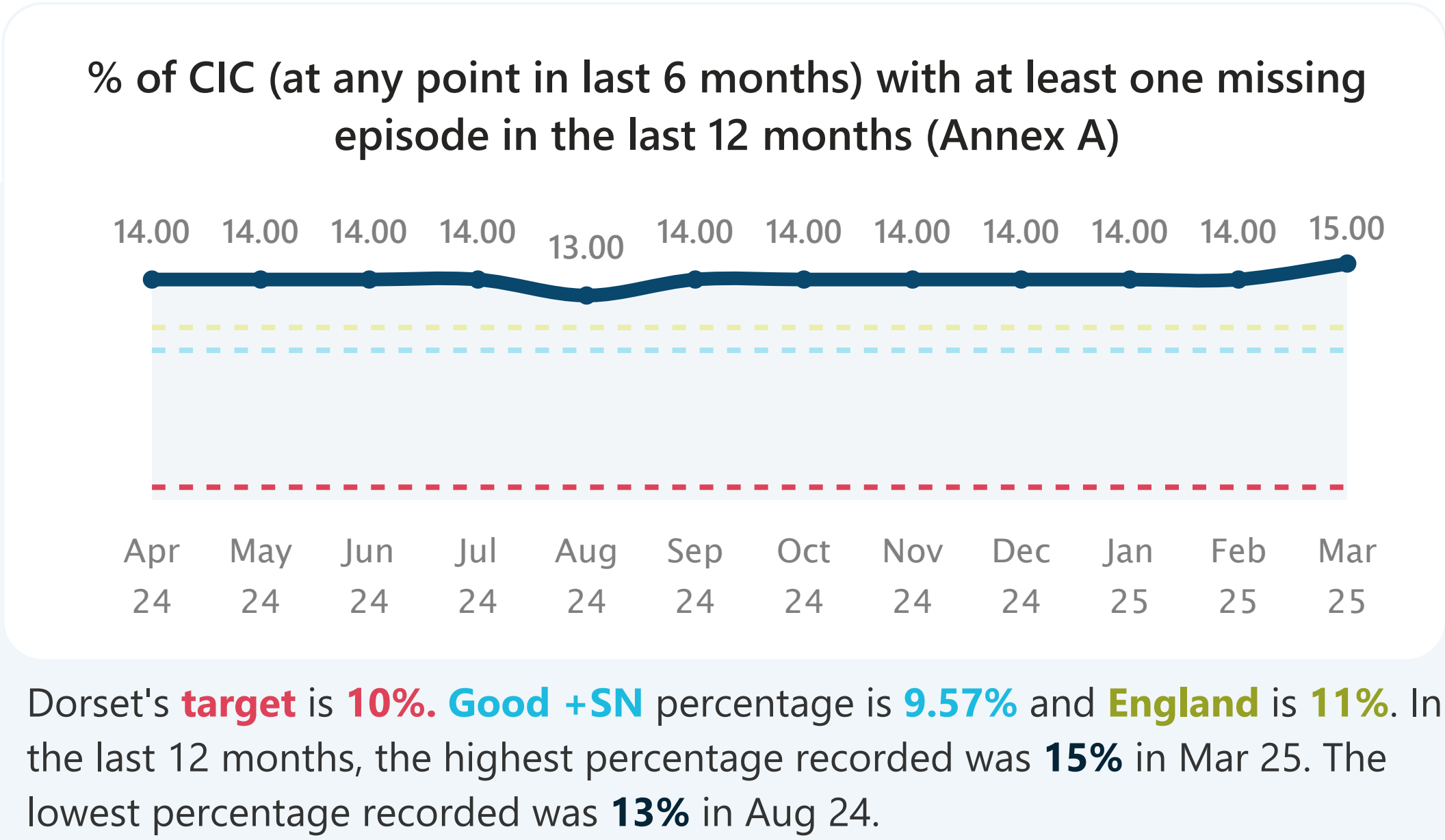
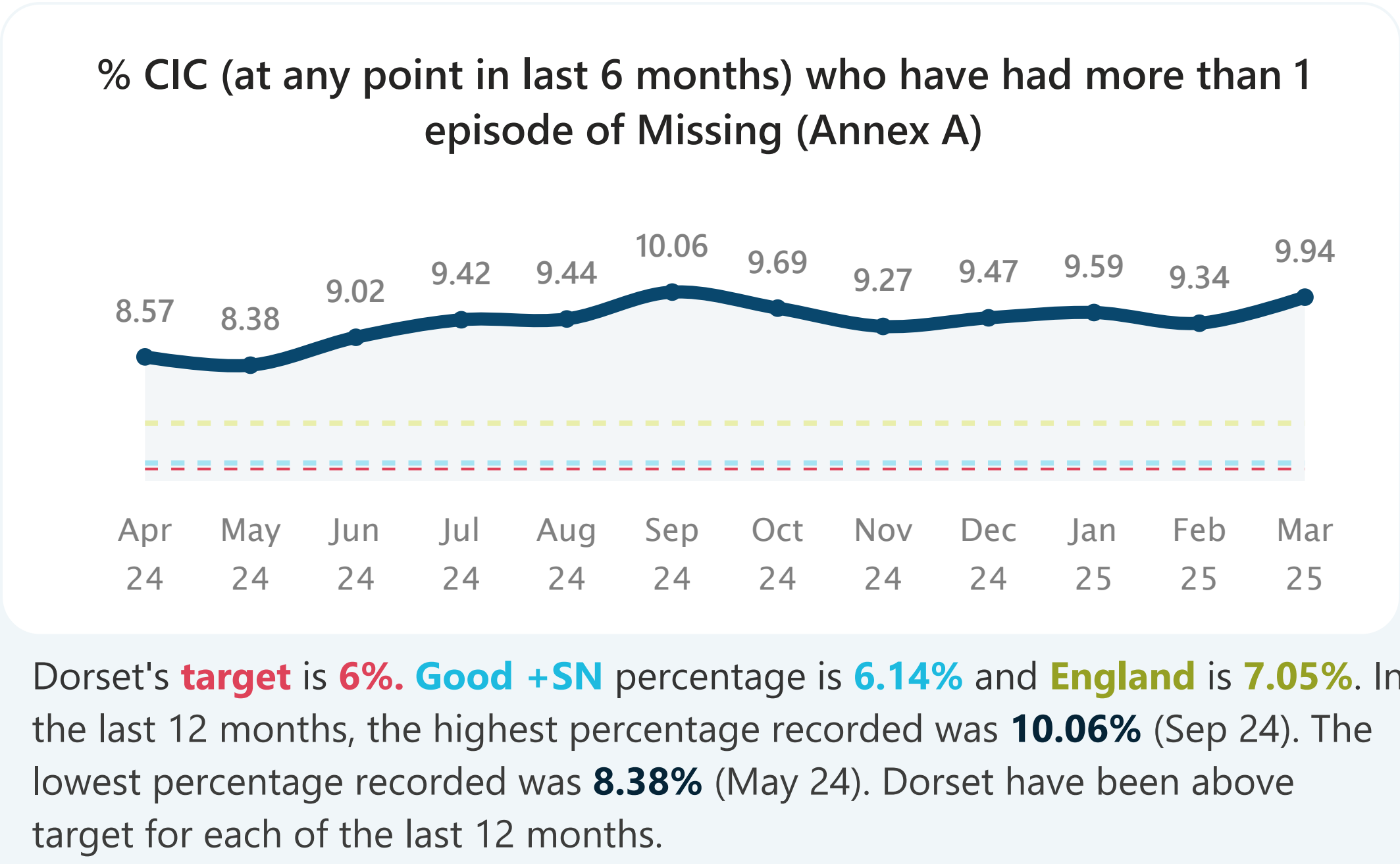
More children are settled with their carers with long term stability strengthening further and being the highest recorded (since April 2020) at 78.2%, 10% better than good+ stat neighbours.% Children placed outside Dorset (Excl Unnacompanied children) has reduced from 42.99% in December to 39.09% in March 2025. There has been a slight decrease in the % of children living in a foster placement although an overall increase from this time last year including an increase in the number of children living with Dorset carers. This month there are fewer children living closer to home with % children 20 mile from home increasing to 41.12 % from 40.92% last month. However, we are in a stronger position than this time last year when 44.3% children lived over 20 miles from their home.

Placement Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Good + SN	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	Latest D.O.T.
% CIC at end of month with 3+ placements in previous 12 months	Low	10.29	10.00	10.00	10.29	10.00	10.16	11.03	⊗ Worsening
% CIC at end of month with 3+ placements in previous 12 months Excl UASC	Low			9.00		10.63	10.49	11.17	⊗ Worsening
% CIC in private provision	Low	40.43	37.00		40.43	44.55	42.49	42.53	⊗ Worsening
% CIC in private provision Excl UASC	Low					39.49	38.11	37.31	⊙ Improving
% CIC living in foster placement	High	67.29	67.00	69.00	67.29	71.36	72.52	69.89	⊗ Worsening
% CIC living in foster placement Excl UASC	High			71.00		70.63	71.61	68.78	⊗ Worsening
% CIC over 20 mile away from home excl UASC	Low	33.29	22.00	35.00	33.29	42.28	40.92	41.12	⊗ Worsening
% CIC placed outside Dorset	Low	33.14	45.00	30.00	33.14	45.23	43.19	43.45	⊗ Worsening
% CIC placed outside Dorset excl UASC	Low			30.00		41.27	39.90	39.09	⊙ Improving
% of CIC for 2.5 years or more, aged under 16 who have been in their placement for 2 or more years	High	68.43	68.00	69.00	68.43	77.85	77.92	78.21	⊙ Improving
No. of CIC placed with parent(s)	-					19.00	16.00	18.00	
No. of unregulated placement (P2, R1, H5 pre Nov23) excl UASC	Low					0.00	0.00	0.00	⚠ Same
No. of unregulated placements (P2, R1, H5 pre Nov23)	Low			10.00		0.00	0.00	0.00	⚠ Same

Safety Data for

March 2025



Commentary

Children who are reported missing does have quite considerable trends linked to the time of year, and weather conditions. It is not surprising to see that during March (the driest ever I believe) we had a notable increase in overall children, and children in care being reported missing. Fortunately a large proportion of those children in care who are reported missing, are children where there are plans in place to increase safety. More return home interviews are being offered, as a percentage, than we have previously been able to offer, and we believe that more consistent presence of the same staff offering a RHI, will increase the relationship between child and practitioner, to then share more information, which can work towards increasing safety.

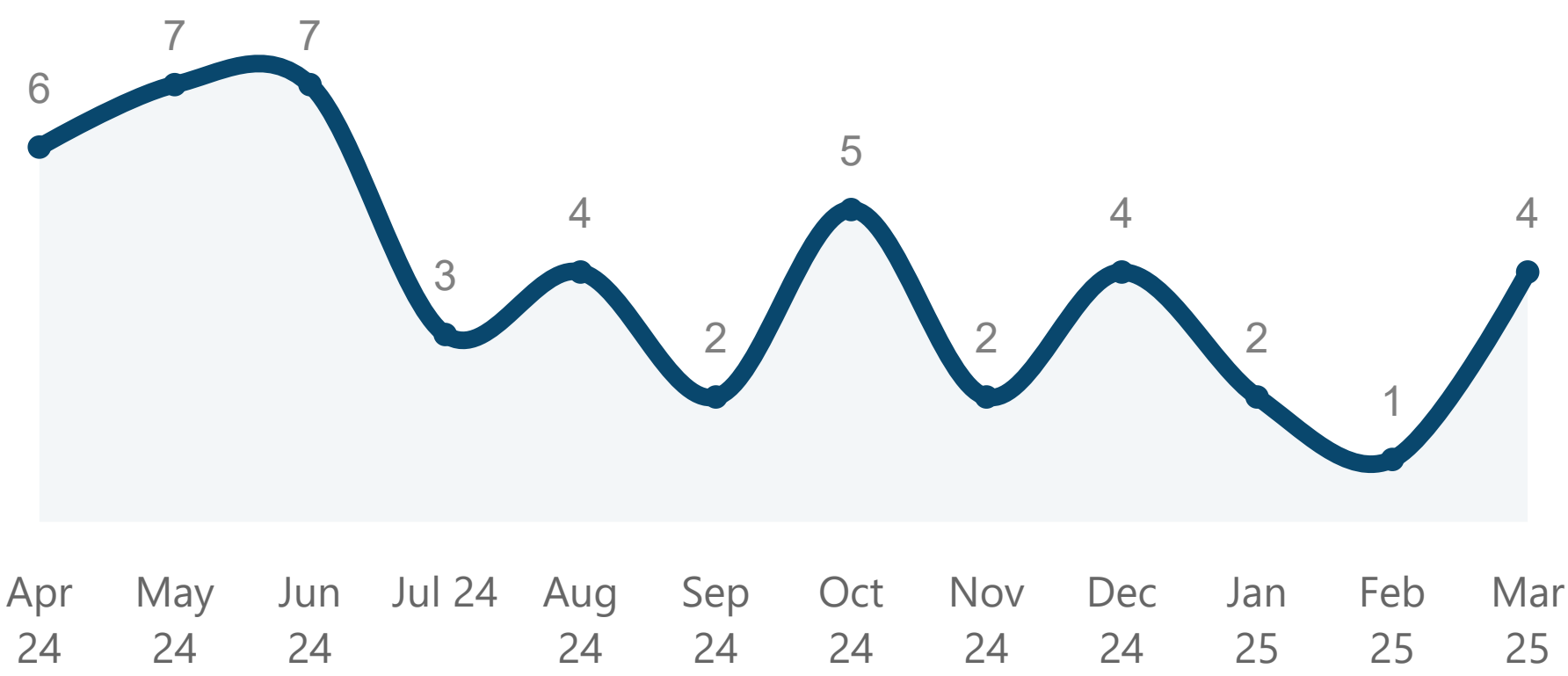
Permanence Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Good + SN	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	Latest D.O.T.
% CIC (at any point in last 6 months) who have had more than 1 episode of Missing (Annex A)	Low	6.14	7.05	6.00	6.14	9.59	9.34	9.94	⊗ Worsening
% of CIC (at any point in last 6 months) with at least one missing episode in the last 12 months (Annex A)	Low	9.57	11.00	10.00	9.57	14.00	14.00	15.00	⊗ Worsening
No. of allegations made against foster carers that were substantiated	-								
No. of formal IRO escalations	High					2.00	10.00	5.00	⊗ Worsening
No. of informal IRO escalations	High					6.00	6.00	9.00	⊙ Improving
No. of IRO escalations closed	-					13.00	23.00	25.00	
Total No. allegation made against Dorset foster carers in last 12 months'	Low								



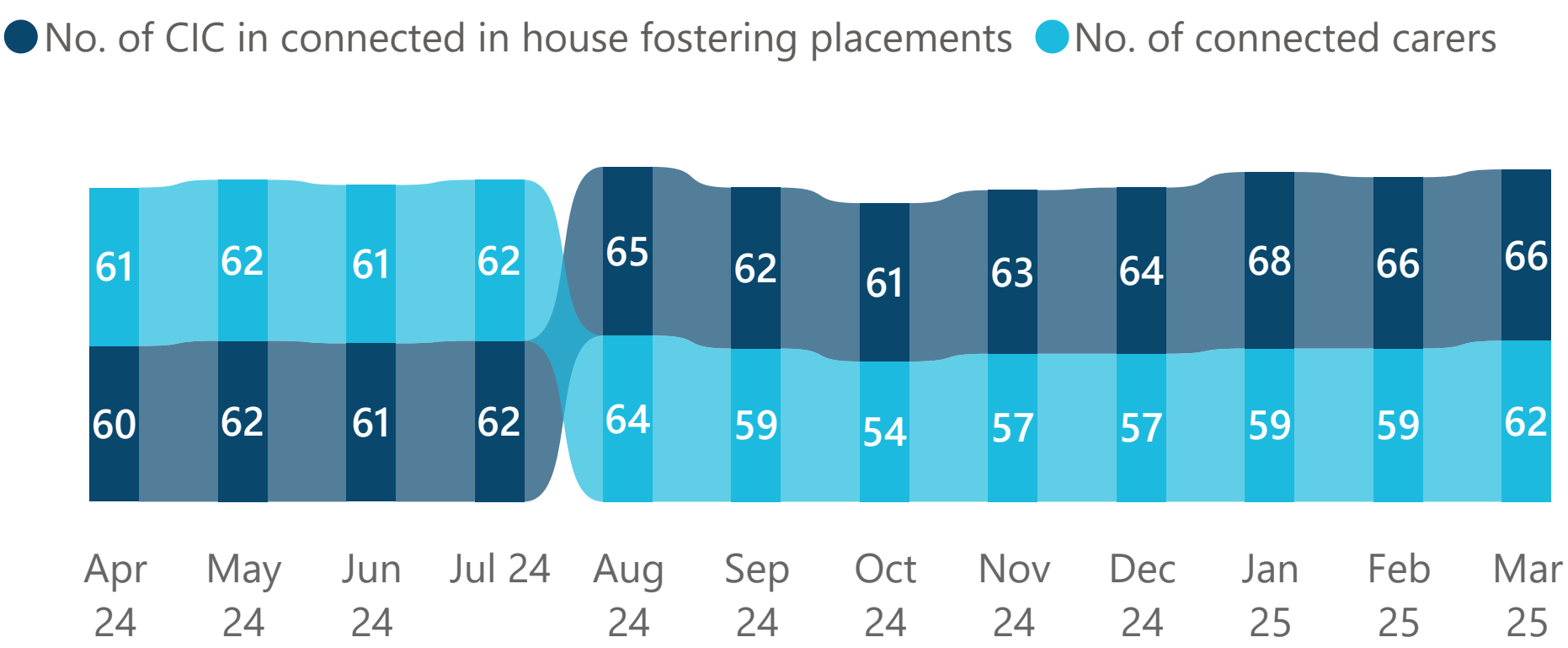
Sufficiency Data for March 2025

Total Number of New Households Recruited



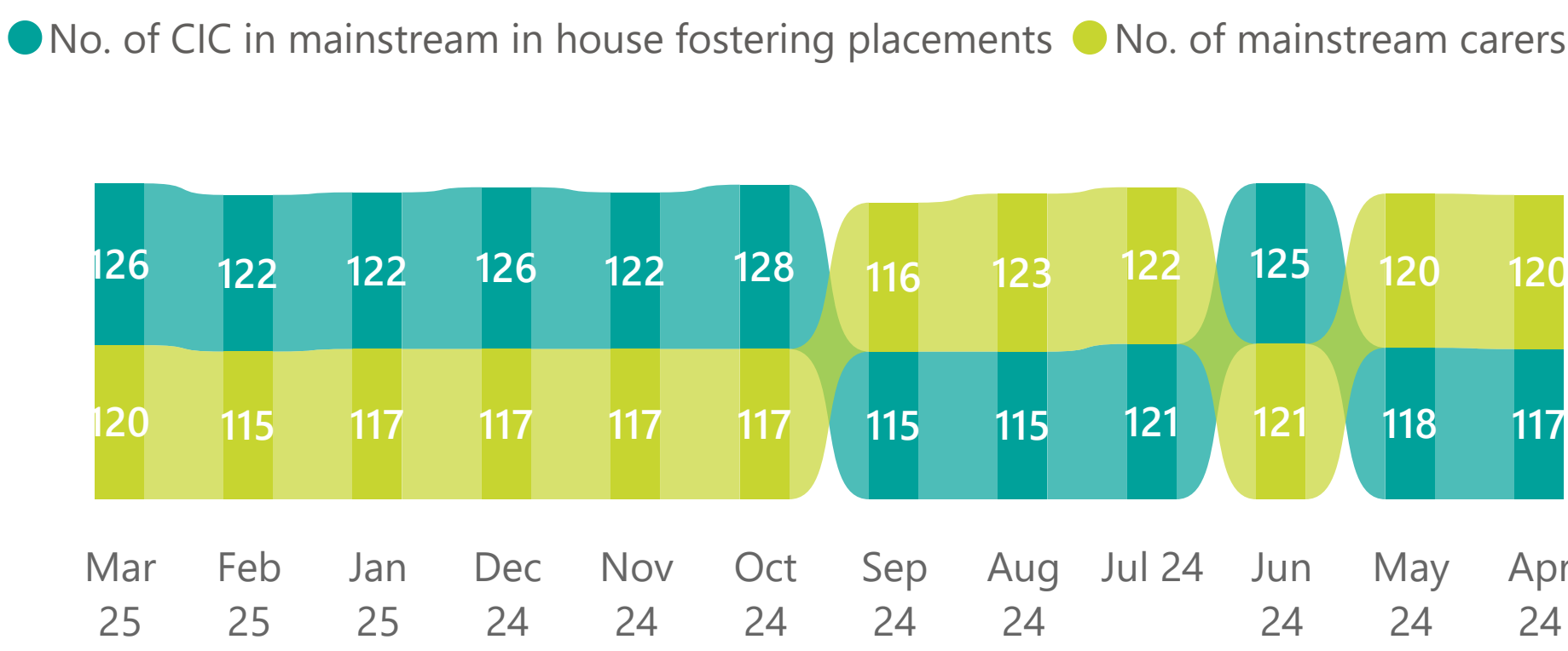
In the last 12 months, there have been **47** new households recruited. The highest number recorded was **7** in May and Jun 24. The lowest number recorded was **1** in Feb 25.

In House Connected Carers



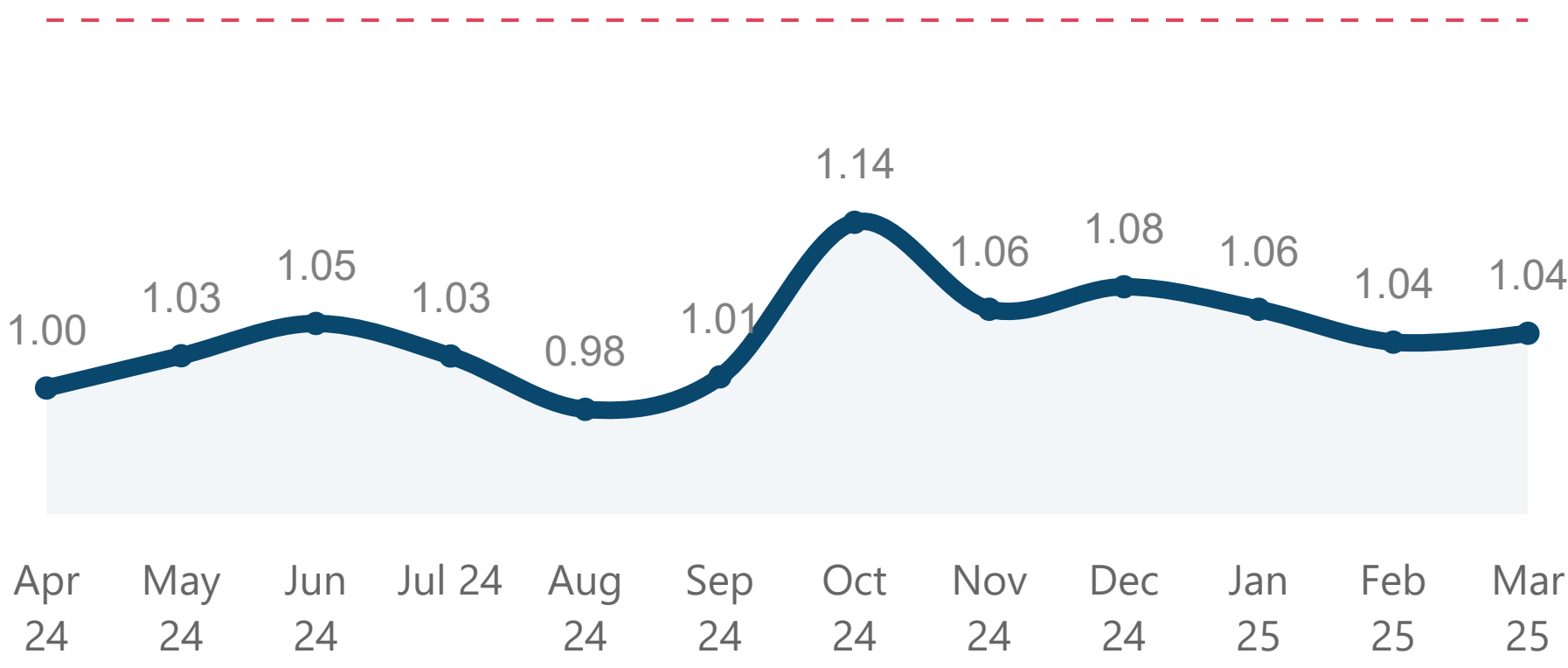
In the last 12 months, there have been a total of **760** CIC in connected in house fostering placements and a total of **717** connected carers.

In House Mainstream Foster Carers



In the last 12 months, there have been a total of **1,457** CIC in mainstream in house fostering placements and a total of **1,425** mainstream carers.

Fostering utilisation rate - mainstream



Dorset's **target** is **1.3%**. The highest rate recorded was **1.14** in Oct 24. The lowest rate recorded was **0.98** in Aug 24.

Commentary

We have seen an increase in the number of foster carers from 179 to 197 in the last 6 months. However, the number of mainstream carers has increased to 119 with 2 mainstream carers recruited this month. The number of children in mainstream foster care has increased from 113 to 121. However, the % of children living in a foster home has slightly decreased to 69.89% and remains better than good+ stat neighbours and national. Recruitment of local foster carers and supporting more children to live within their own family network will enable children to be able to maintain those important relationship and remain connected. Work to establish a dedicated Kinship service within the Fostering Service has concluded and all Special Guardianship work has now transferred from Aspire.

Sufficiency Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Good + SN	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	Latest D.O.T.
% Foster Carer visits up to date (excl FTA)	High			80.00		81.46	67.05	79.89	🟢 Improving
Fostering utilisation rate - mainstream	High			1.30		1.06	1.04	1.04	🟢 Improving
No. of applicants undergoing assessment (Foster Carers - Connected Person)	High					9.00	0.00	0.00	🟡 Same
No. of applicants undergoing assessment (Foster Carers - Mainstream)	High					8.00	9.00	11.00	🟢 Improving
No. of CIC in connected in house fostering placements	-					68.00	66.00	66.00	
No. of CIC in mainstream in house fostering placements	High					122.00	122.00	126.00	🟢 Improving
No. of connected carers	High					59.00	59.00	62.00	🟢 Improving
No. of Foster carers at end of month	High			200.00		182.00	180.00	188.00	🟢 Improving
No. of households deregistered/resigned – Connected Carers	Low					0.00	2.00	2.00	🟡 Same
No. of households deregistered/resigned – Foster to Adopt	Low					0.00	0.00	0.00	🟡 Same
No. of households deregistered/resigned – Mainstream	Low			2.00		1.00	1.00	0.00	🟢 Improving
No. of households deregistered/resigned – Temporary	Low					0.00	0.00	0.00	🟡 Same
No. of mainstream carers	High			138.00		117.00	115.00	120.00	🟢 Improving
No. of new households recruited – Connected Person	High					0.00	0.00	0.00	🟡 Same
No. of new households recruited – Foster to Adopt	High					0.00	0.00	0.00	🟡 Same
No. of new households recruited – Mainstream	High			2.00		1.00	0.00	1.00	🟢 Improving
No. of new households recruited – Temporary	High					1.00	1.00	3.00	🟢 Improving

Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

Appendix



This appendix presents a comprehensive table of key performance metrics related to the **Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report**, covering data from the last six months. Each metric includes relevant targets, benchmarks for "Good+" performance, and the average figures for England, allowing for effective comparison and assessment. Additionally, the table highlights the latest direction of travel for each indicator, indicating whether performance is improving, stable, or declining. It also summarises the total number of key performance indicators (KPIs) included on the page, categorising them based on their performance trends: those that are improving, remaining the same, worsening, or lacking a direction of travel. Furthermore, the table provides totals for RAG (Red, Amber, Green) ratings, offering a quick visual reference for performance status across the metrics.

Corporate Parenting Board Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Oct 24	Nov 24	Dec 24	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	D.O.T
% allocated children open 4 wks+ with supervision in 8 weeks	High			90.00	92.03	91.36	86.87	87.55	92.80	89.45	✖ Worsening
% Children Achieved Permanence Returned home to live with parents/ relatives (with PR) (Rolling 6 months)	High	14.83	17.00		17.46	18.03	21.54	17.14	30.00	15.38	✖ Worsening
% CIC at month end with long term fostering as plan and achieved permanence	High				49.01	48.81	48.00	53.09	55.28	54.47	✖ Worsening
% CIC at month end with long term fostering as plan and achieved permanence Excl UASC	High				53.57	53.33	52.68	57.92	60.00	59.64	✖ Worsening
% CIC for 4 months or more with a completed permanence plan	High			90.00	95.43	96.15	96.32	95.30	95.12	96.51	✔ Improving
% CIC for 4 months or more with a completed permanence plan Excl UASC	High			90.00	95.91	97.03	97.81	96.17	96.51	97.26	✔ Improving
% of CIC who are UASC	-	8.29	9.00		12.36	11.76	10.63	10.23	9.70	9.43	
No. of children and young people supported by an advocate during CP (commissioned)	-				32.00	25.00	19.00	19.00	23.00	35.00	
No. of children who became CIC	Low			10.00	15.00	6.00	17.00	9.00	6.00	14.00	✖ Worsening
No. of children who became CIC Excl UASC	Low			10.00	12.00	5.00	17.00	7.00	5.00	13.00	✖ Worsening
No. of children who ceased to be CIC	High			13.00	10.00	16.00	14.00	8.00	13.00	10.00	✖ Worsening
No. of CIC at end of month	Low			420.00	453.00	442.00	442.00	440.00	433.00	435.00	✖ Worsening
No. of CIC placed with parent(s)	-				20.00	17.00	16.00	19.00	16.00	18.00	
No. of CIC who are UASC at end of month	-				56.00	52.00	47.00	45.00	42.00	41.00	
Rate of CIC as at end of month	Low	71.00	70.00	68.00	68.61	66.95	66.95	66.64	65.58	65.89	✖ Worsening
Rate of CIC as at end of month Excl UASC	Low	65.08	63.55		60.13	59.07	59.83	59.83	59.22	59.68	✖ Worsening

No. of KPIs

16

Improving

2

Same

0

Worsening

10

No D.O.T

4

Green

3

Amber

5

Red

0

No RAG

8

This appendix presents a comprehensive table of key performance metrics related to the **Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report**, covering data from the last six months. Each metric includes relevant targets, benchmarks for "Good+" performance, and the average figures for England, allowing for effective comparison and assessment. Additionally, the table highlights the latest direction of travel for each indicator, indicating whether performance is improving, stable, or declining. It also summarises the total number of key performance indicators (KPIs) included on the page, categorising them based on their performance trends: those that are improving, remaining the same, worsening, or lacking a direction of travel. Furthermore, the table provides totals for RAG (Red, Amber, Green) ratings, offering a quick visual reference for performance status across the metrics.

Corporate Parenting BoardPerformance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Oct 24	Nov 24	Dec 24	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	D.O.T
% CIC at end of month with 3+ placements in previous 12 months	Low	10.29	10.00	10.00	9.73	10.63	9.50	10.00	10.16	11.03	✖ Worsening
% CIC at end of month with 3+ placements in previous 12 months Excl UASC	Low			9.00	9.85	10.77	9.87	10.63	10.49	11.17	✖ Worsening
% CIC for 12 months or more with up to date Immunisations	High	86.29	82.00	85.00	82.25	83.78	86.46	90.85	93.91	91.54	✖ Worsening
% CIC in private provision	Low	40.43	37.00		45.25	45.02	43.89	44.55	42.49	42.53	✖ Worsening
% CIC in private provision Excl UASC	Low				38.04	38.21	37.72	39.49	38.11	37.31	✔ Improving
% CIC living in foster placement	High	67.29	67.00	69.00	68.87	71.04	72.62	71.36	72.52	69.89	✖ Worsening
% CIC living in foster placement Excl UASC	High			71.00	69.52	71.54	72.66	70.63	71.61	68.78	✖ Worsening
% CIC over 20 mile away from home excl UASC	Low	33.29	22.00	35.00	43.58	43.59	42.28	42.28	40.92	41.12	✖ Worsening
% of all CIC who had a valid passport at their last review Excl UASC	High				44.38	42.74	42.21	43.02	43.50	47.44	✔ Improving
% of children for CIC for at least 12 months age 4-16yrs with completed SDQ assessment	High	68.43	77.00	75.00	66.89	64.19	62.54	60.07	57.75	53.17	✖ Worsening
% of CIC & Care Leavers who are EET (16 to 18 Year Olds - Y12 & Y13)	High			72.00	73.76	74.65	68.30	66.90	73.79	69.66	✖ Worsening
% of CIC (in care 40 working days) with valid passport at last review	High				38.50	37.59	37.34	38.42	39.19	42.71	✔ Improving
% of New CIC (in previous month) receiving their IHA within 20 days	High			95.00	50.00	66.67	80.00	76.50	22.22	33.33	✔ Improving
% of New CIC (in previous month) receiving their IHA within 20 days Excl UASC	High			95.00	50.00	75.00	100.00	76.50	28.57	40.00	✔ Improving
Average SDQ score for CIC who have been in care for more than 12 months (age 4 to 16)	Low	15.39	14.70	14.90	14.40	14.66	14.51	14.78	15.07	15.38	✖ Worsening

No. of KPIs

15

Improving

6

Same

0

Worsening

9

No D.O.T

0

Green

3

Amber

3

Red

5

No RAG Rating

4



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Corporate Parenting Board Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Oct 24	Nov 24	Dec 24	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	D.O.T
% Care Leavers aged 19-21 in EET (OC3)	High	56.86	54.00				59.65			59.35	⊗ Worsening
% CIC (at any point in last 6 months) who have had more than 1 episode of Missing (Annex A)	Low	6.14	7.05	6.00	9.69	9.27	9.47	9.59	9.34	9.94	⊗ Worsening
% CIC for 12 months or more with Annual Health Assessment completed on time	High	84.86	89.00	90.00	88.17	88.59	88.62	92.11	93.91	90.28	⊗ Worsening
% CIC in care 12 months or more who have had a dental check within 12 months	High	77.43	79.00	85.00	73.67	72.97	71.08	72.24	78.53	80.56	✓ Improving
% CIC placed outside Dorset	Low	33.14	45.00	30.00	44.15	44.12	42.99	45.23	43.19	43.45	⊗ Worsening
% CIC placed outside Dorset excl UASC	Low			30.00	38.29	38.46	37.97	41.27	39.90	39.09	✓ Improving
Average No. of days between entering care and moving in with adoptive family for adopted children (adjusted for foster carer adoptions)	Low	447.78	485.04	426.00	394.00	302.00	317.00	415.00	334.00	334.00	⚠ Same
No. of Care Leavers (Active aged 17-25) in Bed and Breakfast accommodation	Low			0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	2.00	⊗ Worsening
No. of Care Leavers (Active aged 17-25) in unsuitable accommodation at end of month	Low			11.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	5.00	6.00	⊗ Worsening
No. of Foster carers at end of month	High			200.00	175.00	177.00	180.00	182.00	180.00	188.00	✓ Improving
No. of health passports completed (2 months in arrears)	-						6.00	8.00	10.00		
No. of Health passports due within the month (2 months in arrears)	-						6.00	8.00	10.00		
No. of unregulated placement (P2, R1, H5 pre Nov23) excl UASC	Low				0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	⚠ Same
No. of unregulated placements (P2, R1, H5 pre Nov23)	Low			10.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	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	197.23	196.18	121.00	150.00	155.00	178.00	184.00	201.00	201.00	⚠ Same

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Corporate Parenting Board Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Oct 24	Nov 24	Dec 24	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	D.O.T
% Care Leavers who are in Employment Education or Training (Active aged 19-21)	High			60.00	66.00	64.00	64.00	62.00	66.00	68.00	✔ Improving
% Care Leavers who are in touch with Dorset Local Authority (Active aged 19-21)	High			93.00	99.00	99.00	98.00	98.00	98.00	98.00	! Same
% Care Leavers who are living in suitable accommodation (Active aged 19-21)	High			96.00	94.00	98.00	97.00	100.00	96.00	96.00	! Same
% Care Leavers with an up to date pathway plan at end of month (Active aged 17-25)	High			95.00	93.33	96.04	96.05	93.75	93.09	92.67	✗ Worsening
% Children Achieved Permanence Adoption (Rolling 6 months)	High	13.14	9.00	12.00	16.00	15.00	12.00	13.00	11.00	10.00	✗ Worsening
% Children Achieved Permanence SGO (Rolling 6 months)	High	12.86	11.00	12.00	8.00	7.00	6.00	4.00	1.00	5.00	✔ Improving
% Foster Carer visits up to date (excl FTA)	High			80.00	77.91	67.05	78.98	81.46	67.05	79.89	✔ Improving
% of children with a PEP within 20 days of coming into care	High			100.00			100.00			100.00	
% of CIC & Care Leavers who are NEET (16 to 18 Year Olds - Y12 & Y13)	Low			28.00	26.24	25.35	31.70	33.10	26.21	30.34	✗ Worsening
% of CIC (at any point in last 6 months) with at least one missing episode in the last 12 months (Annex A)	Low	9.57	11.00	10.00	14.00	14.00	14.00	14.00	14.00	15.00	✗ Worsening
% of CIC with a termly PEP completed on time	High			96.00			91.00			93.00	
Children adopted in last 12 months	High				22.00	24.00	25.00	17.00	19.00	19.00	! Same
No. of Adoption placement order revocations over last 12 months	Low				9.00	7.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	✗ Worsening
No. of adoptive families approved (ADM)	High				3.00	1.00	2.00	0.00	1.00	2.00	✔ Improving
No. of adoptive Families in assessment	High				13.00	18.00	18.00	16.00	15.00	12.00	✗ Worsening
No. of CIC in mainstream in house fostering placements	High				128.00	122.00	126.00	122.00	122.00	126.00	✔ Improving
No. of connected carers	High				54.00	57.00	57.00	59.00	59.00	62.00	✔ Improving
No. of mainstream carers	High			138.00	117.00	117.00	117.00	117.00	115.00	120.00	✔ Improving

No. of KPIs

18

Improving

7

Same

3

Worsening

6

No D.O.T

2

Green

5

Amber

5

Red

2

No RAG Rating

6



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Corporate Parenting Board Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Oct 24	Nov 24	Dec 24	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	D.O.T
% CIC (school age) who have had at least one suspension in the current academic year	Low				3.83	5.57	6.87	6.91	8.47	10.78	✖ Worsening
% CIC with an Education Health and Care Plan	-				35.28	35.79	35.55	36.75	36.59	37.91	
Average Attendance % for CIC of school age (Academic year to date)	High			95.00	90.91	90.49	89.93	89.66	89.40	88.86	✖ Worsening
No. of allegations made against foster carers that were substantiated	-				0.00	0.00	0.00				
No. of applicants undergoing assessment (Foster Carers - Connected Person)	High				9.00	12.00	13.00	9.00	0.00	0.00	⚠ Same
No. of applicants undergoing assessment (Foster Carers - Mainstream)	High				8.00	7.00	8.00	8.00	9.00	11.00	✔ Improving
No. of formal IRO escalations	High				4.00	2.00	4.00	2.00	10.00	5.00	✖ Worsening
No. of households deregistered/resigned – Connected Carers	Low				3.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	2.00	2.00	⚠ Same
No. of households deregistered/resigned – Foster to Adopt	Low				0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	⚠ Same
No. of households deregistered/resigned – Mainstream	Low			2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	✔ Improving
No. of households deregistered/resigned – Temporary	Low				0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	⚠ Same
No. of informal IRO escalations	High				5.00	11.00	13.00	6.00	6.00	9.00	✔ Improving
No. of IRO escalations closed	-				17.00	6.00	7.00	13.00	23.00	25.00	
No. of new households recruited – Connected Person	High				1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	⚠ Same
No. of new households recruited – Foster to Adopt	High				0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	⚠ Same
No. of new households recruited – Mainstream	High			2.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	✔ Improving
No. of new households recruited – Temporary	High				3.00	2.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	3.00	✔ Improving
Total No. allegation made against Dorset foster carers in last 12 months'	Low				47.00	47.00	48.00				

No. of KPIs

18

Improving

5

Same

6

Worsening

3

No D.O.T

4

Green

1

Amber

2

Red

0

No RAG Rating

15

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Corporate Parenting Board Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Oct 24	Nov 24	Dec 24	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	D.O.T
Fostering utilisation rate - mainstream	High			1.30	1.14	1.06	1.08	1.06	1.04	1.04	✔ Improving
No. of CIC in connected in house fostering placements	-				61.00	63.00	64.00	68.00	66.00	66.00	
Total No. allegation made against Dorset foster carers in last 12 months'	Low				47.00	47.00	48.00				

No. of KPIs

3

Improving

1

Same

0

Worsening

0

No D.O.T

2

Green

0

Amber

1

Red

0

No RAG Rating

2

Corporate Parenting Board

28 May 2025

Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2024 - 2025

Choose an item.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Clare Sutton – Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Skills

Local Councillor(s):

Executive Director: Paul Dempsey, Executive Director

Report Author: Louise Drury Head of Service Children in Care

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 progress made against our priorities in the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024- 2027.

Reason for Recommendation:

As Corporate Parents, all members of the board seek to stay informed about children in care of Dorset Council and care experienced young people, to offer challenge and support. As a maturing board, the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report provides members with an opportunity to review the work of the previous year, to consider what has worked well and where there is still more to do, and to plan next steps to be ever better.

1. Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report.

1.1. I am pleased to introduce the Annual Report for 2024- 2025.

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

- Continued careful and safe reduction in our children in care population.
- Developed Corporate Parenting Partnership Delivery Group action plan against priorities identified by children and young people through the 'Bright Spots' programme and Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024 -2027.
- Established a dedicated Kinship Service in the Fostering Service
- Increased the number of Mockingbird Constellations to 5 and invited by The Mockingbird Society to visit them in Seattle to share our implementation journey, our achievements and our learning.
- Celebrated our Foster Carers and Supported Lodgings Carers at the annual awards event.
- £1m pot established to fund extensions and adaptations to foster carer and adopter homes to expand capacity and promote stability and permanence.
- Building on the success of The Harbour model, launched Harbour East with an application submitted to register an additional short-term home.
- All our children's homes inspected and graded 'Good'.
- Increased our living options for our care leavers.
- Continued to work with children and young people through Dorset Youth Voice and created better and safer spaces to engage in.
- Alongside our health colleagues worked together to improve health outcomes for our children.
- Embarked on an ambitious children's mental health transformation programme with Health.
- Dorset Virtual School are part of University College of London (UCL) advisory Board for another Local Authority to share best practice around measuring and recording the progress and outcomes of care-experienced young people as they move into adult life.

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 arguably 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. I would like to recognise the progress that has been made over the first year of the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024 – 2027 and the contribution of Corporate Parenting Board in achieving this. As we move to a new financial year, I look forward to continuing the ambition to do ever better for our children in care and care experienced young people.

2. Corporate Parenting Strategy.

2.1. We launched the refreshed Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024- 2027 in June 2024. Since this time, we have published Annual Reports and met at least 6 times to ensure we're making the best impact against our priorities.

2.2. We have tracked progress against key indicators, a summary of which is presented in Fig 1. This includes benchmarking against good+ statistical neighbours and national average, and direction of travel for the year 2024/25.

2.3.

Indicator	Mar-24	Mar-25	Good +Stat Neighbours	National Average	Direction of travel 24/25
No. children in care	449	435			↓
No. unaccompanied children	54	41			↓
Rate of children in care per 10,000 children	68	66	71	70	↓
% children seen in 6 weeks	71%	78%			↑
% children living in foster care	69%	70%	67%	67%	↑
% children living with Dorset carers	44%	47%	41%	43%	↑
% children living outside Dorset	43%	43%	33%	45%	↔
% children settled for 2.5yrs	71%	78%	68%	68%	↑
% permanence achieved through adoption	11%	10%	13%	9%	↓
Dental	64%	81%	77%	79%	↑
Immunisations	88%	91%	86%	82%	↑
Annual health assessment	88%	90%	89%	84%	↑
Initial health assessments*	79%	33%			↓
% children who have completed a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)*	56%	53%	68%	77%	↓
Average SDQ score*	15	15	15	15	↔
% children with a missing episode	14%	15%	10%	11%	↑
No. children entering criminal justice system for the first time in respective year*	56	49			↓
% children who have been permanently excluded from school*	0	0			↔
% children missing education*	2%	3%			↑
No. young people eligible to receive leaving care services	592	586			↓
In touch with young people (19-21yrs)	96%	94%	95%	92%	↑
% young people in suitable accommodation (19-21yrs)	90%	93%	91%	88.00%	↑
No. young people in bed and breakfast	3	3			↔
% young people in education employment and training (19-21 yrs)	51%	59%	57%	54%	↑

Data is taken from the Children's services Analysis Tool (ChAT) for the relevant year. Where data is not provided in ChAT, this has been sourced from monthly Performance Board Report and indicated by *. Note all indicators are benchmarked against Good+ Stat Neighbours and National Average.

Fig 1.

We have worked collaboratively to:

- Create safe spaces for children and young people with youth voice to come together with Corporate Parenting Board members to hear, listen to and act upon feedback from children and young people.
- Create a Corporate Parenting Partnership Delivery Group to operationalise the Corporate Parenting Strategy and Dorset Promise and co-ordinate the delivery of The Corporate Parenting Partnership Delivery Plan (CPPDP).
- Increase the number of homes for our children and young people by developing new children's homes across Dorset and increase the number of fostering households.
- Increase the number of 'Mockingbird' Constellations to support and nurture fostering families.
- Develop a dedicated Kinship Service that recognises the unique needs of Kinship Carers
- Expand the Harbour – multi-agency service for children on edge of care, in care and leaving care to the East of the county and strengthen support for children on the edge of care and edge of exclusion from school.
- Ensure all Dorset children's homes are 'Good.'
- Develop a further 21 living options for care leavers.
- Partner with 'Coram' to participate in their 'Bright Spots' programme, increasing the reach and depth of hearing feedback from children and young people.
- Embed Mind of My Own to hear young people's voices

2.4. Throughout 2024-2025, the Corporate Parenting Board has considered progress against the priorities of The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024 – 2027. The following provides an update on some of the key areas of discussion by the board in this reporting period and highlights positive areas of development.

3. Our children and young people.

3.1. Between end of March 2024 – end of March 2025 our total child in care population has decreased from 449 to 435. Our local child in care population has also decreased from 395 to 394. As of end of March 2025, we were actively working with 300 care leavers compared to 302 last year. We have a total of 586 care leavers a decrease of 6 from 592 end of March 2024.

4. The Network and Youth Participation - *supporting children and young people to be themselves, to listen to them, include them, and work with them*

- 4.1. 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.
- 4.2. We have strengthened the feedback system within our audit process to evolve and learn from our practice. This was tested in our most recent Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) in March 2025.
- 4.3. Our care leavers have taken part in a second 'Your Life Beyond Care' Coram Voice survey which closed on 8th March 2024. 78% young people took part in the survey this year compared to 60% in the 2021 – 22. Results were presented to young people and the wider partnership at an event on 6 February 2025. Our children in care have taken part in a second 'Your Life Your Care' Coram Voice Survey. 48% children took part this year compared to 38% in the previous survey.
- 4.4. We continue to work with young people through The Network and partners to ensure that the CPPDG Plan is agile and informed by views which are captured through these surveys. The delivery of the CPPDG plan themes has the scrutiny of young people and board members at our informal Corporate Parenting Board meetings.
- 4.5. 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
- 4.6. Dorset Council have committed to run the Bright Spots Programme every 2 years. The next survey will be a third 'Your Life Beyond Care' survey in 2027.
- 4.7. 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.
- 4.8. The governance arrangements of Corporate Parenting Board having 4 informal Boards and 2 formal Boards continues to enable increased participation from young people. Feedback from young people attending informal boards which are arranged thematically in relation to The Dorset Promise and Corporate Parenting Strategy are increasingly positive and evidence impact of our children's voices.
- 4.9. This year we have held workshops which have focused on the following:
- Safe and Settled – Language that cares and friendships – 25th July 2024
 - Education and Employment – Belonging in school and education - 19th September 2024

- Physical and Mental Health – Appearance - 25th January 2025
- Identity – Ask me what matters – 20th March 2025

5. Physical and Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing – *supporting our children and young people's physical and mental health*

- 5.1. 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.
- 5.2. 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.
- 5.3. When comparing data in April 2024 to that in April 2025 we have seen improvement in most areas other than initial health assessments and % children with a completed Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).
- 5.4. Performance regarding initial health assessments continues to be variable throughout the year with the most significant impact on completion timeliness being associated with children placed outside of Dorset. NHS England is aware of this and has commissioned a dataset to address some of the variations in placements.
- 5.5. At the thematic workshop on Physical and Mental Health on 25th January 2025 members of the Corporate Parenting Board heard that the average SDQ score for our Children in Care aged 4-16 is on par with that of our good + comparator local authorities and national average. The Board has been interested in the % completed which at 60%, lower than the same time last year 63%, indicates that there are a number of children whose strengths and difficulties have not been assessed, and therefore the average score remains an unreliable reflection of our children in care population.
- 5.6. Young people spoke about the SDQ and the blocks to completion which are experienced by them. Young people described the questionnaire as more of a tick box exercise and had significant uncertainty about what happened next and how their responses were being used. An outcome of this discussion has led to Dorset Council Principal Education Psychologist arranging to meet with The Network in August 2025 to work together to develop a better way that is engaging for young people so we have a better understanding of their emotional and mental health needs.
- 5.7. 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. An operational monthly meeting tracks children in care open to CAMHS and the Emotional Wellbeing services, both within and beyond Dorset.
- 5.8. The children and young people Mental Health strategy is being revised as part of the children and young people mental health transformation. This will give us an

opportunity to identify better ways of working together for our children in care to ensure emotional wellbeing and mental health needs are better understood and services are better organised to respond to their needs.

5.9. The challenges experienced in being able to access Tier 4 provision for our children remains an area of concern.

6. Education and Employment - *supporting children and young people to have goals for the future and celebrating with them*

6.1. 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. The Corporate Parenting Board receives an annual report from the Head of The Virtual School each year.

6.2. Dorset Virtual School is a proud advocate of our children. The vision is that they are thriving in the right educational setting, attending, feel included and listened to so that our children become independent and resilient young people. There is a mutual commitment between educational settings and Dorset Virtual School to support our children and young people to fulfil their potential and live their best lives.

6.3. Some of the key strengths this year have been:

- Outstanding PEP Quality Assurance (93% good or outstanding)
- Providing support and guidance on support for children without a school place with bespoke SEN transition packs
- Weekly celebrations of 160 children and young people who have excelled in education or overcome significant barriers
- Development of termly targets to EHCP outcomes and to Early Years goals Organisation and delivery of two residential opportunities for children from year 5-11, working in partnership with Jamie's Farm
- Development of our support for children Previously Looked After
- Reduction in the use of suspensions in Dorset secondary schools
- Reduction in the use of reduced timetables
- Organisation and delivery of a range of extra-curricular activities in response to our children's voices
- Knowledge Exchange Programme in the UK in collaboration with University College London - working in partnership with a cross-phase group of specialist and mainstream providers to develop practice with the aim of improving outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers
- 75% of post-16 young people in Education, Employment or Training
- Production of the Dorset Virtual School recipe book for belonging
- Good outcomes for phonics, multiplication check and Key Stage 1 SATs

6.4. Board members noted that the Virtual School have built upon its support for our increasing numbers of unaccompanied young people. The specific handbook has been translated into 4 different languages based upon the cohort of children within our school and this has been shared at initial PEPs as an opportunity for language learning and support to settle into new communities. The additional 'Welcome Pack',

providing language learning resources and games that can be used within the family settings to encourage immersion in the English language has been offered to all of our unaccompanied young people this year. Each young person is also provided with a laptop and language tuition as part of their welcome package.

6.5. The Virtual School have plans to develop their work and support for our children previously in care during 2024/25 including;

- The handbook to be updated during summer holidays to reflect change of Pupil Premium plus and other policies.
- Kinship Care and Belonging to be incorporated within the handbook.
- Decision to instigate a one page summary (template with aide memoir to be developed) for every child who becomes Previously Looked After in addition to any other 'final' writing.

6.6. From this year's Virtual School Annual Report 2024, Board members noted that Dorset Virtual School continues to develop creative approaches to supporting children both educationally and in wider enrichment opportunities to raise aspiration and ambition. The Virtual School extends its reach beyond education settings to support the wider development of children and young people through arts participation, sport, cultural and leisure activities that enable them to develop skills and interests beyond formal education.

6.7. Strong links have been developed between the Virtual School and wider services such as the Youth Justice Service, Aspire Adoption and local further and higher education providers as well as the Care Leavers and Early Year's Team to focus on embedding robust and consistent processes and expectations to ensure children and young people are successful.

6.8. The Virtual School has a strong focus on celebrating child successes and sharing these widely to ensure that our children's lived experience is in everyone's minds in a positive, strengths-based way and also to celebrate good practice from teams working with our children.

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

- Improving attendance for those children with persistent or severe absence
- Enhancing our offer for our children living in Kinship Care arrangements
- Reduce the use of suspensions and the number of children missing education, particularly children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- Develop targeted mentoring programmes for young people in Key Stage 4 and 5 to support education, employment and training.
- Developing awareness of the wider statutory role in supporting children with a Social Worker.
- PEP quality assurance for our Post 16 young people

6.10. We continue to support our young people to be in education, employment, and training, with 77% 17-18yr olds and 68% of 19-21yr olds being in Education, Employment or Training at the end of March 2025.

6.11. This is an improvement from 65% of 17-18yr olds and 51% 19-21yr olds being in Education, Employment or Training at the end of March 2024.

7. Safeguarding and Permanence - *supporting children and young people to be and feel safe and for us all to be people they can trust*

7.1. The Harbour multi-disciplinary team has grown steadily under consistent and committed leadership. The Harbour offers a combination of outreach, fostering and residential children's homes. All homes have been inspected and are graded as Good. The duration and intensity of support varies according to the needs of children. The impact of the Harbour Model includes:

- Supporting young people on the edge of care to safely remain at home
- Reducing the number of children age 13+ subject to a new child protection plan
- Improved family relationships
- Improved stability at home

7.2. Following the impact of The Harbour in Weymouth, we launched Harbour East in September 2024 with application to register an additional short- term home submitted with registration anticipated in May 2025.

7.3. The % children living outside Dorset, has remained the same compared between March 2024 and March 2025 and is lower than national average, although above good+ stat neighbours. The % of children, excluding unaccompanied children, living more than 20 miles away from home has reduced from 44.3% in March 2024 to 41.12% in March 2025. However, we know there are still too many children who live too far away from their home and there is more work to do to increase the number of local foster carers so that our children are able to maintain their links with friends, education and their local community more easily.

7.4. It is positive to note the increase in the % of children living in foster care. This is reflected in an increase in both the number of children living in mainstream and kinship foster care. More children are settled with over 78% who have been in care over 2.5 years being with the same carer for 2 years or more, 10% better than Good + statistical neighbours and national average.

7.5. The dedicated Kinship Service is now live with kinship carers being able to have one assessment for both a fostering and special guardianship assessment to reduce duplication and retelling of information. The design of the Kinship service has been supported by Dorset Kinship Reference Group who have helped us to recognise the unique needs of kinship carers in our service design and delivery.

7.6. We are now beginning to see an increase in the number of enquiries through the South West regional Fostering Recruitment and Retention Hub. This has been a slower start than we would have wished for and close working between Fostering

Service Manager and the Hub has ensured good oversight on performance and escalation where required.

7.7. Mockingbird continues to support the resilience and retention of our existing carers and we continue to see the impact for the foster carers and the children they are caring for. This year has seen the launch of a further 2 constellations, making us the largest in the South West and equal to Leeds nationally with 5 constellations now in total.

7.8. Achieving a settled home 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.

7.9. Settled homes can be achieved in a number of ways:

- Return Home to Parents – A similar % of children left care to live with their parents. At the end of March 2024, 15.5% children who left care returned to live with their parents' following reunification compared to 15.3% in March 2025. This is higher than Good+ statistical neighbours but lower than national average.
- Adoption – The % of children who have been adopted has slightly decreased. At the end of March 2024 13% of children who left care in the previous 6 months, did so following adoption, compared to 10% in March 2025. Fewer children have lived with Early Permanence carers in 24/25 with 7 children compared to 12 in the previous year. This approach reduces the likelihood of children experiencing more than one move and supports children to build secure attachments at the earliest point, where there is a high probability that their plan is permanency outside of the family network.
- SGO – We have seen fewer children living with friends of family subject to a Special Guardianship Order. 5% of children who left care in the six months prior to March 2025 were placed subject to Special Guardianship Order compared to 6% in the previous year. This work has moved from Aspire to the dedicated Kinship Service in house with the aim of providing a range of support to build trust and confidence so that children can be brought up within their family networks.

7.10. While decreases are noted and are not the direction of travel that we want to go in, it is worth noting that younger children are more likely to be placed for Adoption, Special Guardianship or Return Home to Parents and the % is taken of the whole cohort of children who cease to be in care. In the 6 months prior to end of March 2025, 17% of the children who ceased to be in care were as a result of turning 18.

7.11. Through the Coram Voice survey 'Your Life Beyond Care' undertaken in 2024, members of the board heard that:

- 99% found it was easy to contact their PA (personal advisor)
- 91% felt involved with pathway planning

- 95% had access to the internet with 97% having a smartphone.

7.12 The area's we need to strengthen include:

- Increasing housing options for care leavers
- Ensuring that all care experienced young people know the reasons why they were in care and have details of their own care histories.
- Support all our young people with staying in touch with the people who are important to them and help them to build their support networks.
- Support care experienced young people to feel positive about their future- to have employment and training opportunities, be financially independent and to be happy with themselves.

8. Next steps towards adult life – *supporting our young people to be safe and happy as adults*

- 8.1. 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 2025 92% of young people had a current Pathway Plan compared to 90% in March 2024.
- 8.2. More young people are remaining in Staying Put arrangements with 39 young people remaining with their foster carer after turning 18 yrs old compared to 34 in the previous year. 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 continue to actively recruit supported lodging hosts for our care experienced young people.
- 8.3. Young people are encouraged to develop their own networks and keep in touch with significant people in their lives. This is supported through our staying close and mentoring programmes, both of which are funded through the DfE. We have secured funding for the programmes to continue throughout 2025/26. We employ 2 care experienced young people as co-ordinators which has been impactful in increasing the number of young people engaging with both programmes.
- 8.4. We have expanded our number and range of Dorset Council properties to provide affordable and local accommodation for up to 21 young people.
- 8.5. Relationships have been strengthened with private landlords which has yielded local and affordable accommodation for 9 young people. We continue to provide rent deposit, rent in advance, act as a guarantor and in some situations “top up” rent so young people are able to maintain employment or further education.

8.6. A new regulatory framework has been implemented for supported accommodation with providers registering with Ofsted as required in the new regulations.

8.7. Dorset Council has underlined its commitment to our young people with 11 young people in Council apprenticeship positions with recent agreement and commitment for a further 10 apprenticeship posts over the next 12 months for care experienced young people, who are not in education, employment or training currently and who have successfully engaged on the pre-employment programmes.

8.8. Our vision for the next 12 months is to:

- Ensure that care leavers have access to the right support whether they live in or outside of Dorset. This includes financial support and exemptions such as Council tax up to the age of 25.
- We want to increase the number of care leavers engaging with a council apprenticeship- up to 10 with the PA mentoring support in place to enable them to maintain and be successful in employment.
- We want at least 60% of our care leavers (18-25 active) to be engaged with meaningful education, employment or training.
- We want to increase the provision of high-quality accommodation that feels safe and is affordable in Dorset.
- We need to work with colleagues and partners to support our care leavers with their mental health and emotional wellbeing and to develop the “Ask me What Matters” programme through our care and pathway planning.

9. Membership and Governance

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

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

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

- Cllr Bridget Bolwell (Chair)
- Cllr Duncan Sowry-House (Vice Chair)
- Cllr Andrew Parry
- Cllr Jane Somper
- Cllr Matt Bell
- Cllr Byron Quayle

- Cllr Andy Todd

9.3. Corporate Parenting Board met 6 times this year and going forward it is planned that the Board will meet 6 times on alternating months.

9.4. There have been 2 formal meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board held in public in June 2024 and December 2024 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 to performance and other areas of interest in relation to Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- Agreed an annual report summarising the Board's activities.

9.5. 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.

9.6. With these arrangements established, Corporate Parenting Board Members are 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.

9.7. 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.

9.8. The data set has been presented to each Board meeting. In addition to the anticipated performance indicators, the data set provides commentary on some of the softer information such as extra-curricular activities which is equally impactful on children's outcomes.

10. Priorities for the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024- 2027.

10.1. The following priorities are linked to our Children, Young People and Families Plan 2023 – 33 and are as follows:

- Children and young people are best cared for wherever possible with their birth family or extended family.
- We will prioritise loving relationships for all children and young people, recognising the important foundation that stability and consistency of relationships with care providers gives.
- We will reduce inequalities for children and young people ensuring we improve their health and wellbeing.

- We are ambitious for children and young people to reach their potential through education, opportunities and activities and we will celebrate their achievements.
- We will ensure that our children are safe at home and in their community and live locally and close to the people who are important to them.
- We recognise our parenting responsibility extends beyond when a young person leaves care.
- All partner agency planning, service delivery and evaluation will start with the needs of children and young people.
- The views, opinions, needs and priorities of children in care, care experienced young people and carers inform everything we do.
- We deliver high quality, innovative services and will work in a transformational way to ensure they become even better.

11. Financial Implications

- 11.1. 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.
- 11.2. Keeping a stable child in care population in terms of numbers has helped us to avoid the increase in placement spend that most other local authorities have experienced.
- 11.3. The National Transfer Scheme has had immediate effects on Dorset Council with a rise in the number of unaccompanied children in our care and supported by us as care leavers.
- 11.4. The challenges for fostering recruitment have been noted nationally within both local authority and IFA services. 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.
- 11.5. The Board has supported investment in the residential estate for Dorset Children in Care and Care Leavers and members have maintained oversight by visiting throughout the year.
- 11.6. 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 has ensured we are in a strong position to deliver ever better services.

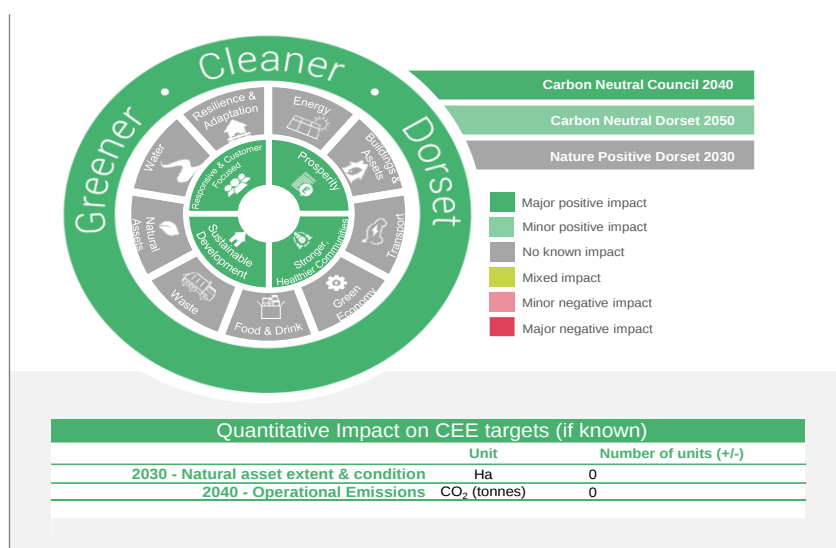
12. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications

- 12.1. As Corporate Parents we strive to ensure that our children are settled and experience love and care with carers, close to the people and places that are

important to them, recognising the link to improved mental health and educational attainment¹.

12.2. 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 189 children living in care outside Dorset. While the majority of children live in neighbouring authorities, there are some children living as far afield as Birmingham, Newcastle, Leeds and Manchester.

12.3. 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.



13. Well-being and Health Implications

13.1. It is reported that Children in Care are four times more likely to have a mental health difficulty than children in the general populationⁱ. Children in Care have double the rates of urgent dental treatment and are half as likely to attend dental services as the general populationⁱⁱ. 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 belongingⁱⁱⁱ.

13.2. The number of unaccompanied children in care and leaving care has increased. Unaccompanied children and young people are more likely to live outside Dorset

which can impact on the timeliness of services such as initial health assessments. There is also a need to raise awareness of the specific trauma experienced by unaccompanied children and young people due to their experiences in their home countries, their journey to the UK and anxiety caused by Right to Remain claims.

13.3. Supported by South London Refugee Association (SLRA)^{iv}, Dorset Council have pledged to:

- identify all children in care and care leavers with immigration and nationality issues.
- connect children in care and care leavers with good quality legal support as soon as possible.
- take a proactive and informed role in supporting children in care and care leavers through any immigration applications and appeals.
- enable those who are eligible to apply for permanent status and British citizenship.

13.4 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.

14. Other Implications

14.1. These are considered in the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report.

15. 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

16. Equalities Impact Assessment

N/A

17. Appendices

ACCESSIBLE TABLE SHOWING IMPACTS

Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments	Impact
Energy	No known impact
Buildings & Assets	No known impact
Transport	No known impact
Green Economy	No known impact

Food & Drink	No known impact
Waste	No known impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	No known impact
Water	No known impact
Resilience and Adaptation	No known impact

Corporate Plan Aims	Impact
Prosperity	strongly supports it
Stronger healthier communities	strongly supports it
Sustainable Development & Housing	strongly supports it
Responsive & Customer Focused	strongly supports it

TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations	Responses -will this be incorporated into your proposal? How? And if not, why not?
Energy	
No recommendations found for this category	
Buildings & Assets	
No recommendations found for this category	
Transport	
No recommendations found for this category	
Green Economy	
No recommendations found for this category	
Food & Drink	
No recommendations found for this category	
Waste	
No recommendations found for this category	
Natural Assets & Ecology	
No recommendations found for this category	
Water	
No recommendations found for this category	
Resilience & Adaptation	
No recommendations found for this category	

18. Background Papers

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

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

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

^{iv} [taking_care-14.4.22.pdf \(slr-a.org.uk\)](#)

Title of Report

Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2024-2025

Who Wrote the Report

Louise Drury, Head of Service Children in Care

Date of Corporate Parenting Board Meeting

28 May 2025

Summary of What the Report is About

This report talks about what the Corporate Parenting Board did in the past year to help children in care and young people who have left care. It shows the progress made and plans for the future.

What are the Key Messages from Corporate Parenting Board

- We worked hard to make things better for children and young people.
- We created new plans and services to support children and young people.
- We celebrated the achievements of foster carers, children and young people.
- We want to keep improving and doing better every year.

Important Facts and Figures

- We have supported more children to live at home. There are 14 less children in our care from end of March 2024 to end of March 2025.
- A new service was started to help kinship carers (family members who care for children).
- Care leavers were supported to find places to live and start work.
- We worked with health services to improve health for children and young people.

Actions or Recommendations

- Keep listening to children and young people to understand their needs.
- Continue to support foster carers and kinship carers.
- Ensure all young people have affordable housing and feel safe where they live.
- Work with health services to make sure children and young people are supported by the services they need to feel well.

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Corporate Parenting Board

28 May 2025

Youth Voice Strategy for Care Experienced Children and Young People

For Decision

Cabinet Member and Portfolio:

Cllr C Sutton, Children's Services, Education & Skills

Local Councillor(s):

N/A

Executive Director:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

Report Author: Kaye Wright
Job Title: Youth Voice Manager
Tel: 01305 228213
Email: kaye.wright@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public Choose an item.

Brief Summary:

This paper provides an update on our responsibility as a corporate parent to listen, respond and act upon the voices of our care experienced children and young people. The paper also reflects on how we feedback to young people about the progress we are making on the things that are important to them. This report covers the period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

The Youth Voice Team host The Network for care experienced children and young people who generously guide our work with their lived experience. The work of the team is carried out within the framework of the Lundy Model which focuses on four areas:

- space
- voice
- audience
- influence

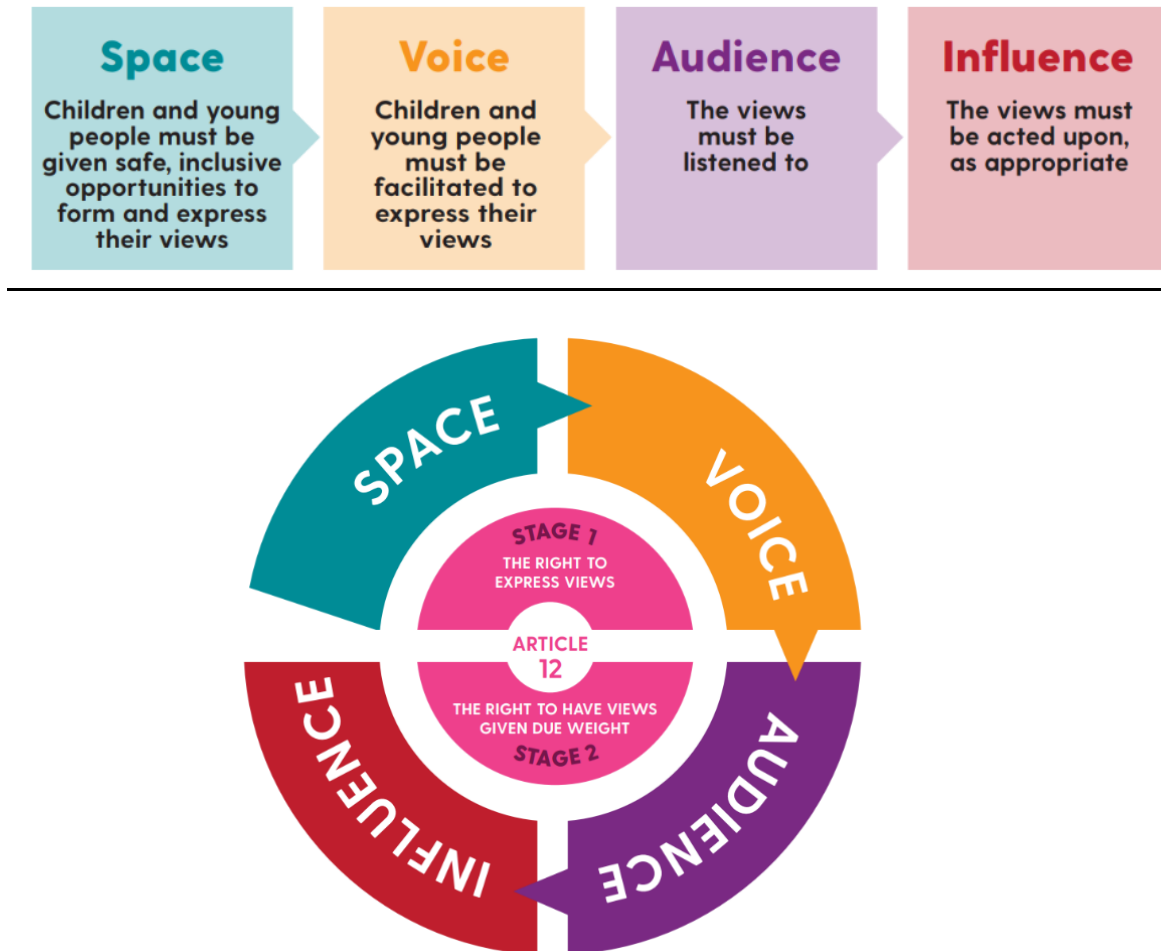
These are illustrated in the image overpage. At the heart of the model is article 12 of the UNCRC. Corporate parents are the duty bearers in upholding all the rights of the child.

Article 12 – Respect for Childrens Views

Children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen and take children seriously.

Article 12 does not sit in isolation and needs other articles to be effectively implemented, as it relies on the support and integration of various rights to ensure that children's voices are heard and respected in all matters affecting them.

Lundy Model



Recommendation:

This report is to provide a service update.

Reason for Recommendation:

Corporate Parenting Board are invited to note and discuss the contents of this report.

1. Update on The Network

This section updates on how we and young people have developed The Network.

1.1 Network postcard

This is the new Network postcard for young people:



*Young people's voices are shown in purple, highlighting what The Network means to them.

1.2 Space

“a space we can talk, laugh and help being in care/post care to be better”

- Once young people join The Network, their membership is normally sustained and

**TEAM
LIME**

flexes according to their life circumstances. This is achieved by investing in those relationships and holding young people in mind when they are not with us.

- There can be high personal cost to young people when they are involved, and the youth voice team work hard to create a psychologically safe environment. This means young people know what the session will be about, where it will be and who will be there. They must know this in advance to exercise their choice about taking part.

“like genuinely you've made a space that's safe for us to do this and it's great that we can actually have a positive impact and outcome”

- The culture of the group has been developed so that they look after each other by keeping their stories safe.

**TEAM
LIME**

- Youth Voice Officers use various engagement activities and tools so that all children and young people taking part can share their views.
- Youth Voice Officers plan in time to check in on the wellbeing of young people after activities.

“hearing the truth and voices of young people in a supported space”

1.3 Voice

“i love doing it all; it just makes me so happy knowing that we’re actually making a difference now”



- The Youth Voice Team continue to offer young people spaces that are adaptable in meeting everyone’s unique needs. Young people take part in ways that suit them.
- Some voices are heard digitally e.g. text, email and voice notes. Others through group sessions and some in 1:1 conversations.

“our voices matter and we can make changes.”

- There are young people who require more support to be heard and may need the help of their important adult to do this or reasonable adjustments to be made.
- We create information using Widgets, Easy Read and have more resources available in other languages. We have also provided adaptive equipment.

“we are so active and involved and I really do love that about our group!”

1.4 Audience

“it’s always encouraging to see our hard work being recognized. I’m proud to be part of this team and contribute to the positive changes we’re making.”

- The Network Board is a subgroup of The Network and these young people act as ambassadors by amplifying the voices of their peers at Corporate Parenting Board. They have been creating presentations and workshops over the last year at Informal Corporate Parenting Board and they include all the voices that have been heard across The Network.
- Decision makers attend workshop sessions with young people throughout the year.



1.5 Influence

“i’m glad to see that we are making change. It’s also nice to see that people are taking our side, meaning we have made a pretty big impact through our words and now can actually have a positive impact and outcome”

- The Corporate Parenting Board action plan tracks the actions that come from the informal board meetings and there is a clear section on the plan to show which actions are influenced by young people. These are monitored at delivery group meetings and young people receive feedback and updates at their Network meetings.

- The Youth Voice Team have a separate tracker for young people so they can easily see the progress of other projects or asks.

2. **Key engagement activities:**

- 2.1 Children's Services continue to work with Coram Voice on hearing the voices of care experienced children and young people. The My Life Beyond Care survey for care leavers was undertaken in 2024 and the My Life My Care survey in early 2025. The Youth Voice Team work with the relevant Heads of Service and children and young people to identify the priorities and plan further engagement activities. Young people have been supported to create and present their solutions at workshops in Informal Corporate Parenting Board over the last year.
- 2.2 Young people who form the Network Board, have told us how difficult it can be to talk about the data set which is shared at Informal Corporate Parenting Board. The data tells a story about them and their lives. How we talk about and present the data matters. We have been working to resolve this with colleagues and Coram Voice, on the Ask Me What Matters (AMWM) project. Young people are considering what the most important questions are to them, which will help shape new questions and make the data set richer and more meaningful.
- 2.3 During National Care Leavers Week, young people curated and installed an art exhibition called 'We All Bloom Differently', at the Dorset Museum. Due to the success of the exhibition, the museum hosted it for a further week. Some of those who exhibited art, had not been involved with Youth Voice before and this exhibition gave young people a different opportunity to express their voices. This exhibition has been replicated and is now able to move around Dorset to have more impact.
- 2.4 The Youth Voice Team have worked closely with colleagues across the council to make a significant step in helping young people to stay in touch with their important adults. Funding was secured to bring specialist training to Dorset and to develop our policy and guidance around 'Staying in Touch'.
- 2.5 Young people have been involved in the recruitment of two Corporate Director positions and for the Executive Director of Childrens Services.
- 2.6 In My Shoes half day training is now mandatory for all new front-line staff as part of their induction. This has been co-designed with young people and is a training resource that is updated throughout the year based on what is being heard by children and young people. The training has also been adapted so that it can be delivered in modules. This has seen further bespoke delivery to internal teams in Organisational Development and externally to designated teachers.
- 2.7 Young people have co-designed an information booklet that children and young people will receive when they come into our care. This is now at the final design stages of design and young people have given feedback on the first draft.

3. **What success looks like in Youth Voice**

3.1 Young people's involvement

Hours volunteered by The Network	Number of young people involved in The Network in their own way	Number of young people actively involved
517	61	35 Age breakdown: 9 under 18 years 26 18 years+

- 3.2 There is an increased number of unaccompanied young people involved in Youth Voice due to the Ukraine Response Scheme funding a temporary part-time Youth Voice Officer from August 2024 until August 2026.
- 3.3 Increasingly, young people are using their strengths and talents to lead spaces.
- 3.4 Young people's actions from Informal Corporate Parenting Board are clear on the CPB action plan.
- 3.5 Decision makers are present in all Network workshops
- 3.6 There is increased equity at Corporate Parenting Board with reports having a youth friendly summary sheet and the data set being available in advance so that young people can ask questions to officers. This was a request from children and young people and the board made a swift response.
- 3.7 Young people suggested that to reduce stigma, schools should talk more about all types of families and the Virtual School created a recommended book list and shared this with schools.
- 3.9 Young people worked with the Quality Assurance Reviewing Service Manager to develop a 'top tips' list about their reviews.

4. Forward Plan

- 4.1 In May 2025, young people are attending a media bootcamp to make a film about stigma to share in schools on Care Day, during National Care Leaver Week and to support the recruitment of foster carers. This is an outcome from the solutions they have presented to Corporate Parenting Board.
- 4.2 The Youth Voice Manager will now attend the Workforce Development Board and an amendment to the terms of reference will be made. This will give young people the reassurance that their voices influence the workforce development offer, including training to foster carers. The board will provide the governance needed to monitor, track and feedback to young people the changes they have influenced and the impact this has had. This will include considering opportunities to embed The Dorset Promiseⁱⁱ, which was co-produced with children and young people.

- 4.3 The use of participatory budgeting will be introduced between The Network Board and Corporate Parenting Board. This will enable young people to work with decision makers on the action plan and Corporate Parenting Board space.
- 4.4 The Youth Voice Manager will work alongside officers and Councillors to support the council in ensuring that it upholds the United Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is hoped that this will be supported by a motion to full council in May 2025.
- 4.5 The Youth Voice Team will strengthen their training offer for the children and young people participating in The Network, so that they develop a wide range of skills whilst participating in youth voice work.

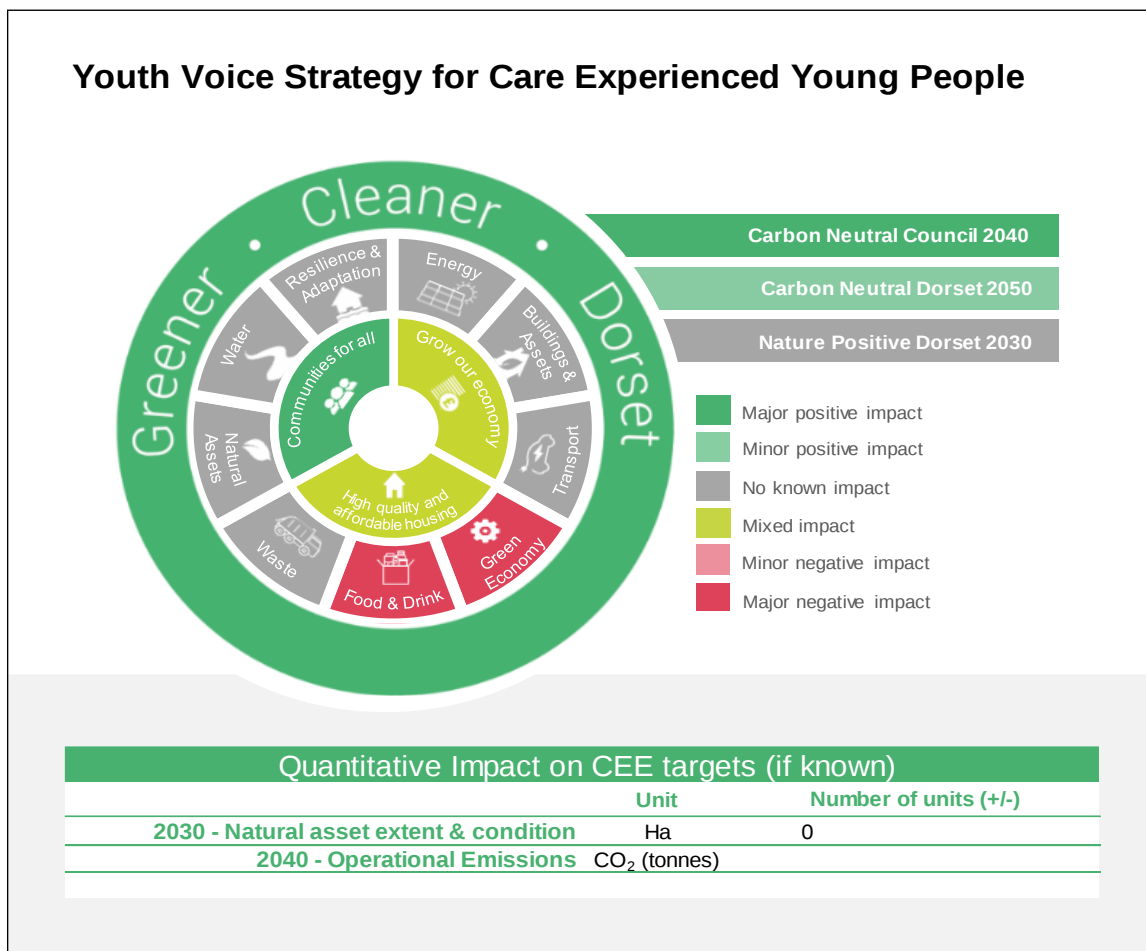
5. Identified areas for continued improvement

- 5.1 The presentation of the data set at Informal Corporate Parenting Board remains difficult for young people. We are working with the business intelligence colleagues to make the language trauma informed and officers are encouraged to talk about the data through a trauma lens. There will be changes to Mosaic and data reporting over the next year. The outcomes from the Ask Me What Matters project will also be visible in the data set.
- 5.2 The Youth Voice Team are strengthening and tightening their feedback loops to young people and there will be an expectation on all decision makers to do the same. The use of our Citizen Space siteⁱⁱⁱ will also be strengthened in the next 12 months with an officer in the team taking on the responsibility for regularly updating it. This site will provide public transparency around the impact children and young people have.
- 5.3 The Youth Voice Team will continue to work with officers and Councillors to develop the Informal Corporate Parenting Board meeting so that young people have the space to hold us to account on our action plan.
- 5.4 Corporate Parenting Partnership Delivery Group will be supported by the Youth Voice Manager to consider the shared responsibility needed in supporting the council in its adoption of care experience, as a locally adopted protected characteristic.
- 5.5 The Youth Voice Team are committed to regularly reflecting on the diversity of The Network and will continue working with colleagues across Childrens Services to identify opportunities to hear a range of voices. The Network is diverse with representation from different genders, ethnicities, backgrounds and disabilities. A focus for the year ahead will be to seek the support of colleagues to hear more from children under the age of 10 and those living in children's homes.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 Ideas and recommendations are mostly achieved within the Youth Voice budget. Some activities share financial resources with other teams e.g Virtual School, Fostering Team and Learning and Development.

- 6.2 A corporate parenting budget has been introduced for 2025/26. This will be for young people to get involved in participatory budgeting. They will have equity in decision making for this budget, helping to bring innovative solutions to life in line with the CPB action plan.
7. **Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**



Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments	Impact
Energy	No known impact
Buildings & Assets	No known impact
Transport	No known impact
Green Economy	major negative impact
Food & Drink	major negative impact
Waste	No known impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	No known impact
Water	No known impact
Resilience and Adaptation	No known impact

Corporate Plan Aims	Impact
Grow our economy	neutral

High-quality and affordable housing	neutral
Communities for all	strongly supports it

TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations	Responses -will this be incorporated into your proposal? How? And if not, why not?
Energy	
No recommendations found for this category	
Buildings & Assets	
No recommendations found for this category	
Transport	
No recommendations found for this category	
Green Economy	
Use the opportunity to increase local, low-carbon, ecologically friendly food production in Dorset?	Food is an important part of the spaces we work in with young people. We will consider the impact of food mileage when sourcing food for our workshops and will ensure there is minimum food waste. These decisions will be made in balance with the needs of children and young people and our financial resources.
Food & Drink	
No recommendations found for this category	
Waste	
No recommendations found for this category	
Natural Assets & Ecology	
No recommendations found for this category	
Water	
No recommendations found for this category	
Resilience & Adaptation	
No recommendations found for this category	

8. Well-being and Health Implications

- 8.1 There is improved health and wellbeing for children and young people when they are given a safe space to be listened to and their views taken seriously. The Network is

also a place where new friendships are made and those involved in the group have told us about the sense of belonging this brings them.

8.2 There is a trauma informed approach and young people are not expected to share their stories. Without question, we must do no harm in our engagement and participation work, always measuring and mitigating the risks in projects.

8.3 Being trauma informed also means that children and young people are fully informed about an engagement space before taking part and then there is also time for 'checking in' with after their participation. The language we use and how we act around children and young people are equally important in making sure 'we do no harm'.

9. **Other Implications**

9.1 Children and young people may make disclosures to the Youth Voice Team, as safe and trusting relationships are built. Officers are also at risk of vicarious trauma as lived experience is explored through Youth Voice work. Children and young people will be supported by their key worker, who would be informed of any disclosures. Officers have the space in their 1:1's to reflect on the impact the work has on them. They also have access to the wellbeing team for further support.

10. **Risk Assessment**

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

Current Risk: LOW

Residual Risk: LOW

11. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

N/A

12. **Appendices**

None.

13. **Background Papers**

None

14 **Report Sign Off**

This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)

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- i [We All Bloom Differently 2024 - Exhibition Recap](#)
 - ii [The Dorset Promise - Dorset Council](#)
 - iii [Youth voice - Dorset Council - Citizen Space](#)

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Title of report

Youth Voice Strategy for Care Experienced Children and Young People

Who wrote the report

Kaye Wright, Youth Voice Manager

Date of Corporate Parenting Board

28 May 2025

Summary of what the report is about

This report talks about how we listen to and act on the ideas and feelings of children and young people who have been in care. It explains what we have done from April 2024 to March 2025 to make sure their voices are heard, respected and acted upon.

What are the key messages of this report

- **Listening to Young People:** We have made sure we listen to what care experienced children and young people say and take their ideas seriously.
- **Safe Spaces:** We have created safe places where young people can share their thoughts and feelings.
- **Making a Difference:** Young people's ideas have helped to make changes that improve their lives.

Important facts and figures

- **517 hours** volunteered by young people.
- **61 young people** involved in The Network.
- **35 young people** actively participating.
- **9 young people** under 18 years old.
- **26 young people** aged 18 and older.

Actions or recommendations

- **Space:** Work hard to make sure all spaces feel safe, welcoming, equal and more lime!
- **Voice:** Provide young people with a training offer and encourage more of them to join and share their thoughts.
- **Audience:** Continue to listen to young people and act on their ideas.
- **Influence:** Make sure young people always get updates on how their ideas are making a difference.

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Corporate Parenting Board

28 May 2025

Care Leaver Service Annual Report 2024-2025

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member and Portfolio:

Cllr C Sutton, Children's Services, Education & Skills

Local Councillor(s):

Executive Director:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

Report Author: Jane MacLennan

Job Title: Head of Service

Tel: 01305 221354

Email: Jane.maclennan@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

The purpose of this annual report is to provide Dorset Council's Corporate Parenting Board with information on the activity of the Care Leavers Service from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. This will ensure that the Board has an overview of the achievements, progress, and challenges in meeting the needs of Dorset's Care Leavers over the last 12 months. The report has been drawn together to highlight key developments and performance of the Care Leavers Service in exercising their duty to our care experienced young people.

Recommendation:

That the Board notes and welcomes the positive outcomes that are being achieved by Dorset's care leavers and the plans of the Care Leaver Service to continue to improve outcomes throughout 2025/26.

For the Board to continue to promote the corporate parenting responsibility across all of Dorset Council.

Reason for Recommendation:

That the Board continues to offer support and challenge to the Care Leaver Service in maximising the offer for care leavers.

1. Background

- 1.1 Protecting and looking after children and young people is one of the most important jobs that councils do when a child or young person, for whatever reason, cannot safely stay at home or with relatives or friends. Being a corporate parent means doing everything that can be done for every care experienced young person to give them the opportunities that other children and young people have.
- 1.2 Despite the ongoing focus within legislation and policy, cared experienced young people have poorer outcomes compared to their peers. For example, care leavers are less likely to be in employment, education, or training post 18, four times more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system and four times more likely to have a mental health condition. It is Dorset's responsibility to ensure all our young people reach their potential and are supported to develop into independent, self-confident adults.
- 1.3 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 inter-dependence to assist them to deal with adult responsibilities. We encourage our young people to continue to access the support available to them until they are 25, providing an equitable service meaning that everyone has what they need to achieve equal outcomes by recognising and addressing disparities.
- 1.4 In September 2023, Dorset Council agreed to make care experience a protected characteristic. It's recognition that young people's experience of being in the care system can be a potential source of discrimination similar to other protected characteristics such as race or disability. We continue to work with all our corporate parents and partners to ensure that our young people are supported to achieve, where communities thrive, and families are supported to be the best they can be.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 We have high expectations and aspirations for all our care leavers. When young people are preparing to leave care, we want to ensure that they feel as ready as possible and know what to expect. We recognise they may

not be fully equipped with practical independence skills or have the knowledge to access the range of services that they may need.

- 2.2 Our model of interdependence aims to ensure that our young people have the support of the Personal Advisor (PA) to guide them around key areas including housing, health, employment, education, leisure, benefits, and other community services
- 2.3 Since January 2023 there has been a separate judgement to the framework for inspecting local authority children's services (ILACS) specifically about the experiences and progress of care leavers. Inspections have considered whether local authorities are making good decisions for care leavers and what they are doing to support them into adulthood. The separate focus and overall judgement provides care leavers with a prominent voice within inspections and allows for scrutiny to highlight what is working well and what needs to be a greater area of focus.
- 2.4 The outcome of the recent ILACS inspection (March 2025) is not available at the time of completing this report and is due to be published on 9 May 2025. We welcomed the opportunity to share our progress and the impact of our work on our young people.
- 2.5 **Context**
- 2.6 Care Leavers are young people aged 18 years to 25 years of age who have been in care as a child. There are four different categories, and each category has an associated entitlement status:
- **Eligible child** - 16 or 17 years old in care and have been in care for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, will meet the criteria as an 'eligible child'.
 - **Relevant child** - 16 or 17 years old, have left care, but were in care on or after their 16th birthday and have been in care for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14. This applies if they have been part of the youth justice system or hospitalised on or after their 16 birthday.
 - **Former relevant child** - 18 to 21 years old and if they were previously either an eligible or relevant child.
 - **Qualifying child** - 16 to 21 years old and have been in care or, if disabled, have been privately fostered after reaching 16, but do not qualify as eligible, relevant, or former relevant (have spent less than

13 weeks in care). May also qualify if subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) and were looked after immediately before the SGO was made, or, if previously an eligible child, but returned to live with someone with parental responsibility (PR) for more than six months before their 18th birthday.

- 2.7 From April 2018 the Children & Social Work Act 2017 introduced a new duty on local authorities, to provide Personal Advisor (PA) support to all Care Leavers up to age 25 (if they want this support). Under previous legislation, local authorities were required to only provide Care Leavers with support from a PA until they reach age 21, continuing up to age 25 only if a Care Leaver was engaged in education or training. We are actively supporting 84 care leavers age 21-25 which is around 30% of our overall active care leavers.
- 2.8 Dorset Council has a corporate parenting strategy which is for all our care experienced children and young people. The strategy includes a focus on young people who are preparing to leave care between the ages of 16 and 17, or who have already left care and are between the ages of 16 and 25.
- 2.9 Various legislation and policies have influenced the development of this strategy, including the Children Act (1989), Housing Act (1996), and the Children and Social Work Act (2017). The strategy outlines several outcomes to improve care leavers' lives:
- **Outcome 1:** Enhance access to education, employment, and training.
 - **Outcome 2:** Ensure care leavers experience stability in their lives and feel safe and secure.
 - **Outcome 3:** Improve access to health support.
 - **Outcome 4:** Help care leavers achieve financial stability and independence.
 - **Outcome 5:** Foster strong family networks and support them in reaching their full potential
- 2.10 We strongly believe that it is everyone's responsibility to help those who have been in care to overcome the difficulties that they experienced in their childhoods, so that they can lead successful adult lives. Dorset Council aims to provide care leavers with the same level of care and support that other young people receive from their parents. The goal is to

ensure services are “good enough for my child” and to be the best Corporate Parents in the country.

- 2.11 We are partners with Bright spots, together with 7 other Local Authorities, to deliver the New Belongings programme. The survey allows us to better understand what makes life good for care leavers and how we can improve our support by co-producing solutions with them. Our most recent Bright Spots survey was completed in February 2024 with the findings delivered in February 2025. Alongside our care experienced network, we have identified priorities and developed an action plan for improvement. This is overseen and monitored from our Corporate Parenting Partners Delivery Group (CPPDG) which reports to Corporate Parenting Board.
- 2.12 The Bright spots survey was completed by 79% of care experienced young people.
- 99% found it was easy to contact their PA (personal advisor)
 - 91% felt involved with pathway planning
 - 95% had access to the internet with 97% having a smartphone.
- 2.13 The survey has identified the area’s we need to strengthen and through the care network and participation we have been able to agree the priorities for 2025-2027 which include:
- Increasing housing options for care leavers
 - Ensuring that all care experienced young people know the reasons why they were in care and have details of their own care histories.
 - Support all our young people with staying in touch with the people who are important to them and help them to build their support networks.
 - Support care experienced young people to feel positive about their future- to have employment and training opportunities, be financially independent and to be happy with themselves.
- 2.14 The care leaver team works closely with the Youth Voice Team, who use a variety of tools to hear feedback from young people. They 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. The Head of Service for care leavers also attends at least 3 networking meetings a year which allows for discussions and opportunities for young people to share their views and thoughts and to be updated on progress made with the priorities.

- 2.15 Over the last 12 months the network has been instrumental in developing and continuing to shape the service and support for our young people. We have heard about the importance of access to driving lessons and other financial support- so we have reviewed and updated our financial offer, policy and procedures and heard about their views regarding having the right people to help and support them and started the process of developing our training and competency framework.
- 2.16 Dorset Council make a promise to all care leavers to share responsibilities by working with people who can help make a difference to the lives of care experienced children and young people. Details of the promise can be accessed via the internet: [The Dorset Promise - Dorset Council](#)
- 2.17 We have consulted with care leavers and stakeholders and also developed a 'local offer' which provides detailed information about the service and support available to care leavers, including information about both their statutory entitlements as well as any discretionary support we provide. This is provided to young people leaving care at age 16 and can be accessed via the internet: [Local Offer for care leavers - Dorset Council](#). This is reviewed and updated regularly to meet the changing needs of our young people.
- 2.18 The local offer highlights our equity of support with a focus on fairness and recognising individual need. Equality of services is important to treat everyone the same however we understand that our care leavers have different needs, and we want them to have access to what they need to achieve equal outcomes, even if that may be that some of our young people get a different service and approach than others.
- 2.19 In January 2025 we launched the Graduating Care Southwest (GCSW) app which provides information on regional and local offers for care experienced young people, enabling information to be accessible to all our young people.
- 2.20 Our service is needs led with a strength in our relational practice, emphasising that effective relationships between our PAs and care leavers are fundamental to positive outcomes.

- 2.21 At the end of March 2025, we had 558 care leavers in our family. 300 were former relevant care leavers (aged 18-25 and previously an eligible child) and were receiving a service.
- 2.22 The role of the PA (Personal Advisor) in Dorset is to complete timely pathway plans, co-produced with young people and review every 6 months (or more depending on need).
- 2.23 Our young people have told us that pathway planning is an area of strength (A Bright Spot of Practice) and enables discussions between the young person and PA to focus on key areas of need and agree actions, goals and review achievements.
- 2.24 We continue to review our progress and performance in this area. In March 2025 we had completed 92% of pathway plans within timescales, with plans in place to ensure there is no drift or delay in those that are outside the timescales. We know our young people well and will always update their pathway plan when there is a significant change in their circumstances. It's important that the plans are collaborative and purposeful and centred around the individual needs and aspirations of our young people.
- 2.25 Keeping in touch with our care leaving young people is a key part of the PA role. By maintaining relationships and communication we can ensure our young people have access to all relevant services, that we can continue to support them in preparing for adulthood and independent living, access suitable housing, support them with their finances (and budgeting) and access (or maintain engagement with) Education, Employment or Training.
- 2.26 We are in touch with 99.33% of care leavers (17-25) which is above our target of 93% and shows the commitment we have to building and maintaining significant relationships with all of our young people. The Head of Service reports monthly to the Senior Leadership Team to identify those care leavers who are not in touch with the service and consider creative ways we can re-engage.
- 2.27 We continue to contact all our care leavers at least annually to share information on what they are entitled to and the support we are able to offer them, at any point until they are 25.
- 2.28 We encourage and support our young people to develop their own networks and keep in touch with significant people in their lives. This is

supported through our staying close and mentoring programmes, both of which are funded through the DfE. We have secured funding for the programmes to continue throughout 2025/26. We employ 2 care experienced young people as co-ordinators which has been impactful in increasing the number of young people engaging with both programmes.

- 2.29 Over the last 12 months we have been able to provide mentoring support to 42 care experienced young people. This has been either through a 1:1 mentor or within our pathway to employment team- depending on the needs and wishes of the young person.
- 2.30 Lifelong links enables young people build and maintain positive support networks throughout their lives. It connects them with important people such as family members, previous foster carers, residential carers, teachers and other significant adults. This fosters lasting relationships and ensures a sense of belonging.
- 2.31 We remain committed to supporting our young people to have a positive support network that extends beyond their time in care and into adulthood. We have started work with our partners to consider how we can best support young people to identify people who are important to them and strengthen the work of family group conferences for children in care and care leavers. This is identified as an area for further development over the next 12 months.
- 2.32 Personal Advisers are secondary allocated to young people as soon as possible after their 16 birthday, to provide a smooth transition from their social worker to the Care Leaver Service once they are 18.
- 2.33 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 so that they feel ready and confident with the plans and know what to expect as the milestone of leaving care approaches. Most young people have the stability of their PA from 18 to 21 or 25 if this is what they want/need offering the stability of 1 worker for up to 7 years of their adult life.
- 2.34 Where it is appropriate we are able to continue to offer advice and support to care leavers beyond 25, offering opportunities to meet with PAs in the hub and seek advice through our duty service. This is to acknowledge that for some young people they are still needing and wanting to maintain a link to the service beyond 25.

- 2.35 Our care leavers who were unaccompanied children in care has risen over the last 12 months, from 49 in March 2024 to 81 on 31 March 2025. This is an area of our care leaver family we know will continue to increase over the next 12 months. We now have 4 PAs who work directly with our unaccompanied children in care and care leavers providing a consistent support throughout their lives.
- 2.36 When our young people become or are an expecting parent, we take on the role of “corporate grandparent”. We are supporting 28 care experienced young people who are pregnant, expectant or parents. The PA role is to support with attending appointments, engaging with health services and other professionals who may be involved and ensure that our young parents are aware of the local family hub offers.
- 2.37 PAs help young people to navigate the complexities to employment, benefits, housing and the impact of changing relationships and the wider support network. Our aim is to help young people to trust those around them and to be reassured that we understand that becoming a parent for some, can be overwhelming. We will increase our visits, contact and communication to a level that is right for the individual that supports but does not provide over-dependence. We can provide financial support with clothing grants, support to purchase new baby items and we personally deliver a new baby box of essentials.
- 2.38 We are in the process of exploring what our care experienced parents would like to develop to increase the support we offer and to utilise the spaces in the hub for groups or activities.
- 2.39 A key priority for 2024/25 has been around increasing Education, Employment and Training (EET) opportunities for our care experienced young people (active aged 18-25). There has been significant progress in this area with the development of an apprenticeship scheme, structured support and mentoring, a programme of pre-employment for those needing additional steps and mentoring support to increase confidence and wellbeing.
- 2.40 Working closely with our pathway to employment team and having 2 senior PAs within the service has helped us to increase our overall EET rates from 54.39% (March 2024) to 73.03% (March 2025). This is above the council target and higher than good+ statistical neighbours.
- 2.41 We currently have 11 young people in Council apprenticeship positions with recent agreement and commitment for a further 10 apprenticeship

posts over the next 12 months for care experienced young people, who are not in education, employment or training currently and who have successfully engaged on the pre-employment programmes. This is a significant achievement and shows the commitment of Dorset Council to our care experienced young people. The apprenticeships available across the council provide flexible and nurturing employment we know our care experienced young people need.

- 2.42 Our pathway to employment for care leavers has grown significantly over the last 12 months and we are now supporting over 40 young people at different levels to meet their needs. This focusses on building confidence, relationships as well as delivering pre-employment training programmes
- 2.43 Our offer to support young people with Higher Education is considered a strength. We have 23 young people who are at university, 1 completing a PHD and another a Masters. We provide additional support through the PA as well as a bursary and support for accommodation/housing over the holiday periods, if they are not able/don't wish to remain at University.
- 2.44 Of the 300 active care leavers aged 18-25 as of 31 March 2024 we had 45 young people in full time training, 37 on a part-time training programme & 89 young people accessing education.
- 2.45 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 and prompt and accurate payment of benefits where these are required.
- 2.46 Personal advisers help care leavers to access education, employment, or training. When young people are not engaged, they have input from the headteacher of the virtual school and from other agencies. Young people are encouraged to undertake other educational activities while looking for employment or waiting for the academic year to begin. Strong collaboration between partner agencies ensures that young people are tracked and monitored so that they can be supported to make future choices that are right for them.
- 2.47 Our aim is to ensure that young people are empowered and enabled to gain sustainable paid employment through individual routes.

- 2.48 We know that housing is a priority for our young people and for us as a Council. We need to have a variety of housing options to meet the diverse needs of our care experienced young people.
- 2.49 We are able to evidence that our care leavers are benefiting from a focused management and corporate approach to ensure that they live in suitable housing. Very few live in unsuitable accommodation and if, (or when) they do, there are systems to ensure that additional management oversight is in place. This helps to ensure that more appropriate housing is provided as quickly as possible.
- 2.50 We have consistently been at 100% for supervision every 4 weeks for those young people in unsuitable housing over this reporting period.
- 2.51 We continue to seek the views of our young people and understand the needs of those approaching 18 through our sufficiency strategy to ensure we can develop housing to meet the needs of our future care leavers. There is an estimated need for housing for young adults exiting supported accommodation of 50 places per year (25-30 for care leavers and 20 for vulnerable young adults at risk of homelessness).
- 2.52 The chart below shows the breakdown of the different housing arrangements for our young people as of 31 March 2025.

Type	Number
Independent living	140
Semi independent	70
Supported lodgings	14
Staying put	32
With parents/relatives	29
Community Home	09
Unsuitable	06
Total	300

- 2.53 We have increased local and affordable housing for up to 21 young people over 3 different properties. Clarence is a shared house for 3, Leon offers

suitable housing for 6 care leavers who were unaccompanied children in care and Kirtleton offers a range of shared and individual accommodation as well as a short-term “crash pad” as an alternative to temporary or unsuitable accommodation.

- 2.54 Within the care leaver service there are now 2 housing officers who, along with their PA, support our young people to maintain their tenancies within Clarence, Leon and Kirtleton, support with move on and to ensure the homes and buildings are maintained to a high & safe standard.
- 2.55 Our relationships with landlords in the private sector has increased over the last year and we have been able to secure accommodation for 9 of our care leavers. This ranges from a 3-bed shared house, 2 bed shared flat and individual flats, all within the BCP area and close to college and support and community networks.
- 2.56 Staying put, supported lodgings and supported housing options for care experienced young people remains an area of focus and whilst this has also increased, we are ambitious that we will be able to provide more supported housing options across and outside of Dorset in the future.
- 2.57 On 31.03.2025 we had 32 young people staying put with their previous foster carers. We have reviewed the procedures to bring clarity to the process and oversight through our resource panel so there is equity and suitable challenge and accountability.
- 2.58 There has been a significant improvement on the stability and suitability of housing for our care experienced young people since March 2024 with 97.7% of young people having safe and suitable homes.
- 2.59 We currently have 6 young people in unsuitable homes, compared to 9 in March 2024. The 6 young people include 3 in custody, 2 in B&B in Scotland (after they left their homes in Southampton to relocate) and 1 young person who is currently homeless having left his supported lodgings arrangement and has not taken up the offers of over 6 suitable homes in the last 5 months.
- 2.60 Improved relationships and joint working with partner agencies alongside working agreements with housing services and organisations means that our young people receive timely services should they become homeless or at risk of homelessness.

- 2.61 Supporting our young people to have positive physical and emotional health continues. We have the continued support from a dedicated nurse for care leavers and are working with our health partners to explore ways we are able to increase capacity within this area of demand and need.
- 2.62 Young people leaving care have a “health passport” which enables our young people to communicate their needs clearly to health professionals. This also prevents the need for repeated conversations and sharing of information which we know can be a challenge for many young people.
- 2.63 All of our young people are registered with a local GP and through our partnership with our health colleagues we have been able to develop access to a dentist in the Weymouth area for those who are unable to register with an NHS dentist.
- 2.64 Over the last 12 months we have strengthened our collaboration with adult mental health services, having dedicated PAs linked with the health community hubs that have developed across Dorset. This has increased our knowledge of available mental health resources to meet the varying needs of our care experienced young people and support them to access local services.
- 2.65 We are working with Coram Voice and our care Network to develop emotional wellbeing indicators through the “Ask me what matters” programme. This will enable us to identify the individual emotional health needs of our young people and respond individually and as a service to meet need. We will be able to develop performance indicators and report to corporate parenting board on the identified needs and impact of our services and support on outcomes for our care experienced young people.
- 2.66 The care leaver team has had a fairly stable workforce. We have been able to recruit to PA vacancies and we have continued to support our young people where there have been periods of extended sickness within the service.
- 2.67 We continue to strengthen our reflective supervision so our PAs know their young people well and can talk confidently about the work and expected outcomes for care leavers. Supervision frequency and quality of recording has continued to improve over the last 12 months.
- 2.68 Our performance in March 2025 showed that 95.95% of young people had supervision every 8 weeks which is an increase from 91.39% in March 2024. Following observations of supervision and quality assurance we are

now ensuring that all supervision records are written to the young person which is further evidence of our reflective practice and young person-centred discussions.

- 2.69 The Business Intelligence Dashboard is embedded into management practice with the leaving care team being the 2nd highest user across children's services. This is used daily 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.
- 2.70 We provide monthly performance oversight to the executive and corporate directors through performance board, performance reports to CPPDG (Corporate Parenting Partnership Delivery Group) and monthly reporting on exceptions to corporate parenting board. There is appropriate challenge from our members and young people. The high level of scrutiny and oversight enables us to quickly spot areas where greater focus or support is required so that we are able to maintain our continuous improvement journey.
- 2.71 Our vision for the next 12 months is to:
- Ensure that care leavers have access to the right support whether they live in or outside of Dorset. This includes financial support and exemptions such as Council tax up to the age of 25.
 - We want to increase the number of care leavers engaging with a council apprenticeship- up to 10 with the PA mentoring support in place to enable them to maintain and be successful in employment.
 - We want at least 60% of our care leavers (18-25 active) to be engaged with meaningful education, employment or training.
 - We want to increase the provision of high-quality accommodation that feels safe and is affordable in Dorset.
 - We need to work with colleagues and partners to support our care leavers with their mental health and emotional wellbeing and to develop the "Ask me What Matters" programme through our care and pathway planning.

- We will develop a lifelong links strategy to support more care leavers to reconnect with people who are important to them or meet new people who could be supportive.

2.72 Despite the number of care leavers increasing, we have continued to strengthen the service and support we provide. The chart below indicates the distance travelled over the last 12 months for our key performance areas.

Indicator	March 2024	March 2025	DoT
Total care leavers	539	558	↑
% care leavers in touch	96.03	98.00	↑
% care leavers 19-21 suitable accommodation	90.70	96.00	↑
% care leavers 17-25 EET	57.62	77.00	↑
% care leavers 19-21 EET	51.20	68.00	↑
% care leavers (active) 8 weekly supervision	91.39	95.95	↑

2.73 As a care leaver team, we know the strengths and challenges of the service well. We have focused on improving the help and support that our care leavers receive. These improvements are underpinned by our ongoing consultation and engagement with care experienced young people. We continue to ask and listen to young people about their experiences and act to improve practice and services.

3. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications from this report, and all have been provided within budget of the service.

4. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications

There are no environmental factors to consider other than young people living out of the area, Personal Advisors meeting face to face with young people requiring at times long travel times.

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.

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

Not applicable

6. **Other Implications**

Not applicable

7. **Risk Assessment**

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

Current Risk: **Low**

Residual Risk: **Low**

8. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

There are no Equality implications for this report

9. **Appendices**

Not applicable

10. **Background Papers**

Not applicable

11. **Report Sign Off**

11.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)

Title of Report

Care Leaver Service Annual Report 2024-2025

Who Wrote the Report

Jane MacLennan, Head of Service

Date Written

11 April 2025

Summary of What the Report is About

This report talks about how Dorset Council helps young people who have been in care. It covers what happened from April 2024 to March 2025. The report shows what has been done well and what needs to be better.

What are the Key Messages of this Report

- Dorset Council wants to help young people who have been in care to have good lives.
- They want to make sure these young people get the same chances as everyone else.
- The Council is working hard to support these young people until they are 25 years old.

Important Facts and Figures

- **558** young people are in the care leaver family
- **300** young people were helped by the Council.
- **99%** of young people found it easy to contact their Personal Advisor (PA).
- **73%** of young people were in education, employment, or training.
- **97.7%** of young people had safe and suitable homes.

Actions or Recommendations

- Keep helping young people find good homes and jobs.
- Make sure young people know why they were in care and help them stay in touch with important people.
- Support young people to feel good about their future and be happy.

Care Leavers

These are young people who have been in care and are now between 18 and 25 years old. The Council helps them with things like finding a place to live, getting a job or staying in education or training, maintaining relationships with important people to them and staying healthy (physically and emotionally)

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Corporate Parenting Board

28 May 2025

Aspire Adoption Statement of Purpose 1st April to 31st March 2026 and Annual Report 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025.

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member and Portfolio:

Cllr C Sutton, Children's Services, Education & Skills

Local Councillor(s):

Executive Director:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

Report Author:	Allan Charlton
Job Title:	Service Manager, Aspire Adoption Services
Tel:	0300 123 9868
Email:	allan.charlton@aspireadoption.co.uk

Report Status: Public

Recommendation:

Members of Corporate Parenting Board are requested to note the content of this report which captures the work of Aspire over the last financial year and progress made against our priorities.

Reason for Recommendation:

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 8th annual adoption report presented by Aspire Adoption, summarising the work of the agency in the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025. It has been written to provide the local authority with an opportunity to satisfy itself that the requirements of the Statutory Adoption Guidance 2013 and the Adoption Minimum Standards 2014 are met and that the activities of Aspire were discharged to a high standard in the last year.

1. Report

1.1 Please see the reports attached:

- Aspire Adoption Statement of Purpose 1st April to 31st March 2026
- Aspire Annual Report 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025

2. Financial Implications

2.1 Aspire Adoption Agency delivered services for the financial year 2024 to 2025 over the agreed budget. Aspire Strategic Board will have access to the full financial report.

3. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications

3.1 Having sufficient adopters who reflect the diverse needs of Dorset Children ensures that Aspire is able to meet the needs of our children who have a plan for adoption and that the plan is achieved in a timely way.

3.2 This also reduces the amount of travel undertaken by families and children's services staff. Reduced travel will lead to 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.

4. Well-being and Health Implications

Children are able to achieve permanence in a timely way.

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

7.1 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.

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

8. ACCESSIBLE TABLE SHOWING IMPACTS

Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments	Impact
Energy	No known impact
Buildings & Assets	No known impact
Transport	No known impact
Green Economy	No known impact
Food & Drink	No known impact
Waste	No known impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	No known impact
Water	No known impact
Resilience and Adaptation	No known impact

Corporate Plan Aims	Impact
Prosperity	strongly supports it
Stronger healthier communities	strongly supports it
Sustainable Development & Housing	strongly supports it
Responsive & Customer Focused	strongly supports it

TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations	Responses -will this be incorporated into your proposal? How? And if not, why not?
Energy	
No recommendations found for this category	
Buildings & Assets	
No recommendations found for this category	
Transport	
No recommendations found for this category	
Green Economy	
No recommendations found for this category	
Food & Drink	
No recommendations found for this category	
Waste	
No recommendations found for this category	
Natural Assets & Ecology	
No recommendations found for this category	
Water	
No recommendations found for this category	
Resilience & Adaptation	
No recommendations found for this category	

9. Background Papers

- Aspire Adoption Annual Report 2024 to 2025
- Aspire Adoption Statement of Purpose 2025 to 2026

10. Report Sign Off

- 11.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring

Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)

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Aspire Adoption Annual Report

1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

Contents

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Partnership Working- Local, Regional and National**
- 3. Children's Adoption Data**
- 4. Adopter Recruitment**
- 5. Post Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Services**
- 6. Adoption Panel**
- 7. Birth Parent Services**
- 8. Special Guardianship Assessment**
- 9. Finance**

Appendices

- 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

- 1.1 This is the 8th annual report for Aspire Adoption Services. Aspire is the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) that undertakes the adoption functions on behalf of the local councils of Dorset and BCP Councils.
- 1.2 The provision of an adoption service is a statutory requirement. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 provides the structure for an adoption service. Under the Adoption Act 2002 s3, each council must continue to maintain within its area an adoption service designed to meet the needs of children who may be adopted, their parents, their natural parents and former guardians. These services are referred to as the Adoption Service, (Adoption and Children Act 2002 s2 (1)). An adoption agency refers either to a local authority or to a registered adoption society under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 s2 (1).
- 1.3 On 17 July 2017 Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset Councils combined their adoption services to form Aspire Adoption Services (Aspire). This changed in March 2019 with a local government reorganisation to create a new council of Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole Council (BCP), and Dorset Council. The Councils choose a hosted model as their delivery model for the RAA. BCP council act as the host for Aspire.
- 1.4 Whilst each local council retains overall responsibility for their adoption services and continues to retain overall responsibility for their cared-for children, most adoption functions are delegated to Aspire. The detail of this is outlined in our schedule of responsibility's.
- 1.5 Aspire has responsibility for recruiting, assessing, and supporting prospective adopters, for non-agency adoption work including partner adoptions and for intercountry adoptions. Aspire is responsible for family finding for all children with adoption plans in the Dorset region. Aspire provides support to all parties affected by adoption, including adopters, adoptees, adoptive families, adopted adults and birth relatives.
- 1.6 An Inter Authority Agreement sets out the terms and conditions for the establishment and operation of Aspire between the parties, including the key objectives of Aspire; the principles of collaboration; the governance structures for Aspire; and the respective roles and responsibilities the parties have during the currency of the agreement.

- 1.7 It is important to note that the data and information within this report is accurate as of 31 March 2025. Plans for children are dynamic and develop every day and the picture will have changed at the point this is read. Our task has been to place children promptly in adoptive families that have been robustly assessed and are well-prepared for the challenges of adoption. We support children and their families throughout their childhood and adolescence.



2. Partnership working, local, regional and national

- 2.1 Aspire has the responsibility to discharge the two local authorities' responsibilities as an Adoption Agency. The working relationship between the local council (local authority) and Aspire is fundamental to the success of the partnership working.
- 2.2 Aspire Strategic Partnership Board is chaired by the Executive Director of children's services for Dorset Council, Paul Dempsey. The Board consists of the Lead Member for Children's Services, the Director of Children's Services of each of the local councils, a representative from a voluntary adoption agency, Parents and Children Together (PaCT), the Designated Doctor for Children in Care, pan Dorset and, Parents and Carers Together, the Service User Consultative Forum.
- 2.3 The Service Directors/Heads of Service for each of the local council authority children's services attend the quarterly Operational Board meetings. In broad terms, the Operational Board has day-to-day operational responsibility for Aspire.
- 2.4 Since the beginning of 2025-26, a review of the governance arrangements of Aspire has commenced in partnership with both partner agencies. This is due to the many changes that have occurred over the past year, both within Aspire and in both partner agencies.

- 2.5 Aspire work closely with the local councils, BCP and Dorset – these are our local authority (LA) partners. We attend LA tracking and legal planning meetings across the RAA in order to support our LA colleagues and progress as promptly as possible where children are unable to live with their birth families and need an adoptive family.
- 2.6 Aspire take over all child in care duties and case responsibility for all BCP children once a Placement Order is made, and for those aged 2 and under for Dorset children.
- 2.7 For those children within Dorset aged 2 and over, Aspire provide a comprehensive Family Finding offer and support our colleagues within the Children's services teams to progress the plans in a timely manner in respect of achieving adoption.
- 2.8 In all children's cases, Aspire co-allocate a Family Finding Social Worker from the should be placed for adoption decision and remain involved until the making of the adoption order.
- 2.9 With regards to the provision of Adoption support, Aspire are a small co-located RAA, and as a small RAA we are privileged to be able to know our adoptive families well and offer a bespoke wrap around support package from pre-match to post Adoption Order, resulting in fewer placement breakdowns. We have developed close working relationships with children's teams, Early Help and virtual schools, to ensure that families get the support they need.
- 2.10 Aspire also work closely with Adoption England, The Southwest Adoption Consortium (SWAC) and the Southwest Permanence Project. The service manager for Aspire sits on the Governance boards for Adoption England, SWAC, and the Southwest Permanence project.



- 2.11 Adoption England is a collaboration of regional adoption agencies working together with a small central team working nationally, aiming to improving adoption practice and develop support and services to better meet the needs of children and families.
- 2.12 Aspire have been directly involved in national projects such as the Early Permanence Project, promoting the use of Early Permanence (EP), and providing training to both our partner LA's and to the Judiciary, local solicitors, Barristers and Cafcass to improve the use and understanding of EP.
- 2.13 Aspire have been involved with the recent research project into RAA's case holding from Placement Order, as Aspire are just one of 5 RAA's that undertake this work. This work was commissioned as many other RAA's are considering taking on this role, but there was no evidential base to identify whether this was beneficial for the children.
- 2.14 This research was published in June 2024. The research can be found here [Copy of Case holding research report](#)

- 2.15 There is currently work being undertaken on a National and Regional level to explore improvements in the commissioning of adoption support services. Aspire are working closely with Adoption West and Adopt Southwest, in conjunction with the Adoption England National Commissioning Team to progress this. This work is funded by the DfE until 2026.
- 2.16 From February 2024 until June 2024, Aspire piloted the 'standalone' support plan designed by Adoption England and Coram. This plan was created as feedback from the Adoption barometer shows many adoptive families do not believe that they have an easily accessible support plan, or that they are aware they have one as it was incorporated in other adoption paperwork.
- 2.17 The use of the plan as a formal document began in June 2024, and the feedback received from Aspire's adoption panel, and Adopters has been positive.

The introduction last year of Adoption Support Plans as a separate document as part of the trial carried out by Coram BAAF has been very much welcomed. The plans now identify the support needs of adopters alongside the identified challenges of the children with which they are matched. This has been particularly useful in the assessment of early permanence matches, where ongoing support required by adopters is more easily identified and evidenced against their experience of parenting through the early permanence period.
Nick Adams-King, Aspire Adoption Panel Chair.



- 2.18 Aspire are members of SWAC which consists of our regional partner RAA's Adoption West and Adopt Southwest, and the regional Voluntary Adoption Agencies, Clifton Childrens Services, Parents and Children Together, and Barnardo's. All agencies work in partnership to support the development of practice through workshops and training events.
- 2.19 SWAC run 3 Adoption Exchanges a year, either virtually or in person. At these exchanges, family finders for children have the opportunity to profile the children they have waiting, and social workers who are supporting adopters waiting also attend, as do prospective adopters themselves. All the SWAC Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) are invited to profile their children waiting, and neighbouring RAAs are also invited to these events.
- 2.20 There are also monthly profiling sessions held virtually where family finders in the 3 SWAC Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) can profile their children waiting. Workers in the RAAs and VAAs also attend virtually, to represent their adoptive families waiting.



- 2.21 Aspire are also involved in the Southwest Permanence project, which is a project involving all the Southwest Regional adoption agencies. The experience of the RAA's in this region when finding adoptive families for children with disabilities is that traditional approaches to adopter recruitment identify few adopters who feel they can provide a family for a child with a disability or complex health needs.
- 2.22 The area covered includes 3 Regional Adoption Agencies, 13 Local Authorities and 5 Voluntary Adoption Agencies. This project is a three-year research project looking into ways of ensuring permanence for those children with complex health needs.
- 2.23 The project has, so far, resulted in changes to the way children with a diagnosed disability are profiled on Linkmaker, a specialist Multi-Disciplinary specialist Assessment provided by the Maudsley Hospital being approved by the ASGSF for inclusion into their process.
- 2.24 The projects funding was due to end in September 2025, with the evaluation report being published at this time. However, further funding has been confirmed for the project to continue and to inform the other matching work that is taking place nationally.

3. Children's Adoption Performance Data

3.1 Who are the Children?



- 3.1.1 As can be seen in Fig 1. There was an even split between male and female children placed and adopted in this period. However, it is interesting to note that 50% of the females were aged 3 and over compared to 28% of the males, whilst 72% of the male children were 2 and under.

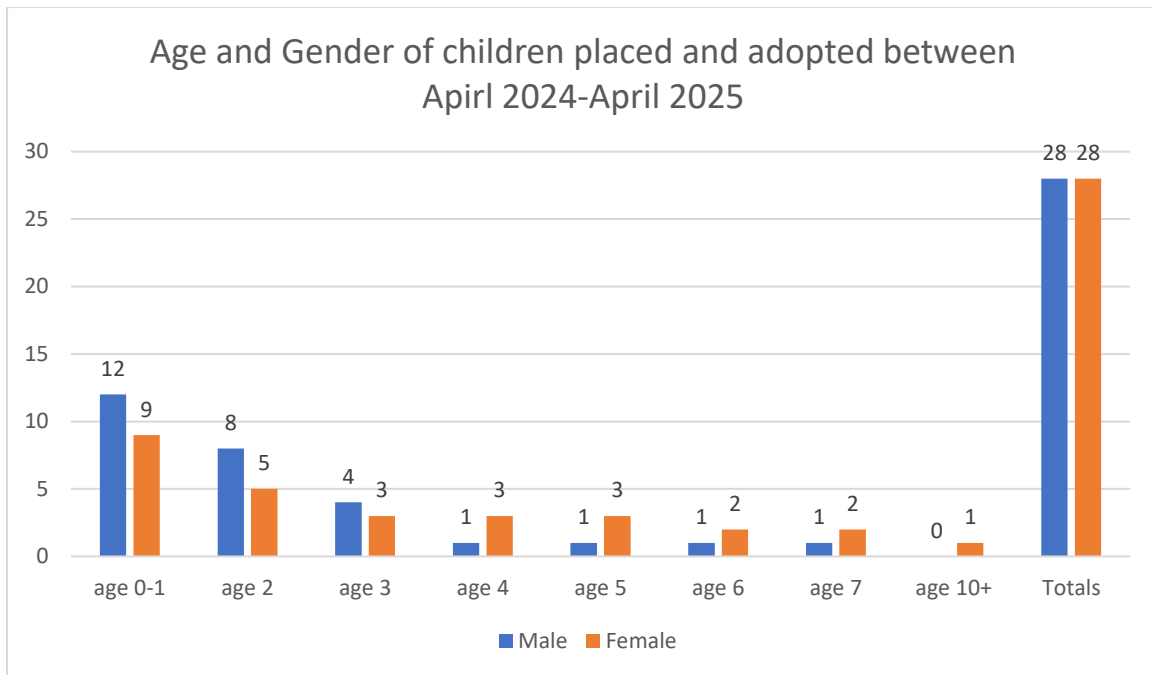


Fig 1

3.1.2 Aspire have also placed sibling groups within the past year. Except for 3 sibling groups of 2 children, all were placed with Aspire adopters. As can be seen in Fig 2, this included older siblings placed with younger siblings (the ages of each child are within the bars).

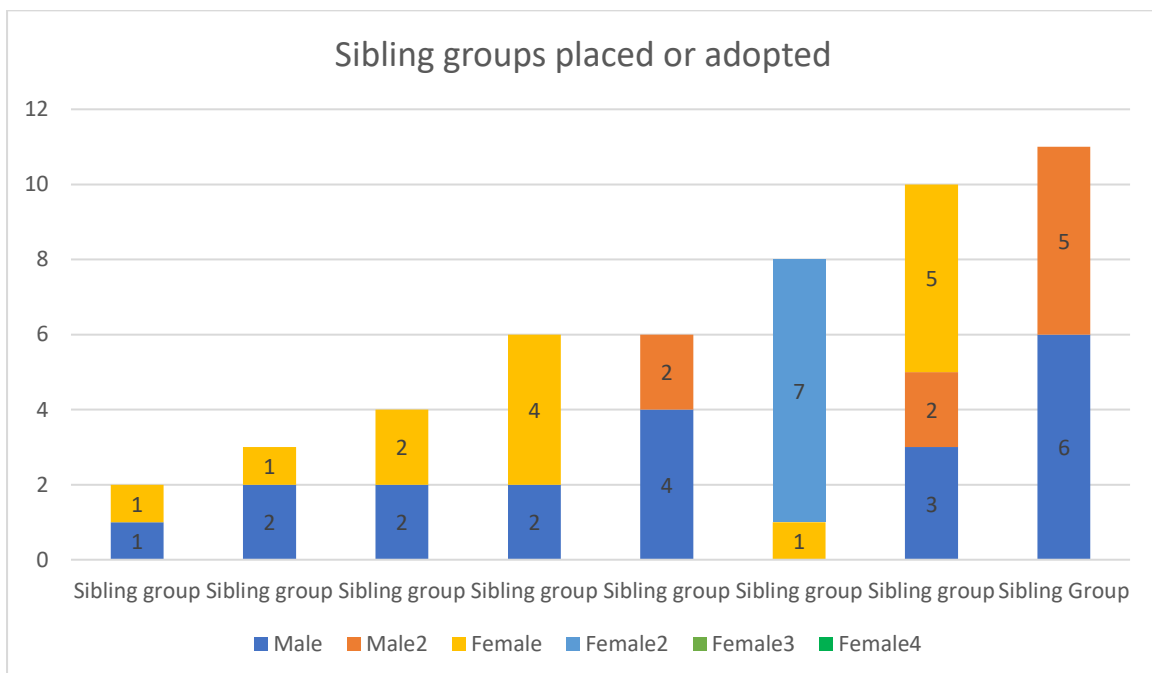


Fig 2

3.1.3 Figure 3 shows the combined numbers of children and the key stages of their adoptive journey for the RAA.

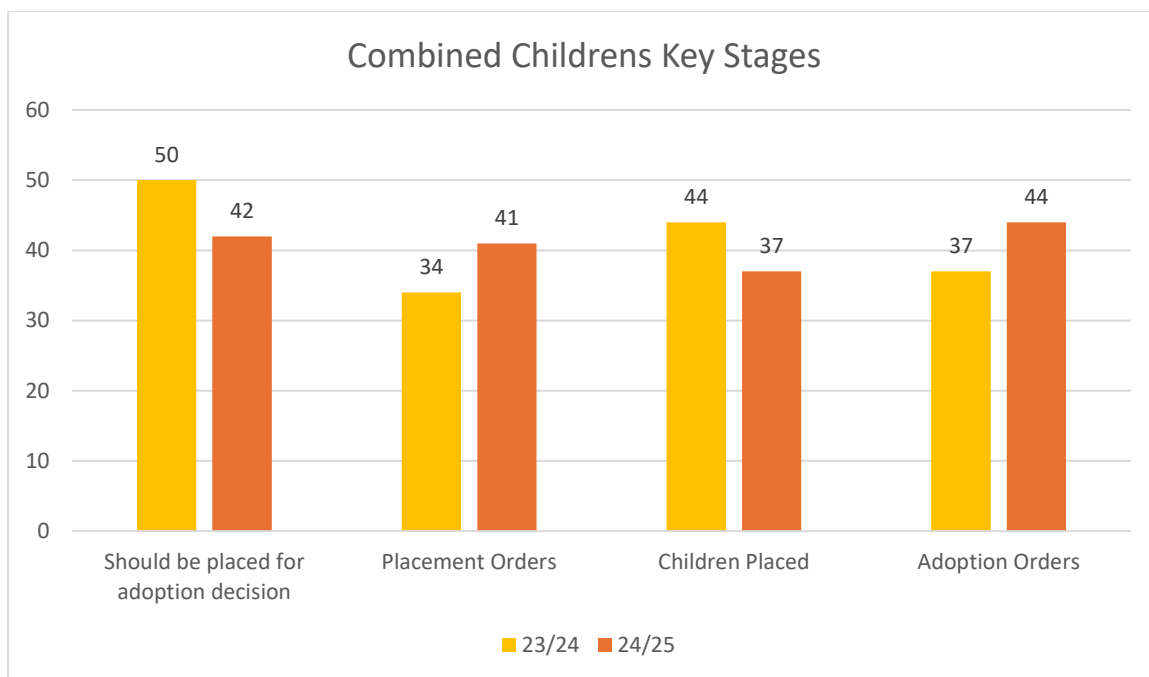


Fig 3.

3.1.4 There has been a reduction of throughout the year in children with should be placed for adoption decisions (SBPA), although an increase in Placement Orders and Adoption Orders.

3.1.5 With regards to the SBPA decisions, there are many variables why this has decreased for the LA's, changes of plan, extended family or kinship carers being identified prior to the plan being adoption, or birth parents making the necessary identified changes to parenting.

3.1.6 There have been some delays with Placement Orders being made, due to the timeliness of the Placement Application being made, which has resulted in Care Orders being granted, with Placement Order applications being filed with the Courts at a later stage. This is a recent development following changes to legal aid in March 2023, whereby birth family can seek legal aid for the Placement Order application. This enables the Court to make a Care Order without delaying this for the Placement Order application.

3.1.7 There has been a decrease in children being placed within 2024/25. This has been due to children having to wait longer for adopters to be identified. Of the children placed 84% of Dorset Children and 100% of BCP children were placed with Aspire adopters. Overall, 92% percent of children who were placed for adoption, were placed with Aspire adopters.

3.1.8 There has been an increase in the number of Adoption Orders made within the year. There were several adoption applications before the Court's in 2023/24 that carried into 2024/25 due to the parents seeking leave to oppose. This is a regular occurrence within the Court's in Dorset and leads to approximately 12 weeks additional delay to the making of the adoption order even if the application to oppose is denied. This is due to the additional time for statements, hearings, and a period of 21 days to enable birth parents to appeal the decision.

3.1.9 Figure 4 shows the individual data for Dorset; Figure 5 shows the number of children for Dorset placed with Aspire Adopters and placed within Interagency Placements.

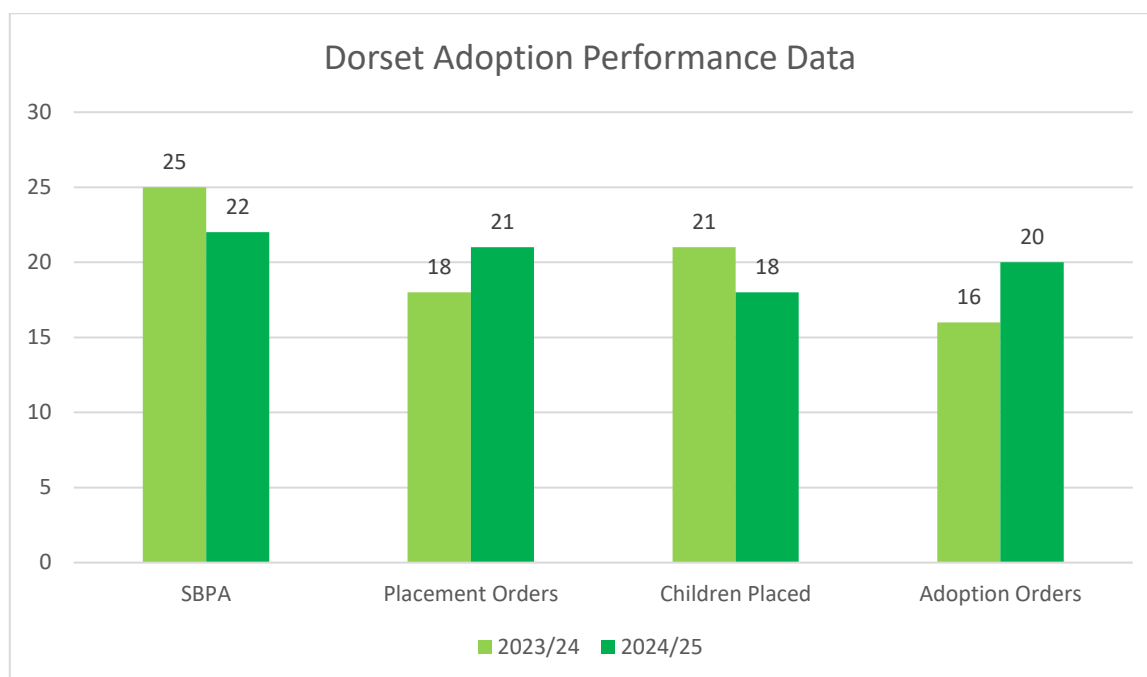


Fig 4

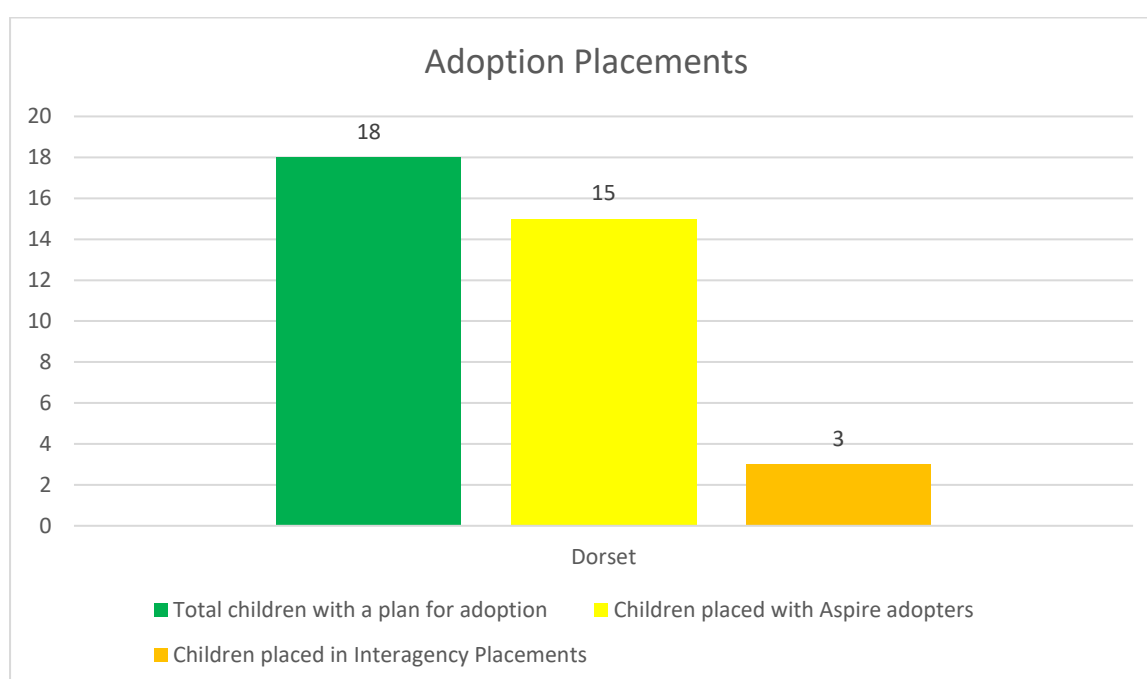


Fig 5

3.2 Should be placed for Adoption Decisions (SBPA)

3.2.1 Dorset have made 3 less SBPA decisions this year as they made in 2023/24. Dorset made a total of 22 SBPA decisions in 2024/2025

3.2.2 Of the 22 SBPA decisions made, 12 were boys and 10 girls, there were 4 sibling groups, 3 of which were groups of two siblings, 1 of which were a group of three. 10 children were below the age of 2 and the remaining children were aged between 2 and 5 years old at the time of the SBPA decision.

3.2.3 All but three children were White British, those not, were a sibling group of 2 who were White/Chinese, and 1 child was White/Black Caribbean.

4. Placement Orders.

4.1 There has been an increase by 3 of Placement Orders granted this year from 18 in 2023/24 to 21 in 2024/25.

5. Children Placed

5.1 There has been a slight decrease in children being placed within 2024/25. Of the children placed 84% of Dorset Children were placed with Aspire adopters.

5.2 Those children that were placed Interagency, were for Dorset, a sibling group of two, aged 1 and 7, and a female child aged 5.

6. Adoption Orders

6.1 There has also been an increase overall in adoption orders made. There were 44 adoption orders granted in 2024/25 an increase of 18% compared to 37 in 2023/24. There has been an increase for Dorset by 4 orders made overall compared to 2023/24.

6.2 The measurement of the number of adoptions order made within a year is problematic, as applications can be made in quarter 3 and quarter 4, but the orders not made for some 3 months later, due to delays with the Courts, which then can skew the figures.

7. Children waiting for a match.

7.1 Dorset and Aspire are ambitious for their children and strive to seek placements for all children, no matter what age, level of need or sibling group size.

7.2 For the children currently waiting for a match (Fig6). Aspire has worked hard to increase the range and diversity of adopters enabling children who are older, or in sibling groups loving adoptive families, by prioritising the assessment of those families. For 2024/25 this is evidenced by the children placed - 92% of Aspire children (BCP and Dorset combined), and 84% of Dorset Children were placed with Aspire adopters.

7.3 It does need emphasising that there is a national sufficiency crisis with the recruitment of adopters, meaning that we have to work harder for older children and or sibling groups. and anecdotally, it has been reported by other RAA's and VAA's that those adopters approved for older children and sibling groups, are seeking out children who have lesser needs on Linkmaker.

7.4 Aspire have also attended matching events both regionally and nationally, linked with our Southwest Adoption Consortium Partners, and have used link maker, a national matching tool to link with external adopters.

**Children with PO
waiting for a
match**

	Apr	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March
Dorset	12	7	10	8	10	15	15	13	15	17	14	13

**Children with PO
linked to
adopters**

	Apr	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March
Dorset	2	0	3	1	1	5	6	7	10	11	8	4

**Children with PO
not yet linked**

	Apr	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March
Dorset	10	7	7	7	9	10	9	6	5	6	6	9

Fig 6

7.5 Of the 13 Dorset children waiting for a match, 4 are linked to adopters and have matching panels booked. 3 children had their placement orders made within 4 weeks of the end of Quarter 4 2024/25. Of those 9 children, there were three sibling groups of 2, and two children with additional needs.

7.6 As a general principle, siblings will be placed together; however, due to the individual needs of children, this is not always right for them and cannot always be achieved. It is essential that sibling assessments are carried out to ensure good quality decision making and support plans are evidence based if children are placed together or apart.

8. Timeliness of Adoption

8.1 Nationally, Aspire are one of the best performing RAA's in respect of their timeliness of the child's journey through the adoption process, and one of only 4 RAA's with a positive adopter gap, meaning we have more adopters available than children waiting.

8.2 There has continued to be a decrease in both the time between entering care and being placed for adoption, the time from Placement Order to be matched with adopters and from becoming looked after to being adopted. It must be remembered that lower is better for these figures as this indicates minimum delay in children achieving their permanence.

8.3 This is attributable to the close working partnerships between Dorset and Aspire. There has been a sustained improvement in tracking the children's progress throughout their adoptive journey.

8.4 Aspire implemented a tracking process in early 2024/25 from when the child was placed with their adoptive family, and the 10 weeks point when the adoption application could be made. This has seen a significant decrease in the time scales which is again beneficial as permanence is achieved quicker for the children.

8.5 This consolidated joint working, and targeted recruitment of adopters for our children, has resulted in a timelier process, enabling children to be with their families sooner rather than later.

8.6 The most up to date scorecard data provided, at the time of writing, is the ASGLB RAA Dashboard Q3-2024/25 - A1, A2, A10 and A20 timescales for children adopted in the year to 31 December 2023.

- 8.7 As can be seen below (Fig 7), the England average at Q3 for A10 was 485 days, and 216 days for A2. Dorset is performing better than the national average, their A10 is 365 days and A2 is 166 days.

ASGLB RAA Dashboard - Aspire 2024/25 Q3 - A1, A2, A10 and A20 timescales for children placed (A1, A10), matched (A2) and granted a PO (A20) in the year to 31 December 2024

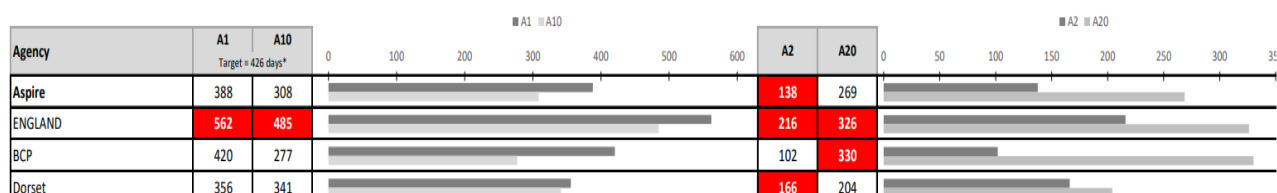
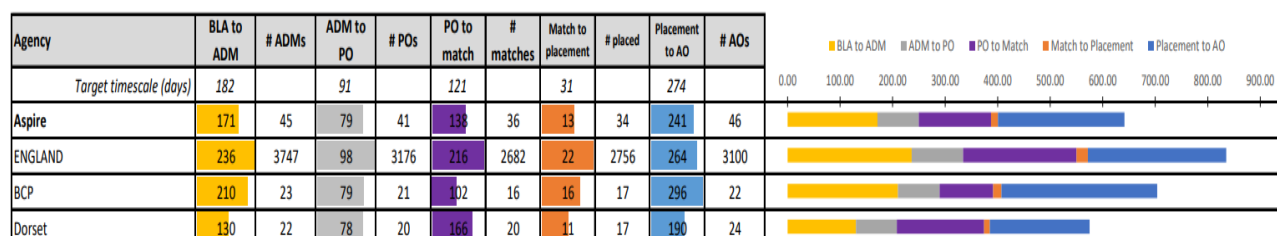


Fig 7

- 8.7 For all aspects of the child's journey through adoption (Fig 8 & 8a), Dorset are achieving good timeliness for children in securing their permanence.

ASGLB RAA Dashboard - Aspire 2024/25 Q3 - Average days to complete key phases of child's journey in the 12 months to 31 December 2024



A1 = entering care to adoptive placement; A10 = entering care to adoptive placement / fostering placement if foster carer adopts child; A2 = placement order to match; A20 = entering care to Placement.

Fig 8

9. Dorset Timeliness

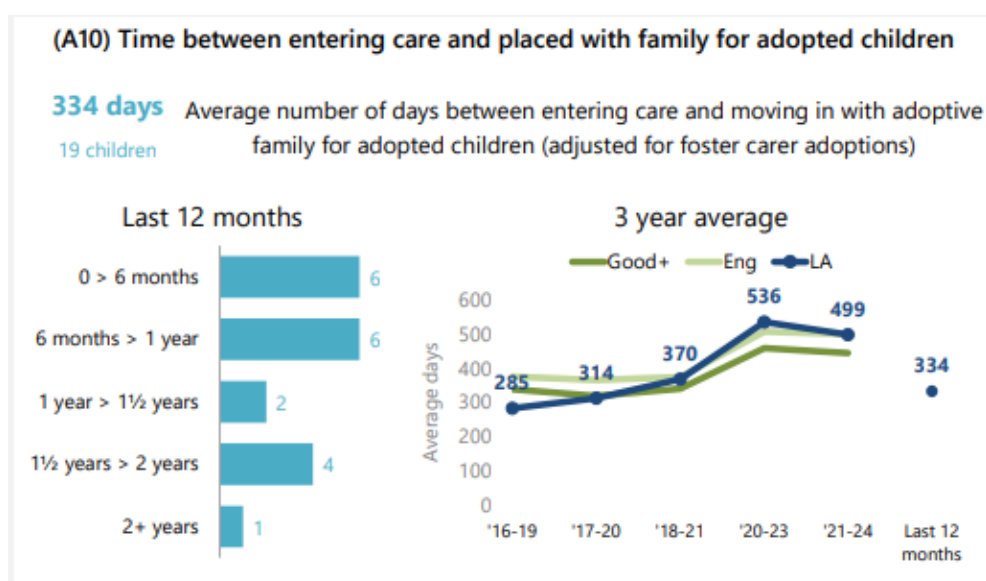


Fig 8a

- 9.1 Dorset are performing better than the England and Good averages in this area (Fig 9). However, this data does include the time taken from entering care to the making of the Placement Order, and there can be delays within the Court process, such as multiple assessments at a late stage, additional applications for Special Guardianship Orders, which can and do impact upon these timescales.

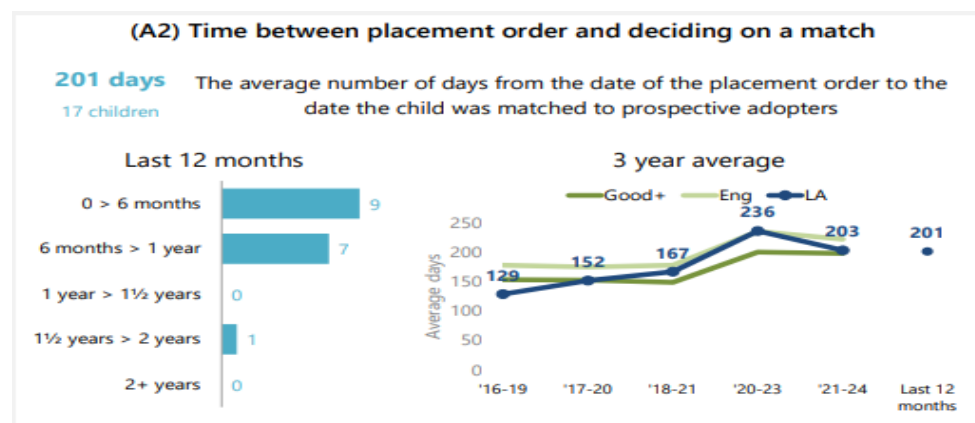


Fig 9

- 9.2 The timeliness between authority to place and deciding on a match has continued to improve over the last 12 months, despite the national sufficiency crisis. Dorset are performing better than the England and Good national averages. There has been much earlier tracking of children deemed harder to place, and targeted recruitment, and in some cases fast tracking of the assessment of the adopters, for those children, to enable them to achieve permanence within their families.

10. Early Permanence

- 10.1 Early Permanence (EP) is an umbrella term for two main placement types where children have been placed with approved adopters who are also approved as foster carers. These placement types have previously been known as concurrent placements and foster to adopt placements.
- 10.2 Early permanence is seen to be win-win for a child, either they stay with the family they know and feel safe with, or they return to the care of their birth family who they also know and feel safe with. It is the adults who have to manage the uncertainty and challenges.
- 10.3 This has resulted in an increase in the confidence and use of EP, which is extremely positive for the children, as they have fewer placement moves, and as above, either go on to be adopted or return to family. Figure 10 shows the number of children placed within EP placements in 2024/25.

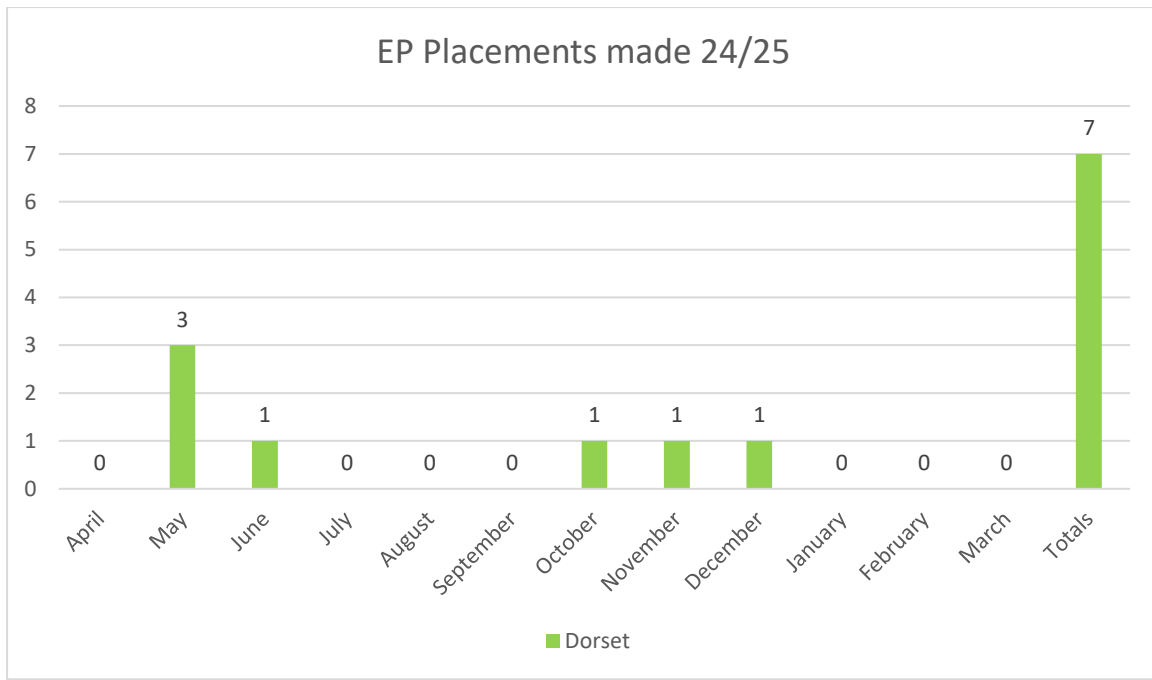


Fig 10

10.4 This is a reduction of 59% of the number of EP placements made in 2024/25 compared to the numbers of EP placements made in 2023/24 year. To compare these figures, the graph (Fig 11), shows the total historic use of Early Permanence.

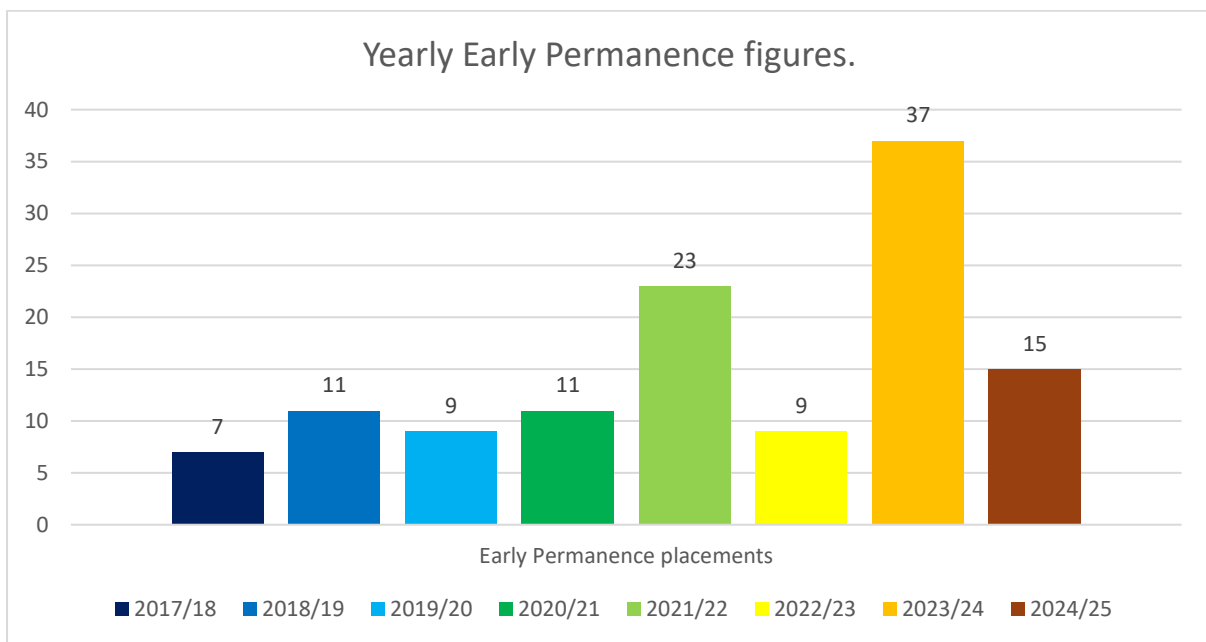


Fig 11

10.5 The increase in 2021/22 was due to the 'Somerset Judgement', and the use of Early Permanence whilst the decision making was scrutinised to ensure that the SBPA decision was compliant with the adoption regulations, whilst avoiding delay for children.

- 10.6 In 2023/24, Dorset placed 19 children within an EP placement, this was completely against the norm, and it was due to a larger number of siblings groups, ranging between sibling groups of 2, 3 and 4 children being placed with adopters specifically recruited, fast tracked and assessed for those children.
- 10.7 We have not seen the same levels of larger sibling groups during 2024/25, and where we have larger sibling groups, these have been more complex, with 1 child not placed with their siblings, resulting in a need to ensure that the children are living together prior to placing in an adoptive placement. We have also seen a decrease in adopters willing to undertake EP at the point of approval.
- 10.8 Whilst Early Permanence has generally been used for babies. Aspire has placed babies direct from hospital so there are children who have only known the one carer. We have also been far more creative in our use of early permanence with older children, and sibling groups, to reduce placement moves to avoid delay.
- 10.9 Our adopters have proved that with the right support and information they can manage a high degree of risk, uncertainty, and contact. Three children ended up being returned to their birth families. They worked incredibly hard to make it a smooth transition for the child.

11. Adopter Recruitment

- 11.1 Aspire recruits a great range of diverse adopters. However, this remains a challenge due to the national sufficiency crisis relating to the recruitment of adopters. However, for the second year running Aspire have continued to 'buck' this trend and have been able to maintain a pool of available adopters for our children. There are only 4 RAA's nationally that have a positive adopter gap. Aspire being one.
- 11.2 Targeted changes to our social media messaging and changes to the induction programme and preparation training, have helped attract adopters for older children, sibling groups and children with additional needs that we require.
- 11.3 We continue to fine-tune our messaging and work with adopters to flex around the needs of our 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. If adopters are not matched with Dorset or BCP children, we support them to explore children nationally.

11.4 There continues to be a significant decrease in the number of approved adopters nationally within this year, however, Fig 12 shows that Aspire have remained relatively uniform in their recruitment and approval of adopters, with a growth in numbers back to the 2022/23 levels.

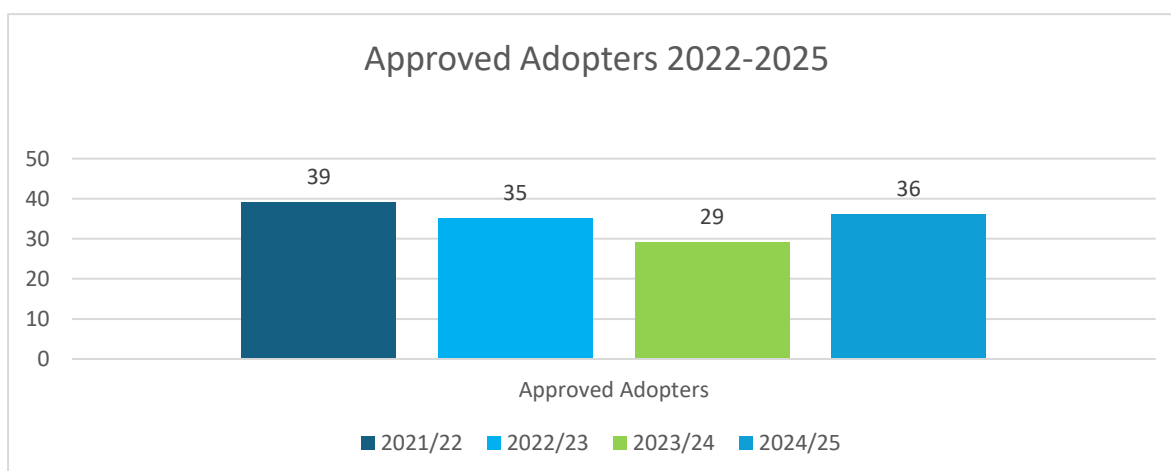


Fig 12

11.5 Aspire have continued to challenge the downward trend in the recruitment of adopters despite the national picture as Fig13 shows. Whilst our approvals are reduced in line with the England national average, we have been able to still approve adopters for our children and have a much bigger adopter gap i.e. more adopters than children. Although this has significant decreased from the 90% adopter gap it was in Q3 2023/24

As at 31-Dec-24						
Families available	Families needed	Adopter Gap*	% children who had been waiting 3 months ago now placed	Open S2 cases	Cases pending S2	Open S1 cases
26	21	27%	59%	12	5	11
1476	2183	-32%	20%	879	275	986

Fig 13 ASGLB RAA Dashboard Q3-2024/25

11.6 In respect of recruitment Fig 14 shows that the enquiries over 2024/25 have increased compared to the data from 2023/24, however not all of these converted to Registrations of Interest or progressed to stage 1 or 2.

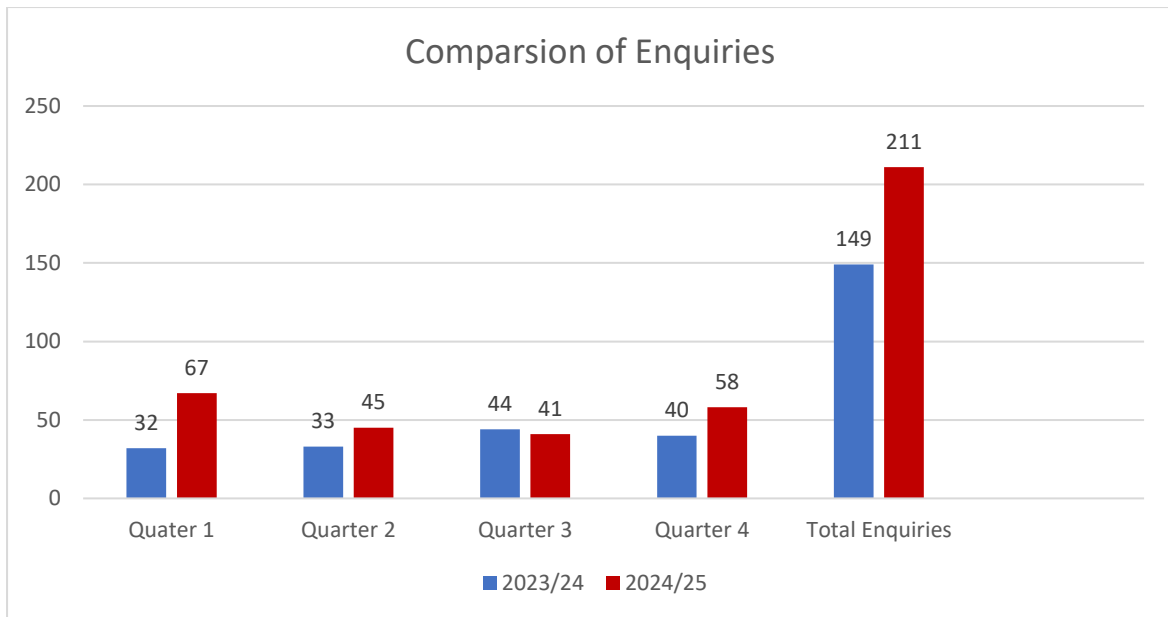


Fig 14

11.7 To further understand this increase of enquires, a dip sample of 92 enquiries from April 2024 to April 2025 was undertaken and the results are as in Fig 15. The highest percentage of enquiries, 61 % came through a google search for local adoption. The second highest at 28% was due to word of mouth. In 7 enquiries the prospective adopter had searched online for their local adoption agency, then spoke to other adopters who had adopted through Aspire. The lowest enquiries came through Dorset (2%) and BCP's (1%) websites. 6.5% of the enquiries were from adopters who had previously adopted through Aspire.

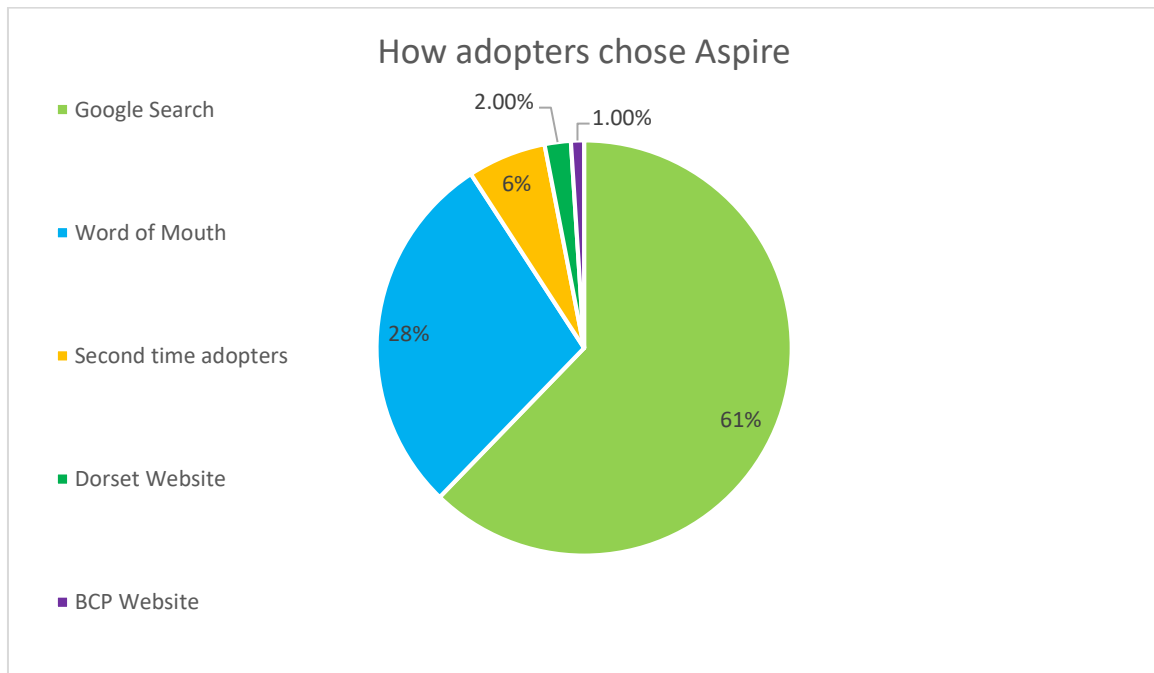


Fig 15

- 11.8 In respect of marketing and recruitment, this would indicate that a larger online presence is required, with marketing and recruitment taking place through social media. Aspire have continued to use social media to advertise its support services and keep their adopters and Special Guardians updated as to what is on offer. This appears to have continued to positively influence the number of enquiries.
- 11.9 Aspire are developing its 2025-2027 marketing policy, using information gained from those that have progressed their adoption journey with Aspire to inform this policy.
- 11.10 There are currently 5 adoptive families with EP placements. Whilst this is extremely positive for those children, it does impact on the availability of adoptive families for the more traditional route to adoption.

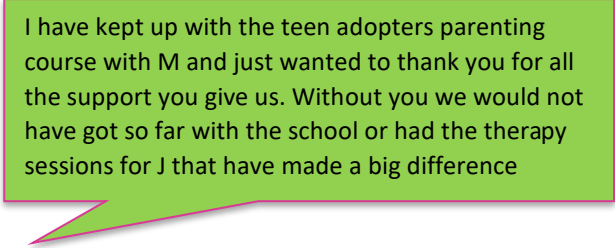
12. Interagency Adoptions

- 12.1 Aspire supports national adopter sufficiency adopters.
- 12.2 Aspire brought 2 interagency placements in 2024/25, at a cost of £91,689 and provided adopters nationally generating £268,000 income. There were two interagency placements made for Dorset children made in 2024-25.
- 12.3 There is a disparity of charges for adopters when sourced from Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA). The cost for one child placed with a VAA adoptive family is £35,565 and for RAA's this is £27,000.
- 12.4 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 can immediately look elsewhere to avoid delay for children.
- 12.5 Our relentless focus on finding families for children means that almost all children with a plan for adoption are found families.

13. Post Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Services

- 13.1 There continues to be national work taking place, involving all the RAA's, regarding Adoption Support, to produce practice standards, so there is a national defined core offer of support, and a shared understanding of practice. There is also national and regional work being undertaken in respect of the commissioning of support services. Funding for this has been secured to continue into 2025/26.
- 13.2 Aspire were specifically involved with this as we piloted the Adoption Support Plans during 2024/25 and in June 2024 implemented the use of the plans.
- 13.3 We also use the Adoption Support Transfer process which enables a seamless transfer of support should a family move from the area they are receiving support or reside in an area where the post three years support has ceased.
- 13.4 Aspire are also working with our regional partners Adoption West and Adopt Southwest to review the commissioning of support services and work on ways to improve and standardise the services on offer.
- 13.5 Aspire offers support to all adopters and special guardians, pan Dorset, until their children reach adult hood. Support is also offered to all adopters and Special Guardians, whose children come from other LA's once the support provided by their own LA ceases 3 years post order.

- 13.6 As most children from BCP and Dorset are placed with Aspire adopters this means that the support is provided throughout the child's minority and into further education. This also creates a sufficiency issue in the ability to meet need, as the support will not cease after the 3 years, and transfer to the area the child is placed
- 13.7 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 4 FTE social workers and 3 and half family support workers. We have maximised capacity by reducing bureaucracy.
- 13.8 The support team worked closely, in 2023/24 with our host Local Authority's Information Teams to have dedicated workflows implemented on the electronic case management system. This was fully implemented at the end of May 2024. This enables a clearer understanding of the families that we support and has standardised the work undertaken.
- 13.9 Close partnership working between the Support Team and both Local Authority's fostering services took place in 2024/25 to ensure the smooth transition of the Special Guardianship support services back to each Local Authority. This work was carefully managed to prevent any gaps in service. Those families affected were kept informed via social media posts, emails and drop-in sessions. The services successfully transitioned on the 1 April 2025



I have kept up with the teen adopters parenting course with M and just wanted to thank you for all the support you give us. Without you we would not have got so far with the school or had the therapy sessions for J that have made a big difference

14. The Core Offer of Support

- 14.1 Aspire continue to offer a tiered approach to support services, which consists of a duty system, universal support, and targeted Intervention. This has proved the most effective way of providing support within the region.
- 14.2 Aspire continues to work hard to eradicate waiting lists and offer an immediate response to families at the lower tiers through a daily duty system. However, due to the sheer volume of work, there is a waiting last of 3-6 days for a consultation with a Social Worker, if this is required.
- 14.3 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. This includes but is not limited to; meetings with Clinical Psychologists, bespoke training packages, therapeutic input delivered by Aspire staff, individual commissioned membership of Children and Trauma Community Hub (CaTCH), a dedicated web based support service providing online training, workshops, advice etc for Adopters and Special Guardians.
- 14.4 The service has formed strong links with Virtual Schools, Early Help and universal services who offer bespoke services for our families.

14.5 The duty system receives approximately 300 enquiries a month, which vary dependant on the time of year i.e. holidays and Christmas seeing an increase in enquiries.

14.6 The universal support offer which is inclusive and provides regular newsletters and information via the mailing list and support_groups and workshops/training.

Universal Support
• Access to Duty system for advice and guidance • Support groups for adults only • Support groups with children • Regular Newsletters • Access to workshops/training • Social events SG and Adopter specific • Coffee mornings/Drop ins in a school setting SG only • Children and trauma community hub membership log ins.

Just wanted to say a great big thank you for the party this year. It was fab.

All our kids enjoyed so much even the very cool, very nearly 12 year old!

14.7 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.

Targeted Support
• Short term intensive support from a social worker/ family support practitioner • Direct work with children/family around therapeutic parenting • Continued advice/guidance to parents/carers • Continued advice and guidance to education settings where necessary • Access to therapy funded through the ASF (if eligible) • Referral to Psychological support via Dorset/BCP referral process

14.8 For those families that need targeted support, a worker will be allocated to the family to carry out the identified work and provide support for up to three months, and an exit plan will be developed within the plan.

14.9 This is not an exhaustive list as bespoke services and workshops/training can be tailored to individual family's dependant on need.

14.10 Allocations are 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 children in their care.

14.11 As well as the more traditional support, there are monthly social walks, and coffee mornings for SG and Adopter groups, and regular monthly support groups, stay and plays, summer picnics and Christmas parties. These provide those families the opportunity to have a reflective space to discuss their circumstances and build up peer support. There is an adult adopter group held 6 times a year.

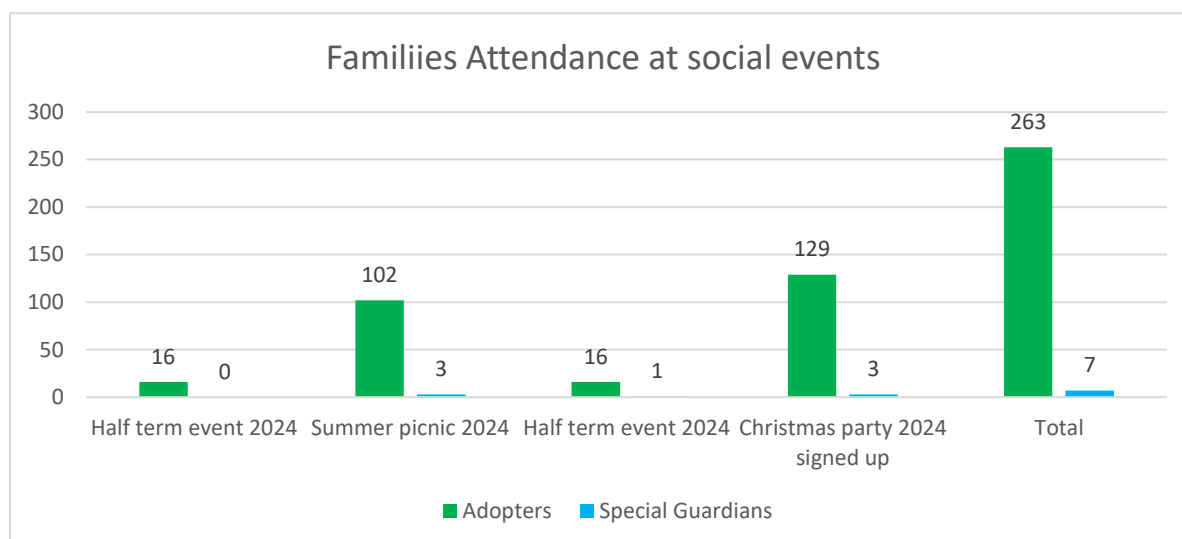


Fig 16 shows the attendance of those families at the main holiday social events held throughout the year.

15. The Department for Education Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF)

15.1 The adoption and special guardian support fund provides funds to local authorities and regional adoption agencies to pay for essential therapeutic services for eligible adoptive, special guardianship order and child arrangement order families.

15.2 The post support team help adopters and special guardians to access the ASGSF by 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 families to access therapeutic services.

15.3 There were 377 applications made to the ASGSF fund in 2024/25 which relates to £1,059,063.93 of funding for therapeutic input for those Adoptive and Special Guardian's within the area. Fig 17 shows the breakdown by Local Authority and Adopters and Special Guardians.

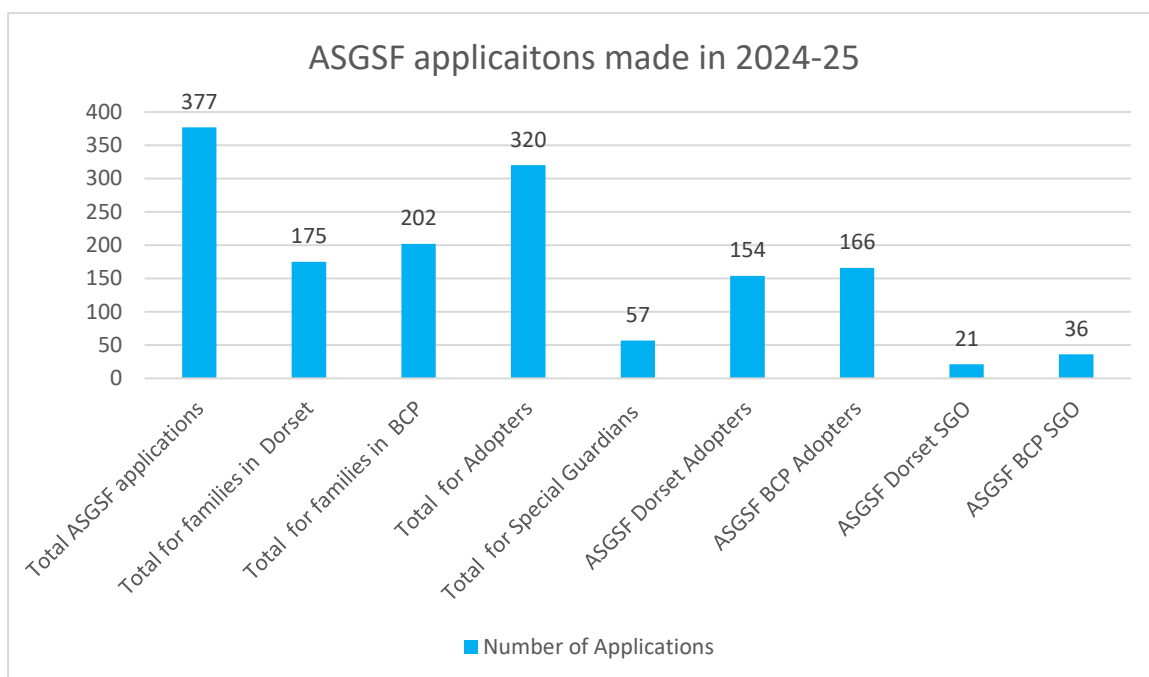


Fig 17

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

- 16.1 Changes were made, and implemented as detailed previously, at the beginning of 2024/25 following 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. This has not occurred, and the levels and quality of the support has remained the same.
- 16.2 There are workshops provided to Special Guardians and Adopters, these are the Great behaviour breakdown, Foundations of Attachment, and Nonviolent resistance. In total throughout 2024/25 187 families across Dorset have been supported through the groups, workshops and social events provided by the Support Team
- 16.3 There has been positive feedback received from the Adopter and Special Guardianship Forum relating to the Support services within Aspire, and from individual adopters and Special Guardians. A further indicator of a positive impact is that there have been only 2 complaints relating to Aspire support services since September 2023. These are a selection of the compliments the service has received during 2024/25:

“Thank you so much for your time and effort with this financial issue I have had, it feels like for the first time in nearly 10 years I am getting support as it has always previously been about the biological mother, so I really do appreciate your support”.

Special Guardian

“I appreciate it's late but I just wanted to say thank you very much for the life story book we've read it this evening and it's fantastic. I can see how much effort has gone into it and I'm very much looking forward to sharing it with Sxxxxx as he gets a little bigger”.

Adopters upon receipt of life story book

“I hope you are well. I cannot put into words how utterly amazing Sxxxx's life story is. I got quite emotional reading it and thinking how proud she will be to show people her adoption life story. You have written it beautifully and I love how user friendly it is and the clip art is relevant and not too much. You've done us proud”.

Adopter on receiving a life story book

“I've just sent the midway report for Wxxxx but I just wanted to email separately to say that I really appreciated how positively you led the review meeting. You made me feel that everything had been really listened to and although we had 2 children to discuss you allowed everyone to say what they needed to without the meeting taking an age too - a skill indeed!”

Therapist relating to a mid-way review

“The whole team is wonderful, we all always really look forward to the summer picnic & Xmas party, it's a great time to see the staff again, including Hayley Curtis, Hayley Rumkie, Kathryn Kerr & Venessa & chat with other adopters we know. We don't always get the chance to dial into the support meetings in the evenings, but when we do, we always leave feeling much happier, supported & that we are not the only ones who experience difficulty!”

“After I send this email, I will think of 100 other things I should have mentioned, but in essence, the post support team are truly excellent, full of empathy, kindness & support both emotionally & with accessing support. They are always at the end of the phone & make you feel comfortable to be honest about any difficulties you are having & are always full of endless reassurance. Thank you, you are outstanding.

Adoptive Family

17. Demand for post support services

- 17.1 This service has seen a continued increase in uptake over the year, and this is expected to continue.
- 17.2 Many support enquiries are dealt with as advice and signposting, or the provision of CaTCH membership. however, as can be seen from the data, there has been an increase in the number of referrals for support via the ASGSF throughout the year more than doubling the funding applied for in the previous year.
- 17.3 We are currently seeing more placement order being made with recommendations or contact orders attached, for direct contact to take place. This will impact on the support services required moving forward, as all involved, birth family, adopters and children, will require support in the initial stages.

- 17.4 Aspire currently support 7 direct contacts between children and their birth parents. There is an expectation that this will rise in the coming years.
- 17.5 Aspire also provide the indirect contact between birth parents and the children through the 'letterbox' system. Aspire currently support 576 letterbox contacts, usually involving 2 parents.
- 17.6 Whilst much of the Support Teams work is providing support post order, the team are also involved with the completion of the Adoption Support Plans, and the Special Guardianship support plans to enable a realistic and needs led approach.
- 17.7 There have been no family breakdowns, either Adoptive or Special Guardianship families when the support services have been involved. Aspire advertise their services via social media, and through mailshots to all known adopters in the area.

18. The challenge for the Post Adoption and Special Guardianship Service

- 18.1 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.
- 18.2 However, we do need to be mindful for the potential increase in the more with direct contact post adoption order potentially becoming the norm. This would require all those involved, Birth parents, Adopters and Children to be prepared and supported through this process in the initial stages.
- 18.3 At present the current change in systems are proving beneficial, and are manageable by the Team, meaning more families are being supported. The Special Guardianship support left Aspire on the 1st April 2025.



19. Aspire Adoption Panel

19.1 The Adoption panel has continued to meet virtually twice a month.

19.1.1 This year the panel made: -

- 36 Approvals
- 27 Matches
- 9 De-Registrations
- 2 Should be placed for adoption Decisions

19.2 Matches of children with adopters.

19.2.1 Matches of children have continued well. The 27 matches identifying new homes for 35 children, including one sibling group of 3 and 5 groups of 2 children. A slight majority of matches were of adopters with children who had already been placed with them under early permanence arrangements. The cases provide the challenge of ensuring appropriate scrutiny of a match which has, to all intents and purposes, already been agreed and settled. The advent of the Adoption Support Plan being used as a separate and more detailed document has helped considerably in allowing Panel to properly scrutinise the support going forward, most particularly from the perspective of there being experience of the children being in the adopters' care.

19.3 Adopters

19.3.1 It has been heartening to see the number of adopters increase this year after the reduction in approvals during 2023-24. There remain delays for adopters in bring brought to Panel not of Aspire's making in that delays to both DBS checks and medical reports have held up a number of approvals.

19.3.2 The number of de-registrations of adopters increased slightly. These adopters had often been approved for over two years and had not been matched. Either their criteria had resulted in them not finding a child they felt able to parent, or personal issues had intervened with their cases.

19.3.3 The stability of Aspire staff also played a part and panel feedback on these cases has reflected the impact of staff changes in the recruitments and assessment team in two adopters feeling unsupported through their journey, resulting in their wishing to withdraw from the process.

19.4 Feedback from Panel

19.4.1 Panel has been operating a RAG rating system for social worker reports since early 2021. This has been generally well received and has improved the consistency and quality of feedback.

19.4.2 The process has enabled an objective and measurable assessment of the direction of travel of reports which has in large part been positive as most reports are given a 'green rating'.

19.4.3 Panel report that the quality of reports continues to be good, with particular improvement around CPRs and APRs at the point of matching.

19.4.4 Analysis and evidencing of resilience in PARs has become uniformly good, leading to no deferrals of adoption approvals this year.

19.4.5 Timeliness of assessments has generally improved but still remains outside statutory limits. Delays to DBS check return and medical assessments remaining the primary cause

20. Birth parent services

- 20.1 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 agency, Parents and Children Together (PaCT) (BFM) following the service ceasing with Families for Children This had been recommissioned from April 2022 to 31 March 2024 with an option to extend for a further 2 years.
- 20.2 The service consists of 15 hours a week of an experienced social worker, management oversight and agency support. The social worker had at times gained additional external charitable funding to support activities.
- 20.3 Following concerns expressed by PaCT, regarding the ability to meet need within the current constraints of the post, they provided notice on the 30 January 2024, that they were not renewing the contract on the 31 March 2024.
- 20.4 The worker was subject to TUPE and therefore remained on her current terms and conditions, which would be met through the current budget. The worker was Taped into Aspire on the 5 May 2024. However, the worker was signed off as unfit to work and resigned in November 2024.
- 20.5 To ensure that this service was met, agreement was provided to use an independent Social Worker to cover the post. This has continued, and recruitment to the post is now taking place.
- 20.6 The service remains under the name of Birth Family Matters and has its own Email address and contact number, and sits within the Aspire support services, offering independence from the line management of children's cases.

21. Special Guardianship Assessments

21.1 Transitioning of Services

- 21.1.2 It was agreed at the Strategic Partnership Board in December 2023, that the Special Guardianship work should transition back into the respective Local Authorities and align within the Fostering/Kinship Care Services. This work commenced in January 2024 and was finalised with a successful transitioning of staff and services in April 2025. Aspire no longer provide Special Guardianship Assessments nor support services as these are now part of the Fostering/Kinship services within each Local Authority.

21.2 Special Guardianship Work

- 21.2.1 For the second successive year there has been a decrease in the number of referrals to the Special Guardianship Assessment Team (Fig 18). This is still above the 120 referrals that Aspire were funded to undertake.
- 21.2.2 Dorset ceased making referrals in January 2025, as the service was to be transitioning out of Aspire, and the timescales for completing and filing the assessments would have passed the transfer date.

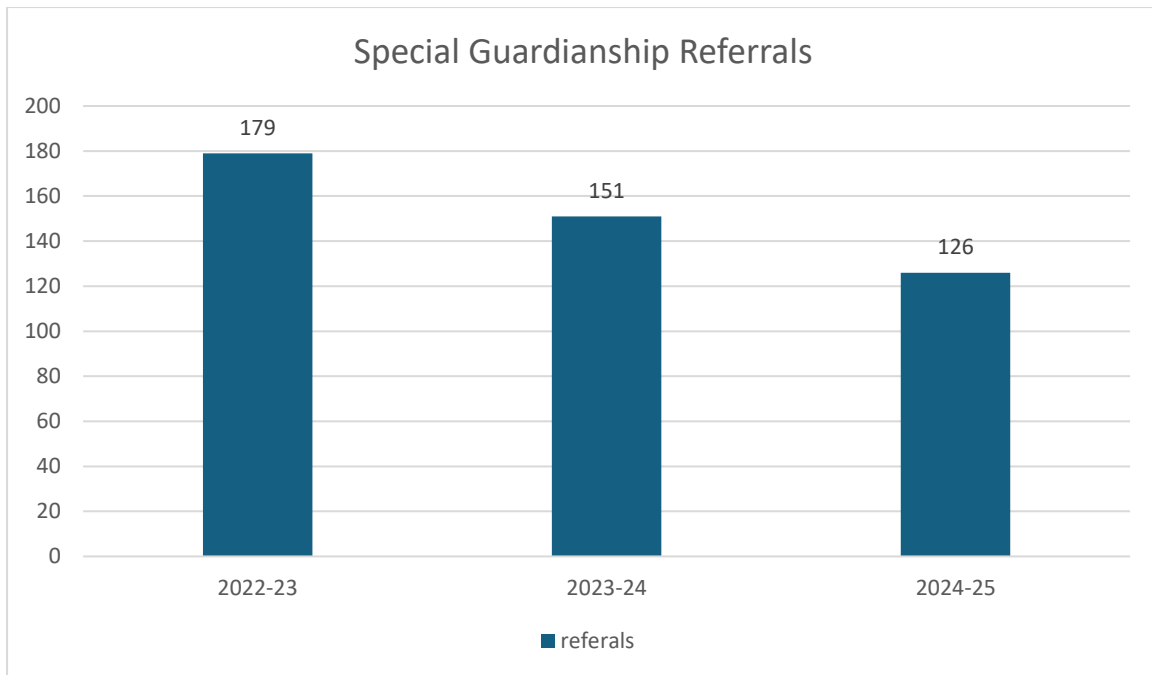


Fig 18

21.2.3 For Dorset, the details relating to the Special Guardianship Assessments are shown in Fig 19.

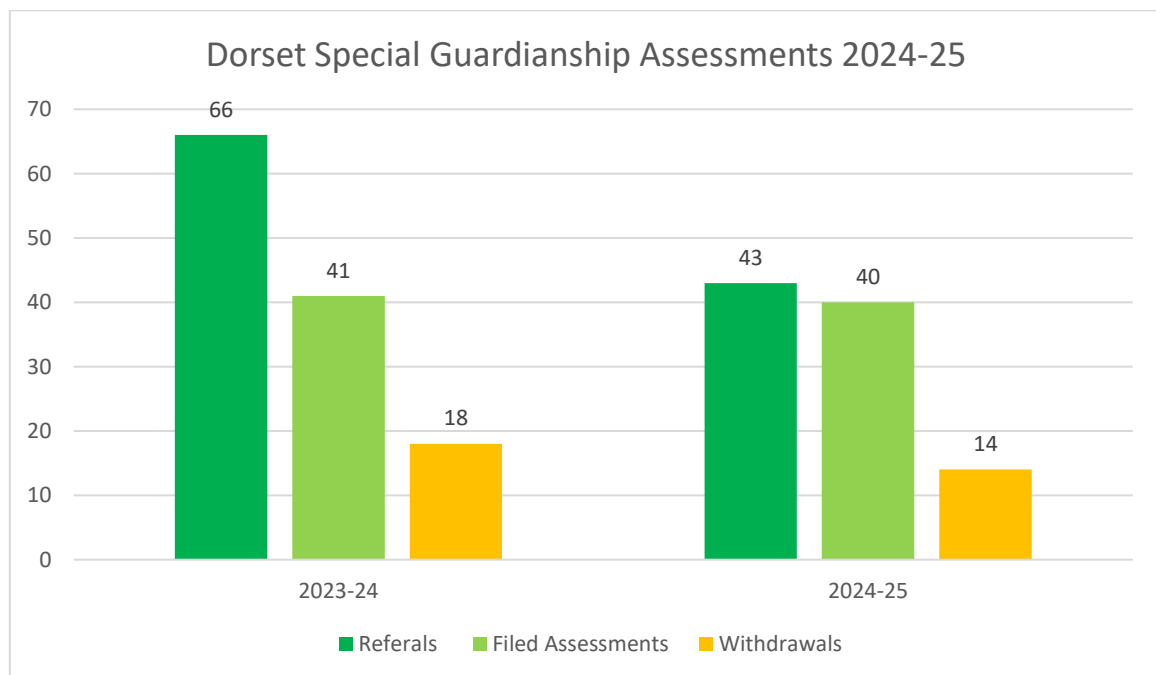


Fig 19

21.2.4 The number of special guardianship referrals from Dorset has decreased since 2023/24 by 35%. During 2023/24 there were 41 Special Guardianship assessments filed with the Court compared to 40 in 2023/24 for Dorset, a decrease of 2.5%.

21.2.5 However, the completion of the Special Guardianship assessment takes 12 weeks from commencement to completion and filing with the Court, there were 12 assessments being undertaken in March 2024, that were from referrals made in Quarter 4 of 2023-24 that were filed within the first Quarter of 2024-25.

21.2.6 Approximately 32% of the special guardianship referrals received did not result in a full assessment being completed.

21.2.7 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 Kinship/ foster carers, more than one family member is being assessed, issues arise during the assessment or the child's plan may change.

21.2.8 For Dorset the reasons for the withdraws are as follows

Number of withdrawals	Reason for withdrawal
2	Withdrew as they felt the assessment was too intrusive.
3	Wished to remain connect person carers.
1	Withdrawn by LA.
8	They couldn't commit to the child.

21.2.9 Dorset's withdrawal rate has remained reasonable static, with a increase of 5% from the previous year. The withdrawal reasons would indicate that Dorset's referrals are good quality, all the applicants gave valid reasons for withdrawing.

22. Finance

22.1 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.

22.2 In 2024/25 the forecast position for Aspire's operational budget was an overspend of £33,988. This overspend mainly arose due to a higher-than-expected staff pay award and included the unfunded element of the 22/23 pay award of £63,000.

Aspire Adoption 2024/2025 Budget Monitoring Statement - position to 26th March 2025							Reasons for variances		
	Annual Budget 2024/25	YTD Budget	YTD Actuals (March salaries not yet charged)	Forecast Variance 2024/25	Forecast 2024/25	Forecast Variance 2024/25	Foreca st March salaries to be charge d	Interagenc y Income	Total Year End Adjustmen ts
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Staffing Costs	2,485,557	2,485,557	2,373,306	(112,251)	2,587,545	101,988	101,988		101,988
Other Employee Costs	10,000	10,000	7,452	(2,548)	10,000	0			
Premises	4,000	4,000	327	(3,673)	4,000	0			
Transport	25,000	25,000	26,353	1,353	25,000	0			
Supplies and Services	36,800	36,800	116,548	79,748	36,800	0			
Third Party Payments (Inc Adoption Panel costs)	43,243	43,243	42,778	(465)	43,243	0			
Interagency Fee Expenditure	0	0	0	0		0			
Interagency Fee Income	(200,000)	(200,000)	(81,000)	119,000	(268,000)	(68,000)		(68,000)	(68,000)
Total Expenditure	2,404,600	2,404,600	2,485,765	81,165	2,438,588	33,988	101,988	(68,000)	33,988

- 22.3 In addition to the potential forecast pressure of £33,988k it must be remembered that each local authority is responsible for the costs relating to interagency expenditure. The current projection of interagency expenditure is a total of £102k. Each placement is agreed with the appropriate Director/SM prior to the placement being made.
- 22.4 The net operational overspend of £33,988 was shared proportionately among the two local councils according to the funding percentages. The Interagency fee's were met by each Local Authority based upon the cost to them of the placements.
- 22.5 Looking forward to 2025/26, the budget for the Operational Budget has been agreed reflecting the removal of the Special Guardianship Assessment and support services .

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 1 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.
- 1.7 The 2014 Adoption Minimum Standards can be accessed at [Department for Education](#).
- 1.8 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

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

- 2.1 Aspire has been delegated all of the local authority statutory responsibilities for adoption, other than the court work leading to Care and Placement Orders.
- 2.2 Aspire has responsibility for recruiting, assessing and supporting prospective adopters, for non-agency adoption work including partner adoptions and intercountry adoptions.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 Aspire undertakes special guardianship assessments for court on behalf of the local authority as part of care proceedings, or in private law applications.
- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 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 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		✓

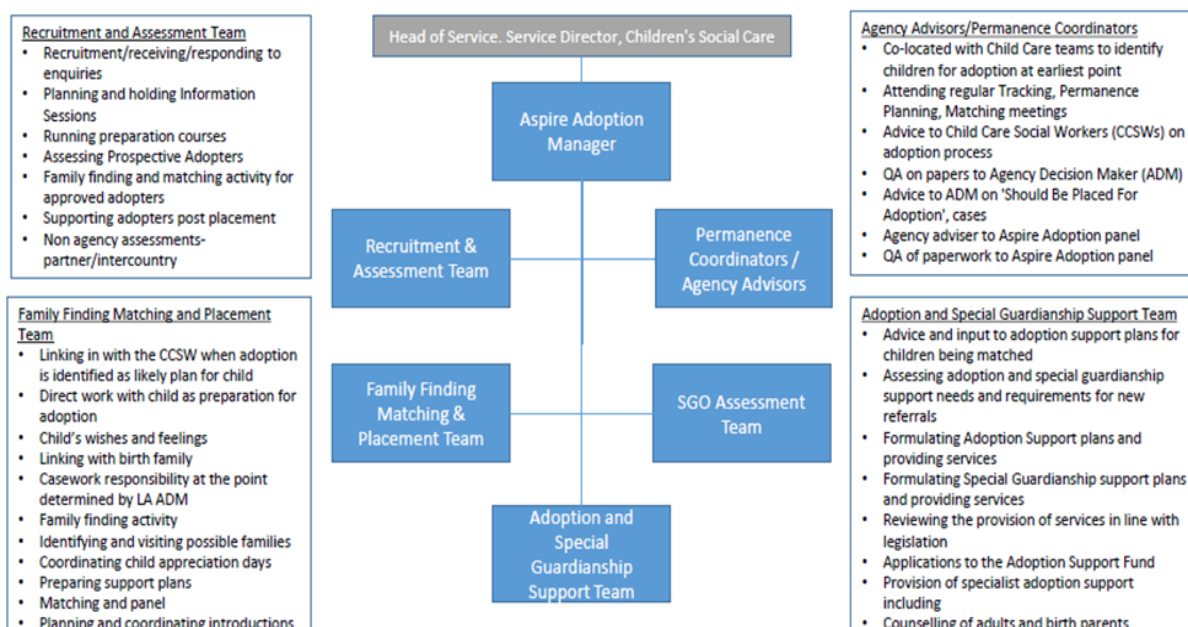
Case management prior to the point agreed by the LA ADM		✓
Case management from point agreed by the LA ADM	✓	
MATCHING AND PLACEMENT		
Family finding	✓	
Looked After Child reviews	✓	✓
Shortlist and visit potential families	✓	
Organising child appreciation day	✓	
Ongoing direct work to prepare child prior 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: • 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

3. Aspire Organisational Structure and Staffing

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



3.1 Staffing

3.1.1 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.

3.1.2 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.

3.1.3 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

3.1.4 The Family Finding, Matching and Placement Team comprises of a team manager, 1 FTE practice manager and 4.FTE social workers, all of whom are registered with Social Work England, and 3.64 FTE family support workers.

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

3.1.6 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 28 April 2023.

- 3.1.7 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.
- 3.1.8 The service is supported by 6 FTE business support staff including a senior business support officer, a panel administrator, the Marketing, Media and Monitoring officer's position is vacant.
- 3.1.9 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).
- 3.1.10 Aspire also has access to dedicated clinical psychology support for staff and service users.
- 3.1.11 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.

3.2 Staff training and development

- 3.2.1 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.
- 3.2.2 Staff have monthly supervision and annual appraisals, and regular team case and practice reflection sessions are facilitated by the clinical psychologists.
- 3.2.3 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

4. Governance

4.1 The following is taken from the Inter Authority Agreement

SCHEDULE 2 – TERMS OF REFERENCE

Governance Structure



Part 1 – Strategic Partnership Board

4.1.1 **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, Christchurch and Poole, and Dorset Councils ("the Councils") for the creation of a Regional Adoption Agency.

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

4.1.3 **The Board will:** Provide and review the strategic direction of Aspire Adoption;

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

4.2 Accountability and Responsibility:

4.2.1 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.

4.2.2 All members of the Board will be in a position to make decisions within their respective organisation, where appropriate.

4.2.3 All members of the Board will be responsible for reporting to their organisation, through their respective governance arrangements.

4.3 Meetings of the Board

4.3.1 The Board will meet every six months or at a greater or lesser frequency if it so decides.

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

4.3.3 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.

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

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

4.3.6 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.

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

4.4 Membership:

4.4.1 The Board will consist of:

- Portfolio Holder and Executive Director for Childrens Services for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council;
- Portfolio Holder and Executive Director for Childrens Services for the Borough of Poole Council.

4.4.2 The Board will consult (so far as it considers proper and appropriate to do so):

- Representatives from local Voluntary Adoption Agencies/Families for Children; and
- A representative from Stakeholders.

4.4.3 Members of the Board should:

- 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;
- 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;
- 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.

4.5 Voting – Quorum

4.5.1 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.

- 4.5.2 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.
- 4.5.3 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.
- 4.5.4 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

- 4.6 **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, Christchurch and Poole and Dorset Council("the Councils") for the creation of a Regional Adoption Agency.
- 4.7 **Role:** The Board will provide support, advice and management to Aspire Adoption to ensure that statutory requirements and the Business Plan is delivered effectively.
- 4.8 **The Board will:**
- oversee the implementation of the Aspire Adoption Budget and Business Plan;
 - oversee the commissioning arrangements and operational performance against agreed local priorities and targets and in line with national priorities and targets.
- 4.9 **Accountability and Responsibility:** 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. This Board will report to the Strategic Partnership Board.
- 4.10 **Meetings of the Board**
- The Board will meet quarterly or at a greater or lesser frequency if it so decides.
 - The Board will elect a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson from amongst its members.
 - 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.
 - The Chairperson shall normally preside at all meetings of the Board.
 - The Chairperson will be responsible for agreeing meeting agendas and draft minutes for circulation.
 - 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.
 - Minutes of meeting will be circulated within 5 working days after the meeting with an action list.

4.11 Membership: The Board will consist of:

- Service Director for Children's Social Care for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.
- Head of Service for Children in Care and Care leavers Dorset Council
- Adoption Aspire Manager.
- Representatives from Health
- Representatives from Virtual School
- Representatives from the adopter reference Group

4.12 Members of the Board should:

- 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.
- Uphold and support the Board decisions and be prepared to follow through actions and decisions and declaring any conflict of interest should it arise.
- 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.

4.13 Voting – Quorum

4.13.1 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.

4.13.2 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.

4.13.3 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.

4.13.4 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

5. Aspire Adoption Panel

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 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.
- 5.5 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.
- 5.6 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.
- 5.7 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.
- 5.8 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.

- 5.9 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.
- 5.10 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.
- 5.11 In 2024/25 the Adoption Panels have all been held virtually to enable full participation of members and adopters.



Aspire Adoption

Statement of Purpose

2025- 2026

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.

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_N

[MS 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 Nicole Mills, Director of Corporate Parenting & Permanence, BCP Council.

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

There are five Agency Decision Makers (ADMs).

Rubina Payne (BCP In House Fostering, Private Fostering & Supported Lodgings Service Manager) and Aleksandra Zabielska (Service Manager for Child Health and Disability Teams, Short Breaks, Children's Occupational Therapy Team, Parenting Assessment & Contact Team) are ADMs for decisions about whether BCP Council children in the care of the local authority should have a plan for adoption, for matches for those children and for the temporary approval of prospective adopters as foster carers for early permanence placements.

Jane McLennan, Head of Service for Care Leavers and UACS, Paula Golding, Corporate Director – Care and Protection 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.

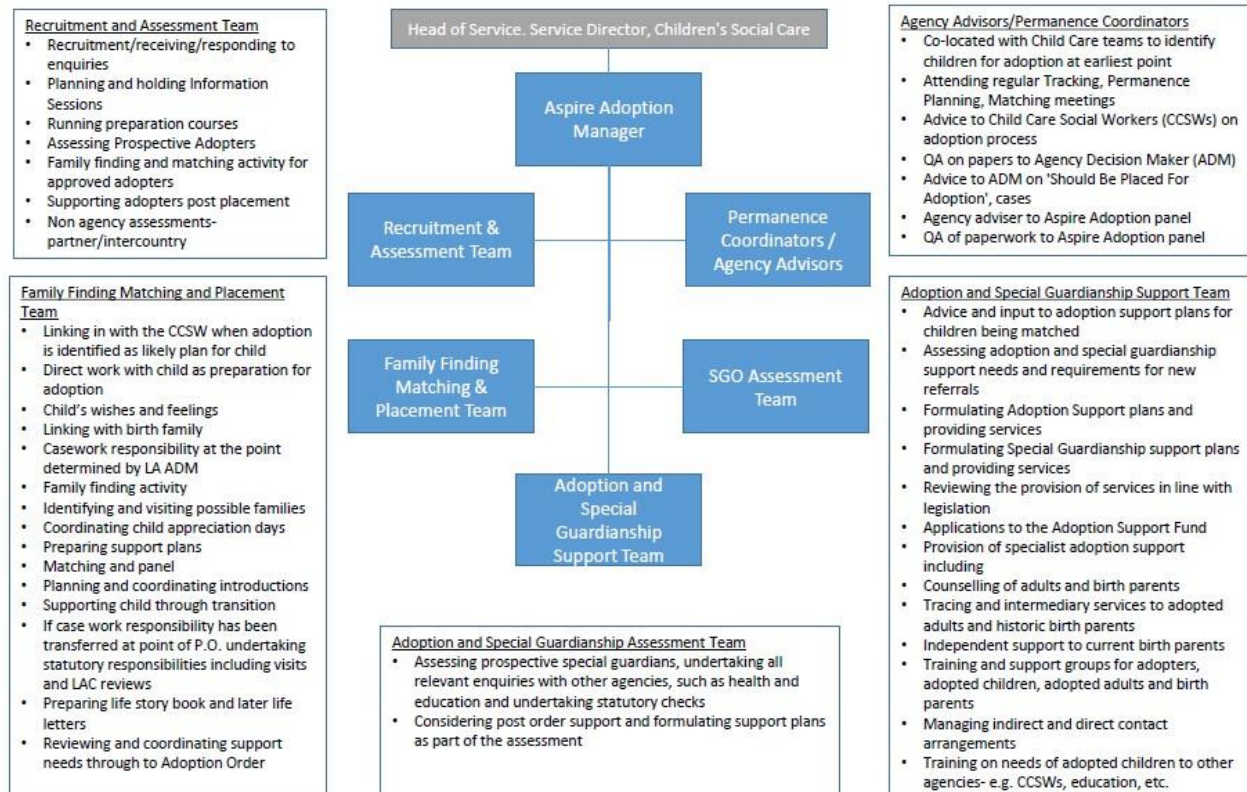
The ADMs in each of the authorities are also responsible for decision making in respect of the temporary approval of adopters as foster carers for early permanence placements.

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 Advisors 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 BCP Civic Centre, Bourne Avenue BH2 6DY. Social workers and support workers have lightweight laptops and smart phones and can work from home or from touch down points across Bournemouth, Christchurch 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 two 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.

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: • 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 6 weekly 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 quarterly, 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 a Voluntary Adoption Agency 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.
- Quarterly 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,
Civic Centre
Bourne Avenue
Bournemouth
BH2 6DY

Tel - 0300 123 9868

Email - enquiries@aspireadoption.co.uk

Contact details for complaints

BCP compliments and Complaints

Tel 01202 458712

[<csccomments@bcpcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:csccomments@bcpcouncil.gov.uk)

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	The Aspire Permanence Coordinator/Agency Adviser and the	

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	would be appropriate for any child for whom they 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.	allocated Aspire social worker will provide advice and support to the local 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		

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	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 proceedings or accommodated under Section 20 of the 1989 Children Act.	Aspire will maintain tracking systems for all children notified to them by the 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	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.	It will be necessary for the local authority worker and Aspire worker to work closely

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	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 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.	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 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.	and collaboratively to ensure that all relevant information is included in the CPR and that the report is of a high standard. 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.	

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
		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 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. 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.	The Aspire social worker will be responsible for obtaining agreement, 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. 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.	The ADM in each local authority will need to 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. 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.
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	

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
		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 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	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.	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	

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	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.	adopters within 10 days of the Adoption Hearing.	
Adoption Panel	There are no Adoption Panels remaining in the local authorities. 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 and should talk with their line manager in the first instance.	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 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	

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
		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.	
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		Regardless of whether casework responsibility transfers to Aspire at Placement Order, the Aspire panel administrator will take responsibility for	

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
placement of a child		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	

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
		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 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.	Aspire will maintain a daily duty service to ensure that all of those making an enquiry about adoption support or requesting an adoption support	

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	This might be an adoptive family in need of support, an adopted adult, or a birth relative.	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 worker support, referral to in house clinical psychology or other specialist services if appropriate; Access to training, workshops support groups for adopters and adopted children; Access to and information about resources such as DVDs, books and specialist services; Opportunities for networking with other adoptive families, including social events for adoptive families;	

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
		Agency updates for adoptive families, e.g. newsletters and other communications whether digital or paper.	
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. 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.	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. Aspire will supervise direct post adoption contact arrangements made before July 2017 if the funding is provided.	
Adoption allowances and other financial support to	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		Harmonisation of adoption and special guardianship allowances across the local authorities will be

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
adoptive families	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.		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.	
Independent support to birth parents	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	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 Birth Family Matters (BFM) service is a support, advice and counselling service. It is not an advocacy service.

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	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	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.	The BFM service will be funded from the Aspire base budget and is not an additional charge to the local authority.
Birth Records Counselling and intermediary services	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.	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 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	

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
		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 local authority will be signposted to Aspire within 24 hours.	Information about partner adoptions will be available on the Aspire website, with links to relevant organisations. 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	Aspire will be responsible for the formal written response to notifications of intent to adopt in partner adoption applications. Aspire will allocate a social	

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	applied to adopt, including in respect of non - agency placements, will be responded to within 15 working days.	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.	
		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	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. 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.	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. 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.	
	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.	
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	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

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	Adoption or Special Guardianship Orders made in respect of children who are or were in their care.		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.	

FOSTER CARERS WISHING TO ADOPT A CHILD IN THEIR CARE

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	Where a foster carer expresses an interest in adopting 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.	

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
		Should the foster carer wish to proceed following the joint visit, Aspire will undertake an adoption assessment within statutory timescales of 4 months	
	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.	

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		

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	allowed by the court at the time of making those 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 a		

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	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
	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. 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. This also includes records in relation to special guardianship assessments and support.	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.	
	The local authority will retain responsibility for storing and maintaining electronic and paper records archived after 1st July 2017 in accordance with Regulations and Statutory Guidance, in relation to children with adoption plans and adopted.		

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASPIRE	NOTES
	The local authority will provide access to Aspire to any records in their archive 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, 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.	Aspire will take responsibility for the data storage and security of any information accessed by an Aspire 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.	

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.

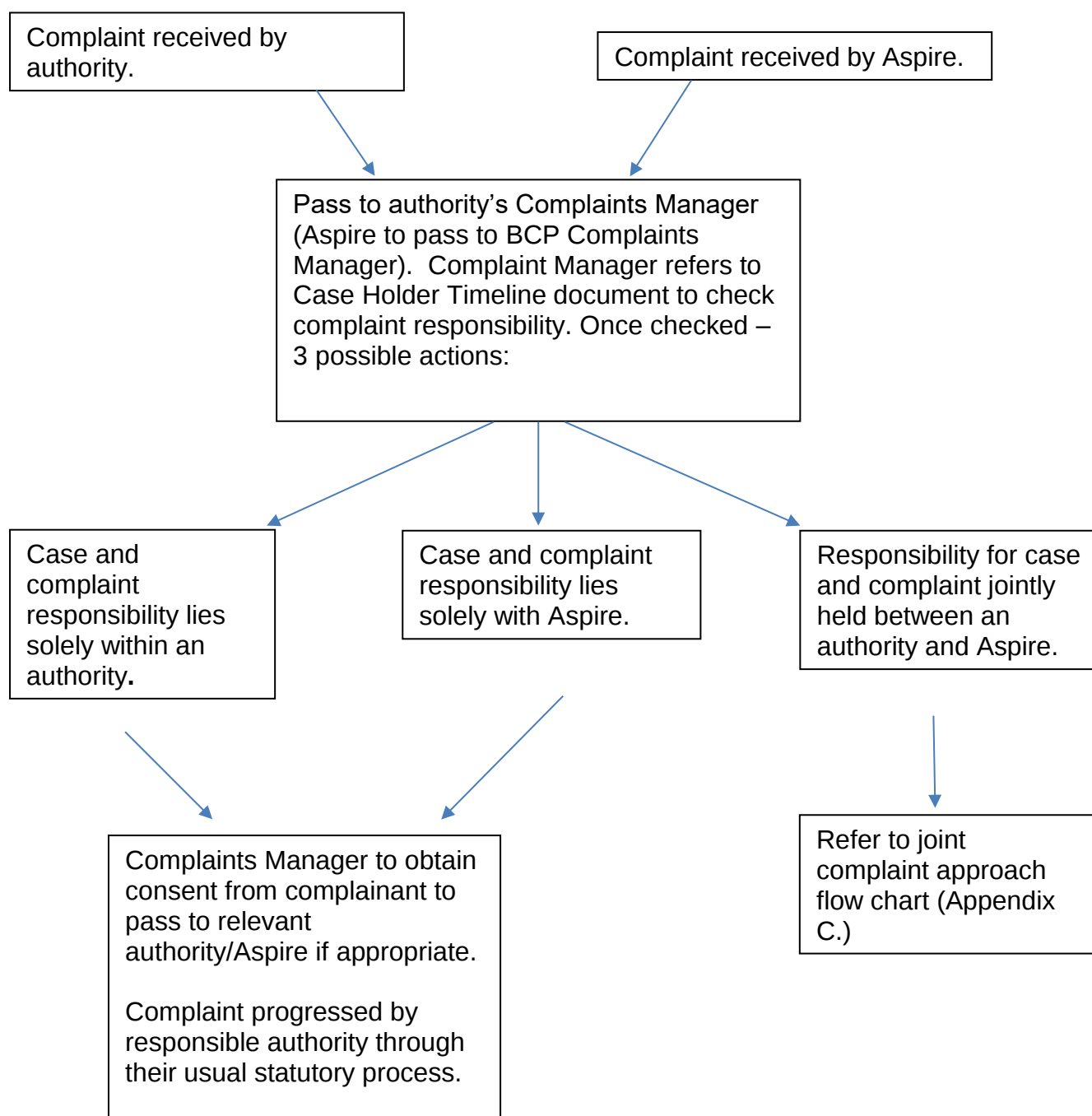
Originating Authority – post Placement Order or Special Guardianship Order

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 with management of

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 referral of Local Government Ombudsman enquiry to provide Local Government Ombudsman with information.

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Title of Report

Aspire Adoption Annual Report Dorset 2024-25

Who Wrote the Report

Aspire Adoption Services

Date Written

1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

Summary of What the Report is About

This report talks about the work done by Aspire Adoption Services to help children find new families through adoption. It covers how they work with Dorset Council and BCP Council, recruit new adoptive parents, and support families after adoption.

What are the Key Messages of This Report

- Aspire Adoption helps children who need new families.
- Aspire make sure children are placed in safe and loving homes.
- Aspire recruits and supports adoptive parents.
- They provide ongoing help to families after adoption.

Important Facts and Figures

- **Children Adopted:** 44 children were adopted this year.
- **Adoptive Parents:** 36 new adoptive parents were approved.
- **Support Services:** Aspire offers lots of support to adoptive families, including special events and workshops.
- **Sibling Groups:** Where it is right for children, Aspire work hard to keep brothers and sisters together.

Actions or Recommendations

- **Recruit More Adopters:** Aspire needs more people to become adoptive parents, especially for older children and sibling groups.
- **Improve Support Services:** Continue to offer strong support to adoptive families to help them succeed.
- **Work with Partners:** Keep working closely with Dorset Council and other adoption agencies to find the best homes for children.

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Committee Title: Corporate Parenting Board 28 May 2025

Report Title: Fostering Service Annual Report

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member and Portfolio:

Cllr C Sutton, Children's Services, Education & Skills

Local Councillor(s):

Executive Director:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

Report Author: Lisa Wilms

Job Title: Acting Service Manager

Tel: 01305228292

Email: lisa.wilms@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public [Choose an item.](#)

Request: 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. Executive summary

- 1.1 The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 require that the Fostering Service provide 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 Service in the Dorset Council area as required by statutory

guidance. The Annual Fostering Service Report must be presented to Corporate Parenting Board.

- 1.2 This report details the advancements that the Fostering Service has made over the 2024 / 2025 reporting year, particularly with the embedding of Mockingbird and constellation 6 preparing to launch in May 2025
- 1.3 The service have been successful in the recruit of permanent staff including the management team. The service has continued to grow with the launch of a dedicated kinship service from January 2025.
- 1.4 We continue to provide stability and continuity to our fostering families, and in turn our children and young people feel supported.
- 1.5 Dorset Council's participation in the Southwest regional fostering hub provides positive signs for 2024/2025 that enquiries and interest in Fostering in Dorset is rising.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 The service has had another busy year. The service has continued to develop a focus on the support provided to our foster carers to ensure that the needs of our children and young people are safely and consistently met.
- 2.2 The service has welcomed an exciting transformation programme, which has seen a growth in the services being offered which includes a dedicated Kinship service.
- 2.3 The service knows itself well, its strengths and areas for focus and has a clear plan to strengthen practice over the next 12 months.
- 2.4 The plan focusses on:
 - Supporting more children to live within their wider family network, if it is not possible for them to live safely with their parents.
 - Improving outcomes for children & young people through the recruitment and retention of local foster carers is a priority.
 - We are committed to ensuring that our foster carers are able to meet the diverse needs of our children and enable them to live close to the people and places that are important to them.
 - Supporting foster carer resilience through the delivery of high-quality support, supervision and training.
 - Delivering value for money, by reducing spend on commissioned external homes.

3.0 Recruitment, Assessment, Approval and De-registration.

- 3.1 As of 31 March 2025, we had 188 Dorset Council fostering households caring for 192 children.
- 120 were mainstream households (an increase from 119 in 2024)
 - 62 were Kinship foster households (compared to 67 in March 2024) and
 - 6 households approved as foster to adopt/early permanence.
- 3.2 This is a reduction overall from 197 fostering households in March 2024. However, there are more children living with Dorset carers than in previous reporting years, with an increase from 186 to 192.
- 3.3 In the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 there were 56 fostering enquiries, and 17 mainstream fostering households were recruited. There were a further 22 kinship foster carers recruited and approved and 4 foster to adopt placements.
- 3.4 This equated to 30.36% conversion rate from enquiry to mainstream approval which compares to an estimated conversion rate of 10% nationally. (Fostering Network).
- 3.5 As of 31 March 2025, there were a further 42 fostering assessments in progress.
- 11 Mainstream fostering assessments
 - 31 Kinship assessments
- 3.6 Nationally 14% of the mainstream foster carer workforce are retiring or leaving every year. In this reporting period 16 mainstream foster households (10.8%) and 13 Kinship carers were deregistered through resignation and a further 22 were no longer Kinship carers as the young person reached 18 and/or left care. This compares to 26 mainstream carers and 18 Kinship foster carers in 2023/24.
- 3.7 Reasons for deregistration include:
- Mainstream:** 16 resigned from fostering of these
- 4 retired
 - 2 moved out of area
 - 2 employment opportunity
 - 1 unable to continue fostering
 - 2 wider family commitments
 - 2 deregistered post allegations
 - 2 resigned post allegations
 - 1 SGO awarded

Kinship: 13 resigned and a further 28 ceased being a Kinship carer due to changes in the legal circumstances of the child or young person.

- 22 children moved either home or left care (turned 18)
- 5 SGO were awarded
- 1 adoption order was made.
- 5 resignations were initiated by service
- 7 resignations were initiated by carer
- 1 carer resigned post allegation

4.0 Recruitment and Marketing

- 4.1 Nationally there has been a 14% decrease in the number of approved or newly approved mainstream foster carers in the last 4 years between 2020 – 2024. The overall change in number of mainstream households (joiners minus leavers) recorded in 23/24 (-765) is smaller than the previous year (-1,045). While this is an improving picture, there remains a national challenge in the recruitment of mainstream carers. While our increase is small, we are bucking the national trend.
- 4.2 The marketing and recruitment and retention of carers is underpinned by the Dorset Council Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2023 - 2026.
- 4.3 The Fostering Service maintain a strong local presence, interacting in community spaces with various stands, activities and more widely through social media to share what a difference becoming a fostering family could make to a child or young person and their future outcomes. Through the collaboration of the partnership, Dorset has benefitted from additional advertising campaigns and recruitment days.
- 4.4 Funding through the DFE to design and launch a regional fostering hub has allowed Dorset Council to become part of the Southwest Regional Fostering Hub. This is a partnership of 15 Local Authorities working in collaboration to improve the recruitment and retention of foster carers.
- 4.5 Since September 2024, we have seen an incremental increase in the number of initial enquiries but are yet to see this translate into sustained improvement in the recruitment of new mainstream households.
- 4.6 Marketing

This year has seen the continued use of the new fostering image and collaboration with an external marketing agency working in tandem with the fostering service and colleagues from the communications team.

- 4.7 Alongside this is our standalone micro-site which is both dynamic and informative. The external marketing agency has also been used to support targeted Google advertising, which has provided focussed and informed campaigns.
- 4.8 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 wishing to transfer to Dorset Council.
- 4.9 The service 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.
- 4.10 Face to Face Recruitment Events
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. The team undertook 46 face to face events across Dorset between April 2024 and March 2025.
- 4.11 We work in partnership with Dorset Carers Voice to hear the voice of current carers and their views on areas we could develop to support our recruitment program.

5.0 Fostering Panel

- 5.1 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:
 - make a recommendation as to whether the applicant is suitable to be a foster carer and the terms of the approval.
 - 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.
 - recommend whether a person still is suitable to be a foster carer, and whether the terms of their approval (if any) remain appropriate.
 - give advice or make recommendations on other matters or cases referred to by the fostering service provider, including terminations of approval.

- 5.2 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
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 There is a separate fostering panel chair annual report 2024-2025, provided to Corporate Parenting Board. This details the progress, performance and plans of Dorset's fostering panel.

6.0 Dorset Approved Fostering Households

- 6.1 As of the 31 March 2025, there were 435 children who were in Dorset's care. 69.9% of Dorset's children were being looked after by foster carers either through an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) or with Dorset's own in-house fostering service. This compares to the National average 67% with good+ statistical neighbors at 67.3%. 50.11% of all of Dorset's children in care are living with mainstream or kinship carers (a total of 218 children).
- 6.2 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. This also includes temporary approved foster carers where the child may not yet be living with them.

Type of Fostering Household	Total Number of Fostering Households	Total Number of availabilities for children	Total Number of Children living with carers
Mainstream Including Parent and Child	120	231	126
Kinship Foster Carers	62	86	86
Foster for Adoption	6	6	6
Total number of Households	188	323	218

- 6.3 Fostering households may be approved for one, two or three children. This is usually due to bedroom space being available. In Dorset we allow siblings

(if appropriate) to share bedrooms. For reporting the number of availabilities for children, the maximum number is reported.

- 6.4 On the 31 March 2025 there were 105 fostering availabilities not in use (323-218) this shows improvement from 114 last year (2023/24).
- 6.5 The utilisation rate as of 31 March 2025 of foster children to mainstream fostering households is 1.04. This continues to be low and has been impacted in the year by the number of fostering households on hold and the number of unavailable placements.
- 6.6 There may be several reasons why we are not able to use or match full availability with our foster carers. This can 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 available because of the needs of children already living with them and the prioritisation of stability and longer-term security within the foster family.
- 6.7 It is important to differentiate between foster households that have vacancies and have no foster children placed (primary vacancies) and those that have vacant availability but do have other foster children in place (secondary vacancies). This means that whilst we need to identify the full capacity of our foster community, we are not able to use all availability due to a range of complex factors and known vulnerabilities. The priority is always enabling children to have stability and security with carers who can meet their individual needs.
- 6.8 Of the 105 vacancies, 38 are currently unavailable at foster carer request meaning there are 67 “active” vacancies within our foster families. Of the 67 vacancy reasons, over 60% are providing short breaks, 15% are unavailable due to being Hub home carers. 3% are unavailable due to Harbour specialist carer and matching. 15% are unavailable as approval states 2/3 if sibs and therefore carers do not have capacity or a physical room in their home.

7. Fostering Reviews

- 7.1 The foster carers annual review of approval addresses all relevant aspects of the National Minimum Fostering Standards and Regulations 2011.

- 7.2 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.
- 7.3 A Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer convenes and chairs an independent annual review meeting.
- 7.4 Over the last 12 months, the Fostering review process has continued to be developed with improvements made to the work step process, to support workers with completion. This has primarily been achieved through the strong partnership working with fostering reviewing and quality assurance service.
- 7.5 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.
- 7.6 Of significance is the improvement in quality assurance which has been built upon with 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.
- 7.7 As of 31 March 2025, there were 41 Reviews outstanding. Of these 15 were initial reviews. Initial reviews are prioritised for completion with weekly telephone support and consultation with the fostering social worker and enhanced visiting patterns for those where initial reviews are outstanding. In addition to this there is service manager oversight and weekly reporting to the head of service.
- 7.8 There have been challenges over the last 12 months in reducing the number of outstanding annual reviews. This has been due to long term sickness within both the fostering and Quality Assurance teams. There are 19 outstanding reviews for which the fostering team are responsible for progressing. We now have in place daily action plans and management oversight to progress and prevent further delays.

8. Foster Carer's Support

- 8.1 Ensuring that foster carers feel valued is vital to maintain a strong service and to ensure that foster carers are retained. Dorset Foster Carers Association shared with us that 99% (March 2024) felt supported by the fostering service. Both the Dorset Carer Voice and the service will continue

in partnership to ensure that every foster carer feels their needs and in turn the needs of their children are met.

8.2 Recognising and celebrating the work of our foster carers

The foster care award ceremony on the 10 May 2024 was according to the foster carers who attended 'inspirational and brilliant'. 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. 39 carers were recognised for long service awards, as well as including a pioneer award and the Childrens Director Award for outstanding services.

8.3 Support Groups

Support groups take place face to face, with the addition of a monthly online offer for those who cannot attend during the day. These groups provide a regular opportunity for carers to come together supported by fostering social workers to discuss a range of topics.

8.4 This year we have widened our support group offer to include a Special Guardianship and Kinship support group that run monthly.

8.5 We have started to explore how we can develop a foster carer birth children support group to ensure they have a space to ask questions, share their voice and be provided with support from peers and professionals.

8.6 Foster carer Forums

The foster carer forums are now embedded in the service. The attendance by foster carers, mainstream and kinship is equally attended. The feedback from foster carers has been 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.

8.7 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. We provide feedback to foster carers four times a year on the "you said, together we have" to maintain communication and confidence in progressing timely actions and developing the service to meet need.

8.8 Over time we have developed space for other professionals around the foster families to attend, listen, take on board feedback and provide

updates. The attendance of the child in care nursing team, leaving care service and QARO service manager has been particularly well received.

8.9 Therapeutic Support

The Fostering Team works in partnership with NHS Dorset to promote the emotional well-being of fostered children and young people.

8.10 A total of 22.5 hours of Clinical Psychology support continues to be provided through 2 part time clinical psychologists. They offer a range of support to foster carers and supervising social workers which includes:

- Foundations to attachment
- 1:1 support for foster carers
- Clinical supervision to supervising social workers
- Child and young people formulations- to help foster carers to understand the child's individual needs

8.11 There has been a focus upon developing a service that is proactive rather than reactive, to ensure we can provide a graduated response and 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 Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP) training across the fostering service staff.
- Free pilot of 'Storm break'. Direct work with foster carers over 12 weeks based on mental health areas to be trialled.
- Commencement of foundations of attachment training for our foster carers.

9. Child's Voice

9.1 Listening to children's voices is key to improving fostering care practice. Throughout March 2025 the fostering service took part in the Coram Voice Bright Spots survey. The survey enables us to focus on what children and young people say about their lives in care and what is important to them.

- 9.2 The outcome of the Bright Spots children in care survey will ensure the views and experiences of children in care influence service development and strategic thinking.
- 9.3 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.
- 9.4 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.
- 9.5 Children in foster care also have access to a children's advocate. This service is provided independently through NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service).
- 9.6 NYAS are 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.
- 9.7 The Youth Voice Team work closely with the 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.
- 9.8 The Network captures the voice of Dorset's children and young people and ensure their voice is heard in the right spaces whilst influencing positive change and outcomes.
- 9.10 Dorset Carers Voice
Dorset Carer Voice has been established over the last 12 months by Dorset foster carers to provide support, strengthen communication between the Fostering Service and our fostering families, to challenge and have a voice and to advocate for the needs of children and young people in their care.
- 9.11 As a group they meet regularly with the Service Manager and Head of Service within fostering so that we are confident and reassured that we understand the needs of our foster carers, so they have the right support to maintain the high quality of care we expect for our children and young people.
- 9.12 The service worked closely with foster carers to encourage the development of a Foster Carers Association. With the growth of Mockingbird and our hub

home carers supporting over 50 carers we are re-setting to ensure voices of all carers, including kinship carers are represented in our new Carer Voice Group. Quarterly meetings take place with the Executive Director and Head of Service Children in Care.

10. Fostering Service Compliance

- 10.1 On 31 March 2025 the service has 41 overdue reviews, this has reduced from 73 reported on 31 March 2024. Of the 41 overdue annual reviews, 19 (46%) are waiting for the fostering social worker to start the review process, 19 (46%) are waiting for the fostering reviewing officer to complete the review and 3 are due to attend panel.
- 10.2 The service has already implemented change to support improvement of review timeliness. This has included an update of the documentation being used and the process for completion. We will now need to focus on embedding the new review process and document to ensure all foster carers reviews are taking place within timescales and meeting fostering regulation standards.
- 10.3 Social worker training is another area of focus for the service. Individual performance plans will continue to support staff to complete all mandatory training and to ensure that we have suitably qualified workforce to meet the needs of our fostering families, children and young people.
- 10.4 Social work visits to foster carers are currently 70.97%, this is below our target of 80%. This has been impacted due to staff illness and recruitment. We now have a system in place to ensure that foster carers receive a visit and support from someone in the team that they know to increase and maintain our visiting patterns and support we provide our carers. The service manager provides a weekly report to the head of service so that we can identify where the areas of support need are and as a team can respond.
- 10.5 Foster carer diaries are completed on a weekly basis by carers to provide a narrative of a day in the life of a child living within their family. This helps provide a narrative of their journey, celebrations and identifies any worries or concerns. This is also a point of reflection between the foster carer and their supervising social workers. Through performance monitoring it is recognised these are not being signed off as read in a timely manner. Further service performance monitoring is in place along with individual staff support plans to ensure this area and the focus of our work is compliant and sustained moving forward.
- 10.6 Fostering households are reviewed in case supervision every 8 weeks. Supervision timeliness as of the 31 March 2025 was 82.2%, an increase from 64.8 % the previous month. This continues to be an area of senior

management oversight and focus, ensuring that the timeliness and quality of the recording of supervision is maintained and reflective discussions we know are taking place are evidenced.

11. Complaints and Allegations

11.1 The Fostering Service always takes complaints and allegations against foster carers very seriously and allegations are thoroughly investigated. Wherever possible we will attempt to resolve complaints informally, but these can be escalated should the complainant remain dissatisfied.

11.2 All Allegations against foster carers are referred to the LADO. The Local Authority Designated Officer role is to ensure that concerns are handled fairly, promptly and confidentially, whilst protecting both the child and the individual.

11.3 Allegations

During this reporting period there were 14 referrals to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) concerning foster carers. 5 of these allegations were raised by 5 children and 9 were from other sources.

Emotional harm	5
Physical harm	4
Transferable risk	3
Neglectful care	1
Sexual harm	1

11.4 Of the 14 referrals to LADO:

- 9 had no further action- the standards of care process were followed with additional training and development identified to ensure the foster carers were able to continue their fostering journey evidencing they were able to meet fostering standards.
- 3 were referred to the fostering panel- Of these 2 were deregistered and one with training recommended.
- 2 were referred to Disclosure and Barring Service with 2 deregistered.

11.5 There is a separate LADO annual report provided to the Corporate Parenting Board which provides further details of the role, activity and outcomes over the last 12 months.

11.6 Complaints

Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 there were 11 complaints about the fostering service, of which 5 were upheld. This is a reduction in overall complaints received by 1, and an increase in complaints upheld by 3 compared to the previous year

- 11.7 4 complaints were made by foster carers
3 complaints were made by 'others'.
2 complaints were direct from a child, the matter was informally investigated and resolved.
2 complaints were children and young people's parents.
- 11.8 The focus of the Fostering Service in response to complaints made is to build rapport and repair 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.
- 11.9 The annual report provided by the complaints service will provide further detail of learning and changes implemented.

12. Foster Carer Training

- 12.1 Foster carers have access to a comprehensive learning and development offer through the Foster Carers Training Handbook. We are able to offer a variety of online and in person training. We have worked collaboratively with the learning and development team to provide flexibility to timings and delivery methods to ensure training available to our carers is maximised.
- 12.2 Training is monitored in several ways, this included data collected by our learning and development team, as well as supervision records, training plan and through foster carer reviews. This ensures mandatory training attendance is tracked, reviewed and recorded regularly and then considered through team performance compliance by team managers and senior leadership oversight.
- 12.3 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.
- 12.4 The development of the 'Fostering Together' portal allows foster carers to have their own Dorset Council e-mail address increasing opportunities to access the tools and resources available through Research in Practice.
- 12.5 Our foster carers have been part of the working group undertaking a review of training. The focus has been to develop the service further in

- respect of being therapeutically based to ensure we meet the training needs of our carers in conjunction with health partners to provide a proactive and resilient service.
- 12.6 This year has seen the rollout of Dorset Council laptops to foster carers, Kinship carers and supported lodgings carers, to enable consistency in accessing training platforms.
- 12.7 Mockingbird
The standout achievement of the fostering service continues to be the launch of Mockingbird and its progression to business as usual.
- 12.8 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 instability, which increases protective factors around the children, young people and their foster families.
- 12.9 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 the children of foster carers.
- 12.10 Across the 5 launched constellations we have 57 children being supported, with support from known carers that replicates that of an extended family.
- 12.11 Mockingbird constellations have not increased in numbers this year due to, 1 hub home resigning from their role due to personal circumstances changing, but remaining an approved foster carer, and 1 service led hub home carer not progressing to launch and their personal circumstances changed, they also have remained as an approved foster carer. The service ambition for the next 12 months is to launch a further 3 Mockingbird constellations, this remains aligned to the 5-year plan to launch 10 constellations.
- 12.12 We have started to explore how we can replicate the model to develop emergency fostering hubs and considering how we quickly target advertising and accessibility to the right audience.
- 12.13 Supported Lodgings Service
The Dorset Supported Lodgings Service ensures young people (16-25 years) who are care-experienced are provided with a stable home and receive high quality support and guidance to build on their life skills and prepare them for adulthood.

- 12.14 Supported Lodging arrangements offers a “step-down” from foster care for those young people who are not ready for living on their own. Carers step into a young person’s life at this important time to offer support, guidance, care and offer their home to the young person.
- 12.15 The supported lodgings service currently has 18 providers, with 2 new households under assessment. 22 of Dorset’s young people live in our supported lodgings provision. We are ambitious and committed to increase our supported lodging homes by 10 over the next 12 months.
- 12.16 Our supported lodging carers have support from the dedicated co-ordinator and access to training and support that reflects that available for foster carers. We continue to ensure that our supported lodgings carers have a sense of belonging within our fostering community and are provided with the same service and learning opportunities to promote their professional development.
- 12.17 It is recognised supported lodgings providers require oversight of attending panel. Whilst there is no requirement through regulations and standards, Dorset Council have aligned the service with Fostering best practice.
- 12.18 Dorset Council’s Supported Lodgings Service is now being regulated by Ofsted, to ensure there is explicit oversight to help make sure young people are safe, secure and living in appropriate accommodation which meets their needs.
- 12.09 Regulations are now applicable to all Local Authorities who are providing a Supported Lodgings Service in the hope of providing a consistent service that follows best practice and promotes positive outcomes into adulthood.

13. Budget

- 13.1 The 2024/25 budget for Inhouse Fostering Placements totalled £5,346,100. This funded an average of 210 placements per week. The 2024/25 expenditure totalled £4,928,341, funding an average of 191 placements per week, meaning that this area of spend was under budget. However, the number of IFA foster homes remains high and an area of budget pressure.
- 13.2 The overall average cost of an inhouse foster home was £496 per week, compared to the overall average of an independent Fostering Agency (IFA) at a cost of £1,202 per week.

- 13.3 It is anticipated that usage of in-house provision will increase going forward through the recruitment of foster carers through the Southwest hub, our priority for targeted recruitment and continued growth of Mockingbird constellations.
- 13.4 Through increasing our in-house sufficiency, we will reduce the reliance on IFA and higher cost homes for our children and young people.

14. Service Developments for 2025 - 2026

Our vision for the next 12 months is to:

- 14.1 Strengthen Foster Carer Recruitment.** To increase the number of foster carers who can provide safe and stable homes to our children and young people. We have identified the need to increase capacity for parent child foster homes, families for teenagers and capacity for offering emergency support and homes.
- 14.2 Develop and embed our Kinship care service.** Dorset now has a specialist Kinship Service. We need to embed the fostering single assessment to reduce duplication of work, information sharing and the need for the persons journey to be told multiple times throughout various assessments from viability stage through to approval or Orders being granted. Alongside assessments we will need to seek feedback from our Kinship carers to understand their lived experiences, identified need and develop support services to meet these needs. We will need to co-ordinate the Adoption Support & Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) to enable children and young people to access therapeutic support.
- 14.3 Increase the number of supported lodgings and staying put arrangements for our care leavers.** We have submitted our Ofsted registration and are anticipating approval within the next few months. Increasing staying put arrangements will aim to reduce the current high cost of staying put fees paid to IFAs. The oversight of the resource panel has helped to strengthen this area of our work but needs further attention from the fostering team.
- 14.4 Compliance.** Fostering reviews, visits, staff training, foster carer diary sheets completion and staff supervision are key areas of our work that need strengthening and continued improvement. This ensures that we are adhering to regulations, statutory requirements and our standards of practice and care. This in turn minimizes risks and supports both our

workforce and foster carers to continue to work with our most vulnerable children and young people.

15. 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.

16. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications

There are no environmental factors to consider other than foster and kinship carers living out of the area. Fostering social workers meet with foster carers face to face requiring at times long travel times.

We as a service try reducing our carbon footprint by using trains and allocating fostering families local to each other, reducing the number of separate journeys undertaken.

17. Well-being and Health Implications

Having a sufficiency of foster carers to provide well matched, stable, 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 provide a home for children and young people within Dorset to maintain relationships important to them and support links local to their families and known environment.

Providing an excellent fostering service with a sound ethos and model for nurturing relationships for our children and young people, that has the required investment, provides stability and the potential of positively impacting good health outcomes for children and young people. It is important to highlight – we are an essential and invaluable service within the children's directorate.

18. Other Implications

None Identified

19. Risk Assessment

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

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

20. Equalities Impact Assessment

Not applicable

21. Appendices

None

22. Background Papers

None

23. Report Sign off

This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)

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Title of Report

Fostering Service Annual Report

Who Wrote the Report

Lisa Wilms, Acting Service Manager

Date Written

April 2025

Summary of What the Report is About

This report talks about how the fostering service in Dorset helped children and young people in the past year. It explains what the service did, how it improved, and what plans it has for the future.

What are the Key Messages of This Report

- The fostering service has grown and improved.
- More children are living with foster families.
- The service is working hard to support foster carers.
- There are new programs to help children stay with their relatives.
- The service wants to keep getting better and help more children.

Important Facts and Figures

- **188** foster families in Dorset.
- **192** children living with foster families.
- **56** people asked about fostering, and **17** new foster families were approved.
- **22** new kinship carers (relatives who take care of children).
- **435** children in Dorset's care.
- **69.9%** of these children are with foster families.

Actions or Recommendations

- Keep supporting foster carers with training and help.
- Recruit more foster families.
- Help children stay with their relatives when possible.
- Improve the service to make sure children are happy and safe.

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Corporate Parenting Board 28 May 2025 Fostering Panel Chair's Report

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member and Portfolio:

Cllr C Sutton, Children's Services, Education & Skills

Local Councillor(s):**Executive Director:**

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

Report Author: Lianne Chorley

Job Title: Fostering Panel Independent Chair

Tel: 01305 228382

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Report Status: Public [Choose an item.](#)

Brief Summary:

This report provides detail of Fostering Panel activity over the last financial year. There have been noticeable changes in panel processes and where there is more to do, this is being progressed through feedback to the service. There is a working relationship between Dorset Fostering Panel and Fostering Service. This report highlights a number of areas of progress and developing strengths.

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. Introduction

1.1. This report covers the year from 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025. This has been a quieter year than previous year, with 28 panels having been held, hearing a total of 103 cases. We have noted several areas of progress:

- Annual appraisals completed – generally positive feedback from members with regards to their experience of being members of Dorset Council Fostering Panel
- Panel members have maintained a trauma informed, strength-based approach with their questions.
- Compliance with regulations, policy, standards and best practice remains a notable strength
- A learning circle in February 2025 – this was beneficial to all involved in a challenging case.
- Panel Chair met with Ofsted in March 2025 as part of the ILACS- this was a positive experience.
- Increase in children's social workers attending panel, this is positive as they strengthen the voice of the child
- Panel remains committed to ensuring that the child remains central to all recommendations and advice to agency

2. Panel Meetings and membership

2.1. The Fostering Panel meets 2/3 times a month, on the first and third Wednesday and an additional booked Tuesday in known busy months retaining the availability to add or cancel panels if so, required in agreement with the Panel Chair.

28 panel meetings were held over the reporting period. In total 103 cases were presented including 8-week extensions, stage 2 approvals, connected person assessment and reviews.

This averaged 3.7 cases per panel.

2.2. There have been 3 panel members resigning during the reporting period, due to progression and personal circumstances. When ending this reporting period there were 13 Panel Members on the central list.

2.3. Of the 28 fostering panels held during the reporting period, 11 (39.29%) were chaired by Vice Chairs. While 2 of these occasions were planned development observations—aligned with best practice guidance of one

observation per Vice Chair per annum—and 2 were due to prior apologies from the Panel Chair.

- 2.4. 7 panels were chaired by Vice Chairs at the direction of the Head of Service (Oct 24-Feb25).
- 2.5. In 2025/26 we hope to see an expansion of the central list members which currently sits at 13 members including the appointed Panel Chair. Whilst there is an undoubtable wealth of experience and professional knowledge held by current panel members, we will be looking to strengthen social work members and a replacement Vice Chair.
- 2.6. Meetings are face-to-face and facilitate a hybrid approach to allow for both in-person and virtual (in exceptional circumstances with prior agreement) attendance to enable full participation. The service aim is for all panels to be held face to face. We need to develop clear guidance as to what is deemed as exceptional circumstance and requires a hybrid panel. This will provide consistency, equity and transparency and is a priority for the coming year.
- 2.7. The panel continues to be open to children and young people attending connected carer approvals and appropriate portions of mainstream reviews. The panel are keen to hear their voice and be involved in conversation about their lives. This is an area we need to develop further in collaboration with the fostering and childcare teams.
- 2.8. A new Panel Advisor was appointed to the Panel in February 2025. The panel members were disappointed to lose their predecessor, but confident that a positive and productive working relationship can be built moving forwards to ensure a professional transition.

3. Training, Development and Appraisals

- 3.1. Dorset has made a commitment to provide 2 training opportunities to panel a year, with the minimum requirement being 1.
- 3.2. There has been continued investment in panel members knowledge with regards to key updates to legislation, practice and performance. This has included:
 - June 2024: Panel Chair attended Reimagining Fostering and Kinship Care Workshop

- July 2024: Panel training facilitated by Panel Advisor – multiple topics including LADO's
- July 2024: Introduction of reflective sessions prior to panel meetings
- January 2025: Kinship Care event, facilitated by Panel Advisor
- February 2025: Learning Circle with Panel Chair, Senior Management and professionals involved in a previously sensitive and challenging case
- February 2025: Panel Chair and Vice Chair attended Reimagining Fostering and Kinship Care Workshop
- March 2025: ILACS short inspection: meeting with Fostering Panel Chair. Very positive verbal feedback given with regards to the Panel Chair, level of scrutiny and challenge, questions asked and minutes.

3.3. In addition to this panel members are encouraged to complete their mandatory training – this includes:

- TEAMS
- Safeguarding and Child Protection
- Equality and Diversity
- Health and Safety
- NEW Safeguarding Adults
- Prevent
- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
- Data Protection Modules (to be completed on Day 1 in post)

3.4. During this reporting period we have started to have reflective sessions. This is protected time for panel to discuss and share key updates and learning in a timely manner. Panel Members enjoy these sessions and find them useful.

4. Panel Activity

	total by case type	positive recommendation	negative recommendation	Deferred
New Mainstream – approval	17	16	0	1
New Connected persons – approval	20	20	0	N/A

Reg 25 (8 week extension request)	15	14	0	1 x No recommendation
Reviews after allegation	8	6	2	N/A
1st year review - Mainstream	7	7	0	N/A
1st Review – connected person	4	3	0	1
3 year review - Mainstream	13	13	0	N/A
3 year review – connected person	3	3	0	
Change of status	10	9	0	1 x No recommendation
Resignations to panel	3	3	0	N/A
De-registration	3	3	0	N/A
Total to panel	103	97	2	2 x deferred 2 x no recommendation
ADM requested early return to panel	2 (1x Reg 25) (1 x CP approval)			

Fig.1.

Year	Total new Applications	Mainstream Carers	Connected Carers
2024/25	37	17	20
2023/24	46	15	31
2022/23	35	12	23

Fig.2.

- 4.1. In comparison to the 2023/24 we have seen a decrease in the number of new applications. Mainstream approvals increasing to 17 from 15 and the number of connected carers applications reducing from 31 to 20.
- 4.2. The number of resignations reduced from 33 to 6 in 2023/24 and reduced further to 3 In 2024/25 alongside 3 deregistration's. This appears to be a result of resignations not being reported to panel, this has been picked up by senior management moving forwards an increase is expected to be evidenced.
- 4.3. Performance in timely reviews is identified as an area where continued work and progress is required. Panel were advised that a new review policy had been agreed and implemented October 2024. The new review policy and procedure is in place to ensure timely reviews and a streamline of the review process. This does have an impact in terms of panel oversight and scrutiny as 3-year reviews, reviews after any allegation and changes of approval (post initial review) will no longer be presented to Panel.
- 4.4. It has been noted by Senior Management that panel should be receiving resignation reports, notifications of changes to terms and exemptions to usual fostering limits and any requests outside carers usual terms. I am hopeful this will happen within the next reporting period.

5. Strengthening opportunities identified in previous reports

- 5.1. Pre-panel preparation sheets are completed jointly in Teams and submitted to the Chair in advance of panel to ensure compliance with regulations and remit of Panel. This is shared on the morning of panel with those attending as a live draft working document. These have been a great success and have had the additional benefit of supporting with minutes. We are working to ensure this is now embedded in practice and becomes business as usual for panel members.

- 5.2. Independent QA feedback sheets continue to be completed independently and are shared appropriately via panel advisor with team managers, ADM (Agency Decision Maker) and fostering services managers. These highlight attendees' presentation as well as quality of reports. These identify strengths in practice and areas to strengthen if needed. We plan to review and update the feedback sheets to reflect recent policy changes.
- 5.3. Minutes are now reaching panel members within 48 hours. They are finalised by Panel Chair and with Agency Decision Maker (ADM) generally within 7 days of panel. This has a positive impact for all awaiting ADM decisions.

6. Themes and Observations

- 6.1. It has been noted that there continues to be delays in the presentation of reviews post allegation or standards of care, and this has been highlighted by the Panel Chair to the service. It is recognised that when this happens this has an impact on the foster carers particularly if a significant number of months have passed before getting to panel.
- 6.2. Panel remain determined that all standard of care concerns and allegations should be presented to panel without delay, to ensure that the focus remains on the child and the care they are receiving. This is being addressed, with the service managing this, alongside the need to prioritise current reviews.
- 6.3. There are still some delays in getting all the required paperwork to panel within the agreed timeframes. This has an impact on the timings of the agenda and compliance with policy and fostering standards (5 working days minimum to review all information). It is hoped that now there is a new policy and review paperwork this area of performance should start to strengthen.
- 6.4. It is noted that timely initial reviews are needed. The impact being unlawful placements if not presented to Panel in the first 12 months of approval. Panel are aware of the changes to the review process and the current senior management oversight and are confident that initial reviews will be conducted within timescales over the next 12 months.
- 6.5. During the reporting period 2024/2025 it was noted that there was a reduction in differing ADM decisions.
- 6.6. The Chair and Vice Chairs remain confident and sure in panel's recommendation making processes and their reasoning, but understand the final decision is with the ADM.

- 6.7. In the previous reporting period, the Panel Chair had requested a review of the approval of a connected carer who was subsequently de-registered following a substantiated LADO investigation and involvement in any learning circles that arise from this case. This took place in February 2025 & evidence openness for challenge and learning. There is a commitment for any learning to be fed back to Panel. This was beneficial to all in attendance. I would support the utilisation of learning circles moving forwards.
- 6.8. It had been noted in 2023/24 that there were regular occasions when addendums and additional reports are being added to or sent to panel members after the packs have been sent, this remains the case in this reporting period.
- 6.9. This has been raised with senior management as it has impacted on the reading time, pre panel preparation for panel members and the agenda timings. This needs improvement as it is not fully compliant with National Minimum Standard 14. There is enhanced oversight and support from panel advisor to track and ensure that all papers are completed and submitted to panel within the required timescales. This has had a positive impact on practice and performance in this area of the last quarter.
- 6.10. On the occasion where a deferral or return to panel has been advised, better tracking is required to ensure a timely return to panel.
- 6.11. Reports that are being presented are generally good to excellent.
- 6.12. During this reporting period it has been observed that there has been an increase in the need for regulation 25 extension requests. Panel will be conducting a quality assurance exercise to establish any themes at the request of the Head of Service. Evidencing collaborative working.
- 6.13. It has been noticed that there needs to be clearer policies and processes in place for, exemptions to terms/numbers over the usual fostering limit, extensions and changes of approval.
- 6.14. Panel continue to highlight the need for childcare teams to ensure that there is good communication between them and fostering. This ensures that connected carer applications and viability assessments remain within timescales for assessment (16 weeks from the placement of a child). In addition, this will ensure that the Independent QA feedback is utilised more efficiently to serve both teams in getting the feedback they need

- 6.15. Panel remain generally impressed with how well-prepared fostering social workers are to present to Panel, often answering and pre-empting any questions in their opening summary.
- 6.16. It has been noted that the service now encourages 0-18 approval for all fostering applications. Panel remain mindful of regulation 25, their function and responsibilities.

7. Developmental work & future plans

- 7.1. There is a commitment from the panel chair to work with senior managers, developing open and strength-based communication, and feeding back to panel members on this work regularly.
- 7.2. A renewed commitment from Head of Service to ensuring that Panel Chair can fulfil obligations in assisting in developing, promoting and monitoring policies and procedures and high standards of work in fostering services in the agency.
- 7.3. Panel chair appraisal for 2025 is outstanding. This is due to several reasons which include the period of absence of the panel chair as well as a change in Head of Service and management oversight. A date has now been set for this to take place in May 2025.
- 7.4. Panel Profile Sheets 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.
- 7.5. To progress work to establish a Children's Panel, this has not progressed in the reporting period, the Panel Chair remains committed to this project.
- 7.6. Ensure foster carers are welcomed and supported to attend panel and know what to expect. We will be working with our foster carers, social workers and panel to ensure we respond to feedback to make the process friendlier and more inclusive.
- 7.7. Recruitment of additional social work Panel members and a Vice Chair.
- 7.8. Continued conversations and learning regarding differing ADM decisions and other cases which have an impact on Dorsets Young People, looking at the impact for all involved potentially through Learning Circles.
- 7.9. 2 x training days for panel members

- 7.10. To support the embedding of the new Form K – Kinship Carer Assessments
- 7.11. Quality Assurance exercise with regards to Reg 25 Extensions
- 7.12. Continue to develop a relationship with the childcare teams to increase their participation in the Panel process and look at meaningful and effective ways of gathering young people's feedback and potentially attending panel.
- 7.13. Supported Lodgings Carers to join the panel process, this remains the same as 2023/2024 – we are yet to have any supported lodgings carers come to panel. We are aware that Ofsted registration is being progressed.
- 7.14. A commitment to ensuring the voice of the child is the golden thread in all paperwork and panel discussions.

8. User feedback

- 8.1 Business Support are currently emailing for feedback post panel. Written feedback has been received from carers, 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.
- 8.2 Attendees report that they really appreciate the conversations pre and post panel with the Panel Chair, finding the Chair to be helpful, calming, knowledgeable and empathetic.
- 8.3 Social workers are feeling positive about attending Panel. New social workers observing – they have found this opportunity rewarding and appreciated being able to observe the whole process from report to formulation of recommendations and rational.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1. Relationships are being nurtured and generally panel is a positive experience for all who attend. This is a strength-based panel which has high challenge, accompanied by advice and guidance to support, It provides robust and thorough independent overview and scrutiny.

- 9.2. There have been some challenges over the reporting period, I am confident that these can be resolved, with senior management generally keen to work with panel members and chair in the best interest of the children.
- 9.3. In conclusion, I would like to thank those that have consistently worked on 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:

There are no financial implications from this report, and all have been provided within budget of the service.

11. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications:

There are no environmental factors to consider.

12. Well-being and Health Implications

Not applicable

13. Other Implications

Not applicable

14. Risk Assessment

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

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

15. Equalities Impact Assessment

There are no Equality implications for this report

16. Appendices

Not applicable

17. Background Papers

Not applicable

18. Report Sign Off

This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)

Title of Report

Fostering Panel Chair's Report

Who Wrote the Report

Lianne Chorley, Fostering Panel Independent Chair

Date Written

2024-2025

Summary of What the Report is About

This report talks about what the fostering panel did over the past year. It explains how the panel helped children and foster families, what went well, and what needs to be improved.

What are the Key Messages of This Report

- The fostering panel had 28 meetings and looked at 103 cases.
- The panel is working hard to make sure children are safe and happy.
- There are plans to make the panel even better next year.
- The panel wants to hear more from children about their experiences.

Important Facts and Figures

- **28** panel meetings held.
- **103** cases reviewed.
- **17** new foster families approved.
- **20** new kinship carers (relatives who take care of children).
- **3** panel members resigned.
- **13** panel members at the end of the year.

Actions or Recommendations

- Keep supporting and training panel members.
- Recruit more social workers and a new Vice Chair for the panel.
- Make the panel process friendlier for foster carers.
- Ensure the voice of the child is heard in all decisions.
- Improve communication between childcare teams and the fostering panel.

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