



Corporate Parenting Board

Date: Thursday, 11 December 2025
Time: 3.00 pm
Venue: Committee Room 2, 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

Chief Executive: Catherine Howe, County Hall, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1XJ

For more information about this agenda please contact Democratic & Governance 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. If you would like to attend this meeting and have any specific requirements please contact the Democratic Services Officer named above.

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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 28 May 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 **8 December 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. CORPORATE PARENTING DATASET

9 - 28

To receive a report from the Corporate Director for Care and Protection.

7. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER'S ANNUAL REPORT

29 - 58

To receive the report from the Quality Assurance Service Manager.

8. ADVOCACY AND INDEPENDENT VISITORS

59 - 84

To receive the report from the Strategic Commissioner

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| 9. | ANNUAL REPORT OF THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL: EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN CARE | 85 - 130 |
| | To receive the report from the Service Manager (Virtual School) Level 2 | |
| 10. | ANNUAL LADO REPORT | 131 - 166 |
| | To receive the report from the Head of Quality Assurance and Partnerships. | |
| 11. | CHILDREN IN CARE AT RISK OF OFFENDING AND CUSTODY | 167 - 176 |
| | To receive the report from the Head of Service, Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service. | |
| 12. | COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS - CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS | 177 - 202 |
| | To receive the report from the Senior Assurance Officer - Complaints | |
| 13. | ANNUAL CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE REPORT 2024/25 | 203 - 216 |
| | To receive the report from the Designated Nurse for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People. | |
| 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 28 May 2026. The next informal meeting will be held on 29 January 2026. | |
| 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 28 MAY 2025

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

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

Paul Dempsey (Executive Director of People - Children), Paula Golding (Corporate Director for Care and Protection), Sunita Khattra-Hall (Corporate Director for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Families), Jane MacLennan, Jo Smark-Richards, Kaye Wright (Youth Voice Manager) and Antony Nash (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

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

Catrina Fountain (Communications Business Partner, Children's)

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed all in attendance with a special mention for the new committee members and thanked the outgoing members for their input over the last year

2. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 April 2025 were confirmed and signed as a correct record of the meeting.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were declarations of interest.

4. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

5. Introduction & recent inspection report

The Executive Director for Children's services described the outcome of the most recent Ofsted report and a specific mention of the role of corporate parenting board in the report.

There was a discussion about the scope for improvement and the need for continued development of areas where needed.

6. Corporate Parenting Dataset

The Corporate Director - Care & Protection described the corporate parenting dataset and the following areas were discussed;

- The completion of Personal education plans and the barriers to their completion
- The educational attendance of Children in care
- The repetition of CIC and repeatedly entering care
- Distance from home as an area of concern and the reasons for children being placed such a distance from their parental home.
- Age tracking on the adoption statistics and sibling groups

7. Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report

The Corporate Director - Care & Protection described the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report

The board discussed;

- the education and work aspirations of care leavers.
- the barriers and reasons for care leavers not engaging in employment or education.
- the addition of unaccompanied asylum seekers and the impact on workloads.

8. Youth Voice Strategy for Care Experienced Children and Young People

The Youth Voice Team Manager introduced the strategy and the Board shared recognition of the “We all bloom differently” work and the potential of repeating it as part of national care leavers month in November. There was also a discussion on language and stigmatisation and what actions were needed manage and improve this issue.

9. Care Leavers Annual Report

The Head of Service - Care Leavers & UASC introduced the item and the areas that are being developed. There was a discussion on the ongoing engagement of formerly cared for children from 21, 25 and beyond.

The value of Children's life stories in shaping services and policy was also recognised.

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

The Head of Service - Care Leavers & UASC set out the report on behalf of Aspire and the key ambitions of Aspire over the coming year.

The board discussed the age and gender of those adopted and the reasons behind the changing demographics. The importance of support for adoptive families and the reduction of funding from central government was also raised.

11. **Fostering Service Annual Report**

The Service Manager – Fostering introduced the report sharing the key points and commitments from the report.

The Board discussed the following areas;

- Allegations and the importance of DBS checks and full vetting of fostering applications.
- Kinship and deregistration's and the mocking bird model in practice.
- Unsuccessful applicants and their next steps if they still wish to be involved in fostering.

12. **Fostering Panel Chair Annual Report**

The Board noted the contents of the report.

13. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Formal Corporate Parenting Board was held on 27 November 2025. The next informal meeting was held on 31 July 2025.

14. **Urgent items**

There were no urgent items.

15. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 3.00 - 4.42 pm

Chair

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Working together | ambitious for **Dorset**

Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

October 2025

Report created by Business Intelligence and Performance | People - Children





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

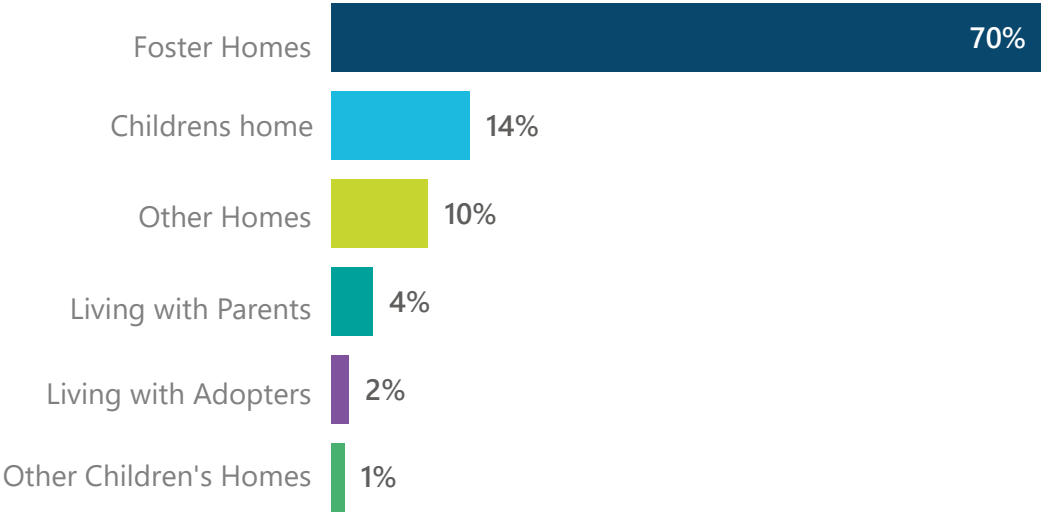
The statistical neighbours recognised for their Good and Outstanding performance include Derbyshire, Essex, Kent, North Yorkshire, Shropshire, Somerset, and Worcestershire. The most recent benchmarking data has been incorporated into this report for your review.



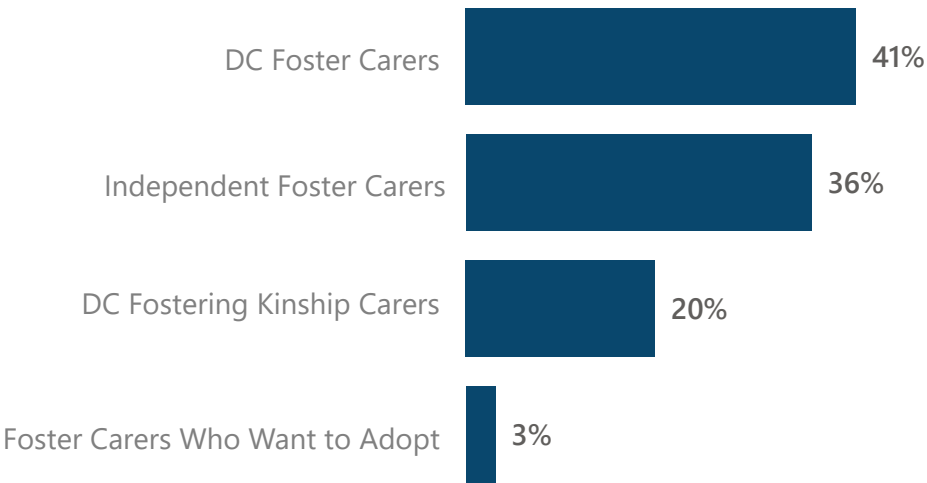
You are currently viewing data for
October 2025

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

Where Children Live



Types of Foster Homes



Children in Our Care

We have **463** children in care (rate of **71** per 10,000), **42** of which are unaccompanied children. Last month we had **471** , (**69**) and **44** respectively.

Adoption and Special Guardianship

In the last 6 months **5** % of children moved to live with adopters and **17** % became settled through Special Guardianship Orders (SGO). Last month this was **8** % and **12** % respectively.

Distance from Family Home

43 % of our children in care live over 20 miles away from home (excluding our unaccompanied children). Last month it was **44** %.

Safe & Stable Home

Of our children in care who have been in care for 2.5 years (aged 16 or under) **73** % have been in their home for 2 years or more. Last month it was **75** %. We have **14** % of our children in care who have had 3 or more homes in the previous 12 months. Last month it was **14** %.

Health

Of our children who have been in care for at least 12 months (aged 4-16), **50** % have had a strengths & difficulties questionnaire completed. Last month this was **48** %. Of our new children in care last month, **45** % 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). **96** % (up to July 2025) of our children in care have had their termly personal education plan completed on time.

Adoption

16 children were adopted in the last 12 months, compared to **22** children in the previous 12 months. The average number of days from the date of the 'Placement Order' to the date the child was matched to prospective adopters was **162** (**162** last month). The average number of days between entering care and moving in with adopted family (adjusted for foster carer adoptions) was **185** (**194** last month).

Care Leavers

We had **1** care leaver(s) (active, aged 16-25 yrs) in B&B accommodation. In the previous month we had **0** . **96** % of our care leavers are living in safe, secure & affordable accommodation (active, 19-21 yrs). Last month this was **97** % . **70** % of our care leavers are in employment, education or training (active, 19-21 yrs). Last month this was **67** % . **94** % of our care leavers with an up to date Pathway Plan at end of month (active, 17-25 yrs). Last month this was **93** % . **96** % of our care leavers are in touch with us (active, 19-21 yrs). Last month this was at **96** % .



Children and Young People Data for October 2025

Number of Children in Care

463

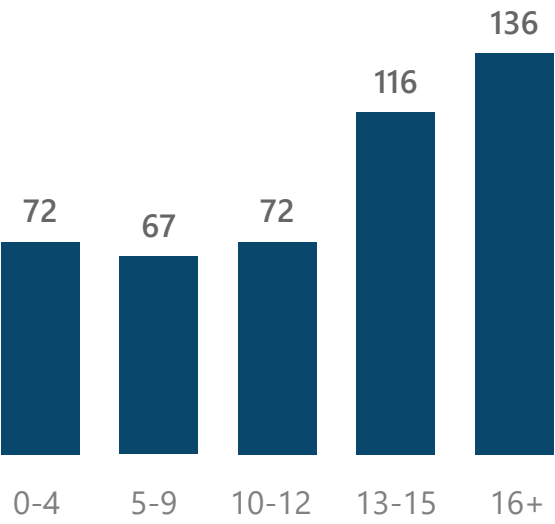
Number of Care Leavers

569

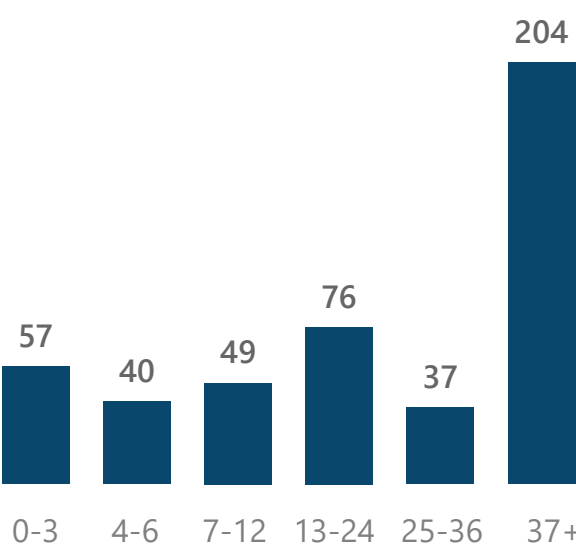
of Those, Number Receiving a Service

318

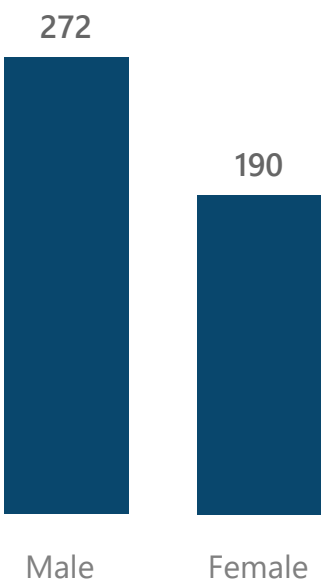
Children in Care (Age)



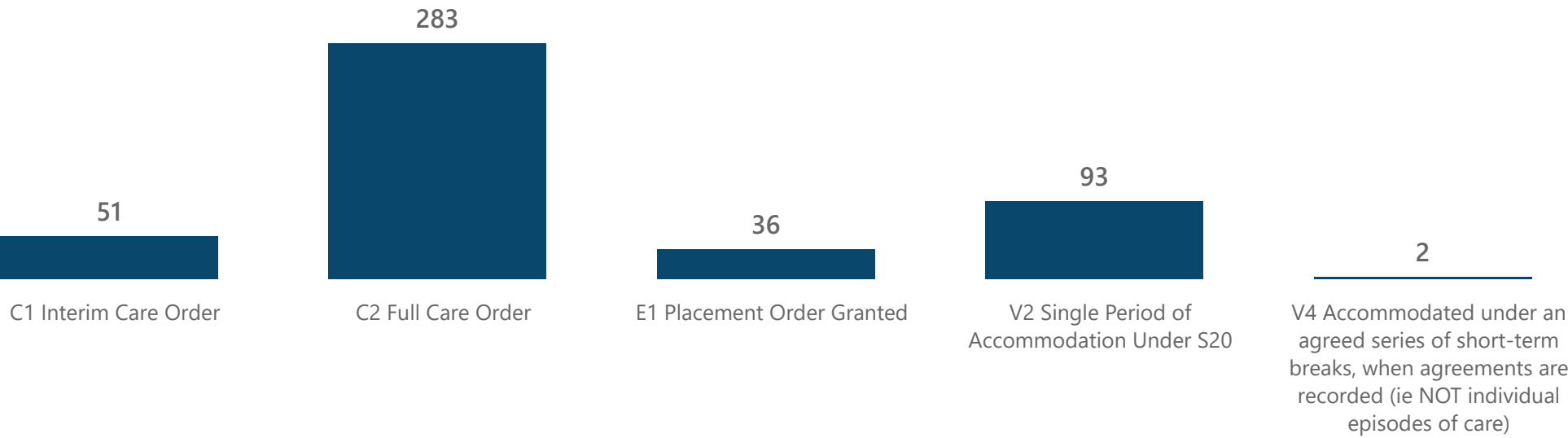
Children in Care (Duration in Months)



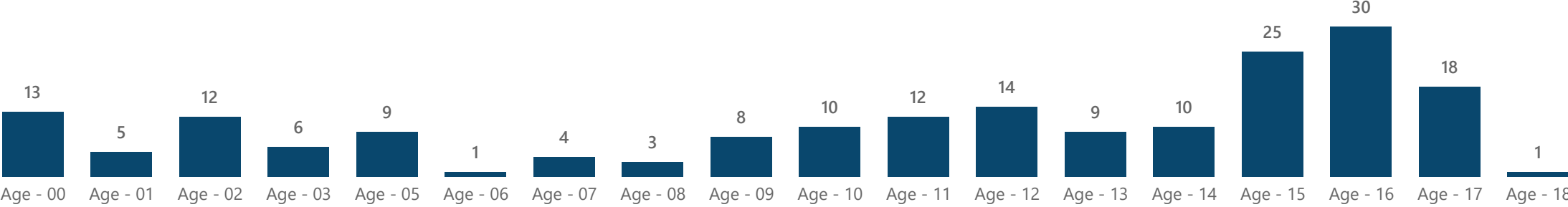
Children in Care (Gender)



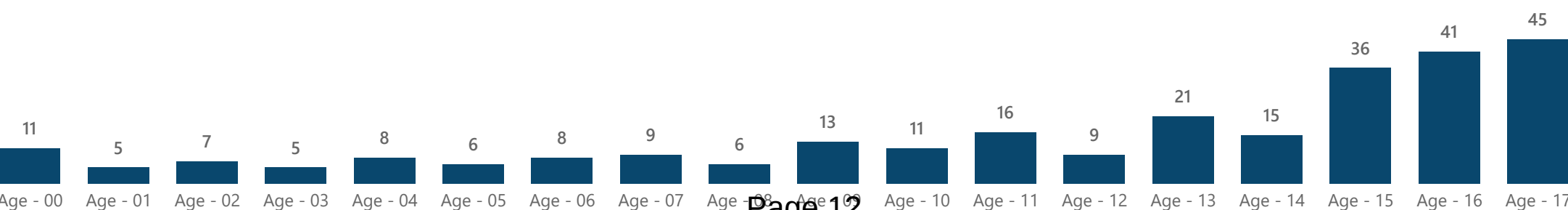
Children in Care by Legal Status (Number)



Children in Care by Gender & Age (Female)



Children in Care by Gender & Age (Male)





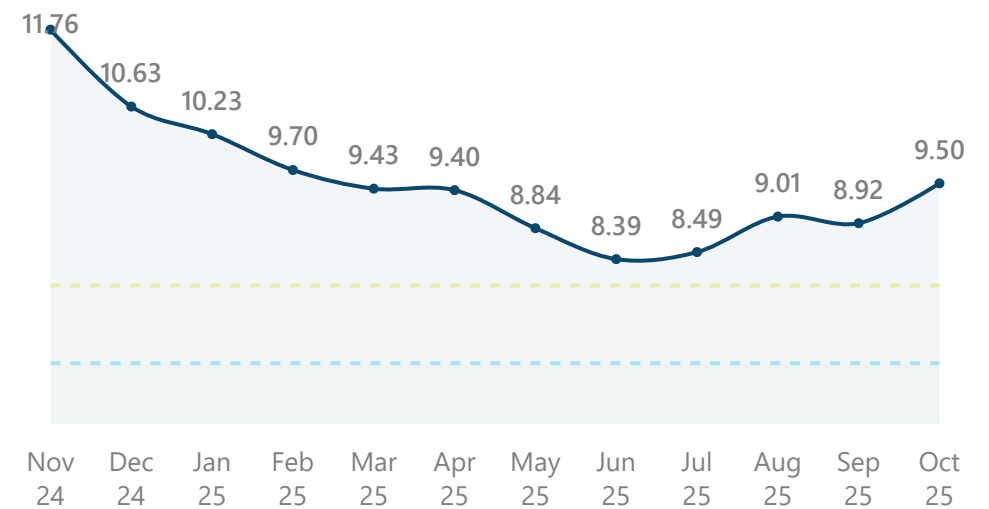
Children and Young People Data for October 2025

Rate of Children in Care at Month-End



Dorset's **target** is **68**. **Good + SN** is **71** and **England** is **70**. The highest recorded rate was **72.25** in Aug 25. The lowest recorded rate was **65.58** in Feb 25.

% of CIC who are UASC



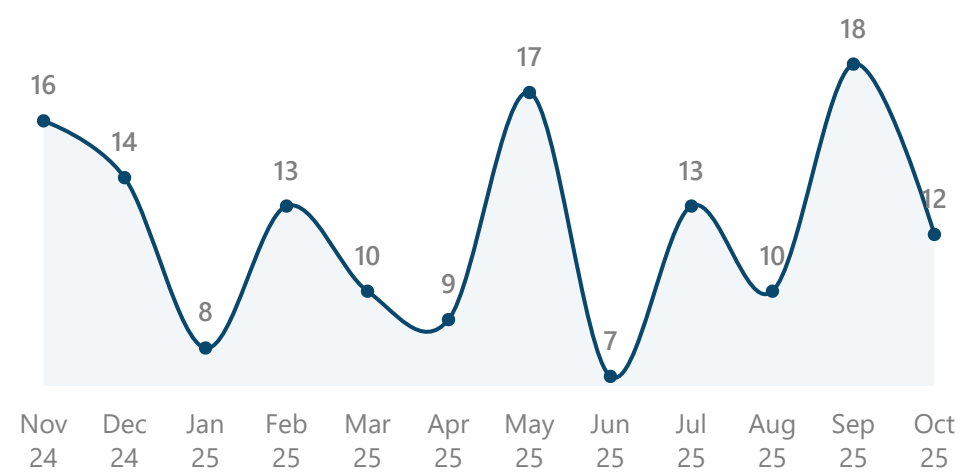
Good + SN is **8.29%** and **England** is **9%**. The highest recorded percentage was **11.76%** in Nov 24. The lowest recorded percentage was **8.39%** in Jun 25.

No. of children who became CIC



In the last 12 months, there have been **8** children who became CIC. The highest number recorded was **31** in Jul 25. The lowest number recorded was **6** in Nov 24 and Feb 25.

No. of children who ceased to be CIC



In the last 12 months, there have been **12** children who ceased to be CIC. The highest number recorded was **18** in Jun 25. The lowest number recorded was **3** in Sep 24.

Commentary

The number of children in care has reduced over the last period to 463. As a result, the rate of children in care at month end has continued to improve to 68.95, returning to a similar rate this time last year (68.91) and better than the National average and good plus statistical neighbours. 8 children entered care in October 2026 with 12 children ceasing to be in care. Children entered care in a considered and planned way with no children being subject to police protection or an emergency protection order. Before moving homes, the children's social worker will have been provided with information about the person who is going to care for the children, so this is shared with them. More children live in steady and settled homes with 72.6% of children who have been in care for 2.5 years or more living in the same home for two or more years. However, we know that there are too many children who have had 3 homes or more in the last year in the previous 12 months and we remain focused on strengthening short term stability.

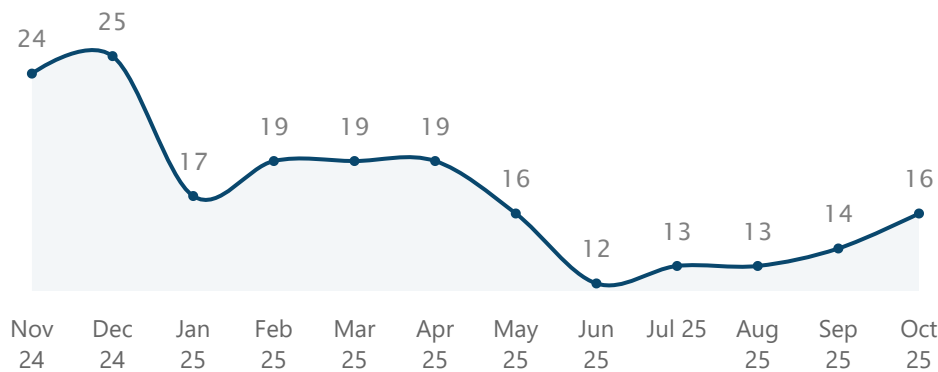
Children & Young Performance Measures & Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng. Avg	Target	Aug 25	Sep 25	Oct 25	D.O.T
Number of Children in Care at Month-End	Low			420.00	477.00	471.00	463.00	✓ Improving
Number of Children in Care who are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children at Month-End	-				43.00	42.00	44.00	
Number of Children who Became Children in Care	Low			10.00	18.00	12.00	8.00	✓ Improving
Number of Children who Became Children in Care (Excluding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children)	Low			10.00	13.00	11.00	4.00	✓ Improving
Number of Children who Ceased to be Children in Care	High			13.00	10.00	18.00	12.00	✗ Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care who are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children	-	6.86	8.00		9.01	8.92	9.50	
Rate of Children in Care at Month-End	Low	66.00	67.00	68.00	72.25	71.34	68.95	✓ Improving
Rate of Children in Care at Month-End (Excluding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children)	Low	61.14	61.76		65.74	64.98	62.40	✓ Improving



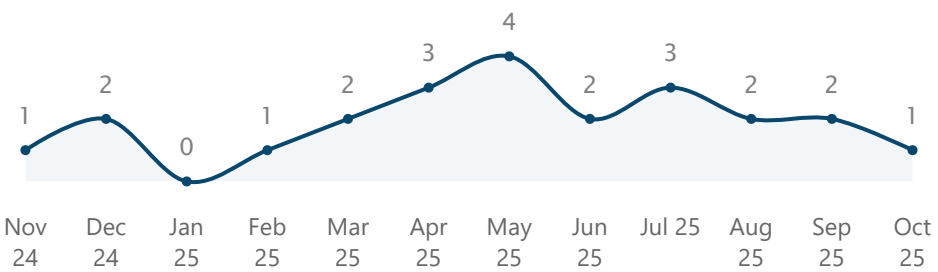
Adoption Data for October 2025

Children adopted in last 12 months



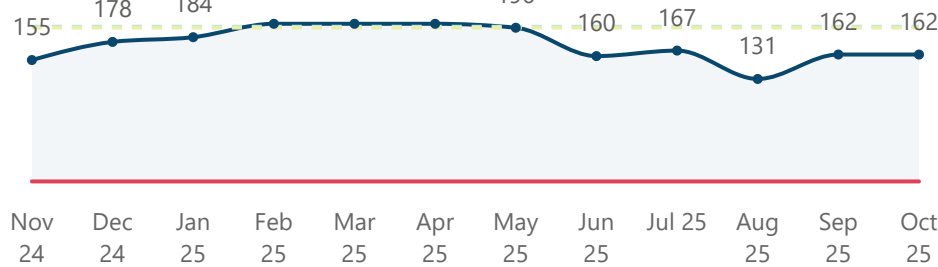
Over the past 12 months, **16** children were adopted - a decrease from **22** adoptions in the previous year.

No. of adoptive families approved (ADM)



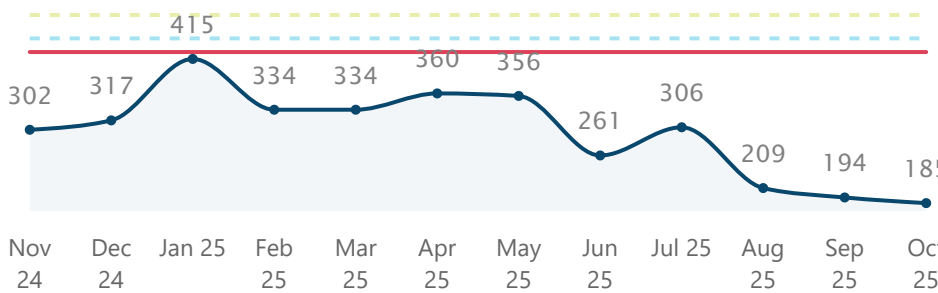
In the last 12 months, there have been a total of **23** adoptive families approved. The highest number approved in a month was **4** (May 25). The lowest number approved in a month was **0** (Jan 25)

The average No. of days from the date of the placement order to the date the child was matched to prospective adopters



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, Mar 25 & Apr 25). The lowest average number of days for Dorset was **131** (Aug 25)

Average No. of days between entering care and moving in with adoptive family for adopted children (adjusted for foster carer adoptions)



Dorset increased it's **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 **415** in Jan 25. The lowest average number of days for Dorset was **185** (Oct 25)

Commentary

Adoption performance shows a mixed picture. The number of children adopted in the last 12 months has increased to 14, showing an improving trend. The average number of days between entering care and moving in with an adoptive family has improved further to 194 days which is significantly below both the national and good+ statistical neighbour averages. The average number of days from placement order to matching has stayed the same and continues to be below the national average. Both of these indicators show that the timeliness of children being placed for adoption has been positive. Aspire are seeing on average around 17 enquiries a month with a recorded 211 across the year to date. The number of adoptive families approved remains low at 2 and is unchanged from last month, this continues to be an area of focus for Aspire. There are 26 assessments in progress (stage 1 and 2 combined) and there have been 18 approvals over the last 12 months. Staff capacity and delays in recruitment have had a direct impact on adopter assessments over the last 6 months. The percentage of children achieving permanence through adoption (rolling 6 months) has dropped to 5% and remains below the national average. Aspire are family finding for 22 children for Dorset. Adoption placement order revocations have improved, with the number and percentage both decreasing. 295 children are receiving support from Aspire through post adoption services as well as supporting 18 adopted adults to access their records. Q2 (July, August, September) saw 79 adoption support and special guardianship fund (ASGF) applications for therapeutic interventions. 13 children are supported with face-to-face family time, and 576 children have letterbox communication with their birth families. Key priorities for Aspire include ongoing tracking meetings to address delays, recruitment efforts for adoptive families, and a focus on early permanence and post-adoption support.

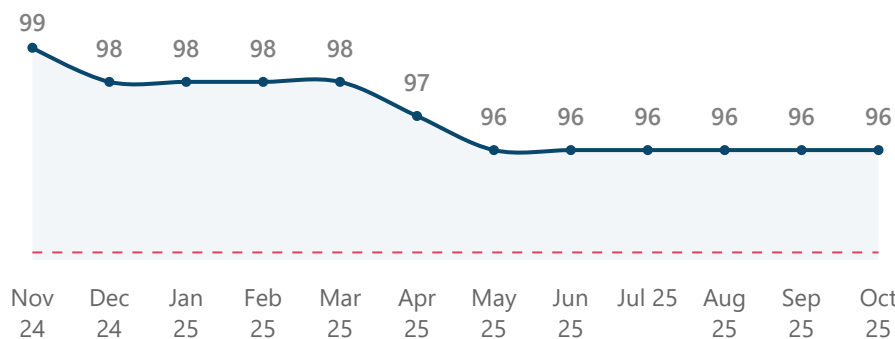
Adoption Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Good + SN	Aug 25	Sep 25	Oct 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	209.00	194.00	185.00	✔ Improving
Children adopted in last 12 months	High					13.00	14.00	16.00	✔ Improving
No. of Adoption placement order revocations over last 12 months	Low					3.00	2.00	2.00	⚠ Same
No. of adoptive families approved (ADM)	High					2.00	2.00	1.00	✖ Worsening
No. of adoptive Families in assessment	High					16.00	8.00	10.00	✔ Improving
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	131.00	162.00	162.00	⚠ Same



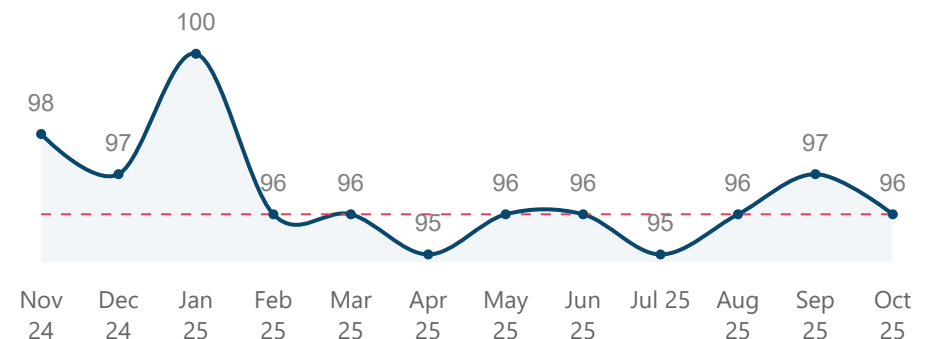
Care Leavers Data for October 2025

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



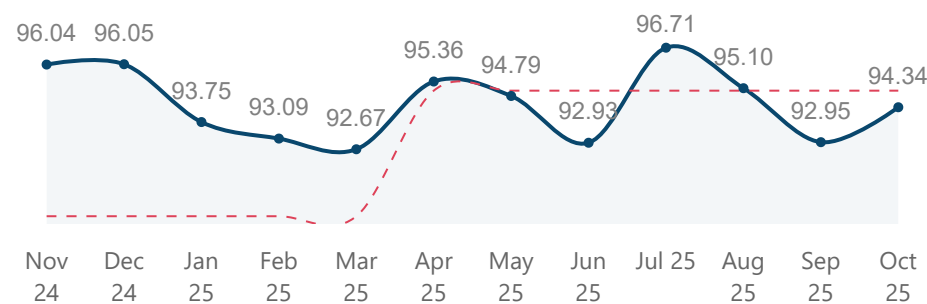
Dorset's **target** is **93%**. In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **99%** (Nov 24). The lowest percentage recorded was **96%** (May 25 through to Oct 25)

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



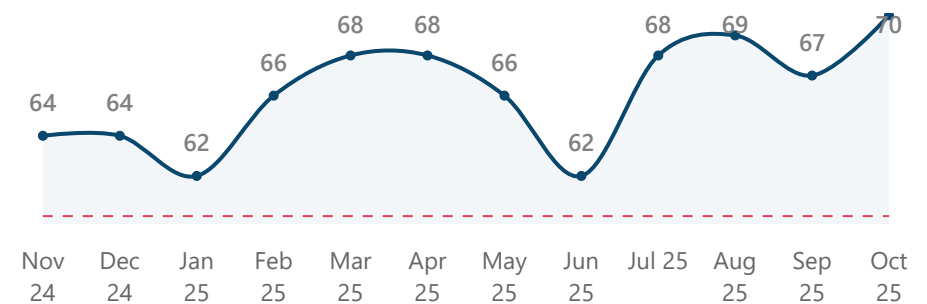
Dorset's **target** is **96%**. In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **100%** (Jan 25). The lowest percentage recorded was **95%** (Apr 25 & Jul 25)

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



Dorset's **target** to Sep 24 it was **95%**. From Oct 24, it was **90%** and from Apr 25 it was back to **95%**. In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **96.71%** (Jul 25). The lowest percentage recorded was **92.67%** (Mar 25)

% 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 **70%** (Oct 25). The lowest percentage recorded was **62%** (Jan 25 & Jun 25)

Commentary

Care Leaver engagement remains high, with 96% in touch, but there is a slight decline in those with up-to-date pathway plans (but still within our target). There are a small number (6 young people) who are currently in unsuitable accommodation or homelessness. 3 in custody serving long sentences, 1 in B&B in Scotland, having left suitable housing, 1 young person remains homeless (suitable housing has been offered) and 1 young person who is staying with friends and we have not been able to check on the suitability of the accommodation and the young person is not wanting at this time to engage or have help finding alternative housing or accommodation. All 6 young people have an allocated PA with high levels of contact, communication and visits being undertaken, there is a professional network of support around them, and efforts are being made to work through the current challenges. There is 4 weekly supervision and service manager oversight and regular planning meetings which include the young person (when possible).

73.27% of care leavers (17-25) are engaged with meaningful education, employment or training (EET), this is above the Council target of 65% and continues to be an area of focus for the service. Supervision has shown an improvement over October (97.44%) which evidences the reflective practice and support to those working directly with our care leavers. As a service we are developing our beyond 25 offer to enable those who want to stay in touch with their PA and/or the care leaver service to be able to and to ensure there is no "cliff edge" at 25.

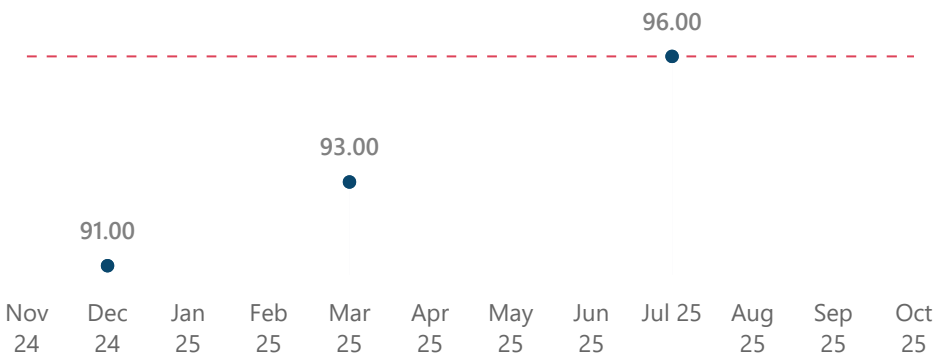
Care Leavers Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Good + SN	Aug 25	Sep 25	Oct 25	D.O.T
% Care Leavers aged 19-21 in EET (OC3)	High	54.00	54.00		54.00		50.00		
% Care Leavers who are in Employment Education or Training (Active aged 17-18)	High			60.00		77.00	76.00	73.00	⊗ Worsening
% Care Leavers who are in Employment Education or Training (Active aged 19-21)	High			60.00		69.00	67.00	70.00	⊙ Improving
% Care Leavers who are in touch with Dorset Local Authority (Active aged 19-21)	High			93.00		96.00	96.00	96.00	⚠ Same
% Care Leavers who are living in suitable accommodation (Active aged 19-21)	High			96.00		96.00	97.00	96.00	⊗ Worsening
% Care Leavers with an up to date pathway plan at end of month (Active aged 17-25)	High			95.00		95.10	92.95	94.34	⊙ Improving
No. of Care Leavers (Active aged 17-25) in Bed and Breakfast accommodation	Low			0.00		0.00	0.00	1.00	⊗ Worsening
No. of Care Leavers (Active aged 17-25) in unsuitable accommodation at end of month	Low			11.00		4.00	5.00	7.00	⊗ Worsening
No. of health passports completed (2 months in arrears)	-					2.00	4.00		
No. of Health passports due within the month (2 months in arrears)	-					2.00	4.00		



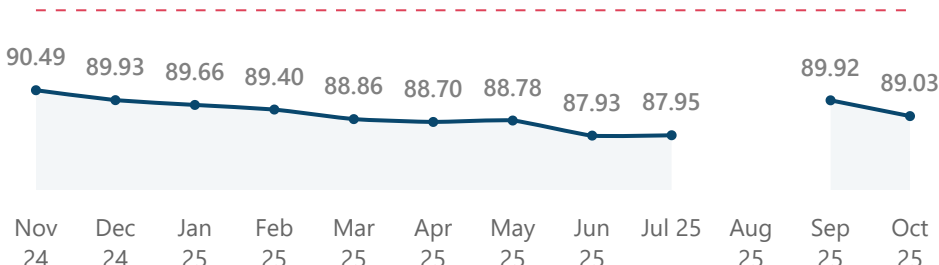
Educational Data for October 2025

% of CIC with a termly PEP completed on time



Dorset's **target** is **96%**. In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **96%** (Jul 25). The lowest percentage recorded was **91%** (Dec 24)

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



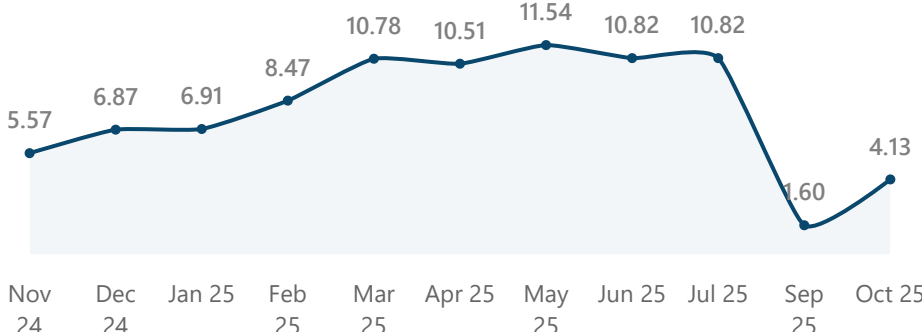
Dorset's **target** is **95%**. In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **90.49%** (Nov 24). The lowest percentage recorded was **87.93%** (Jun 25)

% CIC with an Education Health and Care Plan



In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **39.66%** (Oct 25). The lowest percentage recorded was **35.55%** (Dec 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 **11.54%** (Jun 25). The lowest percentage recorded was **1.60%** (Sep 25)

Education

At the end of October, attendance for the Virtual School stands at 89.03% and is at similar levels to this point last year. Attendance for all year groups is over 90% attendance with the exception of year 9 (86%), 10 (82%) and 11 (81%). These children are being scrutinised by the bi-monthly Inclusion Board or Monthly Pupil Progress Board to understand the barriers and support their education. Fortnightly monitoring of attendance is undertaken by specialist teacher and VSLs to analyse barriers to attendance and strategies that can be implemented by settings. Unauthorised absence stands at 2.87% for the year to date and this is lower than this point last year. All children with unauthorised marks above 20% are monitored via the Inclusion Monitoring Board and plans are in place to support reintegration back into school and unpicking of barriers. This amounted to 50 children in the month with 24 of the children in KS4. Virtual School Leads have been tasked with speaking to teams around the child to clarify unauthorised marks. A piece of work is being undertaken to explore the reasons for Monday unauthorised absence with the team. There has been a reduction in suspensions this year with thirteen children having at least one suspension. The Service Manager (Virtual School) and two specialist teachers have engaged in meetings for 10 of the 13 children suspended as there are wider concerns around education for these young people. A smaller number of children are using reduced timetables this year (4 children) compared to the previous year (6 children). All children are monitored fortnightly on Inclusion Board. Children use reduced timetables for a period of time to transition to full time education with fortnightly meetings for each child to ensure progress is monitored. Work has been undertaken to ensure that our Post 16 young people are engaged with education, employment and training including an increase in the number of young people on ESOL programmes of study and apprenticeship programmes (77.04% of young people are EET)

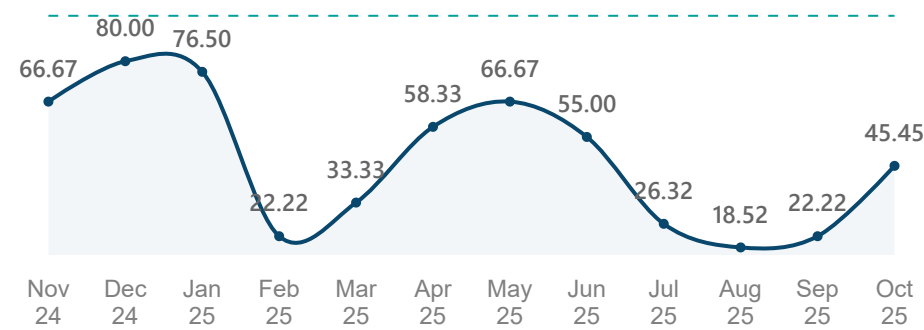
Education Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Good + SN	Aug 25	Sep 25	Oct 25	D.O.T
Average Attendance Percentage for School-Aged Children in Care (Academic Year to Date)	High			95.00			89.92	89.03	⊗ Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care and Care Leavers Who Are EET (16 to 18 Year Olds - Year 12 & Year 13)	High			72.00			77.78	77.04	⊗ Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care and Care Leavers Who Are NEET (16 to 18 Year Olds - Year 12 & Year 13)	Low			28.00			22.22	22.96	⊗ Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care with a Termly PEP Completed on Time	High			96.00					
Percentage of Children in Care with an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP)	-						37.10	39.66	
Percentage of Children with a PEP Within 20 Days of Entering Care	High			100.00					
Percentage of School-Aged Children in Care Who Have Had at Least One Suspension in the Current Academic Year	Low						1.60	4.13	Worsening



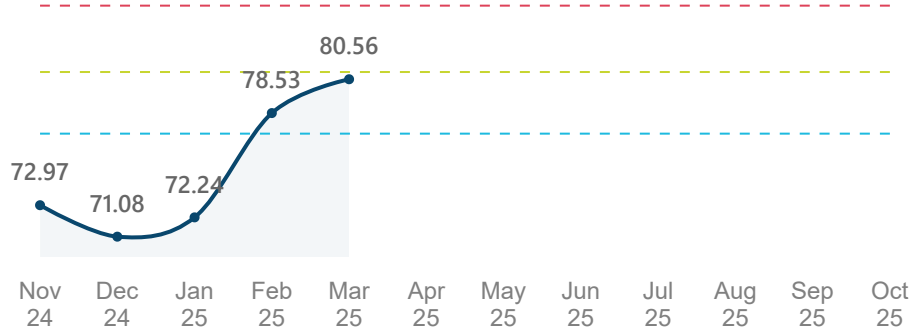
Health and Emotional Wellbeing Data for October 2025

% of New CIC (in previous month) receiving their IHA within 20 days



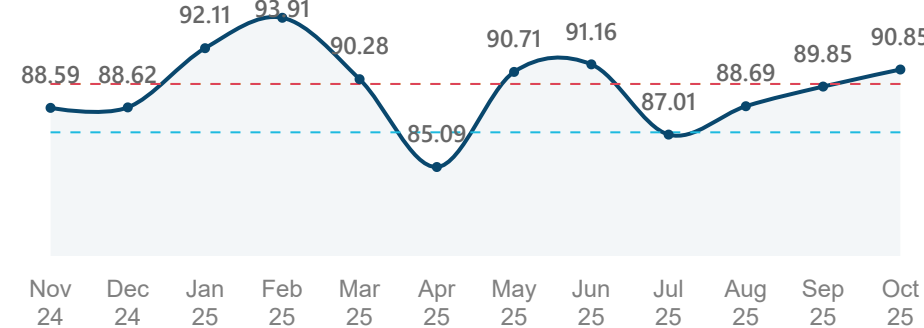
Dorset's **target** is **95%**. The highest recorded percentage was **80%** (Dec 24). The lowest recorded percentage was **22.22%** (Feb 25 & Sep 25)

% CIC in care 12 months or more who have had a dental check within 12 months



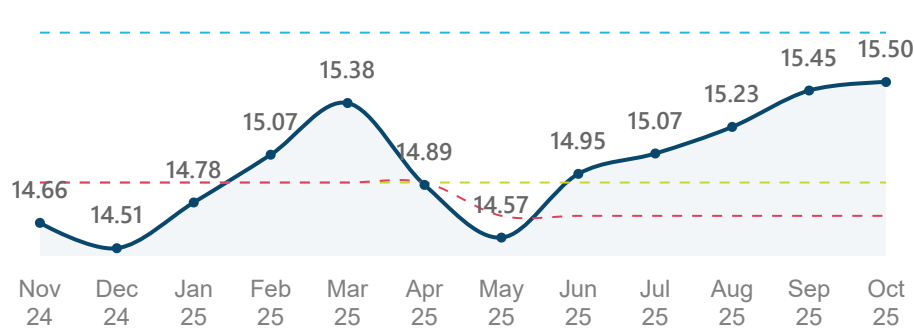
Dorset's **target** is 85%. **Good + SN** is **77.43%** and **England** is **79%**. The highest recorded percentage was **80.56%** (Mar 25). The lowest recorded percentage was **71.08%** (Dec 24)

% CIC for 12 months or more with Annual Health Assessment completed on time



Dorset's **target** is **90%**. **Good + SN** is **84.86%** and **England** is **89%**. The highest percentage recorded was **93.91%** (Feb 25). The lowest percentage recorded was **85.09%** (Apr 25)

Average SDQ score for CIC who have been in care for more than 12 months (age 4 to 16)



Dorset's **target** is **14.9**. **Good + SN** is **15.39** and **England** is **14.7**. The highest average SDQ score recorded was **15.50** (Oct 25). The lowest average SDQ score recorded was **14.51** (Dec 24)

Health & Emotional Wellbeing

While it is reported that 45.45 % of new children in care received their IHA within 20 days, the accurate figure is 54.5%. The % reflects the % of IHA's completed with returned reports that have been recorded on Mosaic and there are occasions when more assessments have been completed on time but reports have not yet been added to Mosaic. There were 11 children in this cohort of which 6 had their Initial Health Assessment within 20 days. Of the 5 children remaining, delay was as a result of delayed consent being received from the social worker. All children now have appointments booked. We continue to work with colleagues in locality and fostering to reiterate the importance of attending IHA appointments within statutory time frames.

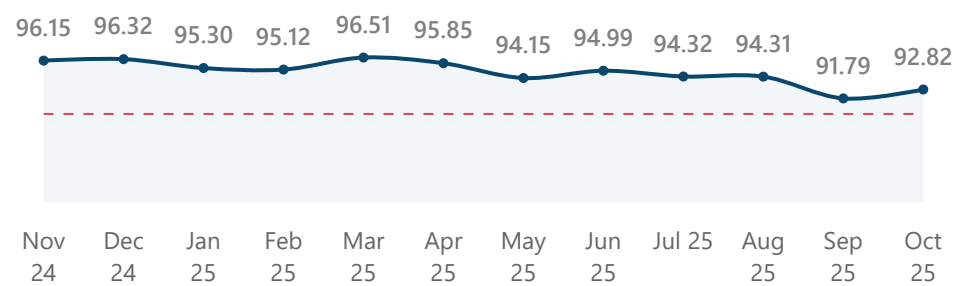
Health & Emotional Wellbeing Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Good + SN	Aug 25	Sep 25	Oct 25	D.O.T
Average Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) Score for Children in Care for More Than Twelve Months (Aged 4 to 16 Years)	Low	15.80	14.90	14.70	15.80	15.23	15.45	15.50	⊗ Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care for at Least Twelve Months, Aged 4 to 16 Years, with a Completed Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) Assessment	High	80.14	78.00	75.00	80.14	48.62	47.74	49.83	⊙ Improving
Percentage of Children in Care for Twelve Months or More Who Have Had a Dental Check Within the Last Twelve Months	High	77.29	81.00	85.00	77.29				
Percentage of Children in Care for Twelve Months or More with an Annual Health Assessment Completed on Time	High	87.14	90.00	90.00	87.14	88.69	89.85	90.85	⊙ Improving
Percentage of Children in Care for Twelve Months or More with Up-to-Date Immunisations	High	87.14	84.00	90.00	87.14	91.44	92.00	92.07	⊙ Improving
Percentage of New Children in Care (in the Previous Month) Who Received Their Initial Health Assessment Within Twenty Days	High			95.00		18.52	22.22	45.45	⊙ Improving



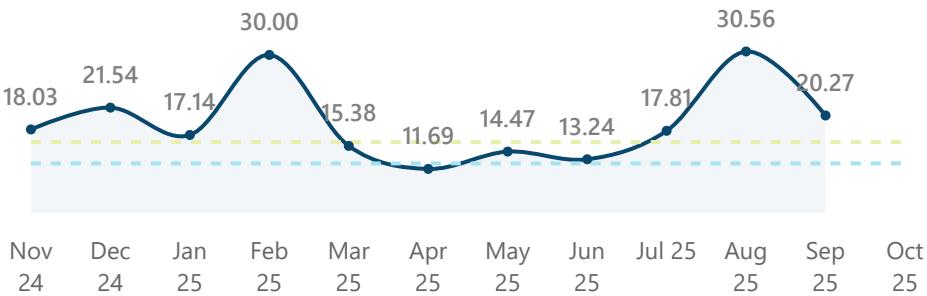
Settled at Home Data for October 2025

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



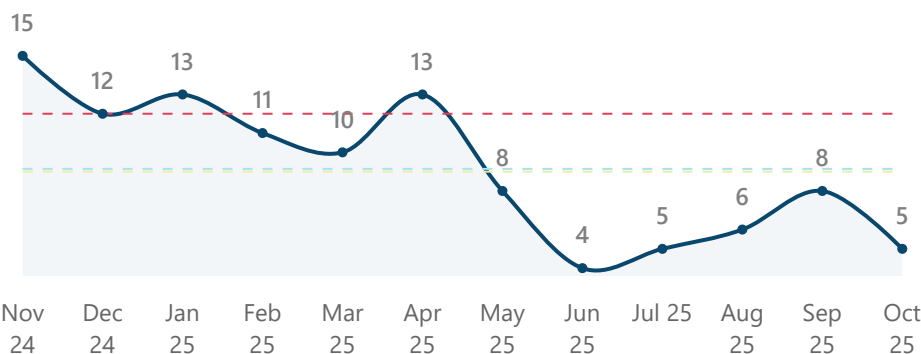
Dorset's **target** is **90%**. In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **96.51%** in Mar 25. The lowest percentage recorded was **91.79%** in Sep 25. Dorset have been above target in all 12 of the last 12 months.

% 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 **30.56%** in Aug 25. The lowest percentage recorded was **11.69%** in Apr 25.

% 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 **15%** (Nov 24). The lowest percentage recorded was **4%** in Jun 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 **17%** in Aug 25 & Oct 25. The lowest percentage recorded was **1%** in Feb 25.

Commentary

We have 463 children in our care. 69.76 % of children in care are living in a foster home, which is an improvement from this time last year (68.87%) and better than National average (67%) and good + statistical neighbours. 60.91% children in care with long-term fostering as the plan have achieved permanence which is better performance than this time last year (53.57%).

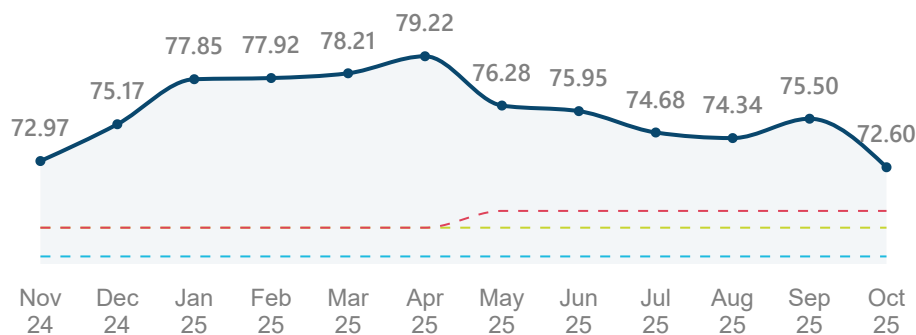
Settled at Home Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Good + SN	Aug 25	Sep 25	Oct 25	D.O.T
% Children Achieved Permanence Adoption (Rolling 6 months)	High	9.14	9.00	12.00	9.14	6.00	8.00	5.00	✗ Worsening
% Children Achieved Permanence SGO (Rolling 6 months)	High	10.00	12.00	12.00	10.00	17.00	12.00	17.00	✓ Improving
Percentage of Children in Care at Month-End with Long-Term Fostering as the Plan and Permanence Achieved	High					57.83	57.09	55.06	✗ Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care at Month-End with Long-Term Fostering as the Plan and Permanence Achieved (Excluding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children)	High					64.38	63.30	60.91	✗ Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care for 4 Months or More with a Completed Permanence Plan	High			90.00		94.31	91.79	92.82	✓ Improving
Percentage of Children Who Achieved Permanence by Returning Home to Live with Parents or Relatives (with Parental Responsibility) – Rolling Six Months	High	12.57	16.00		12.57	30.56	20.27		



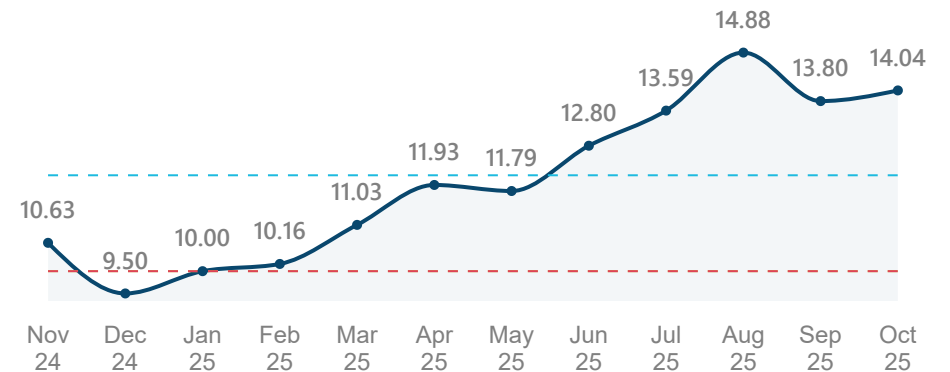
Homes for Children Data for October 2025

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



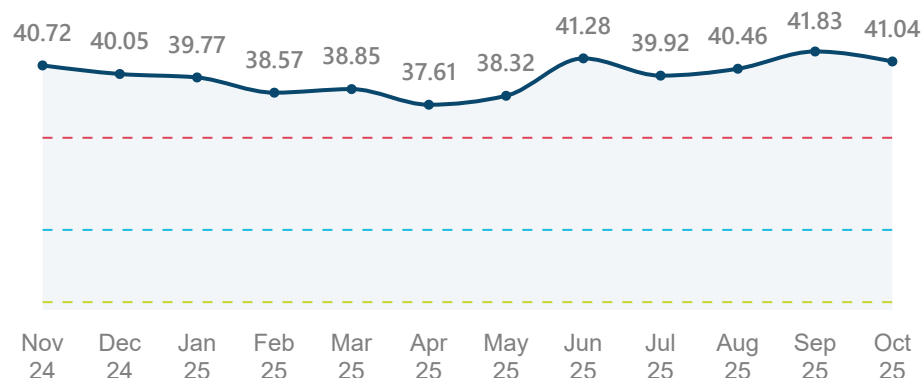
Dorset's **target** is **69%**. The highest recorded percentage was **79.22%** in Apr 25. The lowest recorded percentage was **71.81%** in Sep 24.

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



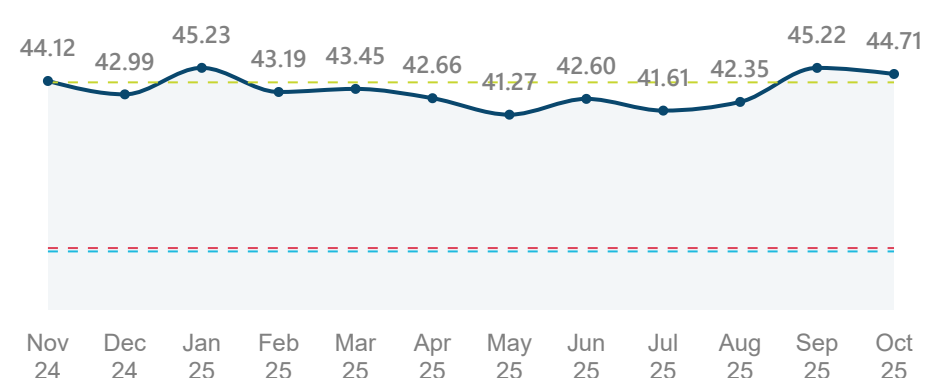
Dorset's **target** is **10%**. **Good + SN** is **10.29%** and **England** is **10%**. The highest recorded percentage was **14.88%** in Aug 25. The lowest recorded percentage was **9.5%** in Dec 24.

% CIC placed 20 miles away from home



Dorset's **target** is **35%**. The highest percentage recorded was **41.83%** in Sep 25. The lowest percentage recorded was **37.61%** in Apr 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 **41.27%** in May 25.

Commentary

132 children live with Dorset foster carers and 64 children live with a connected carer. There are a further 17 connected carer assessments and 16 mainstream fostering assessments which will increase our fostering options for at least 33 children. Despite the national challenge of recruitment of foster carers we have seen a significant increase (9) initial enquiries during October, of which most have progressed to an initial visit and application forms being sent out. There is a national recruitment campaign being launched as well as Dorset's Christmas Stocking campaign- highlighting the need for more foster homes for Dorset children. We continue to work collaboratively with our foster carers to better understand the support they need to expand their fostering family and to hear the voices of children in care so we can ensure that their valuable and lived experiences help to deliver the right homes for the right children.

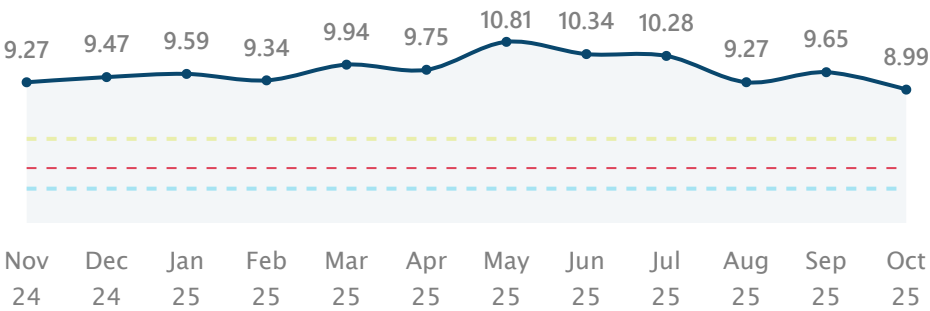
Homes for Children Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Good + SN	Aug 25	Sep 25	Oct 25	D.O.T
Number of Children in Care Placed with Their Parent or Parents	-					21.00	17.00	19.00	
Number of Unregulated Placements (Placement Types P2, R1, H5 Prior to November 2023)	Low			10.00					
Number of Unregulated Placements (Placement Types P2, R1, H5 Prior to November 2023, Excluding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children)	Low					1.00	1.00	1.00	⚠ Same
Percentage of Children in Care at the End of the Month with Three or More Placement Moves in the Previous Twelve Months	Low	12.14	10.00	10.00	12.14	14.88	13.80	14.04	🔴 Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care for Two and a Half Years or More, Aged Under Sixteen, Who Have Been in the Same Home for Two or More Years	High	67.29	69.00	70.00	67.29	74.34	75.50	72.60	🔴 Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care in Private Provision	Low	33.43	40.00		33.43	39.83	42.25	43.20	🔴 Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care in Private Provision (Excluding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children)	Low					35.25	37.06	37.95	🔴 Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care Living in Foster Home	High	55.71	67.00	71.00	55.71	70.23	70.91	69.76	🔴 Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care Living Outside Dorset	Low	29.71	44.00	30.00	29.71	42.35	45.22	44.71	🟢 Improving
Percentage of Children in Care Living Outside Dorset (Excluding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children)	Low			30.00		38.25	40.79	40.33	🟢 Improving
Percentage of Children in Care Over 20 Miles Away from Home (Excluding UASC)	Low			35.00		42.86	44.06	42.96	🟢 Improving

Safety Data for

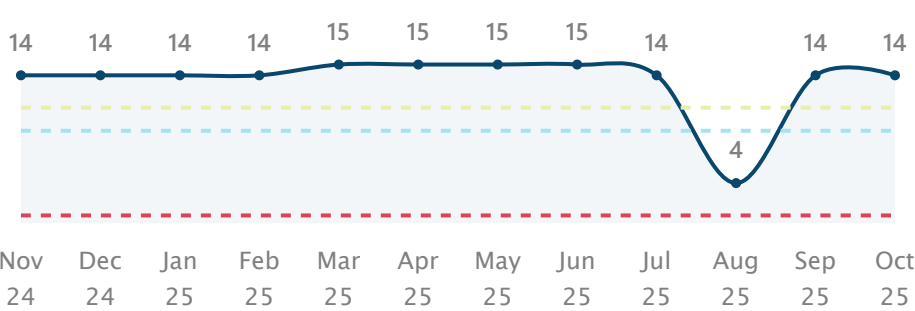
October 2025

% CIC (at any point in last 6 months) who have had more than 1 episode of Missing (Annex A)



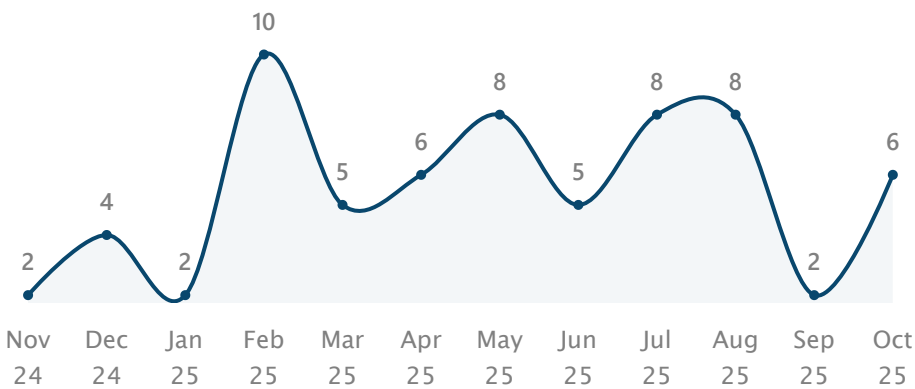
Dorset's **target** is **6%**. **Good +SN** percentage is **6.14%** and **England** is **7.05%**. In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **10.81%** (May 25). The lowest percentage recorded was **8.99%** (Oct 25). Dorset have been above target for each of the last 12 months.

% of CIC (at any point in last 6 months) with at least one missing episode in the last 12 months (Annex A)



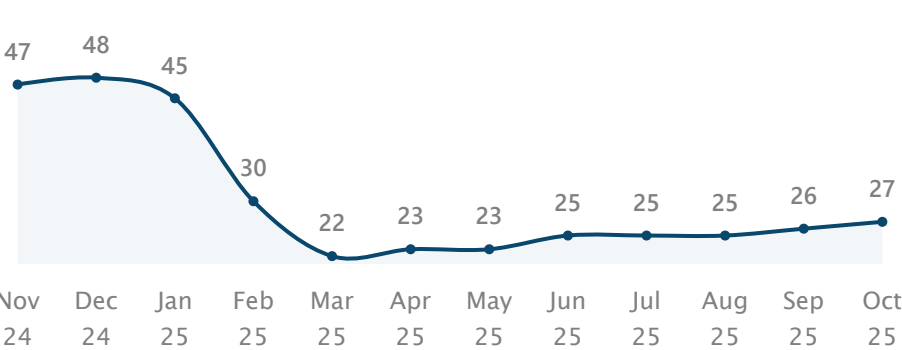
Dorset's **target** is **10%**. **Good +SN** percentage is **9.57%** and **England** is **11%**. In the last 12 months, the highest percentage recorded was **15%** (Mar 25 to Jun 25). The lowest percentage recorded was **4%** in Aug 25.

No. of formal IRO escalations



There has been a total of **66** IRO escalations in the last 12 months. The highest number recorded was **10** (Feb 25). The lowest number recorded was **2** (Nov 24, Jan 25 & Sep 25)

Total No. allegation made against Dorset foster carers in last 12 months'



In the last 12 months, there have been **27** allegations made against Dorset foster carers compared to **47** in the previous year.

Commentary

The allegations process is a robust process in Dorset to make sure we have the right people working with all children in Dorset. This includes making sure we have the right carers caring for our children, in our care. There has been 13 referrals in October, none of these are allegations against Dorset foster carers in October. The percentage of children who have been missing from care has been reducing since May, and although is higher that national average is the lowest level in the last 12 months. There has been lots of work done to strengthen use of the Philomena protocol, working with residential providers and foster carers on the steps that should be taken before a young person is reported missing. We have also undertaken further training with the missing workers in Harbour who complete return home interviews to strengthen our practice in understanding children's reasons for going missing and working with the social worker to reduce further missing episodes.

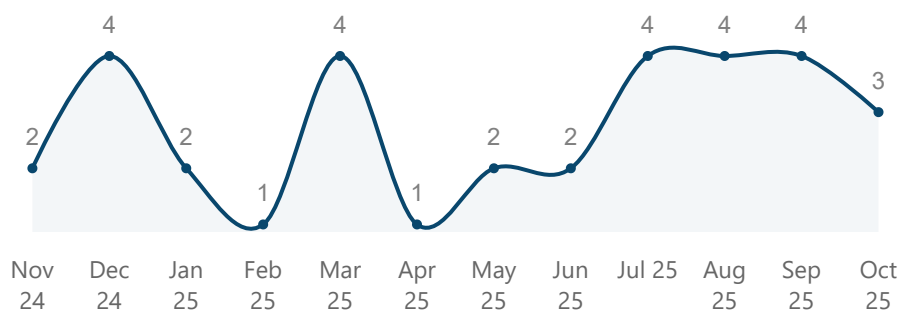
Permanence Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Good + SN	Aug 25	Sep 25	Oct 25	D.O.T
% CIC (at any point in last 6 months) who have had more than 1 episode of Missing (Annex A)	Low	5.22	7.11	6.00	5.22	9.27	9.65	8.99	✔ Improving
% of CIC (at any point in last 6 months) with at least one missing episode in the last 12 months (Annex A)	Low	8.86	11.00	10.00	8.86	4.00	14.00	14.00	⚠ Same
Number of Formal Independent Reviewing Officer Escalations	High					8.00	2.00	6.00	✔ Improving
Number of Independent Reviewing Officer Escalations Closed	-					12.00	14.00	18.00	
Number of Informal Independent Reviewing Officer Escalations	High					11.00	7.00	10.00	✔ Improving



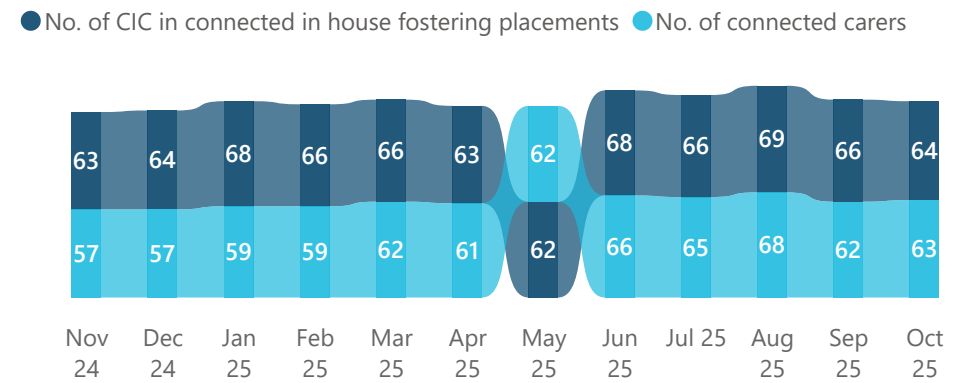
Sufficiency Data for October 2025

Total Number of New Households Recruited



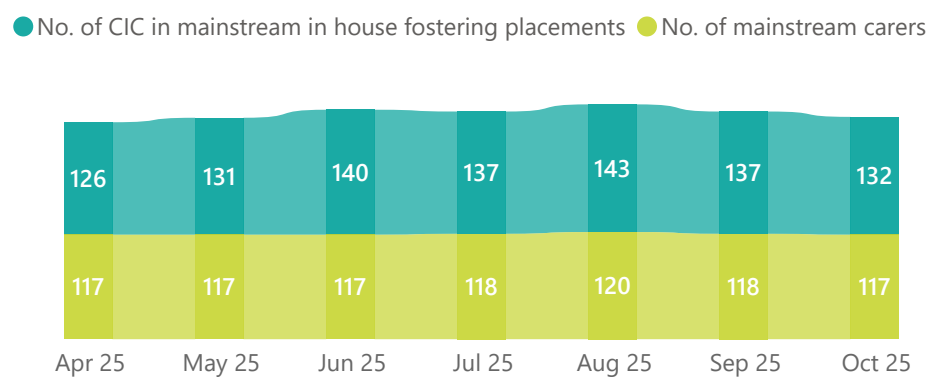
In the last 12 months, there have been **33** new households recruited. The highest number recorded was **5** (Oct 24). The lowest number recorded was **1** (Feb 25 & Apr 25)

In House Connected Carers



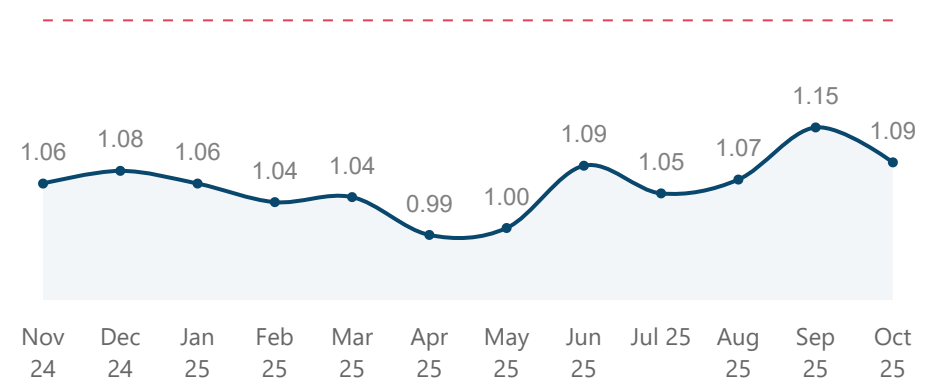
In the last 12 months, there have been an average **65** CIC in connected in house fostering placements and an average of **62** connected carers.

In House Mainstream Foster Carers



In the last 12 months, there have been an average of **124** CIC in mainstream in house fostering placements and an average of **127** mainstream carers.

Fostering utilisation rate - mainstream



Dorset's **target** is **1.3%**. The highest rate recorded was **1.15%** in Sep 25. The lowest rate recorded was **0.99%** in Aug 25.

Commentary

The number of foster carers at month-end was 186, unchanged from the previous month and below our target of 200. Mainstream carers decreased (by 1) to 117 due to their status changing to adopters which is a positive outcome for the child in their care. Connected carers increased to 63, showing a continued increase over the month. The percentage of foster carers who are connected person carers rose to 33.87%, an improving trend and evidence of the strength of family networks, enabling children to remain cared for safely within their family. Children in mainstream in-house fostering placements reduced this month, which has impacted our utilisation rate. Both of these areas are continued focus areas. The post approval support teams will be ensuring that mainstream foster carers have the right approval and that our vacancies reflect the capacity of the fostering families. We are working with partners from Valuing care to develop foster carer profiles so that we are able to understand their capacity, needs and what support is needed to ensure the right homes are identified for our children and young people. Supported lodging providers were visited by Ofsted during October and we are hopeful that our application to be a registered supported lodgings provider will be approved. This will enable supported care to be offered to some 16/17-year-old children in care- where this is right and appropriate to their needs. Overall, while there were improvements in some areas such as connected carers and initial enquiries, key indicators like mainstream carer numbers, placement utilisation, and statutory visit compliance were below target and are areas for focus for the coming month.

Sufficiency Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	Good + SN	Aug 25	Sep 25	Oct 25	Latest D.O.T.
% Foster Carer visits up to date (excl FTA)	High			85.00		73.16	78.38	77.30	⊗ Worsening
Fostering utilisation rate - mainstream	High			1.30		1.07	1.15	1.09	⊗ Worsening
No. of applicants undergoing assessment (Foster Carers - Connected Person)	High					0.00	16.00	17.00	⊙ Improving
No. of applicants undergoing assessment (Foster Carers - Mainstream)	High					17.00	19.00	16.00	⊗ Worsening
No. of CIC in connected in house fostering placements	-					69.00	66.00	64.00	
No. of CIC in mainstream in house fostering placements	High					143.00	137.00	132.00	⊗ Worsening
No. of connected carers	High					68.00	62.00	63.00	⊙ Improving
No. of Foster carers at end of month	High			200.00		193.00	186.00	186.00	⚠ Same
No. of households deregistered/resigned – Connected Carers	Low					0.00	4.00	1.00	⊙ Improving
No. of households deregistered/resigned – Foster to Adopt	Low					0.00	0.00	1.00	⊗ Worsening
No. of households deregistered/resigned – Mainstream	Low			1.00		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		120.00	118.00	117.00	⊗ Worsening
No. of new households recruited – Connected Person	High					0.00	3.00	0.00	⊗ Worsening
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		2.00	0.00	0.00	⚠ Same
No. of new households recruited – Temporary	High					2.00	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	May 25	Jun 25	Jul 25	Aug 25	Sep 25	Oct 25	D.O.T
Number of Children and Young People Supported by an Advocate During Child Protection (Commissioned)	-				21.00	22.00	17.00	12.00	22.00	26.00	
Number of Children in Care at Month-End	Low			420.00	441.00	453.00	471.00	477.00	471.00	463.00	✔ Improving
Number of Children in Care Placed with Their Parent or Parents	-				14.00	16.00	20.00	21.00	17.00	19.00	
Number of Children in Care who are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children at Month-End	-				39.00	38.00	40.00	43.00	42.00	44.00	
Number of Children who Became Children in Care	Low			10.00	22.00	20.00	31.00	18.00	12.00	8.00	✔ Improving
Number of Children who Became Children in Care (Excluding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children)	Low			10.00	22.00	20.00	29.00	13.00	11.00	4.00	✔ Improving
Number of Children who Ceased to be Children in Care	High			13.00	17.00	7.00	13.00	10.00	18.00	12.00	✘ Worsening
Percentage of Allocated Children (Open Over 4 Weeks) with Supervision in the Last 8 Weeks	High			90.00	85.19	85.87	84.12	87.75	89.28	89.19	✘ Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care at Month-End with Long-Term Fostering as the Plan and Permanence Achieved	High				55.70	58.68	57.26	57.83	57.09	55.06	✘ Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care at Month-End with Long-Term Fostering as the Plan and Permanence Achieved (Excluding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children)	High				62.09	66.04	64.06	64.38	63.30	60.91	✘ Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care for 4 Months or More with a Completed Permanence Plan	High			90.00	94.15	94.99	94.32	94.31	91.79	92.82	✔ Improving
Percentage of Children in Care who are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children	-	6.86	8.00		8.84	8.39	8.49	9.01	8.92	9.50	
Percentage of Children Who Achieved Permanence by Returning Home to Live with Parents or Relatives (with Parental Responsibility) – Rolling Six Months	High	12.57	16.00		14.47	13.24	17.81	30.56	20.27		
Rate of Children in Care at Month-End	Low	66.00	67.00	68.00	66.80	68.61	71.34	72.25	71.34	68.95	✔ Improving
Rate of Children in Care at Month-End (Excluding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children)	Low	61.14	61.76		60.89	62.86	65.28	65.74	64.98	62.40	✔ Improving

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Corporate Parenting BoardPerformance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	May 25	Jun 25	Jul 25	Aug 25	Sep 25	Oct 25	D.O.T
% of all CIC who had a valid passport at their last review Excl UASC	High				46.65	45.61	40.95	46.56	43.80	44.09	✔ Improving
% of CIC (in care 40 working days) with valid passport at last review	High				41.99	41.05	37.03	42.36	40.00	39.90	✖ Worsening
Average Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) Score for Children in Care for More Than Twelve Months (Aged 4 to 16 Years)	Low	15.80	14.90	14.70	14.57	14.95	15.07	15.23	15.45	15.50	✖ Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care and Care Leavers Who Are NEET (16 to 18 Year Olds - Year 12 & Year 13)	High			72.00	68.92	76.51	76.51		77.78	77.04	✖ Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care at the End of the Month with Three or More Placement Moves in the Previous Twelve Months	Low	12.14	10.00	10.00	11.79	12.80	13.59	14.88	13.80	14.04	✖ Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care for at Least Twelve Months, Aged 4 to 16 Years, with a Completed Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) Assessment	High	80.14	78.00	75.00	49.15	49.49	50.68	48.62	47.74	49.83	✔ Improving
Percentage of Children in Care for Twelve Months or More with Up-to-Date Immunisations	High	87.14	84.00	90.00	91.95	92.38	90.03	91.44	92.00	92.07	✔ Improving
Percentage of Children in Care in Private Provision	Low	33.43	40.00		41.04	40.40	39.92	39.83	42.25	43.20	✖ Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care in Private Provision (Excluding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children)	Low				35.82	35.42	35.03	35.25	37.06	37.95	✖ Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care Living in Foster Home	High	55.71	67.00	71.00	69.61	70.42	70.70	70.23	70.91	69.76	✖ Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care Over 20 Miles Away from Home (Excluding UASC)	Low			35.00	40.30	43.37	42.00	42.86	44.06	42.96	✔ Improving
Percentage of New Children in Care (in the Previous Month) Who Received Their Initial Health Assessment Within Twenty Days	High			95.00	66.67	55.00	26.32	18.52	22.22	45.45	✔ Improving

No. of KPIs

12

Improving

5

Same

(Blank)

Worsening

7

No D.O.T

(Blank)

Green

2

Amber

2

Red

4

No RAG Rating

4



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Corporate Parenting Board Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	May 25	Jun 25	Jul 25	Aug 25	Sep 25	Oct 25	D.O.T
% Care Leavers aged 19-21 in EET (OC3)	High	54.00	54.00			54.39			50.00		
% CIC (at any point in last 6 months) who have had more than 1 episode of Missing (Annex A)	Low	5.22	7.11	6.00	10.81	10.34	10.28	9.27	9.65	8.99	✔ 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	356.00	261.00	306.00	209.00	194.00	185.00	✔ Improving
No. of Care Leavers (Active aged 17-25) in Bed and Breakfast accommodation	Low			0.00	3.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	✘ Worsening
No. of Care Leavers (Active aged 17-25) in unsuitable accommodation at end of month	Low			11.00	6.00	3.00	6.00	4.00	5.00	7.00	✘ Worsening
No. of Foster carers at end of month	High			200.00	185.00	187.00	188.00	193.00	186.00	186.00	⚠ Same
No. of health passports completed (2 months in arrears)	-				4.00	8.00	6.00	2.00	4.00		
No. of Health passports due within the month (2 months in arrears)	-				4.00	8.00	8.00	2.00	4.00		
Number of Unregulated Placements (Placement Types P2, R1, H5 Prior to November 2023)	Low			10.00							
Number of Unregulated Placements (Placement Types P2, R1, H5 Prior to November 2023, Excluding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children)	Low				0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	⚠ Same
Percentage of Children in Care for Twelve Months or More Who Have Had a Dental Check Within the Last Twelve Months	High	77.29	81.00	85.00							
Percentage of Children in Care for Twelve Months or More with an Annual Health Assessment Completed on Time	High	87.14	90.00	90.00	90.71	91.16	87.01	88.69	89.85	90.85	✔ Improving
Percentage of Children in Care Living Outside Dorset	Low	29.71	44.00	30.00	41.27	42.60	41.61	42.35	45.22	44.71	✔ Improving
Percentage of Children in Care Living Outside Dorset (Excluding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children)	Low			30.00	36.82	38.31	37.35	38.25	40.79	40.33	✔ Improving
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	196.00	160.00	167.00	131.00	162.00	162.00	⚠ Same



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Corporate Parenting Board Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	May 25	Jun 25	Jul 25	Aug 25	Sep 25	Oct 25	D.O.T
% Care Leavers who are in Employment Education or Training (Active aged 19-21)	High			60.00	66.00	62.00	68.00	69.00	67.00	70.00	✔ Improving
% Care Leavers who are in touch with Dorset Local Authority (Active aged 19-21)	High			93.00	96.00	96.00	96.00	96.00	96.00	96.00	⚠ Same
% Care Leavers who are living in suitable accommodation (Active aged 19-21)	High			96.00	96.00	96.00	95.00	96.00	97.00	96.00	✖ Worsening
% Care Leavers with an up to date pathway plan at end of month (Active aged 17-25)	High			95.00	94.79	92.93	96.71	95.10	92.95	94.34	✔ Improving
% Children Achieved Permanence Adoption (Rolling 6 months)	High	9.14	9.00	12.00	8.00	4.00	5.00	6.00	8.00	5.00	✖ Worsening
% Children Achieved Permanence SGO (Rolling 6 months)	High	10.00	12.00	12.00	9.00	12.00	14.00	17.00	12.00	17.00	✔ Improving
% Foster Carer visits up to date (excl FTA)	High			85.00	72.93	80.98	67.03	73.16	78.38	77.30	✖ Worsening
% of CIC (at any point in last 6 months) with at least one missing episode in the last 12 months (Annex A)	Low	8.86	11.00	10.00	15.00	15.00	14.00	4.00	14.00	14.00	⚠ Same
Children adopted in last 12 months	High				16.00	12.00	13.00	13.00	14.00	16.00	✔ Improving
No. of Adoption placement order revocations over last 12 months	Low				3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	⚠ Same
No. of adoptive families approved (ADM)	High				4.00	2.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	1.00	✖ Worsening
No. of adoptive Families in assessment	High				11.00	9.00	9.00	16.00	8.00	10.00	✔ Improving
No. of CIC in mainstream in house fostering placements	High				131.00	140.00	137.00	143.00	137.00	132.00	✖ Worsening
No. of connected carers	High				62.00	66.00	65.00	68.00	62.00	63.00	✔ Improving
No. of mainstream carers	High			138.00	117.00	117.00	118.00	120.00	118.00	117.00	✖ Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care and Care Leavers Who Are NEET (16 to 18 Year Olds - Year 12 & Year 13)	Low			28.00	31.08	23.49	23.49		22.22	22.96	✖ Worsening
Percentage of Children in Care with a Termly PEP Completed on Time	High			96.00			96.00				
Percentage of Children with a PEP Within 20 Days of Entering Care	High			100.00			100.00				

No. of KPIs

18

Improving

6

Same

3

Worsening

7

No D.O.T

2

Green

5

Amber

3

Red

2

No RAG Rating

8



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Corporate Parenting Board Performance Metrics

Indicator	Good Is	Good + SN	Eng Avg.	Target	May 25	Jun 25	Jul 25	Aug 25	Sep 25	Oct 25	D.O.T
No. of applicants undergoing assessment (Foster Carers - Connected Person)	High				0.00	9.00	13.00	0.00	16.00	17.00	✔ Improving
No. of applicants undergoing assessment (Foster Carers - Mainstream)	High				13.00	15.00	17.00	17.00	19.00	16.00	✖ Worsening
No. of households deregistered/resigned – Connected Carers	Low				2.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	4.00	1.00	✔ Improving
No. of households deregistered/resigned – Foster to Adopt	Low				0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	✖ Worsening
No. of households deregistered/resigned – Mainstream	Low			1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	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 new households recruited – Connected Person	High				0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	0.00	✖ Worsening
No. of new households recruited – Foster to Adopt	High				0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	⚠ Same
No. of new households recruited – Mainstream	High			2.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	⚠ Same
No. of new households recruited – Temporary	High				2.00	2.00	3.00	2.00	1.00	3.00	✔ Improving
Number of Children in Care Who Have Been Repeatedly Suspended	Low				11.54	10.82	10.82		1.60	4.13	Worsening
Number of Formal Independent Reviewing Officer Escalations	High				8.00	5.00	8.00	8.00	2.00	6.00	✔ Improving
Number of Independent Reviewing Officer Escalations Closed	-				13.00	26.00	21.00	12.00	14.00	18.00	
Number of Informal Independent Reviewing Officer Escalations	High				9.00	5.00	13.00	11.00	7.00	10.00	✔ Improving
Percentage of All Children in Care with Unauthorised Absence (Monthly)	-				38.95	38.73	38.73		37.10	39.66	
Percentage of Children in Care Missing Education (Reception to Year 11)	High			95.00	88.78	87.93	87.95		89.92	89.03	✖ Worsening

No. of KPIs

16

Improving

6

Same

3

Worsening

5

No D.O.T

2

Green

1

See details

Fix this

See details

Fix this

See details

Fix this

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	May 25	Jun 25	Jul 25	Aug 25	Sep 25	Oct 25	D.O.T
Fostering utilisation rate - mainstream	High			1.30	1.00	1.09	1.05	1.07	1.15	1.09	⊗ Worsening
No. of CIC in connected in house fostering placements	-				62.00	68.00	66.00	69.00	66.00	64.00	

No. of KPIs

2

Improving

(Blank)

Same

(Blank)

Worsening

1

No D.O.T

1

Green

(Blank)

Amber

1

Red

(Blank)



[See details](#)

Fix this

Corporate Parenting Board

11 December 2025

Independent Reviewing Officer's Annual Report

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

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

Local Councillor(s): n/a

Senior Leadership Team:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

Report author and job title: Toni Colledge, Quality Assurance Service Manager

Email: toni.colledge@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Statutory Authority:

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

Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)

1. This annual report provides evidence relating to the Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer (QARO) Service in Dorset Council, as set out in the IRO Handbook. In Dorset QAROs undertake the statutory function of the IRO. It covers the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.
- 1.1 The report evidences a service which continues to develop and provides good quality work to support children being well cared for and achieving good outcomes. The report includes key information outlining the work of the service with and for children in care and the report includes case examples of IRO work with children.
- 1.2 This report includes a profile of the service, performance data including timeliness of review and the extent of participation, a profile of our children in care, including their age, gender and ethnic background, details of the dispute resolution process and how effective this is. The report concludes with a review of aims and objectives set in the last annual report and aims and objectives for the service for the upcoming year.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Members are invited to consider the content of the report and give a view on the strengths, challenges and forward plan for the service.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

- 3.1 To ensure that the QARO service continues to develop and evolve to offer the best possible support and challenge to the Local Authority in meeting the needs of our children in care, and to ensure voices of children and young people in care are heard and acted upon.

4. The report

- 4.1 The report is added as an appendix, please see item 13 below

5. Alternative options considered

- 5.1 N/A This is a statutory service

6. Legal considerations

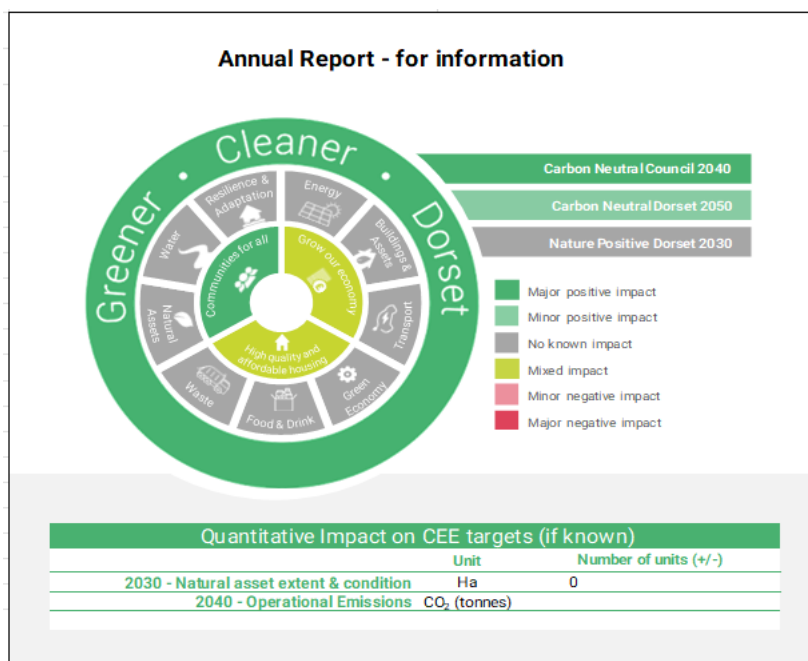
- 6.1 The service fulfils the council's responsibilities set out in [Children Act 1989: care planning, placement and case review](#), and [Independent reviewing officers' handbook - GOV.UK](#)

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 An effective QARO service helps to reduce costs in Children's Services by reducing drift and delay in care planning, promoting early support and reducing escalation of need and higher support costs later in life.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

8.1



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

9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 An effective IRO service contributes to improved health and wellbeing outcomes for children in care, and those who will go on to live in family arrangements or adoption.

10. Other implications

- 10.1 None identified

11. **Risk implications**

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

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

12. **Equalities**

- 12.1 The IRO service key responsibility is to provide independent oversight of care planning by the Local Authority for children in care. One pillar of this is to ensure the child's views are obtained and taken into consideration by the local authority.
- 12.2 Another key aspect of the role is to provide independent oversight of the work of the Local Authority in respect of the Children Act 1989 and relevant guidance and associated additional acts. There is a requirement inherent to the role to challenge the Local Authority where performance is not meeting the required standards through the 'dispute resolution' process, and the service performance in respect of this is detailed in the report.
- 12.3 The requirements for the role of IRO include being an experienced social worker registered with Social Work England. To do this there is a requirement to adhere to professional standards including:
- 12.4 Promoting the rights, strengths and wellbeing of families and communities'
- 12.5 Not to 'Abuse, neglect, discriminate, exploit or harm anyone, or condone this by others'
- 12.6 Report allegations of harm and challenge and report exploitation and any dangerous, abusive or discriminatory behaviour or practice.
- 12.7 This report includes a description of ongoing work by the service to improve practice in relation to hearing the views of care experienced young people in a variety of ways and evidence impact on practice. It describes specific work as part of the Corporate Parenting Delivery Group Plan on supporting young people's identity with reference to protected characteristics, and barriers to equity.
- 12.8 The report draws attention to the importance of diversity within the staff team and that this is an area we seek to improve.
- 12.9 As such I conclude that this service contributes positively to equality. Whilst acknowledging there is much more we can do, there is active work ongoing to achieve this, and this is reflected in the forward plan at the end of the report.

13. **Appendices**

13.1 Appendix 1: IRO Annual Report 24 – 25 final draft

14. **Background papers**

14.1 None

15. **Report sign-off**

15.1 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 Portfolio Holder(s)

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Title of report:**Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2024–2025**

Helping children in care have better lives.

Who wrote the report

Toni Colledge
Quality Assurance Service Manager

Date written

September 2025

Summary of what the report is about

This report talks about how IROs (Independent Reviewing Officers) help children and young people in care in Dorset. It explains what they do, how they listen to children, and how they make sure plans are working well. It also shows how the service has improved and what still needs to get better.

What are the key messages of this report

- IROs help children in care feel safe, listened to, and supported.
 - Most meetings happen on time and children are involved.
 - IROs speak up when things aren't going well.
 - Children's voices matter and help shape the service.
 - There's still work to do to make things even better.
-

Important facts and figures

- 1,251 review meetings were held.
- 94% of meetings happened on time.
- 91% of children had contact with their IRO.
- 93% of children took part in their reviews.
- 55 notes were written to celebrate good work.
- 166 problems were raised and sorted out.

- Children said their IROs were kind, helpful, and got things done.
-

Actions or recommendations

For next year, the IRO team will:

1. Write up meeting notes faster so everyone knows what was agreed.
2. Keep challenging delays in planning, especially for older teens.
3. Listen even more to children's views and act on what matters to them.
4. Run more learning events to help staff improve.
5. Support children's identity—who they are and what makes them special.

Summary generated by AI using Co-Pilot and checked by Toni Colledge, Service Manager.

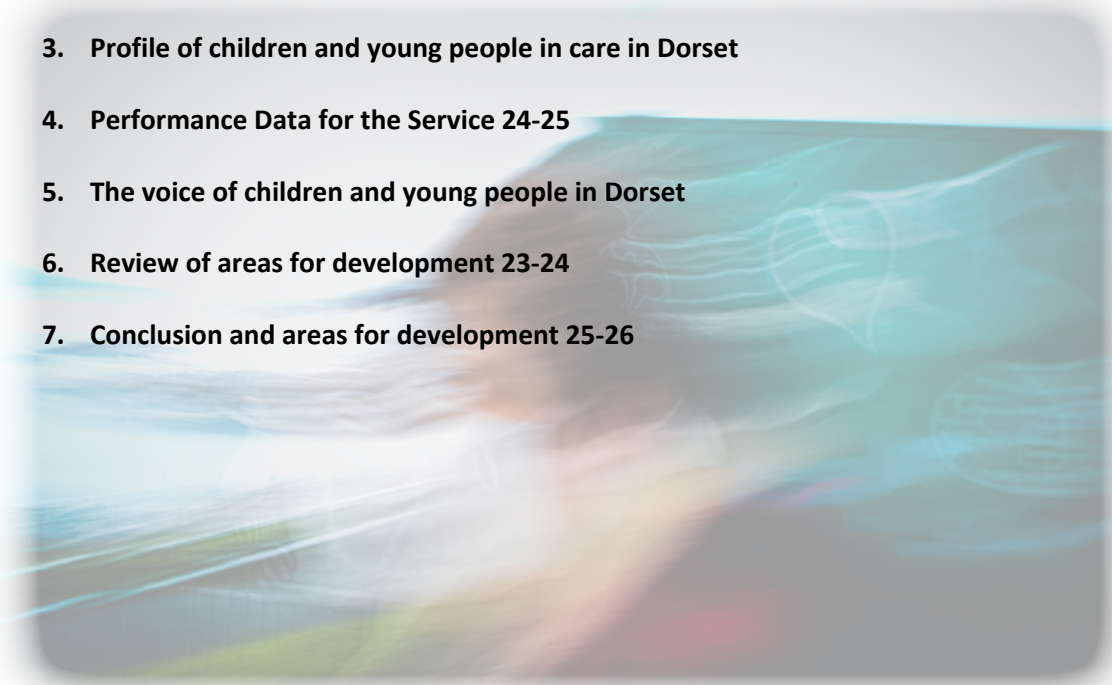


Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2024/2025

***The contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers
to Quality Assuring and Improving Services for
Children in Care.***

**Toni Colledge, Quality Assurance Service Manager
September 2025**

Contents

- 1. Introduction**
 - 2. The IRO service for Children in Care in Dorset**
 - 3. Profile of children and young people in care in Dorset**
 - 4. Performance Data for the Service 24-25**
 - 5. The voice of children and young people in Dorset**
 - 6. Review of areas for development 23-24**
 - 7. Conclusion and areas for development 25-26**
- 

Artist credit: '*Loneliness*' by Kieran, Youth Voice Network Member and Expert by Experience

1. Introduction

To ensure that our service continues to be effective and ambitious for children in our care, it is important that we provide an annual report that sets out our progress. This annual report provides both quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer (QARO) Service in Dorset Council, as set out in the IRO Handbook. In Dorset, QAROs undertake the statutory function of the IRO for children in our Care. This annual report covers the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

The report evidences a service which continues to develop and provides good quality work to support children being well cared for and achieving good outcomes. The report includes key information outlining the work of the service with and for children in care and the report includes examples of IRO work with children.

The IROs continue to maintain a collaborative approach to working which enables them to work alongside our Corporate Parenting Board, our Children in Care Youth Voice team, and the Dorset Safeguarding Partnership. Our work continues to model a relational approach based on the principles of 'High Challenge and High Support' and builds upon the values and aims of Dorset Council, and the 'Dorset Children Thrive' model.

The IROs relational approach continues as this is most effective in improving the experiences and outcomes for our children in care and is supported through the structures of statutory reviews, recommendations, and informal and formal escalations.

Through a range of Quality Assurance (QA) activities and performance management tools the service contributes towards effective and timely care planning for Children in Care. This report will provide an overview of performance data, the extent of young people's participation, the profile of our children in care, and details of the 'dispute resolution' process and its effectiveness. The report concludes with a review of progress of the aims and objectives set out in the last annual report and aims and objectives for the service for the upcoming year.

The government programme 'Stable Homes Built on Love' has now been embedded in Dorset via the Families First for Children Pathfinder. IROs have a key role in the oversight and success of family-led solutions and promoting the contribution of family networks to the plans for children. This approach enables more children to be cared for in their family networks, with the right support from professionals. This will be further refined following the government updates published in November 2024, and March 2025.

Dorset Council's Children's Services were inspected by Ofsted in March 2025 and received an 'outstanding' judgement. The work of the IRO service is proud to have contributed to the result that 'The experiences and progress of children in care' was judged as 'outstanding'. Specifically, it was noted that:

'Children are encouraged to attend their review meetings, and often do so, or they are supported by advocates or an independent visitor to provide their views. This involvement ensures that children are active participants in the care planning process'

The report also noted the role of IROs for children living in unregistered children's homes *'ensur(ing) that children living in such homes are helped to be protected'*.

Further verbal feedback from inspectors during the inspection commended the role of the IRO service in supporting permanence planning, including the introduction of IRO progress checks and escalation tracking meetings.

94% of children in care reviews are held in time, over 90% of recommendations are completed within 5 working days, and participation rates are high. The number of children having contact with their IRO is high and escalations continue to be part of the culture where the service to children needs to be improved.

Alongside all statutory areas of focus, this year IROs have continued to focus on supporting better planning for young people in care turning 18, permanence planning as a whole and promoting the child's voice.

2. The IRO service for Children in Care in Dorset

The IRO service is now made up of 10 IROs, 5 full time and 5 part time. There is a mix of genders and a range of background experience including Child Protection, Adoption, Fostering, Permanence Teams, Probation, CAFCASS, and including Frontline Management and Service Management. IROs have also developed areas of specialist interest such as children with disabilities and asylum-seeking young people. The team is not split into specialisms, which maintains versatility, broad knowledge and experience across the whole team. However, if required, it is possible to allocate an IRO with specialist knowledge or interest, or an IRO of a specific gender if needed/requested.

The ethnic diversity in the team is low, although it is comparable to the population in Dorset. However, we do have White European ethnicities represented. Different sexualities are also represented in the team.

The team has remained stable throughout the year with one IRO moving on to a management role in the Care Leavers Service in Dorset, and another sadly passing away. The Service Manager has remained in post since May 2023.

Caseloads for IROs are between 50-60 (full time equivalent) and include a significant amount of travel due to the number of children placed out of county. We aim to keep sibling groups with the same IRO where possible to aid consistency and understanding of the whole family picture and history, as well as having less professionals for a family to have to link with. If a child comes back into care for some reason, we endeavour to assign the same IRO again for consistency, reflection and learning. If a young person requests a different IRO, we are happy to respect their wishes.

IROs in Dorset have access to independent legal advice through a reciprocal arrangement with a neighbouring Local Authority and this has been used well this year.

Working with other teams

Dorset has a locality-based model for Children in Care and in 2024 a Permanence Service Manager role was created, whilst the teams remained linked to their locality through matrix management. This has enabled a greater focus on the specific and unique needs of children in care and greater consistency. We have 'link IROs' including the Birth to Settled Adulthood Service, the Care Leavers Service and the Asylum-Seeking Young People service. Escalation tracking meetings between the IRO Service Manager and Locality Service Managers continue to improve relationships and working

together between the different parts of the service. The IRO Service Manager promotes understanding of the role through extended CSLT meetings, panel/oversight meetings and project work related to children in care, including working closely with the Principal Social Worker and Practice Leads.

IROs regularly attend Permanence Planning Meetings, Stability Meetings, Extra Familial Harm, (contextual safeguarding) meetings and other decision-making forums for their children.

Quality Assurance role

Dorset has adopted the name 'Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer' for IROs to reflect the responsibilities around Quality Assurance work. The team sits within the Quality Assurance and Partnerships service, under a Quality Assurance Service Manager. The team complete monthly audits across a range of practice areas, and thematic dip samples in areas of focus for children in care, for example as raised through Corporate Parenting Board and the Priority areas of the Corporate Parenting Board delivery plan.

Quality Assurance work is also completed monthly by the Service Manager, including additional thematic audits, quarterly escalation reports and contributions to our 'Good and Better Board', which celebrates good practice.

IROs complete monitoring forms at each review which identifies quantitative data around relevant issues, for example, participation, whether children's views are represented, completion of plans, whether appropriate meetings are taking place (for example Permanence Planning Meetings) and gives an overall grading (in line with Ofsted grading). This contributes to senior management oversight, preventing or addressing drift and delay, and overall performance management.

The Quality Assurance and Partnership Service, which the IRO service is part of, includes a focus on 'closing the loop' in terms of learning from audits and feedback. It is achieved in collaboration with the Principal Social Worker, colleagues in Practice, Policy and Procedures and Workforce Development who sit within the partnership.

Supervision and training

Supervision for IROs takes place regularly and covers personal, performance and practice issues. We have continued to have face to face team meetings with guests/visitors from partner teams and agencies to develop stronger relationships and up to date knowledge about development in other service areas. Our annual Team Development Day has been held in February 25. This included peer audits, inspection preparation, reviewing our practice standards and escalation policy, and sharing and recognising good practice in the team.

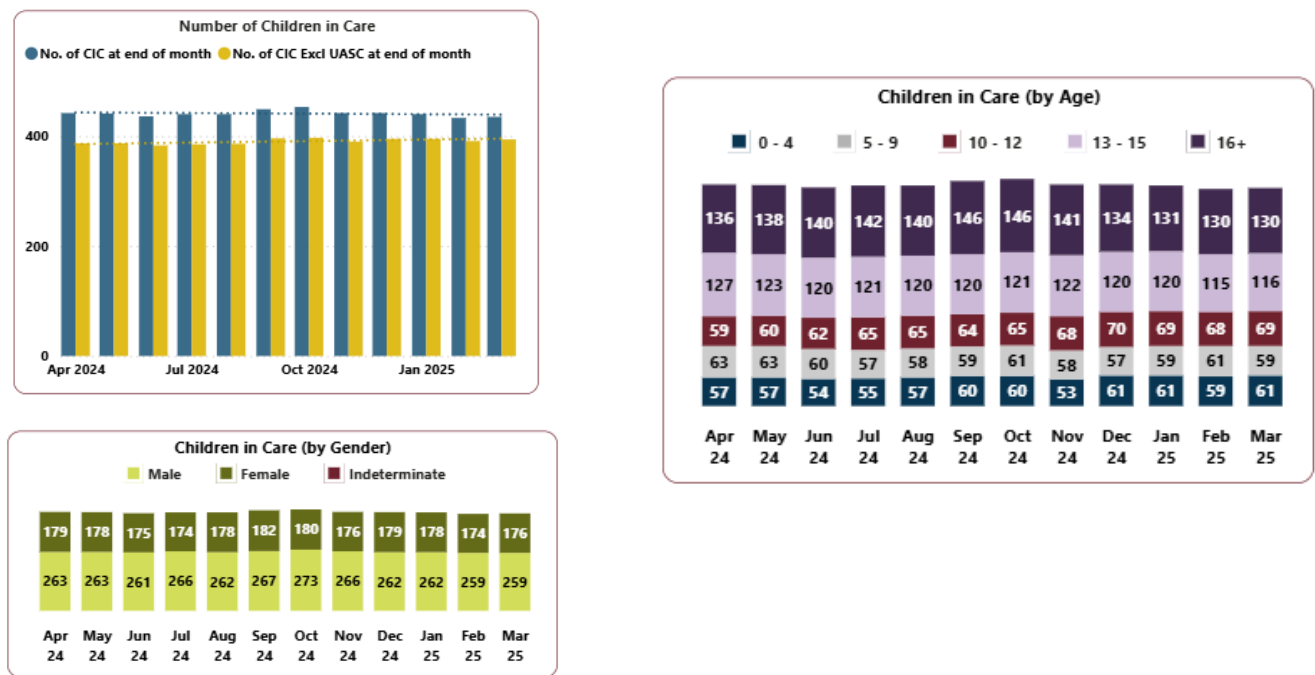
Training for IROs is available through the council training programme and IROs have been provided with a range of training opportunities throughout the year including: The National Supporting Refugees and Asylum Seekers Conference; Safe and Settled Care Learning Event; Violence Against Women and Girl workshops; Shame Competence Training, Restorative Practice, Mind of My Own, Re-imagining Foster Care, How trauma affects the body: the psychosomatic nature of trauma, Nitazens (Substance Misuse) with Dr Mindy Bartlett; NAIRO training for new IROs.

The Clifton Strengths coaching is also being implemented in Dorset and new IROs have completed the assessment as part of their induction. A more in depth exercise is planned for a team building day later in 2025.

Regional and National links have been maintained and strengthened, and the IRO CPD event in July 2024 was well received and well attended by Dorset IROs. This will be repeated in September 2025 with the Dorset IRO Service Manager leading a workshop and sharing the voices of care experienced young people from Dorset.

The ‘Mind of My Own’ app has been adopted by the service as the default method of consulting with young people prior to reviews. This has been very successful for reviews and as a way of encouraging young people to share their views at other times, for example during IRO visits. One member of the team is currently the ‘top user’, and her practice and experience has been used to promote the app to other teams. Mind of My Own has a version for young children and those with learning needs, and an in-built translation function, which is very valuable for young people where English is not their first language, or they are unable to speak English. The IRO Service Manager is part of the project team working to increase the usage across all of Children’s Services.

3. Profile of children in care in Dorset



Children in Care (by Ethnicity)	Apr 24	May 24	Jun 24	Jul 24	Aug 24	Sep 24	Oct 24	Nov 24	Dec 24	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25
White	344	343	339	342	343	350	345	341	345	349	345	347
Asian	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Black	17	17	19	20	21	21	21	20	18	18	16	16
Mixed White and Asian	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	2	2	2	3	3
Mixed White and Black	10	10	10	10	10	10	15	15	15	15	15	16
Mixed other	14	15	15	15	15	17	18	17	17	17	16	16
Other minority												
Non-white British (%)	26	26	26	26	26	26	28	27	26	24	24	24
Non-white British (Number)	115	114	113	114	115	118	127	120	113	107	104	104

The table above shows the overall numbers of children in care have decreased over the period of this report. However, the decrease is due to the reduced number of children in care seeking asylum, transferred to Dorset through the National Transfer scheme (55 to 41). This decrease is due to the NTS not requesting young people transfer to Dorset, as we are keen to welcome them at any time. The number of children in care excluding asylum seeking children has increased from 387 to 394. This increase is an area for focus in 2025 for the Care and Protection Service, and the IRO service will support where required to understand why the numbers are increasing and what can be done to address this. There is a noticeable decrease in number of adolescents in care, which is only partly accounted for by the decrease in asylum seeking young people, and is positive. There is a slight increase in boys coming into care, and ethnicity data remains similar, with a 2% drop in 'non-white British' the only notable difference.

4. Performance data for the service:

Number and Timeliness of Reviews, Recommendations and Minutes.

IROs in Dorset now all consistently write their minutes in the form of a letter to the child or young person, and some produce additional age-appropriate versions.

The total number of reviews completed this year is 1,251. Overall, the number of reviews completed in timescales is 93%. This has been consistent with every month this year being over 90% and finishing on a high of 100%. Some of the lateness shown on the performance charts is caused by delays in write ups which can mean the data is not captured in the report for the month. Other reasons have included illness or emergencies.

It is positive to see that the number of recommendations distributed within 5 days has continued to improve this year. The small percentage that are not can be due to 'split reviews' (where two separate meetings may be required for separated parents or birth family and prospective adoptive family), reviews that take place as a 'series of meetings' or staff sickness and absence.

It is disappointing that the number of minutes completed in 20 days has not improved, however the team have now started utilising AI more to help with meeting these targets dates, and several members of the team are regularly completing 100% of minutes within 20 days each month. It is hoped that this will show an improvement in 2025. High caseloads and extensive out of area travel are the main reasons for delayed write ups.

Ensuring the minutes are completed and distributed within the appropriate timescales of 20 working days is a continued priority area for improvement, which will require ongoing focus in 25 -26. There are specific actions in place to address the late completion of minutes within the team.

Annual figures

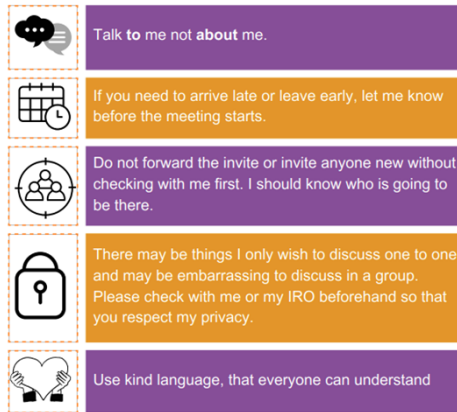
Task	Total number	Percentage	Comparison to 23-24
Child in care reviews that took place	1251		-29
Child in care reviews that took place within timescales (not including overdue reviews)	1172	94%	same
Child in care reviews with completed recommendations	1250	100%	same
Child in care reviews with completed recommendations within 5 working days	1143	91%	+3%
Child in care reviews with full review minutes completed	1138	91%	-1%
Child in care reviews with full minutes completed within 20 working days.	563	45%	-1%

Participation and advocacy

Participation levels for reviews remain consistently high with a year total of 93%. This year we co-produced some 'Ground-rules for Meetings' with the Youth Voice Network because of feedback from them about how we could increase participation. These are now shared with attendees as part of the invite. 'Mind of My Own' is also now being used to help young people share their views more easily and we are seeing it used regularly.



If you attend one of my meetings, please follow these rules.
This will make it a safe place for me and means that I will be able to take part more easily.



A new feedback form is sent out after each review which provides feedback on the meeting itself, asking attendees their views on the number of people attending, was it the right people, how well they understood what was said, and were the right things discussed. We have begun to receive feedback from young people, family, foster carers and professionals, which will help us continue to improve.

Children are encouraged to participate in a way that feels comfortable for them. This could be sharing their views, wishes and feelings 1:1 with their IRO, the use of an advocate to represent their views, attending their review and joining the discussion or in some cases, chairing their own review.

Use of advocates for reviews has improved, with 29% of children (175) represented by an advocate at their review in between Oct 24- March 25. However, most children and young people consistently tell us they would prefer an existing trusted adult (for example foster carer) to speak on their behalf or to speak for themselves. A workshop to support better collaboration between Independent Advocates and IROs was delayed this year due to other demands and the Advocacy Manager post being vacant, however this post has now been filled and there are plans to deliver it in 2025. This will look to increase the use of advocates to support young people to resolve issues of concern between reviews, and not just to represent their views at the meeting. The Service Manager is part of the contract monitoring group for advocacy and meets monthly with the new manager to improve how advocacy works for children in care in Dorset.

Consultation questionnaires are sent out via an online form prior to every review, and are sent to parents, carers, other family members and professionals. The feedback forms have been improved this year and the IROs are finding this helpful. These cover a range of areas including relationships, emotional wellbeing, health, education, family time, information sharing, and offer the space to add requests or recommendations and help the IRO to prepare for the review and understand the perspectives of those involved in the child's life prior to the meeting so they can make sure it is as meaningful and useful as possible and all important points are covered.

IRO contact and relationships with children and young people

IRO contacts on 31 st March 2025	
All Children in Care	439
Percentage of all Children in Care who have had an IRO contact in the last 6 months	91%
Those in placements where a contact is expected to take place	427
Percentage of those above, who have had an IRO contact in the last 6 months	94%

For the first half of the year (April 23 – September 23) 96% of children expected to have contact with their IRO over the previous 6 months did so. This is likely to reflect the increased opportunity for visiting over the school holidays. This indicates a consistent picture, and positive relationships between the IRO and their children is something the team are rightly proud of.

Contact is tailored to the young person's needs wishes and feelings. Young people who are more vulnerable or who have a particularly strong relationship with their IRO having more. Between September 2024 and March 2025 71% of children had more than one contact with their IRO (313 out of 439) and 31 of these children had 5 or more contacts with their IRO.

'Contact' in this context includes in person visits, telephone calls, text conversations and cards. IROs in Dorset use creative and individualised ways to build relationships with young people. This can include taking them for a milkshake or hot chocolate or doing an activity/playing a game.

Circumstances where a contact 'is not expected to take place' includes children 'placed for adoption' or children in a hospital setting. However, IROs in Dorset usually maintain contact with those children where appropriate.

Feedback from young people

I've had Anna about 4 years, she gets things done and if they don't she complains, which is great. (H, 18)

Kerry has been good to me, she's helped me with a lot of issues I needed help with, she is nice and calm. A bit too cheerful, ha ha, just kidding! (J. 17)

She got everything done as she gave the social deadlines, she was the main one who got things done. The meetings were ok, she talked to me afterwards to make sure I was ok (A, 15)

Feedback from foster carers:

We are grateful for Glen's support over the years with this young person and his older brother
(foster carer)

Dear Iain, thank you so much for being such a kind advocate for the boys. Grateful to have you! (Dorset foster carer)

help and we have long conversations about the best arrangements (Kinship foster carer)

Feedback from Social Workers:

"Just wanted to feedback about how Glen managed a challenging CiC Review recently. I felt that Glen was outstanding in being able to focus the meeting on the children and their needs, whilst showing value to each of the parents' position and giving them sufficient opportunity to share these. I felt the meeting was drawn together with some clear and realistic actions and that each member of the meeting left feeling heard."

"I would like to share my experience of Anna, she is a fierce advocate for all our children, she does exactly what her job role says on the tin (independent)! Anna is knowledgeable, passionate and child/young person centred"

Debbie's calmness kindness and consistency have made a huge difference for C. C's Foster carer always highlights the hard work of Debbie and how important she

Feedback from parents/family members:

Anna has been really the only stable person throughout our whole involvement; she has always been fair and thorough in the meetings. She will speak up if things aren't being done, or she feels they are not in the best interests of the children. If I've had problems getting hold of social services and Anna is straight onto it, she has been brilliant. (mum)

She has been quite consistent for us, the only person who hasn't changed. She always seems really positive; she met me and my mum and was positive about what we had done. She is always pleasant, kind and helpful. (mum)

She has been fantastic, she always seems to go above and beyond, very prompt, clear and concise. Doesn't pull her punches but we have appreciated that, as we know where we stand and she has helped our family immensely, it was like having another member of the family there. Also how caring she is towards (the children) and put things in ways they understand. (grandad)

What care experienced young people have told us, via Youth Voice, is that they do not like being asked repeatedly for feedback by lots of different adults, they feel they must repeat themselves and often don't get to hear if anything has changed as a result.

We continue to strengthen the relationship the new Youth Voice Network and a team of care experienced young people who have said they wish to give feedback. In June 2024 members of the Network did a 'takeover' of the IRO team meeting. They gave their views on how we could make child in care reviews more welcoming for young people and what things they would like us to challenge on their behalf. This led to further workshops with the network about how to make Child in Care Reviews more comfortable and child focussed, and the impact of delays in decision making for them on day to day matters. Feedback on both these have been taken forward, with the 'Ground Rules for Meetings' being developed and work on 'Delegated Authority' to be progressed later in 2025.

As mentioned above a new feedback form was introduced this year, and launched in January 2025, taking into consideration the things young people had raised at this meeting, such as whether there were the right people at the meeting and if they understood what was being said. It also asks question about what the IRO does well and what they could do better (multiple choice with a free text option). In direct response to feedback from Youth Voice we have allowed this to be completed anonymously so that young people are more likely to tell us how we can improve. It is being used regularly, with 8 responses received up to the end of March 25 from a range of respondents. The 2 young people who have responded so far have given positive feedback ticking that their IRO listens, cares, does what they say they will, and gets things done; that the meeting was the right amount of people, included the right things. One young person shared that they did not understand all of the meeting and this is helpful feedback to take forward for that IRO.

Dispute resolution (escalations)

Dispute resolution continues to be achieved with a variety of approaches and tools which IROs can draw from according to the situation. Issues are raised in conversation, at meetings, set out in formal recommendations at reviews, and IRO progress checks. If these do not achieve the outcome required for the child then they can use 'pre-escalations', informal escalations, formal escalations of varying levels, and/or escalation resolution meetings. The ethos is one of high support, high challenge and the expectation on the IRO is to approach issues with balanced and strengths-based communication, looking for solutions and with a focus on the outcome for the child. They should be a safety net and tool for learning and improvement, not a criticism of individuals, teams or practice.

The Service Manager has produced quarterly reports to share and analyse the escalation data and make improvements to the process. These are shared with operational managers in our Quality of Practice Action Group and demonstrate a developing and effective approach.

Pre-escalations:

The pre-escalation tool has continued to be used well this year, as a way of capturing the informal challenge that IROs provide on a day to day basis before raising more formal escalations with managers. The overall number has increased by 36 this year.

Pre-escalation type	Number of Children	Number of Notes
QARO Pre-escalation: Care/Pathway Plan missing or out of date	53	59
QARO Pre-escalation: Child's journey not reflected on the file	75	102
QARO Pre-escalation: Child's voice not being heard	27	30
QARO Pre-escalation: Education (incl. SEND)	10	11
QARO Pre-escalation: Family contact	2	2
QARO Pre-escalation: Health	7	9
QARO Pre-escalation: Permanence/transitions	55	67
Total	168	280

This report shows that the IROs have continued to focus on planning for young people turning 18 and permanence planning, with many of the pre-escalations being in relation to ensuring Pathway Plans are completed when young people turn 16 and are then updated as they approach 18. Others focus on Permanence Plans being completed and updated, and plans being progressed to achieve long term matching with foster carers, as well as ensuring plans are in place for when children turn 18.

The 'child's journey not reflected on the file' category refers to missing documents, 'chronology of significant events' not being updated and delays in recording visits. Care experienced people have told us how much they dislike having to repeat their story to new workers and how important it is that they can look back at their records and understand what happened and why. Keeping their records up to date and accurate is not only important for safety and sound decision making, but also respectful too.

The significant number of records relating to the 'child's voice not being heard' is evidence that the IROs fulfilling their duty to promote the child's voice as well as their best interests.

Informal and Formal escalations resolved.

Informal Escalation	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Totals
79 (-38)	52 (+14)	26 (+10)	8 (-2)	1 (-2)	0	166 (-22)

In the year 2024 – 2025 the overall numbers of escalations concluded has reduced. Noticeable changes this year are a decrease in informal escalations and increase in Stage 1 and 2 escalations. I would suggest this is most likely due to the greater use of the pre-escalation tool and therefore IROs moving straight to stage 1, where their pre-escalation has not achieved the outcome needed.

Consistent with last year, most escalations were resolved 'informally' with the Social Worker or Team Manager, and all were resolved before reaching Stage 5. No referrals needed to be made to

CAFCASS this year. This shows the benefit of the collaborative approach and strong relationships with the operational teams which enable issues to be resolved before reaching those stages, but also that IROs are confident and willing to escalate higher if required.

Area of focus	Escalations completed Apr 24 – March 25
Care plan / Pathway plan missing or out of date	7
Drift in Permanence Planning (including adoption and reunification)	21
Education/SEND	11
Family time/support networks	1
Health (emotional wellbeing, mental health)	5
Health (physical, dental)	6
Home	15
Identity needs (including life story work and protected characteristics)	4
Legal advice needed	0
Moving homes (planning and support)	5
IRO not being kept informed/consulted appropriately	3
Safety (must start at formal)	11
Transition planning for leaving care	13
Voice of the child/young person not being heard	29
Historical other – for reporting only	137

The most common areas raised by IROs were around drift in Permanence Planning, planning for young people leaving care, education/SEND and Safety (of the child). Multiple areas can be raised on one escalation.

The categories were updated this year and provide more detail about the subject of the escalation, and incorporating more child-focussed language. The ‘historical other’ category shows the phasing out of the broad ‘umbrella’ categories, such as ‘provision of services’, which did not give us enough information about the reason for the escalation. Escalations are now a more effective tool to improve practice through support (identifying where practice needs to change) not just challenge. This will become more helpful moving into 25-26 as the old categories are completely phased out.

The above data does not include escalations still open at the end of the reporting period, of which there were an additional 31.

Escalation tracking meetings

Escalation tracking meetings were introduced in November 2024 and are now held monthly with Service Managers for all service areas (Locality Teams, Permanence, B2SA, and Asylum Seekers Team). A structured monthly tracker was developed in February 25. Actions set for progressing escalations are now tracked consistently. It has helped improve working relationships and maintain

oversight of complex or difficult to resolve escalations and helps with timely resolution of issue for children and families.

The average time to resolve an escalation prior to the tracking meetings has improved from 79 to 48, and it is hoped this will continue to improve through 25-26. The service still prioritises effective resolution of the issue over timeliness, to avoid repeated escalations for the same issue.

Closer working between the IRO service and the Safeguarding Partnership has improved, to enable IROs to escalate to partner agencies more effectively. The Service Manager for the Dorset Safeguarding Partnership will be attending a Team Meeting in 2025 to ensure the team are confident in how to do this and provide support if needed.

Recognition of good practice:

To reflect the commitment of this service to strengths-based practice and high challenge high support, we have also created a 'recognition of good practice' note which is added to the child's record to shine a light on good practice.

There have been 55 notes to recognise good practice this year, covering issues such as relationship-based practice, good quality assessment, and child focussed recording on the file.



"I just wanted to say how impressed I was with the social work report provided by Kate for K's most recent child in care review held on the 27th March. Her report was very comprehensive and must have taken her some time to write – I really appreciated her hard work" (IRO)



"“She (the mum) wanted to share with me how brilliant and amazing (her words) you have been with her and the children. She tells me that the children have a lot of confidence in you and are more than happy to contact you if, and when needed. Though it was important to share this with you. Great feedback from a family during a stressful time for them. Well done.” (IRO)



"Linda's social work throughout this has been excellent. T's needs have remained at the forefront and she has done a sterling job as lead professional - both in liaising with professionals and foster carers - but also in her sensitive and empathic approach to working with T's parents; his mother herself a care leaver. I am sure that T will enjoy a great childhood with his new carers and I am pleased for him too that it is likely that his birth parents will retain a role in this. A very well done to all involved, and especially to Linda." (IRO)

Example of the impact of an escalation:

Significant risks to 3 children were identified when their father was found to be a sexual risk to children. Positive work by the Social Work team engaged the mother and enabled her to understand the risk and become more protective of her children. This work was completed under a Care Order with the children living at home with her. However, when the time came to discharge the Care Orders there was some drift and delay. An escalation by the QARO on 9th July 2024 supported progression of this to court and the Care Orders were discharged on 14th October.

These children will now longer have the intrusion of Social Workers into their lives, and this will reassure and empower their mother to move on with a new chapter of their lives.

Thematic audits and broader Quality Assurance work

Themes and thematic audits completed by the IRO team and Service Manager help to identify where practice can be strengthened with Children in Care. The focus of these comes from a variety of sources including themes noticed in the day to day IRO work; those raised by the Youth Voice Network; requests linked to the Corporate Parenting Board Delivery Plan; themes identified by Senior Managers; and themes identified during inspection work/auditing.

The 'Safe and Settled Care' learning event in September 2024 was organised and co-ordinated by the IRO Service Manager to 'close the loop' by providing training to practitioners that had been identified as needed through the previous years audits.

Workshops covered 'Planning for Safe and Stelled Futures' (Permanence Planning); Being Settled Where You Live' (Placement Stability) and 'Returning to Parents' (Reunification) it was a success, and 57 practitioners attended from 9 different teams. Positive feedback included:

- I have more knowledge on the skills needed.
- I am going to review how my team fill in the paperwork and get them to consider who this is for and what should be included.
- I am more aware of the process now and it was interesting to consider Bias.
- Add to the discussions I have within my team, with children and young people, foster carers and colleagues in children's services around 'permanence' and reunification. Taking away the slides from Sonia and the NSPCC tool will be really helpful for future discussions.
- I support young people in care daily and it will help me think of how my Practice influences others

A further event will be held in October 2025. This year thematic audits have been completed by the IRO service on the Child's Voice and Family Participation; Permanence Planning Meetings (Quality) and Supporting Identity for Children in Care. Workshops will be offered on all three and it is hoped that attendance will increase and learning from last year's event will improve the conference further.

It is planned to continue this annually and address the learning needs identified in thematic audits consistently this way.

Current resources issues impacting on outcomes for children in care

The national shortages of suitable foster families and good quality care provision continue to be a challenge for us in Dorset. It makes matching more difficult and can result in more frequent moves for children. A new project with Impower consultancy in 2025 is hoped to improve this and provide better tools for maximising opportunities both for individual children, and for strategic planning.

Children living outside of Dorset continues to be a challenge and can impact particularly on timeliness of IHAs (Initial Health assessments), access to education provision (especially where the young person has SEND) as well as planning for support and accommodation when the young person turns 18.

A specific area of shortage is appropriate care for young people who need a Deprivation of Liberty Order, and/or have complex needs which are not able to be supported by existing Children's Homes. A project took place this year to submit a bid for development of a specialist provision, in partnership with health. However, this was not able to be progressed due to the NHS Dorset were not ready to commission this.

The availability of NHS dentist places has been a concern for some time and is now improving due to the launch of a new initiative by the CIC health team. This supports dentist practices to use a trauma informed approach with patients and provides an incentive to offering NHS places for children in care and care leavers. A project to support those young people who decline their dentist appointments is planned for 2025 to make the most use of the new scheme and improve young people's dental health further.

Young People from the Youth Voice Network have raised the need for better mental health services for children in care. One that will be improved is with the CAMHS transformation programme. CAMHS will be modelling a graduated approach with the iThrive model, including expansion of mental health in school teams. We hope to see the impact of this over the next 18 months for all children, including children in care.

5. Young People's experience/voice

The 'Your life beyond care' Bright Spots Survey results were received in September 2024, giving a valuable insight into how Dorset's Care Leavers feel and what their needs are. A total of 234 young people completed the survey across a range of ages. Bright Spots of practice included ease of contact with their Personal Advisor; internet access and pets; with positive results for friendships and partners offering emotional support. Areas to be strengthened were identified as 'good friends'; feeling lonely; 'doing things that are worthwhile'; 'being happy with how I look'; and feeling positive about the future. Finances, Education Employment and Training, 'Feeling safe where I live' and levels of Wellbeing were also identified as areas that need more support.

Since the report was received the Care Leavers Service have continued to develop the 'Pathways to Employment Programme' and apprenticeships within the Council, as well as the Staying Close and Mentoring Programmes, amongst others. The learning from the survey has directly informed the

Corporate Parenting Board delivery plan. This evidences that the way the services are developing is in line with, and in response to, what young people tell us.

The IRO Service Manager regularly attends Network meetings and Informal Corporate Parenting Board, to hear what is important to young people who are experts by experience. Examples throughout this report show how young people's voice continues to influence and shape what we do. There is much more that could be done, and we will continue to be ambitious about working with and being directed by young people with lived experience as they understand best what the issues are and how they can be improved.

IROs have been leading the way with 'Mind of My Own', role modelling how it can be used to enable young people to give their views in everyday practice.

Identity has been raised by young people as an area of practice that needs to be improved. This has become one of the priority areas for the Corporate Parenting Board Delivery Plan, and the IRO service manager is leading on this priority area. Improvements have begun including plans for adding a prompt for identity to care plans; creating an 'identity' training page on the learning hub, completing an audit on identity for children in care, developing a training workshop, working to increase the diversity of foster carers, training for foster carers and improving the delegated authority process. The implementation and success of these actions will be reported on in next year's report.

Care experienced people, research and theory, continues to tell us about the importance of language. The IRO service manager has drafted a new 'home finding' form which is based on more child focussed language, simplified for ease of use and will hopefully improve the speed with which we can find new homes for children and better matching. Implementing this form will be part of a bigger project with the Head of Good Care Provision and Commissioning Service in 2025.

5. Review of areas for development identified in the 2023-24 Annual Report:

1. Increase the focus on the child's voice.

This year the IRO service took part in the 'Takeover Challenge' and the outcome and actions resulting from that show direct changes being implemented because of what young people have told us matters.

Pre-escalations and escalations have been used to amplify young people's voices where they are not being heard, and this is an area for continued focus in 25-26

The IRO team have been pioneers for the Mind of My Own app, promoting its use with children and young people in care, as detailed above this has been embedded as the default method for gaining children's views for child in care reviews.

2. Improve challenge around drift and delay

The IRO service has introduced more consistent structured midway reviews, called the 'IRO progress check'. These track whether recommendations have been followed through and give more opportunities to prevent drift and delay for children.

Challenge around drift and delay has been a top area for escalations this year, and the new tracking meetings are helping to give these even more impact.

3.Support better transition planning for care leavers

IROs have not been able to start the structured check in with Care Leavers at 6 months due to delays with the mosaic form being added. However, IROs have a flexible 'closure' date and can stay allocated to a young person for a short period to assure themselves a young person is settled. Many keep in touch with young people after they turn 18, and the formal 'check-in' will strengthen this once added to Mosaic.

As evidenced in this report planning for the young person turning 18 is one of the most frequent areas of challenge for IROs this year, and there have been some examples of robust escalation. In 25-26 the Service Manager will be meeting regularly with the Care Leavers Service Manager to highlight any young people where the plan is not clear or not secured, and assist where needed. It is still an area where we can continue to improve.

4. Support with learning from audits

The Safe and Settled Care Learning Event went ahead and was successful. Now it will become an annual event and be improved for next year.

5. Maintain timeliness of reviews and recommendations

The team have maintained good timeliness with its core functions. Child in Care Review timeliness and completing recommendations consistently being above 90%. Unfortunately, the timeliness of minutes being completed within 20 days has not yet improved and this is an area of continued focus into 25/26. Completion of escalations within 20 days has seen a big improvement and there is further work to do.

6. Conclusion and Plan for 25/26 - 5 key priorities

Reflecting on our progress over the last year I am pleased to report that the service remains stable, committed and focussed on children in care. Working in partnership with the Youth Voice service has been strengthened, and this helps to keep the balance between supporting the business and being a strong voice for children.

The strengths of the service continue to be professionalism, conscientiousness, consistency and positive relationships with the wide variety of professionals working with children in care, as well as families and young people themselves.

Where we need to improve is in consistently challenging areas where practice should be improved, through formal escalations, as well as our own minutes timeliness.

1. Improving the timeliness of Child in Care Review Meeting minutes.

We will utilise new technology to improve the timeliness of minutes, as well as performance management approaches.

2. Continue to challenge where there is drift and delay in Permanence Planning, including planning for young people turning 18.

Continue to use recommendations, IRO progress checks and escalations to address drift and delays.

3. Increased focus on the child's voice and being guided by what matters to young people in care and care leavers.

Close working with the Youth Voice Network, Corum Voice survey and 'Ask Me What Matters' to ensure we are asking, addressing and escalating what matters to young people.

4. Continuing and improving the Safe and Settled Care Learning Event to learn from audit findings.

We will complete more thematic audits, in line with young people's and corporate priorities and deliver training based on the needs identified. Learning from feedback from last year and increasing input/co-design with young people where possible.

5. Improve practice around supporting the identities of children and young people in care.

Ensuring learning from the audit is shared and recommendations carried out to strengthen practice in this area.

Corporate Parenting Board

11 December 2025

Advocacy and Independent Visitors Report

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

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

Local Councillor(s): N/A county wide service

Senior Leadership Team:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

Report author and job title:

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Statutory Authority:

Advocacy

Corporate Parenting Duties: Under Section 22 of the Children Act 1989, local authorities must safeguard and promote the welfare of looked-after children. Advocacy is seen as a key mechanism to uphold children's rights and ensure their voices are heard in decisions affecting them.

Section 26A requires local authorities to make arrangements for the provision of advocacy services for children and young people who wish to make or have made a complaint under the Children Act 1989.

Independent Visitors

Local authorities have a statutory duty to consider appointing Independent Visitors for children in care under Section 23ZB of the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008.

Report status: Public Choose an item.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This report has been jointly prepared by the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS), commissioned by Dorset Council to deliver advocacy and Independent Visitor (IV) services, and the Council's Children's Commissioning Service.
- 1.2 It reflects delivery and performance during the first eight months of the new contract (1 August 2024 to 31 March 2025). The services support children in care, care leavers, and other children in need, ensuring their voices are heard in decisions that affect their lives and that they have access to consistent, trusted relationships.
- 1.3 The report sets out:
 - service developments
 - performance data
 - the views of children and young people
 - progress made against challenges identified in the 2024 report
 - priorities for the year ahead

2. Recommendation(s)

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

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

- 3.1 The rights of children in care to be heard in decisions about their lives are fundamental. These rights are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, Article 12), which states that every child has the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, and for those views to be given due weight. They are also embedded in the Children Act 1989, which requires local authorities to ascertain the wishes and feelings of children before decisions are made about their care.
- 3.2 Advocacy provides a mechanism to ensure these rights are realised in practice. Where children find it difficult to express their wishes or feelings, or where their views conflict with those of the care provider, an advocate offers independent support. Advocates can help children to prepare for and participate in meetings, to raise concerns, or to make a complaint when they feel their voice has not been heard. Importantly, advocates work to the child's agenda, ensuring the child's perspective is central to decision-making processes.

- 3.3 The appointment of an Independent Visitor (IV) is a further statutory duty. Local authorities must consider the appointment of an IV where it is judged to be in the child's best interests, and this should form part of care planning and be reviewed regularly. IVs provide children with consistent, trusted relationships with adults who are independent of their corporate parent and professional network. The role is not task-focused; rather, it is relational. For many children, the IV may be the only person in their life who is there by choice, not by professional obligation.
- 3.4 Both advocacy and IV provision are more than compliance with statutory duties; they are expressions of good corporate parenting. They provide children and young people with trusted adults who listen, amplify their voices, and ensure their rights are upheld. Dorset's commissioning of dedicated advocacy and IV services reflects its commitment to embedding these duties within a child-centred framework of practice.

The report

4. Background

- 4.1 Dorset Council commissions the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) to deliver the Advocacy and Independent Visitor (IV) service. Alongside providing advocacy for children in care and care leavers when issues arise (issue-based advocacy), NYAS also provides advocacy for children who are subject to child protection processes. This report focuses on issue-based advocacy for children in care and care leavers.
- 4.2 Dorset Council undertook a re-tendering exercise in early 2024 and re-commissioned NYAS to continue delivering these services.
- 4.3 This report covers performance during Year 1 of the current contract (1 August 2024 to 31 July 2027, with the option of a further three-year extension). To align with reporting and monitoring with financial years, year 1 of the contract runs from 1 August 2024 to 31 March 2025, and year 2 of the contract began on 1 April 2025.
- 4.4 The report also summarises joint work undertaken to develop and strengthen these services under the new contract.
- 4.5 Advocacy ensures that the views, wishes and needs of children and young people are represented to professionals making decisions about their lives. It enables them to navigate complex systems, particularly at points of transition. The service provides independent and confidential advice,

representation, and support. High-quality advocacy is preventative, addressing issues early so that practical problems do not escalate. Advocates also support children and young people who wish to make a complaint about council services. A further role of NYAS is to help young people build their self-advocacy skills, growing their confidence to speak up for themselves; a lifelong skill that extends beyond their time in care.

- 4.6 Independent Visitors (IVs) are trained volunteers who befriend children in care, providing consistency and reliability to enable a trusting, positive relationship to develop over time. An IV remains independent of the child's professional network and continues to provide support even when placements or social workers change. Visits usually take place at least once a month, ensuring regular contact. IVs may be allocated to children living in foster care, residential care, residential special schools or supported living arrangements up to the age of 18.
- 4.7 Where it is in a young person's best interests, and both the IV and young person wish to continue their relationship beyond the age of 18, this is supported and encouraged as a natural evolution. Dorset Council and NYAS work together to maintain this important relationship.
- 4.8 While children and young people can refer themselves to NYAS, most referrals are made by social workers or Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) through the NYAS referral portal. As a national organisation, NYAS provides advocacy services across multiple local authorities using this system.
- 4.9 It is important to recognise that:
 - not all children will want or need an advocate
 - some may prefer a trusted professional or another adult to represent their views
 - some may choose not to engage with an advocate, even if initially consented
 - others may only require advocacy for a short period
 - many will grow in confidence and develop their own self-advocacy skills

5. Advocacy standards and strategic context

- 5.1 Dorset's services are benchmarked against the National Advocacy Standards (DfE, 2023).
- 5.2 Statutory guidance requires local authorities to:

- act in the best interests of children and young people, promoting their physical and mental health and emotional well-being.
 - encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes, and feelings.
 - take those views, wishes, and feelings into account in decision-making.
- 5.3 Children and young people may sometimes express views that professionals feel are not in their “*best interests*” or that conflict with other needs. Local authorities must balance these views with what is reasonably practicable and achievable, just as any good parent would.
- 5.4 A child’s right to be heard and the local authority’s best interest duties are not mutually exclusive. Where differences arise, it is essential that the child’s views are given due consideration and that a clear, respectful explanation is provided. This underscores the value of high-quality, independent advocacy in supporting children’s rights and ensuring transparency.
- 5.5 The Children’s Commissioner’s 2023 report, *The State of Children and Young People’s Advocacy Services in England*, highlighted national variability in access, independence, and commissioning practice. It recommended stronger entitlements, clearer oversight, and improved data collection. Dorset’s approach, commissioning a dedicated provider, embedding youth voice in service design, and aligning with national standards, reflects these recommendations and demonstrates good practice.

6. Independent Visitor standards and strategic context

- 6.1 The National Independent Visitor Network (NIVN) Standards (2016), ensuring alignment with best practice and statutory expectations across both service areas.
- 6.2 The Independent Visitor (IV) service is a statutory entitlement for children and young people who are looked after and have little or no contact with their birth family. The NIVN Standards (2016) set out expectations for quality, consistency, and child-centred practice in IV services.
- 6.3 IV’s provide long-term, stable relationships with trusted adults outside the care system. They support emotional well-being, build confidence, and offer opportunities for fun, connection, and personal growth. The IV role complements advocacy by promoting the child’s voice through relational support, not just representation.

- 6.4 The 2024 NIVN report, *A Friend Indeed*, provides the first independent national review of the impact of Independent Visitor services. Drawing on the voices of care-experienced children and young people, it evidences the emotional, developmental, and relational benefits of IV friendships. The report calls for improved access, stronger commissioning, and better outcome tracking. Dorset's structured matching process, youth-led service development, and alignment with national standards reflect many of the report's recommendations and demonstrate good practice.

7. Alignment to our council's priorities

- 7.1 The advocacy service works with children in care on the issues that are important to them, and this can touch on many different aspects of their lives including the following that align with the [Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024–2027](#):

Priority 1, safety and permanence: living arrangements and ensuring that the child's voice is heard in decision making regarding where they live and any necessary moves

Priority 2, education and employment: their experience and needs in education, as well as their future, plans aspirations, and ensuring that care-experienced young people have a Pathway Plan that meets their needs and is delivered

Priority 4, identity: having the opportunities, abilities and confidence to express their views; not only about their Care but also about who they are and their Identity. We work with children to ensure that the adults in their lives listen and respond to their views, wishes and feelings, including their concerns. We support children to understand their rights and entitlements, including the right to complain through informal or formal Local Government processes

Priority 5, next steps towards adult life: our relationships with children can extend beyond care, with our advocacy service available for young people / young adults up until their 25th birthday

- 7.2 Through our IV service, children and young people build long-term relationships with adults who they meet regularly to have fun and do things together.

Priority 1, safety and permanence: these relationships form part of the important wider support network for children and give them an adult (who is not paid to be there) that they can rely on

Priority 4, identity: children are given choice and control over who they are “matched” with and can give specific criteria for the volunteer that they would like to spend time with. This can include either volunteers with similar interests / hobbies, or volunteers who share some characteristics (e.g. a young boy who wants a male volunteer)

Priority 5, next Steps towards adult life: we continue to support the IV relationship beyond a young person’s 18th birthday, if this is something that the young person wants to continue. This is currently being achieved through the IV contract, but we have also started to develop connections with the Council’s lifelong links, recognising the value and importance of these long-term relationships

- 7.3 [The Dorset promise](#) is Dorset Council’s commitment to care experienced children and young people as their corporate parents. The provision of advocacy and IV services supports the council in meeting these commitments:



8. Advocacy overview of performance Aug 2024 to March 2025 (8 months)

8.1 NYAS report on two types of advocacy:

- a. Child Protection Advocacy (CPA) representing children and young people at child protection conferences and reviews.
- b. Issue Based Advocacy (IBA) representing children and young people for short-term issues e.g. during child in care reviews. This includes children in care, care leavers and a wider cohort of eligible children.

8.2 In 2024/25 the service received **478 referrals for advocacy**:

- 249 (52%) of these were for children being safeguarded in the child protection system (CPA)
- 229 (48%) were supported with issues raised by children in care and care leavers (IBA)

8.3 This report focuses on the **229 IBA referrals**

8.4 Of the 229 IBA referrals, the most common reasons were:

60% Child in Care Review (statutory meeting)

- 11% Child in Need (statutory meeting)
- 5% Living arrangements
- 3% Issues in home

- 8.5 The 229 IBA referrals made represent **156 individual children and young people**. 94 children were referred for advocacy only once during the 8-month period, and 62 children were referred at least twice, including 4 children who were referred for advocacy support for separate issues on four or more occasions during the period.
- 8.6 Between 1 August 2024 to 31 March 2025 **178 IBA referrals were closed**. This figure includes some instances of advocacy that there open within the service and carried forward from the previous year, and likewise some of the referrals received in this year have remained active and open into year 2 of the contract.
- 8.7 Of the 178 IBA referrals closed, **140 (79%) of these referrals resulted in the delivery of advocacy support**.
- 8.8 When advocacy is not delivered, the advocate will contact the social worker to let them know and share the reasons for this. There are a range of reasons that advocacy support was not delivered, but the most common circumstances for these 38 referrals were:
- 14 (37%) Children and young people declined the offer
 - 11 (29%) NYAS were unable to make contact to provide the service e.g with the child, foster carer or the person who made the referral
 - 7 (18%) Advocacy was no longer required, due to the issues being already resolved or the Statutory meeting for which advocacy was referred is no longer going ahead.
- 8.9 The demographics of the 156 children and young people using the service in this period were:
- Gender
- 45% were female
 - 52% were male
 - 3 either did not conform to a gender, were non-binary or were transgender
- Age
- The youngest children who were referred for advocacy were 4 years old.

The oldest young people who were referred for advocacy were 24 years old.

- 3% aged 4 to 6 years
- 25% aged 7 to 11 years
- 28% aged 12 to 15 years
- 28% aged 16 and 17 years
- 16% were aged 18 to 25 years

Ethnicity

- 83% White British
- 4% were Black
- 7% were Mixed / Multiple ethnicities
- 2% Other White backgrounds
- 4% were from other ethnicities

Disability and mental health

- 28 children and young people (13%) were identified as having a disability. The most recorded needs were Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties.
- 5 occasions of Non-Instructed Advocacy¹ were provided to safeguard the rights and entitlements of children with complex communication needs, including those with Severe Learning Difficulties.
- 19 children/young people identified as having a mental health issue
Resident Authority

8.10 Whilst most children referred for IBA live within the Dorset Council footprint, 36 children were living outside of the county. These children were living in (one child unless otherwise stated):

- Birmingham City Council
- Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (4 children)
- Bristol City Council

¹ Non-instructed advocacy is used when a child or young person is unable to clearly express their wishes or views, for example due to communication difficulties, learning disabilities, or very young age. In these circumstances, the advocate works to uphold the child's rights and best interests by:

- observing the child's behaviour and responses;
- consulting with people who know the child well; and
- ensuring that decisions take account of the child's rights, welfare, and likely wishes.

This approach ensures that children with the most complex needs are not excluded from having their voices represented in decisions about their lives.

- Cambridgeshire County Council (2 children)
- Cornwall Council (4 children)
- Devon County Council
- Hampshire County Council (4 children)
- Isle of Anglesey County Council
- Kent County Council
- London Borough of Hounslow
- North Somerset Council
- Somerset County Council (9 children)
- Southampton City Council (5 children)
- Wiltshire Council
- London Borough of Hounslow
- North Somerset Council
- Somerset County Council (9 children)
- Southampton City Council (5 children)
- Wiltshire Council

8.11 Table 1 shows the children and young people who answered 'yes' to the questions before they received support (pre) and when it ended (post). It illustrates a significant shift in understanding, confidence and satisfaction following the support

Question	Children aged 11 and under		Children and young people aged 11 to 25 years	
	Yes-Pre	Yes-Post	Yes-Pre	Yes-Post
Do you know what your Rights are?	37% (16/43)	86% (30/35)	45% (28/62)	83% (53/64)
Did you have opportunities to express your views, wishes and feelings?	69% (29/42)	97% (33/34)	56% (36/64)	93% (63/68)
During planning, are changes made to your plan because of your views?	17% (7/41)	50% (16/32)	34% (20/59)	80% (53/66)
Do you tell workers / carers in your life what you think about your care?	69% (27/41)	88% (30/34)	48% (31/64)	77% (50/65)

Are you happy with the service you have from your NYAS advocate?	n/a	97% (33/34)	n/a	97% (64/66)
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8.12 Below are a sample of quotes from children and young people during the year (no amendments have been made to how they were worded):

"I also want to thank my advocate, for being there and making sure my voice was heard throughout everything. Knowing I had that support behind me gave me confidence and helped me feel like I wasn't going through this alone."

"If it wasn't for your support I don't think I would have made it this far. If it wasn't for charity's like the one you work at (NYAS) children like me now an adult would be left on their own and no support."

"Thanks for everything. You're the only one who is doing anything to help me."

"I know you have my back."

"I'm really grateful for the support of my advocate since my time in hospital. The communication has been great. I've decided not to go to future meetings because I trust my advocate to share my views for me."

"I'm really pleased that an issue I raised with my advocate before has now been addressed, and things are much better."

8.13 Below are a sample of quotes from family members or professionals during the year (children's names have been changed):

"Mum said the advocacy service has been 'worth its weight in gold due to the support received.'"

Social worker commented "You managed to get more out of the children than I did – thank you."

The Independent Reviewing Officer commented that the child's report submitted for the review had "a powerful impact in letting Sophie's voice be heard in the meeting."

Staff at the residential home thanked me for the advocacy support and "its power in ensuring Jacob was placed at the heart of decision making."

"It absolutely helped Neil having an advocate. It was a huge, huge help!"

- 8.14 When an advocate completes their support, they summarises the impact for individual children and young people. Below are some examples of the impact that were recorded during the year (children's names have been changed):

Alex — Safety, stability and clear planning

- Issue: Alex repeatedly raised concerns about feeling unsafe in their home and asked for a new social worker
- Advocacy actions: Advocate presented Alex's wishes at their review; ensured immediate escalation; sought clarity on options and requested life-story work
- Outcome/impact: New social worker allocated; concerns acted upon with exploration of alternative living options (remaining with dad/emergency/supported accommodation). Alex understands next steps and has requested continued advocacy
- Next steps: Ongoing advocacy for the next review to monitor safety and placement planning

Ben — Resolving debt and building self-advocacy

- Issue: Long-running financial dispute alongside housing instability and domestic abuse.
- Advocacy actions: 18 months of structured support drafting formal correspondence, negotiating with agencies, and maintaining engagement through multiple moves.
- Outcome/impact: Debt written off; Ben now settled in his own flat. He reports increased control and confidence in managing issues.
- Next steps: Case closed with option to re-open if needed.

Layla — Education plan that fits her needs

- Issue: Anxiety about school moves and timetable.
- Advocacy actions: Secured a child-led planning meeting; presented wishes for practical adjustments and contact with family.
- Outcome/impact: Agreed package for Layla to remain at current school with timetable changes, additional tutoring, plus a two-day practical skills course.
- Next steps: Advocate to remain involved to review whether the plan continues to meet Layla's goals.

Marcus — Entitlements confirmed and pathway support

- Issue: Marcus believed he should have been treated as a child in care from first presentation to social services; needed help understanding rights.
- Advocacy actions: Supported Marcus to articulate his views and navigate complaints and assessments.
- Outcome/impact: CIC status confirmed; care leaver entitlements in place; ASD diagnosis received and ADHD assessment pending. Marcus has maintained full-time work and reports greater confidence.
- Next steps: Continued advocacy to uphold care-leaver rights and grow self-advocacy skills.

Chloe — Practical solutions and transition planning

- Issue: Communication gaps and practical barriers (travel passes, equipment) affecting participation and future planning.
- Advocacy actions: Escalated missed actions; ensured commitments were recorded at review; supported discussion about work options and independent living.
- Outcome/impact: Train pass arranged; bike agreed; pathway plan updated (goal to live independently at 18; explore vocational training options). Chloe requested advocacy again for her next review.
- Next steps: Follow-up on actions and support transition to adulthood.

Dylan — Contact and overnight stays agreed

- Issue: Dylan's priority was to secure overnight stays with his dad and gran and to be part of family activities.
- Advocacy actions: Advocate ensured these views were consistently presented at the review and followed up after delays.
- Outcome/impact: Permission granted for overnight stays and inclusion in family outings, increasing Dylan's sense of belonging.
- Next steps: Continued monitoring to ensure arrangements remain in place.

Priya — Value of continuity where professionals change

- Issue: Priya experienced multiple placement moves and frequent changes of professionals, leaving her feeling unsettled.
- Advocacy actions: Advocate provided continuity across reviews, ensuring her history and views were understood by new professionals.
- Outcome/impact: IRO and social worker acknowledged the value of consistent advocacy in safeguarding Priya's voice during transitions. Priya expressed trust in her advocate as the only adult who had remained consistently involved.

- Next steps: Continued advocacy until placement stabilises, with a focus on supporting Priya to develop her own self-advocacy skills.

9. IV overview of performance Aug 2024 to March 2025 (8 months)

- 9.1 There were **16 new referrals** during the period (including re-matches) and **8 new matches** of children and young people with an Independent Visitor (IV).
- 9.2 5 existing matches ended. There were a variety of reasons why IV relationships came to an end, including:
- a child no longer wants an IV due to increased extra-curricular activities and hobbies
 - a child moves out of the area and the distance means the IV visits can't continue
 - changes in personal circumstances for volunteer IVs who are unable to continue to meet their commitment
 - a young person turns 18 and the match comes to a planned (celebratory) end
- 9.3 The year started with **12 children and young people on the waiting list** waiting to be matched with and ended with **18 children on the waiting list**.
- 9.4 19 children and young people were matched with an IV at the start of the contract year. **23 were matched by the end of the reporting period**.
- 9.5 Therefore, despite the service achieving 8 new matches during the 8-month period, the total number of children who continue to be matched saw a net increase of four. However, the rate of new matches being achieved has seen an increase since the previous year, and this trend has continued into year 2 of the contract as we celebrate more children who are benefiting from having an IV.
- 9.6 Where an IV match ends, children and young people can decide whether they would like to be re-matched with a new IV volunteer. Of the 5 matches that ended, three children said that they would like to be re-matched.

1 August 2024 to 31 March 2025 (8 months)

New referrals	16
New matches	8
Matches ended	5

No. matched at 1 Aug 24	19
No. matched at 31 March 25	23
No. on the waiting list at 1 Aug 24	12
No. on the waiting list at 31 March 25	18

9.7 The demographics for referrals during the 8-month period, including those waiting to be re-matched were:

Gender:

- 5 were female
- 10 were male
- 1 did not conform to a gender

Age:

- The youngest age of a child referred for an IV was 7
- The oldest age of a child referred for an IV was 17
- Most children were aged between 10 and 13

Ethnicity:

- 13 White British
- 1 Black British
- 2 from other ethnicities

Disability and mental health:

- 1 child was identified as having a Specific Learning Difficulty

9.8 If a child or young person is placed outside of Dorset, they can still be referred to NYAS. The resident local authority for the referrals over the year were:

- Dorset Council 13
- BCP Council 2
- London Borough of Enfield 1

9.9 Below are a sample of quotes from children and young people during the year (no amendments have been made to how they were worded):

"He always shows up when he says he will, when he was poorly, he let me know and came the next weekend instead"

"She's always there for me"

"My IV makes me feel less angry about stuff and we end up laughing"

"Sometimes I moan about my mum and feel bad I don't want to see her, my IV always listens to me"

"It's fun, he asks what I want to do, we went to Marwell zoo and saw sea lions, I didn't know sea lions were a real thing!"

"My IV lets me choose where we go. I like being in the car with her and talking, we always get my favourite meal deal. Walking her dog is fun, I would love a dog!"

"One time I didn't want to go out so my IV came to my house and we had hot chocolate, then we went for a walk near my house and I felt better"

"My IV brings me Mario cards, I have loads now"

Volunteer IVs provide feedback after their visits. They provide a summary of the activities they have done together and make observations on their relationship and ongoing value for each child. Below are a sample of quotes from IVs during the year (children's names have been changed):

"Josh had lots of fun and enjoyed our trip to the Christmas lights. Josh said he appreciated the opportunity to be himself and felt safe"

"Sam is moving to another new foster home, he was sad and disappointed at the decision however was responsive to validation of his feelings"

"Ryan invited me to their RAF cadet presentation. Ryan was given an award, they are flourishing...Their confidence has grown, and they have made a wide circle of friends...Ryan has decided to join the RAF as an apprentice"

"Jess was upset about making a decision to not see her mum for a few months, we chatted about this, and this allowed her to make the decision without feeling guilty"

"Jake chose to do indoor climbing, he improves every time. We talked about his online Xbox tournaments & Minecraft playing"

"Daniel said they have done well enough in their exams to get into their college which starts September, I am proud of their determination. We Watched Dorchester FC and chatted over lunch"

"Kai was excited to go fishing again and is getting better at the sport every time. He was keen to ask for guidance and also demonstrate his increasing knowledge and skill base. Kai is looking forward to our next fishing trip"

- 9.10 Dorset IVs have access to additional funding, Positive Activities Fund, which is grant funding that has been secured by NYAS. This fund is

specifically intended to be used to support Dorset's children and young people in care who are matched with an IV to further their interests, hobbies, sports and developing their skills. In Dorset, our IV's have been proactive in recognising how this fund can be used in a positive way with more than £1,000 of expenditure requested and approved in the year.

"We went to a posh restaurant in Bournemouth and got dressed up and went shopping, I hadn't been anywhere like that and I loved it"

"Brian took me to the Christmas lights at Longleat, I have asked to go again. He said we can!"

"Billy bought me fishing gear, I didn't have my own, he said I am getting better than him now at fishing"

"My IV took me on the train to London and we went on the London Eye, I have always wanted to go to London, we walked so far!"

"Me and James went to a bowling day with other IVs and children. I'd never been bowling before! I was nervous but I had fun with everyone."

"At the group bowling day me and my IV went on the virtual motorbikes after bowling, can we go again?"

- 9.11 When a child or young person has been matched with their IV for 12 months, our IV Coordinator meets with them to hear directly about their experiences. This feedback is a central part of our Quality Assurance process, ensuring that children's voices shape how the service is monitored, evaluated, and improved. It provides valuable insight into what works well, what could be different, and how relationships with IVs make a difference in children's lives. In this way, children and young people are active partners in shaping and developing the IV service.
- 9.12 During the period, nine Dorset children participated in an Annual Review conversation with us. Findings included:
- 80% reported trying something new
 - 60% reported learning a new skill
 - 100% felt comfortable talking to their IV
 - 80% rated listening 5/5
- 9.13 Children highlighted the value of activities such as zoo visits, cinema trips, and sports, and placed strong emphasis on consistency: *"He always turns up."*

9.14 These insights will inform volunteer recruitment, training, and activity planning in year 2.

9.15 The following examples illustrate how Dorset's Independent Visitor (IV) service makes a difference in children's lives. Each story highlights the importance of consistent, trusting relationships with adults who are there by choice, not by professional obligation. IVs provide fun and new experiences, emotional support, and continuity through times of change, helping children and young people feel listened to, valued, and supported (children's names have been changed):

Ruby – Rebuilding Confidence after Family Strain

- Context: "Ruby" (14) was finding family contact arrangements difficult and felt guilty about stepping back from contact with her mum.
- IV role: Her Independent Visitor offered a safe space to talk through her feelings, validating her choices and reassuring her.
- Impact: Ruby felt listened to and more confident, saying it helped her to make her decision without guilt.

Hassan – Stability through Placement Moves

- Context: "Hassan" (13) experienced several foster home moves in quick succession, which left him feeling unsettled.
- IV role: His Independent Visitor kept visits consistent throughout, giving him continuity when many other things were changing.
- Impact: Hassan said his IV "still turns up for me," helping him to feel less anxious during times of disruption.

Ryan – Aspirations and Achievement

- Context: "Ryan" (16) lacked confidence and was uncertain about their future.
- IV role: Their IV encouraged them to take part in activities such as cadets, attended their presentation, and celebrated their progress.
- Impact: Ryan received an award at cadets, grew in confidence, and now plans to join the RAF as an apprentice. They said their IV "believes in me and makes me want to try."

Ella – Fun, Exploration and Shared Experiences

- Context: “Ella” (11) had limited opportunities to try new things outside of her placement.
- IV role: Her Independent Visitor planned regular outings chosen together, including a zoo trip, cinema, and sports.
- Impact: Ella described them as “the best days out” and added, “*She always turns up.*” These experiences helped Ella build confidence, learn new skills, and enjoy positive time with a consistent adult.

9.16 Together, these examples show how the IV service supports Dorset’s Corporate Parenting priorities; giving children safety and permanence through consistent relationships, supporting their identity by valuing their voice and choices, and helping them take positive steps towards adulthood with confidence.

10. Developing the Advocacy and IV Services

10.1 There continue to be many positive outcomes for children and young people through Dorset’s advocacy and Independent Visitor (IV) services. The first eight months of the new contract (August 2024 to March 2025) have seen strong progress, while some areas remain a focus for ongoing development. The key challenges highlighted in the 2024 report remain relevant reference points:

- staffing gaps / recruitment / end of commissioned contract
- referrals and uptake of services
- volunteer recruitment for the IV service
- building relationships and trust between workers and agencies

10.2 Dorset Council and NYAS have worked in partnership to address these challenges. Progress and ongoing actions are summarised below:

Staffing, recruitment and contract transition

- The transition to the new contract was managed collaboratively, with retention of key staff to maintain continuity.
- Recruitment to all roles has been successful, and the benefits are evident in performance data and in the relationships now being built between teams.

Referrals and uptake of services

- Dorset Council's *Thinking Thursday* sessions and other promotional/training opportunities have been used to raise awareness with children and professionals.
- NYAS has provided clearer professional guidance on referral routes for both advocacy and IV services.
- Advocacy referrals have increased, and the IV service received six new referrals in quarter 4 alone, reflecting greater confidence and awareness of the service.

Volunteer recruitment for the IV service

- Targeted recruitment campaigns have led to increased applications, particularly through community outreach and university engagement.
- Messaging now emphasises diversity, representation, and lived experience to broaden the volunteer base.
- At the end of quarter 4, 23 children were matched with an IV, with 18 waiting. This represents a significant improvement on the previous year.

Building relationships and trust between workers and agencies

- Joint training sessions and Best Practice Meetings have strengthened collaboration between agencies.
- Feedback loops between advocates, IVs, social workers, IROs, and carers are now more consistent, with a shared commitment to restorative practice approaches when issues arise.
- Case studies (e.g. sustained advocacy through placement changes, long-term IV relationships) demonstrate the positive impact of improved trust and continuity.

11. Forward Focus: year 2 priorities

11.1 In year 2 of the contract (April 2025 to March 2026), Dorset Council and NYAS will continue to consolidate progress and drive improvement in both the advocacy and IV services.

Key priorities include:

- Expanding the reach and uptake of advocacy and IV, particularly among underrepresented groups
- Continuing to embed youth voice in service delivery, governance, and evaluation
- Broadening the use of direct work tools and relational approaches in advocacy practice
- Supporting transitions for care leavers, with stronger links to lifelong networks
- Growing a diverse and sustainable volunteer base to meet demand for the IV service.

- 11.2 These priorities will ensure the services remain child-centred, sustainable, and closely aligned to the ambitions of Dorset's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024–2027 and the Dorset Promise.

12. Financial implications

- 12.1 The service is operating within the agreed budget.

13. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

- 13.1 This report does not require a decision; therefore the climate decision wheel is not applicable

14. Well-being and health implications

- 14.1 Dorset Council require the contracted provider to be responsive to advocates and IVs referrals to minimise impact on emotional well-being for children and young people.

15. Other implications

- 15.1 Dorset's advocacy approach was adapted during the time we were pathfinders for the DfE's [Families First for Children programme](#). This programme has now rolled out nationally as the [Families First Partnership \(FFP\) Programme](#). This has led to an even greater focus on ensuring children, young people and their parents have their voices heard in meetings we have that impact them.
- 15.2 The advocacy and IV specification included requirements from the revised advocacy standards for children and young people². The Department for Education (DfE) consulted on these in 2023, but they are published yet (likely due to the subsequent change in Government). However, we believe the revised standards were robust and are unlikely to change significantly when they are published.

16. Risk implications

16. The risks are assessed as 'low'.

² [National Standards for the Provision of Children and Young People's Advocacy Services](#)

17. Equalities

- 17.1 This report does not require a decision; An Equalities Impact Assessment is not required for this report.

18. Appendices – none**19. Background papers**

[Report to Corporate Parenting Board – December 2024: Dorset Independent Visitor and Advocacy Report](#)

[Report to Corporate Parenting Board – November 2023: Dorset Independent Visitor and Advocacy Report](#)

[Report to Corporate Parenting Board – November 2022: Dorset Independent Visitor and Advocacy Report](#)

20. Report sign-off

- 20.1 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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Your Voice. Your Rights. Your Relationships.

Dorset Advocacy & Independent Visitor Service – 2025 update

 **Who wrote the report:** This report was written by Rob Elkins, Emma Collings and Sara Mullen.

We are the manager and senior team members in the Dorset Advocacy and Independent Visitor Service, part of NYAS.

 **Date written:** October 2025 (covering August 2024 to March 2025 – 8 months)

What's this?

- Every year Dorset Council & NYAS report how advocacy and Independent Visitors (IVs) are helping children and young people in Dorset.
- It shows what's working well and what we're doing next to make things even better. 😊
- We share it with the **Corporate Parenting Board** (the people who make sure children in care in Dorset are supported).
- This update is for *you*.

What are the key messages of this report

- Advocacy helps you speak up and be heard.
- Independent Visitors are kind volunteers who spend time with you and do fun things.
- More children are getting support than last year.
- Your feedback helps us improve the service.

What is Advocacy?

An **advocate** is someone independent who is on *your side*.

- ✓ Helps you share your views in meetings about your life
- ✓ Makes sure adults listen to you
- ✓ Explains your rights
- ✓ Supports you to complain if needed
- ✓ Works to *your* views and wishes, not anyone else's

💬 "I know you have my back."

What is an Independent Visitor (IV)?

An **IV** is a volunteer who chooses to be in your life.

- ✓ Meets you once a month
- ✓ Does fun activities you pick together
- ✓ Always turns up, even if workers or where you live change
- ✓ They're there because they *want* to be, not because they're paid

💬 “She always turns up.”

📊 What happened this year?

Advocacy

- 156 children and young people supported
- Ages 4–24
- 13% had a disability, 12% with mental health needs
- 97% say they are happy with their advocate

Changes thanks to advocacy:

- ✅ More children knew their rights (37% → 78%)
- ✅ More children said their views changed their plans (up to 77%)

💬 “Thanks for everything. You’re the only one who is doing anything to help me.”

Independent Visitors (IVs)

- 23 children had an IV (more than last year!)
- 18 waiting for a match (we’re recruiting!)
- 9 children told us about their IV after 12 months:
 - 👁️ 100% felt comfortable talking to them
 - 👁️ 80% tried something new
 - 👁️ 60% learned a new skill

💬 “The best days out.”

🗨️ What’s next?

In 2025/26 we’ll:

- ✦ Make sure more children know about advocacy & IVs
- ✦ Recruit more volunteers so no one waits too long
- ✦ Listen to your feedback to keep improving
- ✦ Support young people leaving care with lifelong links
- ✦ Use fun and creative tools to help you share your views

💡 Want support?

📞 Call NYAS free: 0808 808 1001

🌐 Visit: www.nyas.net

💬 “If it wasn’t for your support I don’t think I would have made it this far.”

Corporate Parenting Board

11 December 2025

Virtual School Head Annual Report 2024-2025

For Decision

Cabinet Member:

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

Local Councillor(s):

Senior Leadership Team:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

Report author and job title:

Jo Smark-Richards

Job Title:

Service Manager (Virtual School Headteacher)

Email:

jo.smark-richards@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Statutory Authority: Dorset

Report status: Choose an item. Choose an item.

Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)

1. The Virtual School Headteacher's Annual Report 2024/25 evaluates the progress, attendance and outcomes for our Children in Care and Care Leavers during the academic year. The report also evaluates the work undertaken through the Extended Role of the Virtual School to provide strategic leadership and oversight for all children with a social worker, children in kinship care arrangements and children who have previously been in care.
2. **Recommendation(s)**
 - 2.1 Members of Corporate Parenting Board are requested to note the content of this report which captures the work of Dorset Virtual School over the last academic year and progress made against our priorities 2024-2025. The report also identifies the next steps and the identified priorities for Dorset Virtual School 2025- 2026.
3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**
 - 3.1 As Corporate Parents, all members of the board seek to stay informed about Dorset children in care and care experienced young people, to offer challenge and support. The Virtual School Headteacher's Annual Report provides members with an opportunity to review the work of the previous year, to

consider what has worked well and to plan priorities for the next academic year.

4. The report

4.1 Please note Appendix 1 is the Virtual School Headteacher's Annual Report 2024/25

5. Alternative options considered

Not applicable

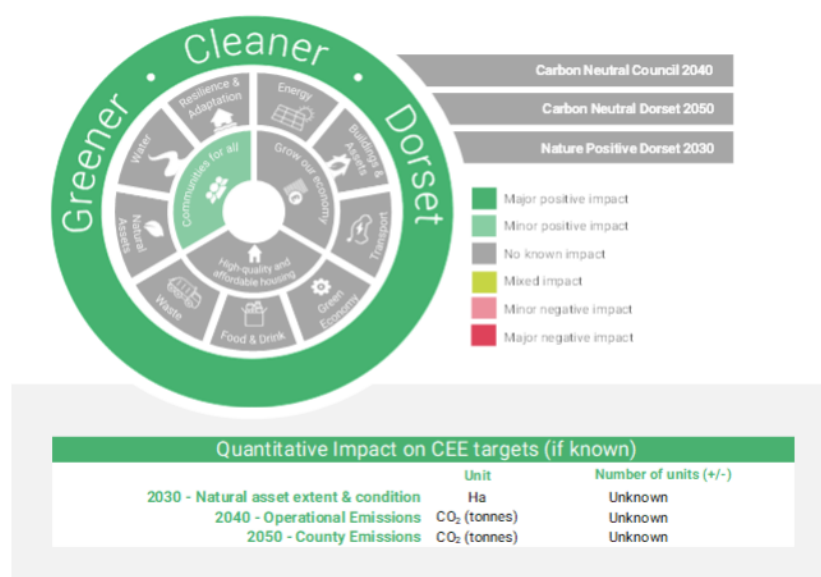
6. Legal considerations

Not applicable

7. Financial implications

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

8. 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	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
Grow our economy	Neutral impact
High-quality and affordable housing	Neutral impact
Communities for all	Minor positive impact

9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 The report evaluates the impact of the work of the Virtual School to supports its children in education; the report considers the impact of interventions on well-being and progress of young people. Due to the nature of the work, working with children in complex family situations and children who have experienced trauma there are risks to the virtual school leads wellbeing and need for additional support. To mitigate against this there is a Dorset Council allocated link educational psychologist who provides group supervision to the staff of the virtual school.

10. Other implications

- 10.1 None

11. Risk implications

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

Current Risk: Low
Residual Risk: Low

12. Equalities

- 12.1 None

13. Appendices

- 13.1 Appendix 1: Virtual School Headteacher's Annual Report 2024/25

14. Background papers

- 14.1 None

15. Report sign-off

- 15.1 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: Virtual School Head Annual Report 2024–2025

Who wrote the report: The Virtual School Headteacher and their team.

Date written: November 2025

Summary of what the report is about:

This report looks at how children in care, care leavers, and children with a social worker did in school during the last year. It talks about what went well, what changed, and what still needs to improve.

What are the key messages of this report

- We worked hard to make sure children feel they belong and are included.
- Fewer children were suspended or excluded from school this year.
- Attendance has gone up for most children.
- More young people aged 16+ are in education, training, or work.
- We gave extra help to children in care and those living with relatives (kinship care).
- We listened to children's voices and added more extracurricular activities.

Important facts and figures

- Suspensions for children in care dropped from 15% to 10%.
- Only 1 child in care was permanently excluded.
- Attendance: 88% (children in care), 77% (child protection), 80% (child in need).
- 72% of care leavers aged 16+ are in education, training, or work.
- 95% of Personal Education Plans were rated good or outstanding.
- 165 children were celebrated for doing well in school or overcoming challenges.

Actions or recommendations

- Help children who miss a lot of school (50% or less attendance).
- Give more support to children living with relatives.
- Make sure children's voices are part of all decisions.
- Work with schools to reduce suspensions, especially for children with special needs.
- Create new programmes for older children to prepare for jobs or further education.
- Keep improving support for all children with a social worker.

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Dorset Virtual School Annual Report 2024/25

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Foreword from Miriam Leigh, Head of Children Thriving in Education

It is a privilege to be the Head of Service with responsibility for the work of the Virtual School including the extended role of the Virtual School Head.

The Dorset Virtual School Annual Report for 2024/25 reflects a year of growth, innovation, and unwavering commitment to improving educational outcomes for our children in care, care leavers, and those supported through our extended strategic role—including children with a social worker and those in kinship care arrangements.

At the heart of the work is a shared vision: that every child and young person we support thrives in a setting where they feel safe, included, understood, and empowered to succeed. This report showcases the resilience and achievements of our children and young people, the dedication of our carers and educators, and the continued strategic efforts of the Virtual School team to advocate for and champion educational equity.

Throughout the year, our partnerships, expanded our team, and implemented targeted interventions to address attendance, exclusions, and engagement have been strengthened. The data-driven approach, combined with a deep commitment to the voice of children and young people and belonging, has led to celebrating successes and identifying areas for continued development.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the work of the Virtual School, challenges, and priorities, and serves as a testament to the collaborative working practices.

Introduction

Dorset Virtual School is a proud educational advocate for our children. Our vision for our children is that they thrive in the right educational setting; they attend, feel included and listened to and are understood, to prepare them to 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. We do this in a variety of purposeful activities.

We have had a very busy 2024 – 25. Our children and young people have shown incredible resilience, perseverance and positivity in terms of educational outcomes and aspirations and this has been exemplified in our weekly celebration awards, our activity days and residential trip and our wonderful Annual Awards, showing just how exceptional our children truly are.



The Virtual School Team have worked tirelessly to strengthen our practice, be creative for our children and young people and ensure that our settings have the right support to support and understand our children.

Jo Smark-Richards: Service Manager Virtual School/ Virtual School Headteacher

Purpose of the report

This report provides an overview and analysis of the impact of Dorset Virtual School's work during the academic year 2024 – 25 and is the key educational advocacy service of Dorset's Education Service within the Children's Services Directorate for Dorset's Children in Care,

Care Leavers, children with a Social Worker, children in Kinship Care arrangements and children previously looked after.

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

A year in summary

2024/25 has been a year of expansion and transformation within the team to support all children with a Social Worker and children in kinship care arrangements alongside our work with our Children in Care and Care Leavers and has given the opportunity to build relationships with our partners to ensure that our children and young people have the opportunity to achieve and be successful.

We have focused on highlighting and celebrating belonging and inclusion within our work and practice, implementing alternatives to suspensions and enhancements of our bespoke offers for our children alongside implementing focused monitoring and support for all children with a Social Worker within the locality teams and partners.

Virtual School headline data is reported weekly to the Children's Services Leadership Team with Key Performance Indicators reported monthly to ensure that there is a line of sight of the work of the Virtual School. Performance is also reported monthly to the Corporate Parenting Board. The Virtual School Governing Body has a forward plan of monitoring activity linked to the priorities on the School Development Plan and continues to challenge the Virtual School to ensure that it is providing all our children with the best education possible.

Some of the key strengths this year have been:

- Reduction in suspensions for Children in Care (10% of cohort vs 15% in 2023/24 37 vs 50 children)
- Ensured that there has been no increase in suspensions for children with a social worker: 8% (23 children) Child Protection and 15% (178 children) Child in Need compared to 24 children (Child protection) and 178 children (Child in Need)
- Reduction in the number of permanent exclusions for Children in Care (1 child), children on Child Protection Plans (5 children) and Children in Need (20 children)
- Proactive approach to alternative to suspensions launched
- Relaunch of the 4th Knowledge Exchange Programme in collaboration with University College London - working in partnership with a cross-phase group of specialist and mainstream providers to develop practice
- Proactive staff training offer implemented
- Increase in attendance 88% (Children in Care), 77% (children on Child Protection plans) and 80% for Children in Need
- Maintained low use of Reduced Timetables in 24/25 with 7 children currently on the register (Children in Care)
- Increase in the number of Post 16 who are in Education, Employment or Training (72.10% monthly average) (Children in Care)
- Outstanding PEP Quality Assurance (95% good or outstanding)
- Weekly celebrations of 165 children and young people who have excelled in education or overcome significant barriers
- Organisation of one residential opportunity for children from year 7-11, working in partnership with Jamie's Farm

- Development of our support for children in kinship care arrangements
- Organisation and delivery of a range of extra-curricular activities in response to our children's voices
- Good outcomes for phonics, year 4 multiplication check, Key Stage 2 SATs, GCSE and Post 16

We need to focus on:

- Improving attendance for those children with severe absence (50% attendance or less)
- Enhancing our offer for our children living in Kinship Care arrangements
- Embedding our children's voice within our work
- Working with locality practitioners and partners to develop good practice to reduce suspensions, particularly for children with Special Educational Needs
- Develop a robust monitoring report for children with a Social Worker who are Electively Home Educated in preparation for Children's Wellbeing Bill.
- Develop targeted programmes for young people in Key Stage 2, 4 and 5 to support education, employment and training.
- Develop the work of the wider extended role in supporting children with a Social Worker.

Virtual School Structure and responsibilities

The Virtual School is led by the Service Manager/ Virtual School Headteacher. The Virtual School team delivers their work within Dorset Council localities, enabling best practice to be disseminated and shared within the wider Children's Services structure. This enables the best possible support and guidance to be available for our schools and children and young people.

In November 2024, the Virtual School team was expanded to include a Team Manager with oversight for children with a Social Worker and children in kinship care arrangements and an Inclusion Lead to support these young people and families alongside locality practitioners. This ensures that the Virtual School can champion the educational attendance, attainment and progress of all children with a social worker.

The Virtual School team consists of:

- Two Specialist Teachers: A Virtual School SENCo and a data and assessment lead who hold wider responsibilities to build skill and capacity within the Virtual School Team and schools to meet the needs of all children.
- One Team Manager with responsibility for children with Social Worker and children in kinship care arrangements
- One Inclusion Lead with responsibility for ensuring the monitoring of attendance, progress and inclusion for children with Social Worker and children in kinship care arrangements
- Thirteen Virtual School Leads (11.8 FTE): responsibilities are for a case load of, on average 45 children in each locality (and a share of those children out of authority), ensuring that children have a suitable and ambitious education offer, there is strong liaison with their settings and Designated Teachers, and the Personal Education Plan (PEP) is effective in supporting children's progress.

Each member of the team holds a whole school responsibility to support the priorities of the Virtual School. This enables the team to develop leadership skills and have a sense of autonomy over the priorities within the school. During 2024/25, these whole school

responsibilities led to the development of an alternative to suspension package, improved tracking processes for children with a Social Worker and a bespoke training offer for all settings to access.

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

The School Development Plan 2025/26 has set three strategic priorities with an overarching aim to ensure that all children within the Virtual School are ambitious around education and feel they belong. (further details in appendix 1):

A programme of half-termly Continuous Professional Development is in place for the Virtual School Team. CPD training themes in the academic year 2024/25 have included:

- Emotionally based school avoidance
- Understanding the Early Years Wellcom Programme
- Using Welfare Call to monitor attendance effectively
- Target setting
- Changes to children previously looked after
- New interventions to support learning
- Linking EHCP outcomes to PEP targets

Children and young people in the Virtual School

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

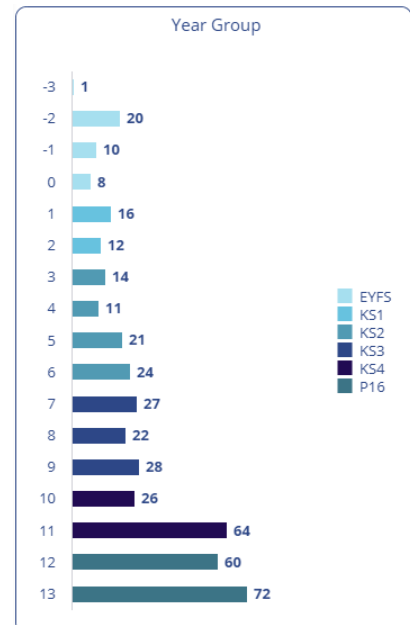
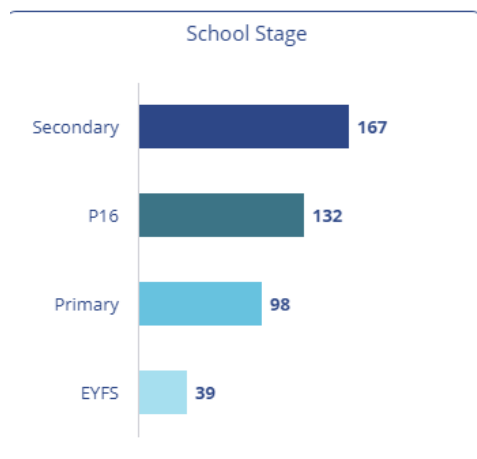


The Virtual School work with children with a Social Worker and children in kinship care arrangements or previously looked after from the age of 2 to the end of the academic year following their 18th birthday. This allows the Virtual School team to support settings and our Social Work teams to champion the educational progress and outcomes for these young people and ensure that our children's voice is heard throughout their educational career. Responsibility and oversight for the extended role of the Virtual School was moved within the team in November 2024 with a Team Manager and Inclusion Lead taking a lead to improve outcomes for this group of children and young people.

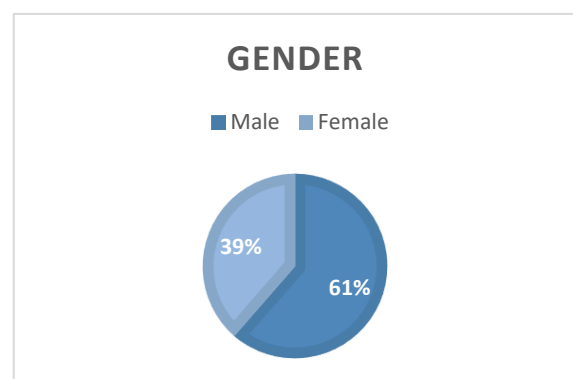
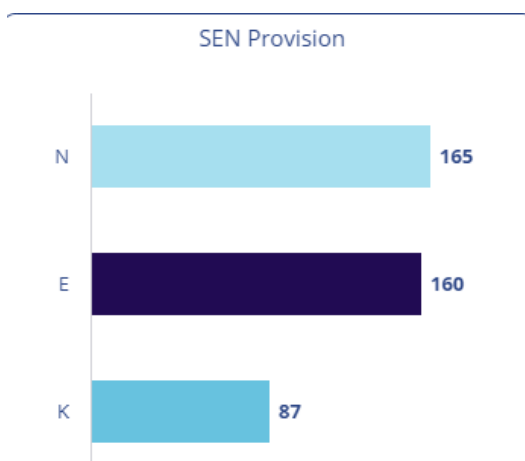
School roll

Children in Care and Care Leavers

At the end of the reporting period, 491 children and young people were part of our school as Children in Care or Care Leavers. The Virtual School cohorts range from early years to our Post 16 cohort, which is made up of young people in Sixth Form, Further Education colleges, those in apprenticeships and those in employment. The Virtual School has a higher number of young people across Key Stage 4 and 5 and an increasing number of children in Early Years in 2024/25. The Virtual School has seen a decrease in the number of children seeking asylum this year with 41 young people listed as unaccompanied from 8 to year 13.

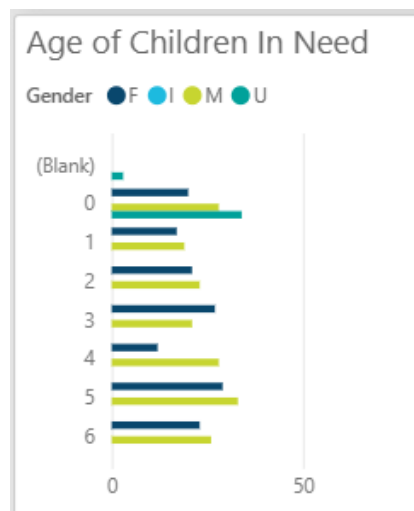
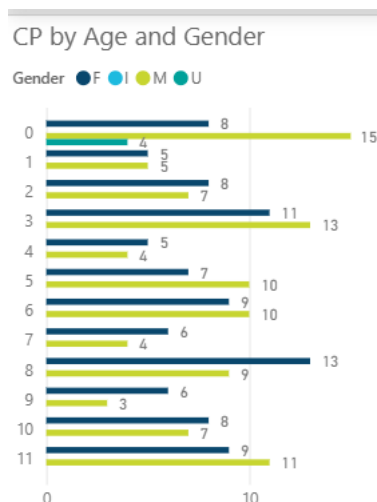


The Virtual School Children in Care cohort is 61% male, with 58% of our young people living in County. 37% of our children have an EHCP and a further 20% of our cohort have an identified SEN need. In terms of SEN, 63% of our children have SEMH listed as their primary need (55% in 2023/24) with a further 32% listing complex needs.



Children in Need and on Child Protection Plans

At the end of the reporting period, 274 children and young people on Child Protection Plans and 1165 children and young people on Child in Need plans sat within the extended role of the Virtual School.



The Virtual School has a higher number of young people across Key Stage 4 and 5 and an increasing number of children in Early Years in 2024/25. The Virtual School has seen a decrease in the number of children seeking asylum this year with 41 young people listed as unaccompanied from 8 to year 13.

The Virtual School Children in Need cohort is 54% male and on Child Protection Plans is 49% male, with 24% of our Children in Need and 14% of our children in Child Protection having an EHCP. Additionally, four children on Child Protection Plans and 22 Children in Need are currently electively home educated.

Admissions and schools attended

Dorset Virtual School aim to ensure that our Children in Care attend settings that have been rated as rated as Outstanding or Good by Ofsted. Due to changes in Ofsted inspections during 2024/25, it has been difficult to analyse the data for this. However, the Virtual School ensure that any Ofsted reports, monitoring reports and improvement plans are scrutinised prior to our children starting a new school to ensure that the school is the right choice for our children.

We aim to support our children to attend the same school once they move into care to ensure stability and support at times of upheaval. In the unlikely event that a child may ask to attend a school that requires improvement, we will evaluate the suitability of each setting, considering the improvement plan in place and the progress the school has made. During 2024-2025, none of our children were in or moved to existing Ofsted 'Inadequate' settings.



74% of our children and young people attend a mainstream or Learning Centre setting, 65% are in Early Years settings and 17% of our children and young people are in specialist settings.

Educational engagement

Attendance

Children in Care

The Virtual School undertakes daily attendance monitoring through Welfare Call's live dashboard, providing dynamic and instant overview of attendance for all cohorts. This robust system provides data at a cohort, group and individual level to give an accurate view of attendance, reasons for absence and patterns of absence. This has enabled the Virtual School to monitor, analyse and respond to attendance concerns rapidly and remains a key area for improvement (priority 1 on the School Development Plan). The attendance overview for statutory school age children in the academic year 2024 - 2025 is provided in Appendix 3.

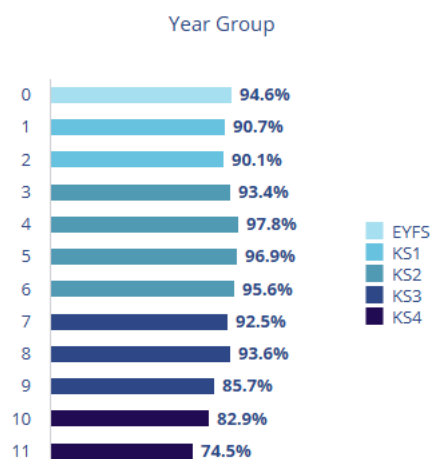
Our ambition is to ensure that all our children thrive and achieve through the targeted monitoring of and challenging of attendance within the Virtual School. This also includes the reduction of persistent absence and unauthorised absence.

The Virtual School set an ambitious target of 92% attendance for our statutory school age children. Dorset Virtual School did not meet this target, but attendance was above the Welfare Call Local Authorities average (88.0% compared to 87%) and slightly above 2023/24 (87%).

All year groups are above 90% attendance with the exception of year 9, year 10 and year 11. Additionally, there are 44 children with 100% attendance (25 in 2023/24), 160 children with above 95% attendance (54%) and 187 children with above 90% attendance (63%).

Attendance for children with an EHCP was slightly lower compared to the whole cohort (86.0%) with the lowest attendance seen in year 2 (78.4%) and year 11 (77.7%). However, the remaining year groups were all at or above 90% attendance for the year.

Attendance for children with a SEN need was higher compared to the whole cohort (91.2%) with the lowest attendance seen in year 11 (72.7%).



Unauthorised absence is defined as any absence that has not been agreed by school. Unauthorised absence has slightly reduced this year to 3.99% compared to 4.29% in 2023/24. This accounts for 133 children having at least one unauthorised mark during 2024/25. 46% of these children were in KS4 with 59% of unauthorised marks were from males and 45% having an EHCP. There has been an increase in unauthorised absence this year for children seeking asylum with 11% of the unauthorised marks for this cohort of children.

Persistent absence is defined as attending less than 90% of school sessions. Persistent absence figures have slightly decreased since the previous year. 25.8% of our children have had persistent absence compared to 28% 2023/24. Our persistent absence marks are in line with to the Welfare Call average at 29.5%. This accounts for 91 children during the year with below 90% attendance. There is particular concern for children in year 11 (39 children with below 90% attendance) and year 1 (7 children with below 90% attendance) Further analysis of year 1 children is that 6 children were new into care during the year and 14 of the 39 children in year 11 were also new into care during the year.

Severe Absence is defined as attending 50% or less. There has been an increase of children with severe absence (9% of our children) compared to 4.4% 2023/24. Dorset Virtual School have lower levels of severe absence compared to the Welfare Call average of 10.28% for 2024/25.

A piece of work has been undertaken by the team to unpick barriers to education for this cohort of children with illness as the biggest driver of the increase in absence; an increase in anxiety and capacity within specialist provision to support places also contributing, as well as changing behaviours and habits during the Pandemic.

Current attendance is improving overall but the Virtual School needs to focus on children with persistent absence; additional monitoring including analysis into specific persistent 'low attenders' by attendance mark is being undertaken to provide an additional layer of scrutiny. Further scrutiny through bi-monthly Virtual School Inclusion Monitoring Board meetings involving the Virtual School Leads, SEN Leads and Social Workers allows discussion, analysis and support for targeted children to monitor and address concerns.



Monthly scrutiny of children with low attendance is undertaken via the Student Progress meetings and oversight is via the monthly Extended Leadership Performance Board. The Virtual School Governing Body have undertaken dip sampling during the academic year on attendance and strategies in place.

Targeted training for Virtual School Leads and Designated Teachers on attendance has discussed and embedded strategies to overcome barriers to attending school.

Children in Need and Child Protection Plans

National data for attendance will not be released until Spring 2026 as a comparison. Dorset Children in Need overall attendance stands at 78.68% whilst attendance for children on Child Protection plans stands at 77.12% which is a slight improvement on the previous year (76%). There are concerns around persistent absence (Child Protection 59% and Children in Need 53%) and severe absence (Child Protection 15% and Children in Need 16%) and this is an area to focus on in 2025/26, working in collaboration with locality teams to increase awareness of the impact of attendance for young people.

The Virtual School undertakes weekly cohort attendance monitoring through the Inclusions dashboard to provide tracking of trends for these children. This has enabled the Virtual School Extended Team to monitor, analyse and respond to attendance concerns rapidly and remains a key area for improvement (priority 1 on the School Development Plan). The attendance overview for statutory school age children in the academic year 2024 - 2025 is provided in Appendix 3.

Children in Care Not in Full Time Education

Children in Care

Reducing the number of children in care who are missing out on education is within priority 1 of the development plan. To address this there are robust methods for identifying, supporting and tracking these children. A Virtual School Inclusion Monitoring Board is chaired by the

Service Manager for the Virtual School fortnightly that focuses on actions being taken to re-engage identified children and young people in education (or training and employment if relevant post-16) with a cross Children's Services panel. The meeting gives clear oversight of these children and ensures that robust actions are in place to secure suitable full-time education. A monthly child-level report is produced for Children's Services Leadership Team to ensure there is sufficient oversight and challenge around our most vulnerable young people.

During the year we have returned 80 children and young people to full time education. A further 35 young people have closed to the tracker at the end of year 13. 29 children have become a Child Missing Education during the year (reduction from 2023/24) with 9 having EHCPs and 13 being children seeking asylum new into care.

The team have focused this year on ensuring that children who are also open to the Youth Justice System are monitored via the board fortnightly to ensure that there is collaboration around the support for these young people.

Children in Need and Child Protection Plans

An Inclusion Monitoring Board is chaired by the Locality Learning and Belonging Service Manager fortnightly that focuses on actions being taken to re-engage identified children and young people in education (or training and employment if relevant post-16) with the Virtual School extended team supporting with this. The meeting gives clear oversight of these children and ensures that robust actions are in place to secure suitable full-time education or equivalent.

This year has seen a development of the panel to ensure there is a clear focus on Children in Need and on Child Protection plans to ensure that timely interventions occur. The team are focusing on monitoring the data monthly as on children who are in Need or Child Protection plans vary regularly due to movement in status and this can impact on the data being evaluated. The Virtual School analysis includes all children who have been on a Child in Need or Child Protection plan throughout the year at any point.

Reduced Timetables

Children in Care

The team have focussed on reducing the number of children on reduced timetables with 16 children being opened to reduced timetables in 2024/25 (20 in 2023/24) for a small period of time as a reintegration or transition period. Eleven of these children have been closed during the year with two further children planned to close in September 2025.

Children in Need and Child Protection Plans

The team have focussed on identifying the children within the cohort and plans to support children back into education through the locality teams. During 2024/25, there have been 25 Children in Need and 4 children on Child Protection plans opened to a reduced timetable. In July 2025, there were 20 Children in Need and one child on a Child Protection remaining on a reduced timetable. The Extended Team are working with the locality Learning and Belonging Service Managers to refocus the Inclusion Monitoring Board so that there is closer monitoring of reduced timetables for these children in 2025/26.

Children missing education

Children in Care

The team have also focused on reducing the number of children who are CME with 29 children opened to the tracker in 2024/25 (Decrease from 31 in 2023/24) with 19 of these

children being CME at the point of coming into care and all being closed to the tracker having returned to school once in care.

This year, 16 of the children have had an EHCP and 13 children being children seeking asylum. 4 children remain open to CME at the end of July, all who have EHCPs.

This year, the team have focused on children who have a school place but professionals have been unable to engage with education. At most, there have been 6 children who have not accessed their educational provision. This has been reduced to two children at the end of July with both young people accessing a package of Alternative Provision (AP) whilst aiming to engage them with their educational provider.

Children in Need and Child Protection Plans

The Extended Role team have focused during 2024/25 on monitoring children with a Social Worker who have become CME during the year and the timeframes to return children to education. During 2024/25, 26 Children in Need and 3 children on Child Protection plans became CME. In 2025/26, the extended role team will develop a monthly monitoring system for this cohort of young people to analyse the reasons and timeframes for returning young people to education.

Not in Education, Employment or Training (Post 16)

Children in Care

54 young people have been opened to the tracker as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) during the academic year with 20 closed during the year. This has meant the EET figure for Dorset Virtual School has maintained 72% throughout the academic year. This is a further improvement on 2023/24.

32 Post 16 young people also are employed in part-time or full-time employment or accessing tutoring as their provision. These young people are still monitored on the fortnightly inclusion monitoring board to ensure that the correct support and guidance is offered throughout their career and close collaboration with the Leaving Care and Education, Employment and Training team has been crucial to this success.

Children in Need and Child Protection Plans

Currently, tracking for young people in Post 16 provision is monitored through the Education, employment and training team. The plans for 2025/26 are for closer work with this team considering the child's care status and working alongside the Education Challenge Leads in locality with our settings who will all have access to ALPs data for the academic year. This will ensure more robust support for children with a Social Worker.

Alternative Provision

Children in Care

During 2024/25, there have been 70 children and young people who have accessed some form of alternative provision as part of their weekly educational package. The Virtual School have robust plans in place to ensure that this alternative provision is for a time limited period with clear guidelines in place to ensure a smooth transition back into education. These children are monitored fortnightly through the Inclusion Monitoring Board to ensure that progress is monitored and transition plans are secure. The provision used varies and is bespoke to the child or young person in order to reengage with education but consists of tutoring, play therapy, mentoring programmes and outreach centres that provide emotional support alongside maths and English learning. In order to assess impact, interventions are funded through Pupil Premium + and commissioning through Children's Services brokerage

team. AP providers offer weekly feedback on our young people and these are considered at the next panel request for funding to ensure that impact is considered.

Exclusions

Our ambition is for effective inclusive practice in our schools which leads to zero suspensions and permanent exclusions of Children in Care. This was an area for improvement during 2022/23 and was priority 1 on the school development plan.

Permanent Exclusions

Children in Care

There has been one permanent exclusion during 2024/25 compared to 3 in the previous year (one in county and 2 out of county). The reasons for this permanent exclusion were violent behaviour towards adults and children. The young person returned to another educational setting within three weeks. Work has been undertaken for numerous children in this academic year to prevent further permanent exclusions and this was due to collaborative working between schools and Virtual School Leads to reduce the risk.

Children in Need and Child Protection Plans

There have been five permanent exclusions during 2024/25 for Children on Child Protection plans and 20 permanent exclusions during 2024/25 for Children in Need compared to four children subject to a Child Protection Plan and 21 Children in Need in 2023/24. The Extended Team are focusing in 2025/26 on the schools that have permanently excluded children with a Social Worker to consider alternative ways to suspension and preventative approaches.

Suspensions

Children in Care

The Virtual School undertakes daily monitoring of suspensions and permanent exclusions through Welfare Call's live dashboard, providing dynamic and instant overview of exclusions of our young people.

With a focus on reducing suspensions, 10.43% (41 children) of children had at least one suspension during the academic year compared to the 14.45% (53 children) in 2023/24. This amounted to 41 children being suspended during the year with 83% from secondary school age (59% of these were Key Stage 4). 49% of these children had repeat suspensions during the year (62.2% in 2023/24). Appendix 4 gives a breakdown of suspensions in 2024/25.

A high proportion of suspensions were children with a SEN need (41.5% with an EHCP and 26.8% with a SEN need) and a higher proportion of boys (59%) had at least one suspension compared to girls.

There has been an increase in the number of suspensions from schools out of county with 49% of children suspended being in out of county schools. Reasons for suspensions are persistent disruptive behaviour (18 suspensions), Other (vaping and smoking) (13 suspensions) and verbal abuse towards an adult (10 suspensions).

Due to the work undertaken by the Virtual School, there has been a reduction in suspensions for young people in Dorset secondary schools in 2024/25 and a reduction in the number of schools who repeatedly suspended our children. There have been no suspensions for our post 16 young people. Virtual School Leads attend every reintegration meeting with the school and team around the child and collate feedback from the child and team about strategies to prevent further suspensions. The Virtual School Lead will request that a Speech, Language and Communication Need checklist is undertaken by the setting

and used as part of the strategy to prevent further suspensions. The Virtual School Service Manager or specialist teachers will support the Virtual School Lead at meetings when the child has had more than one suspension.

Through monitoring, we identified schools that repeatedly used suspensions for Children in Care and have worked with these settings to put in place support that focuses on helping the school to better understand the whole child and look at strategies that may be more effective than suspensions.

Children in Need and Child Protection Plans

In Dorset there were 5386 suspensions involving 1906 children (6814 suspensions involving 1913 children in 2023/24). Of these, 23 children had a Child Protection Plan (38 in 2023/24) and 190 Children in Need had at least one suspension. Further analysis identifies that 21 of the 23 children on Child Protection plans and 77 of the 190 Children in Need had multiple suspension during the year.

In 2025/26, the focus for the Extended Team will be on Alternatives to suspension training for settings, using the Knowledge Exchange Programme in collaboration with University College London to share best practice as well as focusing the fortnightly Inclusion Monitoring Board on children with a Social Worker. The team will work collaboratively with Education Challenge Leads who will lead the co-ordination in their localities of working with primary phase schools where a child has had one suspension and secondary phase schools where a child has had more than two suspensions. The team will work in collaboration with locality Educational psychologists and specialist teachers to support settings with their children.

Elective Home Education

In 2024/25, there were 0 Children in Care, 4 children on Child Protection plans and 27 Children in Need who were electively home educated. Locality Learning and Belonging Teams monitor the home learning offer as part of the statutory role with Social Workers and Family Workers supporting the care aspect to the child's plan. From 2025/26, the Extended Team are collaborating with the locality teams around a focus on children with a Social Worker who are electively home educated to understand reasons for the choice and support for Social Care teams around education to prepare for the Children's Well-being and School's bill.

The experiences and progress of Children in Care and Care Leavers

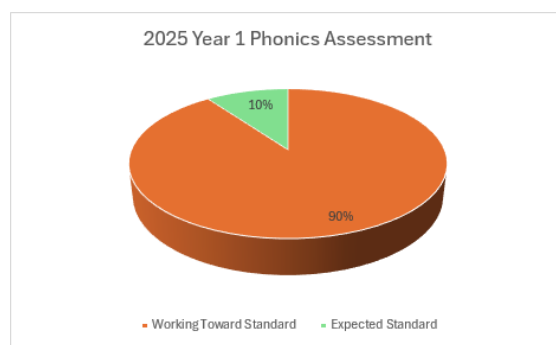
The Virtual School ensure that our children have high aspirations and equity of opportunity for making good progress. Termly progress reports for key stages is produced and this allows close monitoring of progress at a child level through to a cohort level. This allows the Virtual School team to collaborate with teams around our children to ensure that swift and robust support is in place for any child not making good progress that term.

The Virtual School challenges where academic expectations are too low and celebrates successes, including overcoming barriers. As a result, the academic outcomes for our children are very positive and have improved across all key stages compared to 2023/24.

Attainment data

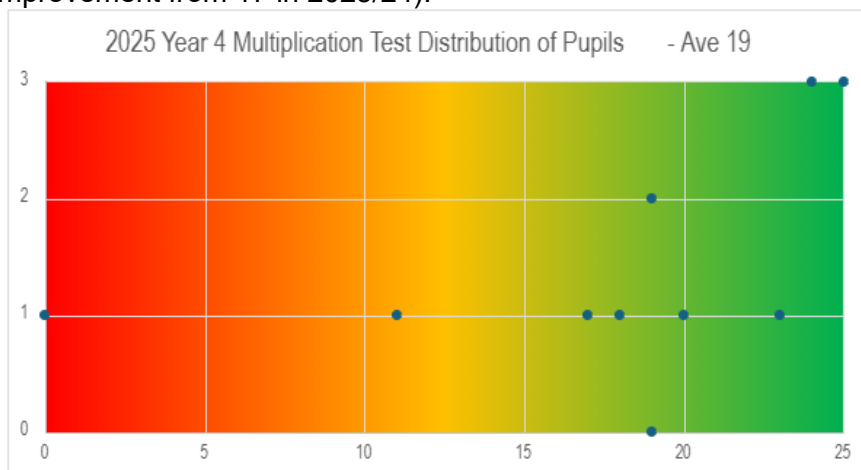
Phonics Screening

There are ten children in year 1 with 100% taking the screening test. Conclusions are difficult to draw due to the small number of children within our cohort. It is positive to see an increase in the number of children attempting the assessment in 2024/25 compared to the previous year where a number of children were disapplied. Three of the children have been with the Virtual School for 12 months plus with seven children joining the Virtual School during year 1 and progress reports throughout the year from teaching staff have been positive with 70% of the children making good or expected progress.



Year 4 multiplication check:

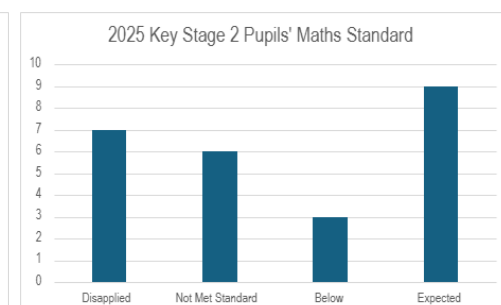
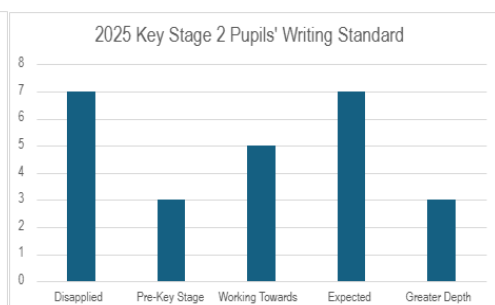
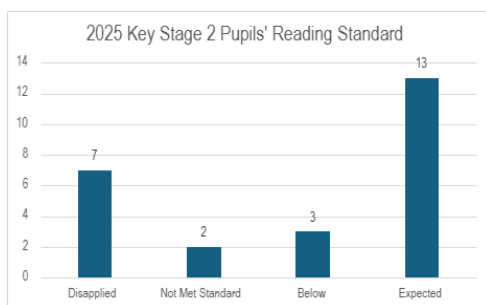
In year 4, there were 19 children on roll. Two children are in specialist provision with both unable to access and disapplied from the assessment. However, the mean average for the year 4 multiplication check for all children is 19. The mean average for Dorset Children in Care is 19 (improvement from 17 in 2023/24).



Key Stage 2:

In year 6, there are 25 children with all children on roll. Fifteen of these children have either an EHCP or SEN need with six children in specialist provision. Seven children did not sit assessments and were disapplied, with six of these children in specialist settings.

36% of our children are working at expected standard in maths, 40% at reading and 52% of our children are working at expected standard for writing compared to 20% for writing and maths and 30% for reading in 2023/24.



It appears that children in year 6 in mainstream schools are performing well for reading, writing and maths in comparison to the previous year. However, we still appear to have small numbers of children who are working at below the standard of the test in maths in comparison to reading and this is an area to consider additional interventions when the children reach year 7.

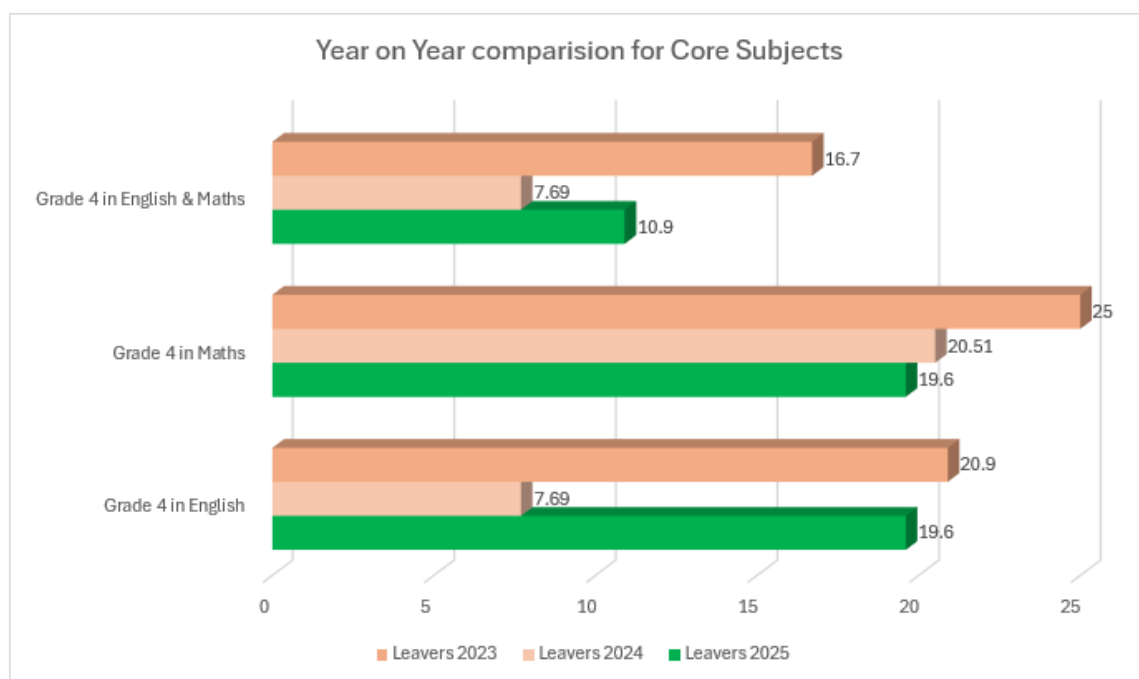
Key Stage 4:

In year 11, there were 59 children on roll during 2024/25 with 16.94% being children seeking asylum. 49% of year 11 have an EHCP and 15% have a SEN need.

67.4% of our young people are in mainstream provision and 32.6% within specialist provision. 4% of our young people (2) were not in education to take examinations.

28% of our young people (13) did not sit exams this year. This is due to six children being in specialist provision and undertaking bespoke qualifications and two children not having a school place as well as one young person seeking asylum who did not sit exams.

We have seen a sustained achievement rate with 19.6% of our cohort achieving a grade 4 or above in maths (20.51% in 2023/24) and a marked improvement with 19.6% achieving a grade 4 or above in English (7.69% in 2023/24).



There has been no discernible difference in GCSE achievement grades for children living in and out of county and this is evidence of the equitable support provided for our young people.

There has been a marked improvement in the number of children achieving grade 5 or above in English (8.7% vs 2.6%) and maths (10.9% vs 5.1%) in 2024/25 compared to the previous year and this is due to targeted interventions for young people, including tutoring, revision resources and targets set during termly PEPs that have focused on final outcomes.

The Virtual School has seen a decrease in the number of young people achieving a grade 3 in English and maths (13% compared to 16.3% in 2023/24). Progress 8 data for our children will not be available until December 2024.

Key Stage 5:

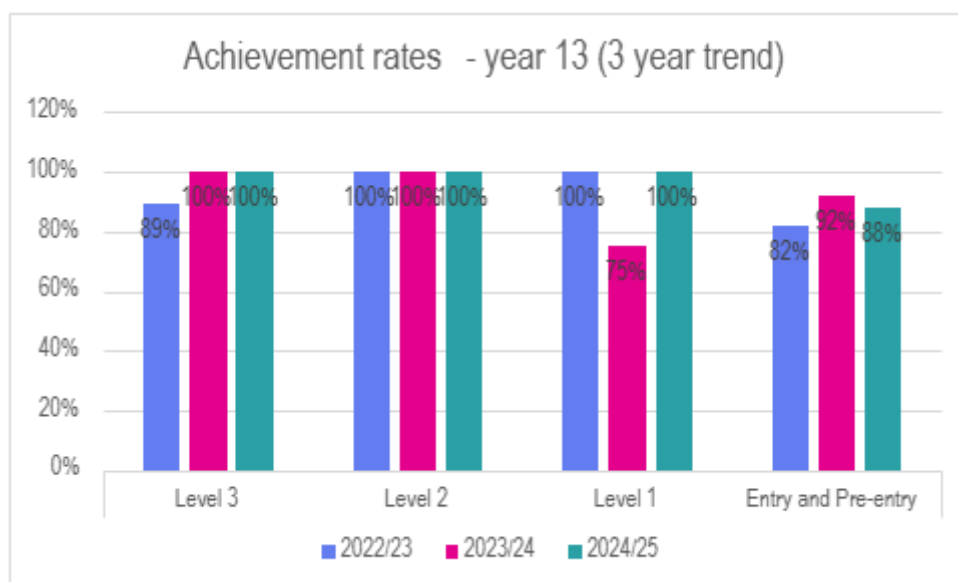
Main qualification (year 13)

There were 77 young people in year 13, Six of the young people are in employment, six are engaged with tutoring and 26 young people were not in Education Employment or Training (NEET). 39 young people were enrolled on provision in further education.

The school had six young people in year 13 undertaking level 3 qualifications with three of these in their final year of their level 3 qualification. 100% passed with all progressing to a university course or higher apprenticeship, ranging from childcare to business.

Additionally, 15 young people in year 13 are unaccompanied young people accessing ESOL courses and Functional Skills maths. Of these, 87% (13) passed their main qualification. 100% will progress onto the next level of the ESOL course.

Our year 13 young people performed well in their main qualifications with 100% of our young people passing, level 1, 2 and 3 programmes. 88% of our young people on Entry Level programmes passed (13 out of 15 young people).



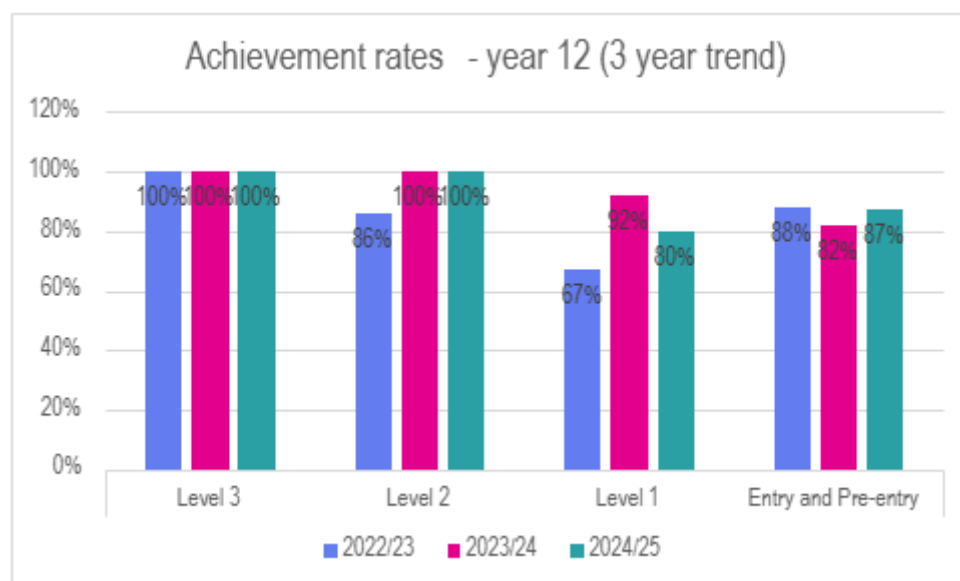
The Virtual School has seen a sustained improvement of year 13 results for our young people on their full-time programmes across all levels of programme and this has been in part due to increased monitoring of this cohort and rapid interventions to engage young people with education and support with access to Post 16 provision. There has been a slight decrease in entry level results accounting for 2 young people who have passed part of their qualification but need to complete one further element.

Main qualification (year 12):

There were 72 young people in year 12 within the Virtual School. Seven of the young people are in employment, 12 are accessing tutoring and 17 young people Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET). 36 young people were enrolled on provision in further education.

In 2024/25, the Virtual School had comparable entrants on each level of full-time course but saw higher achievement rates for every level of programme in comparison to 2023/24 with

the exception of our level 1 programmes. This amounts to 1 young person not achieving their full qualification but achieving two of the three elements. The young person will progress onto the final element of their programme in 2025/26.



Outcomes for Children in Need and children on Child Protection plans

This is the first year that Dorset Virtual School have monitored outcomes for Children in Need and on Child Protection plan and children have been listed based on the most recent census data linked to care status.

Key Stage 2

Children in Need are doing less well in year 6 than their peers and compared to national data with 50% working at or above expected in reading, 38% for maths and 33% for writing.

Group	Expected					Higher				
	RWM	Reading	GPS	Maths	Writing	RWM	Reading	GPS	Maths	Writing
National All	62%	75%	73%	74%	72%	8%	33%	30%	26%	13%
Dorset All	56%	72%	69%	70%	69%	7%	30%	24%	21%	12%
Dorset CIN	21%	42%	41%	35%	33%	0%	8%	1%	3%	0%

Children on Child Protection plans are doing less well in year 6 than their peers and compared to national data with 52% working at or above expected in reading, 22% for maths and 43% for writing.

Group	Expected					Higher				
	RWM	Reading	GPS	Maths	Writing	RWM	Reading	GPS	Maths	Writing
National All	62.1%	75.0%	72.6%	74.0%	72.2%	8.4%	33.3%	29.6%	26.3%	12.8%
Dorset All	56.3%	72.3%	69.5%	69.8%	69.4%	7%	30%	24%	21%	12%
Dorset CPP	17%	48%	43%	22%	43%	0%	4%	0%	0%	0%

Support for families and education settings is a focus for the Virtual School Extended team in 2025/26, including liaison with other Local Authorities about tracking data as part of the network boards. The team will also collaborate with Education Challenge Leads within localities to ensure that there are focused interventions such as the Oracy project focusing on our children with a Social Worker.

Personal Education Plans and resources including Pupil Premium Plus

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

All PEPs are peer Quality Assurance (QA) reviewed. The QA outcome appears on the PEP so that all involved in the PEP are able to see the grading and any feedback given. The QA process grades a PEP red (inadequate), amber (requires improvement) green (good) or gold (outstanding). Themed audits of PEPs review specific aspects of the school development plan, such as the quality of the use of the child's voice through person centred planning, are a central part of link governor monitoring. QA outcomes are fed back to the Full Governing Body Meeting for oversight.



Governor feedback also commented on the consideration of the cultural identity of the child and the whole person being considered within PEPs as well as the improvement in linking PEP targets to EHCP outcomes for our children.

The impact of the work to strengthen the PEP process can be seen in the PEP QA results with 95% of PEPs found to be good or better (93% 2023/24) with an increase in the number of gold PEPs being awarded (28). As a breakdown, each cohort has seen an improvement in PEP quality with a maintaining of quality for Post 16;

- Early Years 100% good or outstanding
- Primary 98% good or outstanding
- Secondary 94% good or outstanding
- Post 16 93% good or outstanding

Completion of PEPs within 20 days of the PEP date has been an area for the Virtual School to focus on during the academic year with all PEPs being completed, signed off by the Designated Teacher, Social Worker and Virtual School Lead. Overall, 93% of PEPs were completed within 20 days of the PEP date with the remaining PEPs being completed within 25 days.

Term	Number of PEPs completed	Average number of days to be signed off by the Designated teacher, Social Worker, Virtual School Lead and quality assured.
Autumn 2024	442	18 days

Spring 2025	459	16 days
Summer 2025	495	16 days

Attendance to PEPs has also improved in 2024/25 with termly feedback given to our Social Care teams so that they can further support our children and young people at the next PEP. There appears to have been a decrease in attendance to PEPs by our Social Workers in the summer term, particularly for children within specialist settings and this will be an area to focus on in the Autumn term.

Term	Child/Young Person	Social Worker/ Personal Advisor	Designated Teacher
Autumn 2024	55%	72%	94%
Spring 2025	55%	72%	95%
Summer 2025	51%	68%	94%

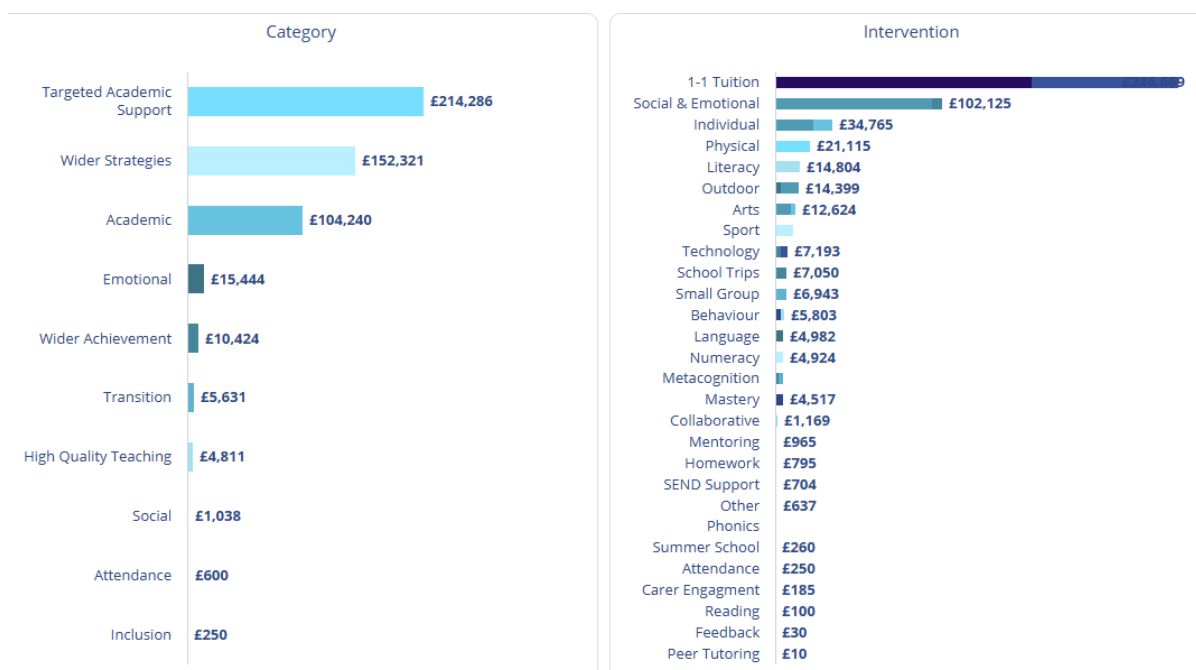
Pupil Premium Plus

Pupil Premium Panel meet on a weekly basis to consider requests for funded interventions. These decisions are recorded and shared with Children's Services Accountant. The document is reconciled with the Council's Financial Ledger each month. This ensures that payments have been allocated, and it is clear how much of the Grant is available to use to inform future funding requests.

The Virtual School Service Manager, Virtual School Specialist Teacher leading on data, and Children Services Accountant meet monthly to review the Virtual School budget and evaluate the effectiveness of spend on types of intervention. Outcomes from the meetings are reported to the Virtual School Governing Body.

During 2024/25, £509,045 of interventions were approved with 58% being spent on secondary school children, 25% on Post 16 young people and 18% on primary and Early Years children. The average pupil premium cost per child of PEP outcomes achieved was £1325 (£383 per outcome). 62.10% was spent on targeted academic support and 29.90% was spent on wider strategies. Targeted academic support interventions include tutoring and small group sessions whilst wider strategies include social, emotional support, trips and arts interventions.

Interventions that were set for our children during the summer term will be fully assessed for their impact by January 2025 so this evaluation is based upon Autumn and Spring term targets. 77% of the interventions were either graded as met or partially met during the Autumn and Spring terms. Of the targets achieved, 57.7% were for academic tutoring, 33.5% was based around emotional and mental well-being and 2.0% based on wider achievement including visits, trips and musical intervention.



23% of the funded targets were marked as not achieved during the year. Of these, 49.5% of these were tuition targets and analysis of this with VSLs has highlighted some schools marking tuition as not achieved in order to request additional funding at the next PEP as well as a capacity issue in terms of tutor availability. Fortnightly meetings have been placed in diaries with the tutoring agency to ensure that timely referrals occur.

16.3% of the not achieved targets were based on social and emotional interventions. On closer scrutiny, these were not achieved due to a delay in starting therapy for some young people.

Funding for our Post 16 young people has been used to support interventions such as gym memberships for health and well-being, swimming lessons for our young people and support towards college residential trips. 67.7% of funding has been used to support 1:1 tutoring and small group lessons, whilst 6.7% has been used to support sport and physical education and 4.9% has been used to support social and emotional well-being interventions. This has resulted in an increase in spending from £63,309 in 2023/24 to £120,080 in 2024/25.

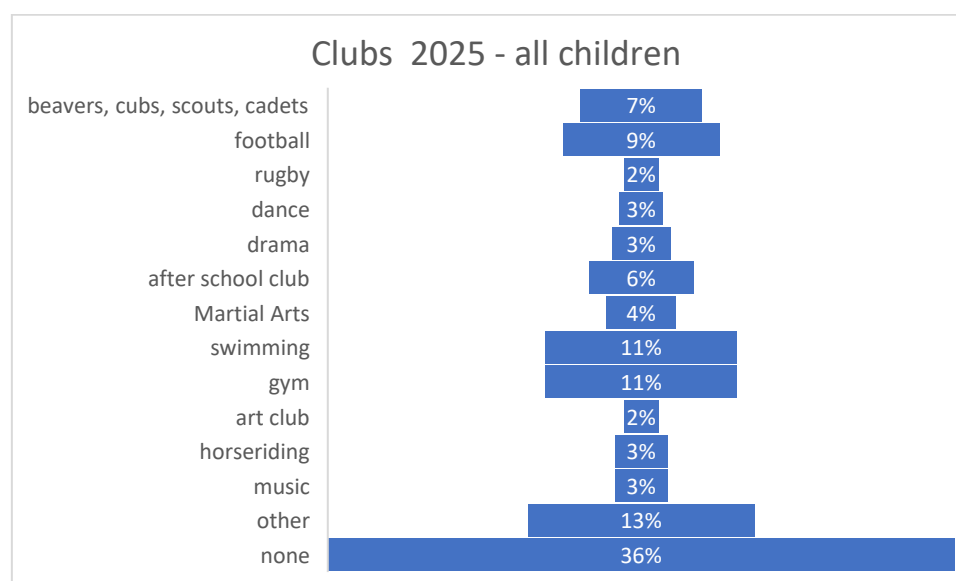
Pupil Voice / Belonging

Dorset Virtual School have worked hard to ensure that our children and young people feel that they belong within the educational settings and also belong to the Virtual School. At every PEP, work is undertaken with our young people to collect their views and be curious about their interests. Children within our school aged cohort scored school as 7 out of 10 this year, young people in our post 16 providers scored education a 6 out of 10 and children within specialist provision said that they felt score was graded as 4 out of 5. 95% of children have said that they feel safe in school and now who to talk to if they have worries.

We have used feedback from Coram Voice to impact on our work, including setting out plans to support belonging in schools through the development of a reading list for Children in Care and setting out a reminder for how our young people would like their voices to be heard within their PEP meetings.

Work has been undertaken this year to understand our young people's voice and their interests with 65% of children and young people engage in some form of extra-curricular activity or club outside of education.

- 81% of primary aged children are engaged in some form of extra-curricular activity
- 73% of secondary aged children are engaged in some form of extra-curricular activity
- 52% of Post 16 young people are engaged in some form of extra -curricular activity



54 children engage in an extra-curricular activity classed as 'other'. Further work to understand this was undertaken and a range of activities are accessed including fishing, table tennis, young farmers, badminton, Duke Of Edinburgh, volunteering, youth voice, World War Two enactments, cookery classes, fishing and diving. Interest for other clubs available was raised around coding clubs and further access to AUB arts club.

Through this analysis, the Virtual School has offered a range of activities this year that link to the views of our children and young people.

Celebrating Child Successes

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

Children's successes are celebrated weekly within the team, with each identified child receiving a £10 book voucher. During 2024/25, 165 children and young people were celebrated for a variety of reasons, including leading their PEP, accessing education full time after missing education for one term completing their ESOL qualification and moving to the next qualification. The positive acknowledgement of children's successes in the PEP meetings was recognised in governor monitoring as a strength of the PEPs.

The 2025 Virtual School Awards took place in July 2025 at the Tivoli Theatre following young people's feedback around the type of event they would like where they would be able to spend time with their families.

Dorset Virtual School Awards 2025

128 children and young people were nominated and celebrated at this event with five children and young people having an additional celebration from the Corporate Director for Education and Director of Children's Services.

Additionally, twelve Designated Teachers were nominated for their hard work and commitment to our young people and celebrated at the award this year alongside our 12 Designated Teachers of the month awards. The awards provided a valuable opportunity to show our young people, our Designated Teachers, and their supporters just how much they are appreciated and how proud we are of all they've achieved.

Virtual School Book list

In response to our young people's voice about further understanding in education settings about being a child in care, the Virtual School have produced a reading list for all settings with stories about different types of families as well as key themes that our young people wanted to see within their libraries. This has been shared with all settings and Virtual School have utilised its PP+ funding to support some settings to purchase some of the books from the list. Additionally, this resources has been shared with the Dorset Library Service to ensure that our children's voices are heard.

Dorset Virtual School Booklist for Schools



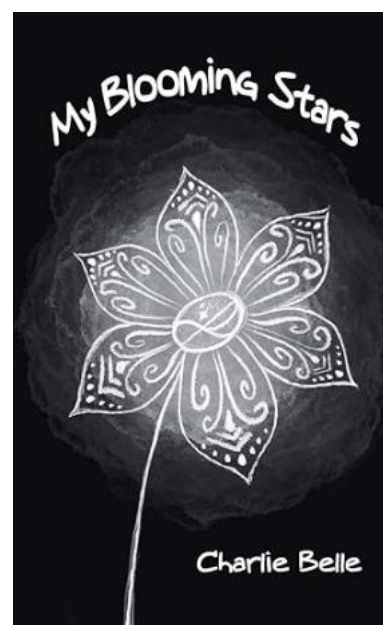
Book Title	Author	Publish Date	Form	Primary/Teen	Topic
Strong and Tough	Rico Hinson-King	August 2022	Picture Book	4-7	Adoption
The Visitors who came to Stay	Annalena McAfee & Anthony Browne	April 1993	Picture Book	2-6	Amalgamating Families
Where the Wild Things Are	Maurice Sendak	May 2000	Picture Book	2-6	Angry Feelings

Publication of work

The Virtual School has supported one of our young people to produce and publish their own poems using Pupil premium Plus funding to support the process of meeting with a publishing company and design team to ensure that their work would be recognised. This has been shared with all of our Dorset settings to ensure that our children's voices are being heard. Our young person has said 'This book was built from the words I wrote to help me find solace in a time when all I had was paper and pen. I turned the hurt I was feeling into something that can be shown, to be understood in the only way I knew how. As a lifeline, or simply a release, I used a pen to tell my story. This book is filled with my hardest goodbyes, my most welcome hellos, simple recollections of times past and a telling of a more hopeful future.'

Digital Day workshop

The Virtual School have worked in collaboration with Arts University Bournemouth (AUB) Health Sciences University



and Bournemouth University (BU) on a digital day on the campuses. This encouraged 10 children to undertake a series of workshops delivered by AUB and BU academics around the use of Artificial Intelligence, coding, digital photography and the use of creative apps in design work.

Both AUB and Dorset Virtual School are keen to progress this partnership with an enhanced offer for our young people in 2025/26, culminating in a shared piece of work with the Dorset Music Service alongside.

Residential visits for Children in Care

The Virtual School recognises the importance of building relationships and resilience for our children and during 2024/25 have funded one residential visit to Jamie's Farm in Monmouth, Wales with a focus on children with Emotional Based School absence.

The residential visit allowed the Virtual School to take 6 children to Jamie's Farm in Monmouthshire for a residential week at the farm. Prior to the visit, none of the children knew one another and came from different schools across the county and outside of the county. The children ranged in age from year 7 to 11 during the trip. During the visit, our young people herded cattle, fed the pigs and sheep, moved a flock of sheep to a new field, went on very long walks (!), looked after horses and cooked all meals.

In terms of well-being, the young people undertook a survey prior to attending the visit and at the end with all young people seeing an improvement in their well-being (8.2%), social and emotional feelings (12%) and self-awareness (20%). Perhaps, most importantly, they have made new friends during this week and become more resilient and confident young people.



These visits have been a highlight of the year for both the Virtual School staff and wider Children's Services staff who attended to support our young people. The Virtual School plans to continue this offer into 2025/26 and further enhance this provision with consideration of the Dorset outdoor learning sites.

Oracy Project for children with a Social Worker

The Extended Team have collaborated with the Education Challenge Leads to implement a bespoke oracy programme aimed at children in Key Stage 2 to improve literacy and oracy. This started on 25th April 2025 involving 12 settings in Chesil. The intended aims of the programme are to improve implementation climate for settings; Develop Accountable Talk knowledge and practice; Begin reflecting on how to support talk more systematically through the curriculum and to have improved knowledge of how to structure and support talk.

There is much research into the significant benefits for disadvantaged pupils where schools have a strong focus on oracy and deliver this in a high quality and consistent way. Outcomes for this work will be seen with the 2025/26 series but progress is being monitored termly by the Extended Team and Education Challenge Leads within the project.

Creative Writing Course

Dorset Virtual School offered a one-day creative writing course in collaboration with the Dorset History Centre for our younger children to share a love of reading and creative writing. 9 children from year 4-6 took part in the activities with children creating quills and becoming detectives around the centre to learn to write letters to someone special about their day.

Virtual School and the Network

The Virtual School has evolved its work with its young people from a school council to the Network Board alongside the Youth Voice team, using feedback from the Coram Voice surveys to support. In the academic year 2024-2025 the Virtual School have worked with our young people through the Network and through the Mockingbird constellations to develop an understanding around uniform concerns, views about identity and self and young people have supported the coproduction of the new Kinship handbooks for families and settings. This has led to amendments to the annual awards ceremony with a focus on activities with the family as well as introducing a guide to PEP meetings written by our young people.

Virtual School Projects

Supporting Learning

During 2024/25, the Virtual School supported 81 children and young people to have access to the Letterbox Literacy Club to encourage and foster a love of reading and to improve literacy. Feedback from this project was positive with one carer noting 'how excited our young person was to receive his first parcel. It is in his bedroom, by his bed waiting to be read!'



The Virtual School has also invested in a range of support materials and online learning packages for our children and young people to support with maths and English learning at Key Stage 2 and 4. This has been offered to 37 Children in Care and 13 Children with a Social Worker to be used as an additional revision resource for examinations with 23 young people making use of the programme during the year.

Supporting our children with SEN

Dorset Virtual School have embedded the learning packs designed for children with a SEN need in 2024/25. These packs have been designed for children in homes with new carers who are waiting on a school place and allow learning to take place for up to four weeks. Each pack included resources based on The Gruffalo, The Snail and The Whale and Room on the Broom with activities based around literacy, numeracy, geography, art, music, science, cooking, outdoor education and drama opportunities. Each pack was designed to be flexible in terms of ability and there are enough activities to stretch beyond the four weeks planned should sourcing an appropriate provision take longer. Each 'book' comes with a soft toy and an audible book and is accompanied by other art resources provided by the publishers.



By providing our resource following a move, Dorset Virtual School are ensuring there is education in place for up to a month while SEN process is followed, and appropriate and welcoming provision secured. Feedback for the resources has been positive with one family commenting; 'He loves the packs! We are still on the Gruffalo, but it has proven to be an excellent starting point for learning opportunities at home. He is able to talk about the activities we do together with the staff at his Ap. This is proving helpful during the transition in drop off and collection.'

In 2025/26, the Virtual School plan to adapt the resources with a different range of books and resources for older children.

Knowledge Exchange Programme with University College London

The Virtual School partnered for the fourth year running with University College London (UCL) to deliver their Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children (PALAC) Project and Promoting the Achievement of Care Leavers Project (PACL).



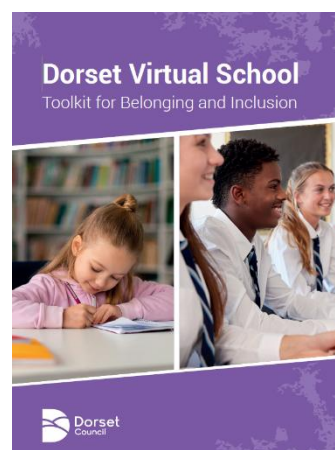
The Knowledge Exchange (KE) programme seeks to support practice in schools and colleges to improve outcomes for children within the Virtual School. It originated as a result of the dearth of evidence available to support schools in developing practice for this group of children and young people. The collaborative relationship between practitioners in settings and university researchers seeks to improve our collective understanding of how students in care can thrive in school.

We identified settings that covered all phases of

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

This year, seven settings are involved with the project and are focusing on a range of initiatives including a supervision package for staff and subject champions for children within the Virtual School.

A set of case studies is due to be published by UCL demonstrating the impact and learning from each of the projects and the school/college lead for each project will be sharing their work through workshops in the Virtual School Conference in January 2026. The Virtual School is continuing the project with settings in 2025/26, focusing on our expanded role working with children with a Social Worker and those in kinship care arrangements.



As part of the Knowledge Exchange Programme, the participants are contributing towards a Belonging strategy for the Virtual School that can be shared with all settings in 2026.

Dorset Virtual School were invited to be a peer mentor on an advisory panel for University College London supporting another Virtual School with a focus on Post 16 progression and pathways leading to shared practice and improved outcomes for these young people.

Big Bids

Following feedback from our colleagues within schools and settings around 'dream projects' if funding was available, the Virtual School has continued to offer its Big Bids process for schools and settings for the fourth year running. This initiative encouraged settings to bid for funding to implement a project or creative idea that would support our children within the Virtual School as a cohort within the school to achieve and be successful.

During this period 34 bids were received (27 from Dorset schools) with 21 successful. Projects ranged from resourcing for ELSA and literacy rooms, sensory equipment, indoor and outdoor sensory spaces, table tennis tables for regulation to Virtual Reality headsets for wider learning opportunities and training courses for staff to support emotional well-being of children.

Feedback from settings involved has been positive; 100% said the project had very good or good impact on their children and 100% said the project had an impact on attendance of our children. One setting commented that the funding provided an 'enhancement of our space which we use for direct work with our Children in Care pupils. It is now a private space where they can get ELSA but also other types of interventions, i.e. play therapy and support from social workers'

In terms of impact of the 21 settings that were successful, 5 settings have suspended a young person this year. Of those five settings, 6 children out of 13 children within those settings had 1 suspension this year. In 2025/26, the Virtual School will use the Big Bids process to further support raising the profile of our young people's voice and to support interventions that offer alternatives to suspension.

Virtual Reality training

To support the Extended Role of the Virtual School and children with a Social Worker, we introduced a new training offer in 2024/25, using the Cornerstone Virtual Reality training programme which allows the user to experience the impact of our conversations and interactions with children who may have experienced trauma through the eyes of the child. This is a clinically led, technology enabled behaviour change tool. It is designed to enhance the adults understanding of a child's emotions, trauma and potential triggers with the aim to improve the care, support and guidance they provide, thus improving educational outcomes for our children.

11 staff were trained to deliver sessions with settings, focusing on the impact that adult interactions have with young people. Since January 2025, 24 settings have had the training delivered onsite, with a further 30 participants at the annual conference. 100% of participants said that they session met its aims with high or very high impact and 96% of participants stating that it made them think differently about their practice. One participant feedback that the training was 'excellent; I would definitely recommend this training, and I feel every adult working with children should do it in order for them to have a deeper understanding and

awareness of the needs of children'. In 2025/26, the Virtual School plan to widen this training offer to focus on work with our knowledge exchange settings to consider training for all staff within the setting to encourage cultural changes towards suspensions and belonging. This will be measured over the three terms following the training, considering suspension, attendance and progress data for young people within settings.

Mentoring

Dorset Virtual School recognise the importance of a safe person for our young people in their lives. In 2024/25, we have offered targeted mentoring through Insights Wellbeing to eight young people around next steps in education. Six young people have been referred and mentoring has been offered. In 2025/26, the team will review the offer through half termly meetings.

The Virtual School offered Higher Education mentoring to those young people who have aspirations to study at University. In 2024/25, there was a small uptake from young people who felt that they were able to access the offered programme through alternative methods. In 2025/26 the team are developing a new offer of HE experiences to give the young people some hands on time, rather than the planned virtual meetings.

Pre-16 provision

Building on the 14-16 Programme at Kingston Maurward College in 2023/4, Dorset Virtual School implemented an SLA to work with Weymouth College for a group during 2024/25. The plan was for the young people to access a range of vocational subjects with a view to achieving a qualification; building the confidence of the young people and giving young people a working knowledge of the college and their courses.

The programme needed to be adapted during the year and Dorset Council Outdoor Education Team supported sessions until the GCSE examination period. In spite of the disruptions, the young people achieved Outcomes 2 and 3. The young people developed a confidence between themselves and formed a strong sense of belonging within their own group. The young people were confident to attend and engaged in activities and performed well as a group. All of the young people in year 11 had a progression pathway into year 12. In September 2025, Virtual School have collaborated with Dorset Trade Skills to deliver the intervention. This year the group will be working through Asdan short courses to enable young people to gain academic outcomes in addition to their current school provision. Virtual School staff support the sessions weekly with half-termly monitoring of progress for all young people.

Communication with stakeholders

Dorset Virtual School work with a wide variety of stakeholders to ensure that our children and young people thrive and are successful. During 2024/25, Dorset Virtual School have worked with 39 Local Authorities across the country and 197 provisions for children in Statutory school aged placements and a further 20 Local Authorities for our Post 16 young people. This collaboration has included supporting children with an EHCP as well as children and young people seeking asylum who may not live in Dorset.

Virtual School training

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

During 2024/25, these have included:

- Using Strength Based Language
- PEP interventions and Target setting
- Emotionally based school absence
- Supporting children within the Extended Role
- Hear My Voice (voice of our young people)
- Using Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire to support children



Based on feedback from Designated Teachers, the Virtual School offered its third Virtual School Annual Conference in January 2025. This conference benefitted from Gareth Morewood as our Keynote Speaker who considered how to support all children within the classroom environment as well as the opportunity for our teachers to participate in a range of workshops that considered how to support our children further. These workshops included considering the physical space as part of inclusive classrooms, changing environment and changing practice, the language that we use and using Virtual Reality to understand relationships.

Feedback from this event was excellent

with 95% stating that the CPD would have a good or significant impact on their practice. The Virtual School are planning a fourth Conference in January 2026 around the concept of 'building belonging'.

Alternatives to Suspensions

The Virtual School have implemented a proactive approach to reducing suspensions for our children and young people. Training has been offered to all locality Child Protection and Child in Need Teams to raise the profile of suspensions and their impact and guidance on reintegration meetings with 80% of team undertaking the training by July 2025 with final teams met in Autumn 2025.

A working group has created a flow chart for schools for decision making around suspensions, a clause for schools to add to behaviour policies when considering children within the Virtual School, created a workplan and 'model lesson' for learning around reason for suspension and produced a new format for the reintegration process.

The team have met with wider colleagues and external stakeholders in the Summer Term 2025 to present the plans with feedback provided.



The team plan to implement these changes during 2025/26 following feedback from our young people in the Autumn Term 2025.

Support for children who are adopted, Post Looked After or in Kinship Care arrangements

The Virtual School aims to ensure outstanding educational achievement for our children who have previously been in care. We have amended our tracking system that monitors enquiries to the Virtual School that are allocated to locality based Virtual School Leads who provide support and guidance to families, schools and settings. This tracking is now incorporated in a half-termly board meeting, giving Virtual School Leads to discuss children and settings that they have worked with and to consider next steps.

The Virtual School has responsibility for supporting educational progress for children in kinship care arrangements. This tracking began in the Summer Term 2025 and has led to support being monitored through the half-termly board meeting in place for children previously looked after. This has led to 95 enquiries from families and settings for children previously looked after and 13 request from families and settings around kinship care. The key queries were related to SEN and admissions. A new handbook to support families and settings around kinship is being implemented from September 2025.

Additional CPD will be delivered to the Virtual School Leads in September 2025 around support for our children previously looked after and the changes to Special Guardianship orders and kinship care. The Virtual School have delivered phase transfer meetings for children applying for reception and year 7 in conjunction with Aspire Adoption Agency and will provide support and guidance for parents with children in choosing their next steps. The Virtual School have implemented a one page summary for every child who becomes Previously Looked After in addition to any final PEP.

Support for our Early Years Children

One priority in 2024/25 was to embed the best practice for our children within early years settings. The Virtual School offered targeted CPD for our Virtual School staff in September 2025. The training focused on using Wellcom to support our Early Years children and has led to detailed conversations within PEP meetings to look at the impact of this for our children.

The Early Years PEP in collaboration with Welfare Call has been utilised throughout 2024/25 to excellent effect and this has led to an improvement in the quality of PEPs for our youngest children with 100% of Early Years PEPs being classed as good or outstanding. Governor oversight of this priority noted that the child is well considered in the PEPs sampled with a good attempt at capturing the child voice in creative ways. Plans for 2025/26 to refine this priority will consider how to support all children within the Virtual School in Early Years with focused improvement projects for settings alongside the Best Start in life team as well as working alongside the VSEND programme to produce holistic overviews of our children within the Virtual School that support their educational journey.

Support for our Unaccompanied young people

The Virtual School have built upon its support for our increasing numbers of unaccompanied young people during 2024- 25. Our 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 our unaccompanied young people this year. Each young person is also provided with a laptop and language tuition as part of their welcome package.

Our Unaccompanied young people are funded during the summer holiday to take part in the International Care Network (ICN) summer package that focuses on language learning and community visits if they live locally to Bournemouth with 100% of the children living locally taking part in this offer. As a result of these interventions, 100% of our unaccompanied young people in year 11,12 and 13 have a college course to progress onto.

Appendix 1: School Development Plan 2025/26

AIM	To ensure that Children within the Virtual School are ambitious around education and feel that they belong		
STRANDS	Achieving educational stability	Improving how children are represented in our work	Developing opportunities for children to achieve their ambitions
PURPOSE	To provide children and settings the right support to enable full time stable education age 2 - 18	To provide children with the best support led by them	To provide high quality opportunities that lead to educational and employment success and belonging
12 MONTH GOALS	(1.1) Improve attainment for Children in Care at Key Stage 2 maths and Key Stage 4 in maths and English and attainment for children with a Social Worker at Key Stage 2 reading, writing and maths (1.2) Reduce the use of suspensions for Children in Care with a SEN need and reduce the number of suspensions for children with a Social Worker (1.3) Develop and deliver a programme of CPD for professionals working with Children within the Virtual School, including collaborative work with UCL (1.4) Improve the attendance of SSA children and remove barriers to belonging in school (1.5) Reduce the number of children missing education, use of reduced timetables and young people who are NEET (1.6) Improve progress and outcomes for children with a SEN need	(2.1) Provide a sense of belonging for Early Years children (2.2) Promoting a sense of belonging for children seeking asylum (2.3) Provide support for settings to better meet the needs of children previously in care and children in Kinship Care arrangements (2.4) Collect and respond to child feedback to improve our service	(3.1) Embed a structured programme for young people with aspirations for higher education (3.2) Embed a personalised programme of mentoring for young people to develop a sense of belonging and resilience in education (3.3) Develop wider learning opportunities and positive experiences (3.4) Embed clear plan to engage with Locality teams through Pathfinder
OUTPUTS	75% engagement with OLEX English and maths programme for all children 75% engagement with online and face to face 1:1 tutoring for Children in Care 65% Children in Care making expected progress in KS2 maths 25% Children in Care achieving grade 4+ in English and maths at KS4 40% Children with a Social Worker making expected progress in KS2 reading, writing and maths - Development of a monitoring system for educational progress for all children with a Social Worker - Development of a package of interventions for English and Maths for all children - To develop/amend recording systems that accurately record <u>attainment</u> for children with a Social Worker - Less than 10% of suspensions in the academic year for Children in Care with SEN 100% Virtual School attendance at reintegration meetings for Children in Care - Less than 13% of suspensions in the academic year for children with a Social Worker	- Implementation of bespoke training for Early Years setting - Implementation of method of capturing the voice of our early years children via most appropriate method 100% of children needing additional support with communication is being monitored through the PEP process. - Collaborate with VSEND operational group on Early Years to reception pathway to implement a next steps pathway for Children in Care and all children with a social worker. 90% of young people seeking asylum engage with the welcome pack and induction booklets - Implementation of a responsive roll-on programme of tutoring for UASC. - Develop a targeted programme of extra-curricular activities for our UASC. - Develop process for targeted handbook and Pupil Premium+ funding - Register of children previously looked after and in kinship care arrangements includes record of advice, guidance or support provided by the Virtual School - Review handbook for children Previously Looked After - Identification and resourcing for children in kinship care arrangements	- Target group of 6 (child in care) young people to participate in initial HE <u>programme</u> and evidence of impact via child voice feedback - Introduce an annual list of University and Post 18 visits - Target group of 10 young people to participate in initial belonging programme and evidence of impact via child voice feedback 100% of children will have a confirmed destination place for Post 16 from the KS4 programme 100% of children undertaking the KS4 programme will achieve unit accreditation - Implementation of education mentors for children with a Social Worker - Development of an Annual programme of events linked to belonging and child voice - Every child is celebrated at least once during the year - Development of planned collaboration with locality teams to enhance monitoring of children with a Social Worker - Implement monitoring for children supported by the Youth Justice Service

	• Development of process to support children with a Social Worker with more than 3 suspensions in the year. • Develop an annual programme of CPD for professionals (education and Children's Services, Journey to Fostering)) • Collaborate with UCL on their Knowledge Exchange programme • Expand the Virtual Reality training programme for Children's Services • At least 92% statutory school age attendance for Children in Care and 85% for Children in Need and on Child Protection Plans • Less than 3% Unauthorised Absence (all children) • Improve KS4 attendance to at least 90% (all children) • Less than 50% <u>Persistent</u> Absence (Children in Need), 55%(Child Protection) 15% (Children in Care) • 100% of children who are EHE with a Social Worker have timely monitoring • Less than 10% <u>Severe</u> Absence (Children in Need), 7%(Child Protection) 9% (Children in Care) • Monitoring and updating of registers on Welfare Call • 0 CME for longer than 6 weeks • 0 Children on reduced timetables for longer than 6 weeks • At least 80% Post 16 EET • Monitoring of children with a Social Worker with a • Permanent exclusion to ensure that education is in place in a timely manner • embed VSEND within the Virtual School • Develop a monitoring system for children with a Social Worker who receive EOTAS or attend an AP • Develop a monitoring system for Children with a Social Worker who are EHE.	• Development of kinship care handbook • Undertake membership of the Kinship Care Forum • Implementation of a training programme available to families around supporting children previously in care and those in kinship care arrangements. • At least 65% attendance of children at PEPs • At least 75% attendance of SW, PA and EYSAO at PEPs • Implement a guide to our children's voice for our meetings • Review the capturing of our child's voice	
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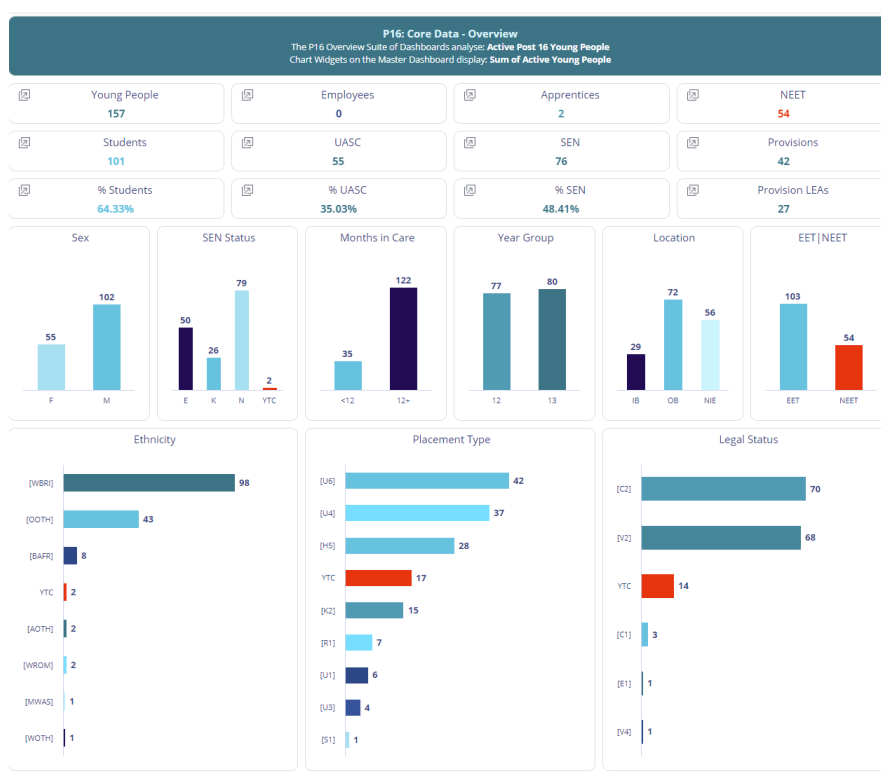
Appendix 2: Virtual School Cohort Statutory School Age and Post 16 2024/25

Please note that the cohort details change regularly and therefore this is a snapshot in July 2025.

Statutory School Age



Post-16



Appendix 3: Attendance for 2024/25

Attendance Trend

Year	Overall absence (%)
2020/21	14.5%
2021/22	11.43%
2022/23	13.3%
2023/24	13.0%
2024/25	12.0%

2024/25 Attendance

Cohort No. @ 31.8.2025	2024-25 (Internal Data)	Sep-24	Jul-25	Overall Attendance
296	Whole Cohort	90.74%	87.10%	88.01%
12	Reception	95.3%	93.2%	94.60%
11	Year 1	94.6%	94.0%	90.70%
12	Year 2	91.7%	86.2%	90.10%
11	Year 3	97.3%	97.3%	93.40%
18	Year 4	98.6%	98.4%	97.80%
23	Year 5	97.4%	96.8%	96.90%
25	Year 6	93.4%	94.9%	95.60%
20	Year 7	95.9%	90.7%	92.50%
25	Year 8	90.1%	93.1%	93.60%
25	Year 9	85.7%	84.8%	85.70%
57	Year 10	86.8%	77.4%	82.90%
57	Year 11	84.8%	46.7%	74.50%
	Persistent Absentees (No.)	55	27	27
	Severe absence (No.)	17	66	91

2024/25 Unauthorised absence

Year	Overall absence (%)
2021/22	2.9%
2022/23	4.44%
2023/24	4.29%
2024/25	3.99%

2024/25 Persistent and Severe Absence

Year	Persistent absence (%)	Severe absence (%)
2022/23	31.3%	4.4%
2023/24	28.0%	6.0%
2024/25	25.8%	9.4%

Children in Need and on Child Protection Plans weekly attendance

Academic year 24/25 starting 2.9.24	Overall Attendance %	Attendance %		
W/E	EH/CIN/CP	CIN	CP	CIN EH
10/01/2025	92.54%	76.53%	75.23%	
17/01/2025	92.58%	76.42%	75.15%	
24/01/2025	92.40%	76.57%	75.12%	
31/01/2025	90.98%	75.04%	77.22%	
07/02/2025	92.45%	75.20%	76.19%	
14/02/2025	92.39%	77.25%	76.50%	
21/02/2025	92.38%	77.25%	76.52%	
28/02/2025	92.39%	77.19%	76.46%	
07/03/2025	92.45%	77.43%	76.68%	
11/3/25 (OFSTED)	92.45%	78.11%	76.74%	
14/03/2025	92.43%	80.06%	73.05%	
21/03/2025	92.41%	79%	76%	
28/03/2025	92.40%	79%	76%	
04/04/2025	92.35%	79%	77%	
11/04/2025	92.35%	79%	77%	
18/04/2025	92.35%	79%	77%	
25/04/2025	92.35%	79%	77%	75.82%
02/05/2025	92.44%	80.65%	77.89%	75.69%
09/05/2025	92.42%	80.58%	78.01%	75.61%
16/05/2025	92.39%	80.51%	77.87%	75.53%
23/05/2025	92.30%	80.32%	78.35%	75.43%
30/05/2025	92.30%	80.32%	78.35%	75.43%
06/06/2025	92.17%	80.19%	78.26%	75.21%
13/06/2025	92.06%	80.09%	78.48%	75.08%
20/06/2025	91.87%	79.93%	78.42%	74.98%
27/06/2025	91.70%	79.43%	78.38%	74.82%
04/07/2025	91.63%	79.39%	78.85%	74.70%
11/07/2025	93.71%	79.60%	79.23%	74.73%
18/07/2025	93.69%	79.57%	79.57%	74.69%

Appendix 4: Exclusions

Suspensions 2024/25

Year		Episodes	Children	Male	Female
Primary	0	0	0	0	0
	1	3	2	2	0
	2	0	0	0	0
	3	1	1	1	0
	4	2	1	1	0
	5	0	0	0	0
	6	4	3	3	0
Secondary	7	8	2	2	0
	8	3	3	2	1
	9	36	10	4	6
	10	29	11	6	5
	11	25	8	3	5
Sum		111	41	24	17

Suspensions by cohort educated in Dorset Suspensions by cohort educated outside Dorset

Year		Episodes	Children	Year		Episodes	Children
Primary	0	0	0	Primary	0	0	0
	1	3	2		1	0	0
	2	1	1		2	0	0
	3	0	0		3	0	0
	4	0	0		4	2	1
	5	0	0		5	0	0
	6	3	2		6	1	1
Secondary	7	7	1	Secondary	7	1	1
	8	0	0		8	3	3
	9	19	5		9	17	5
	10	20	5		10	9	6
	11	8	5		11	17	3
Sum		61	21	Sum		50	20

Suspensions with SEN detail

SEN Status	Episodes	Children	% Suspended Children
Education Health and Care Plan	49	17	41.5%
Recorded SEN (inc EHCP)	93	28	68.3%
No SEN	18	13	31.8%

Total	111	41	
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NB - Based on Roll Yr R- 11 (322 Pupils)

Suspensions by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Episodes	Children	% Suspended Children
WBRI - White British	105	35	85.4%
MWAS – White and Asian background	2	1	2.4%
MOTH -	1	1	2.4%
MWBA -	1	1	2.4%
WOTH - White Any other background	1	1	2.4%
OTH - Any Other	1	2	2.8%
Sum	111	41	

NB - Based on Roll Yr R- 11 (322 Pupils)

Corporate Parenting Board

11 December 2025

LADO Annual Report April 2024 – March 2025

Choose an item.

For Information Only

Cabinet Member:

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

Local Councillor(s):

Executive Director:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

Report author and job title: Megan Cameron-Brown, Head of Quality Assurance & Partnerships

Email: megan.cameron-brown@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk;
dorsetscp@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk;

Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public Choose an item.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report will provide an overview of the management of allegations in Dorset, and the role of the Designated Officer between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. The statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 sets out the requirements for all agencies providing services for children to have procedures in place for reporting and managing allegations against staff and volunteers. This is mirrored in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024.
- 1.2 The guidance highlights the need for a Designated Officer to oversee the process, by giving independent advice on thresholds and the other aspects of safeguarding when an allegation is made. This will include a range of measures, in consultation with the employer, including risk assessments, the use of suspension for more serious conduct matters or criminal investigations, alongside other issues including managing duty of care to the employee and proportionality to ensure the process is concluded fairly and as soon as possible.
- 1.3 The procedures for the management of such allegations are contained in the Pan- Dorset Child Protection Procedures Pan Dorset Multi Agency

Safeguarding Procedures - Allegations against Staff. This report summarises the key activity and themes in the past year.

2 The Role of the Designated Officer

2.1 Working Together (2023) and Keeping Children Safe in Education (2024) states the criteria for Designated Officer involvement applies when an individual working or volunteering with children has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child.
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child.
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children.
- Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

2.2 This last bullet point refers to situations that arise in a professional's personal life, which give may give rise to concerns about their suitability to work with children, this is known as transferable risk.

2.3 All agencies have a duty to contact the Designated Officer directly or make a referral through the Family Support and Advice Line if there is a child protection concern or an allegation made that a criminal offence may have been committed or related to a child.

2.4 Allegations are considered in the context of five main categories of abuse: sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and Transferable Risk (safeguarding concerns arising in a person's private life).

2.5 The role of the Designated Officer is varied, but key tasks include:

- Providing independent support and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations regarding allegations or when a pattern of conduct concerns arises.
- Liaison with the Family Support and Advice Line, Multi-Agency partners, Children's Services Teams, and Police when child protection or criminal concerns become known about at the point of referral or during an investigation.

- Participation in strategy meetings and chairing of meetings involving Dorset Council employees or foster carers.
- Chairing evaluation meetings and professional meetings when the evidence for 'significant harm' for strategy meetings has not been met, but where a meeting is needed to consider complex issues and plan to reduce future risk.
- Ensuring the child's voice is heard.
- Monitoring progress of referrals and investigations to ensure progress on actions identified are all fully completed.
- Ongoing advice and guidance throughout the process, including organisational learning if gaps in practice are identified.
- Liaison with other local authority Designated Officers when there are cross-boundary issues, including Adult Safeguarding in Dorset when risks are linked to a role with adults.
- Maintaining confidential case records on the secure database (MOSAIC), tracking systems and the Designated Officers database
- Liaison with partner agencies and other departments to improve practice, including police, education, health, transport and Ofsted and contribution to meetings and supporting the development of policies and procedures to improve safeguarding.
- Ongoing practice development and delivering of allegations management training.

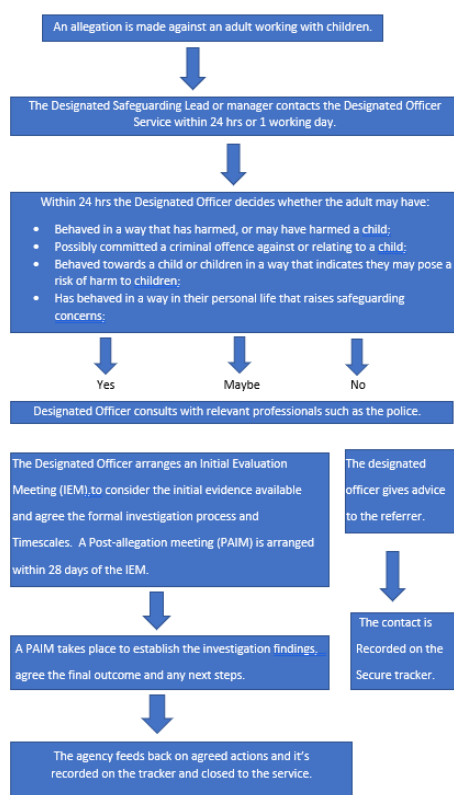
3 Service Structure and Supervision

- 3.1 The Designated Officers are located within the Quality Assurance and Partnership Service based at County Hall, Dorchester. There are two full time Designated Officers and a further 0.5fte supplement from a Safeguarding Standards Advisor who works flexibly across both roles.
- 3.2 All three Designated Officers are qualified social workers with a background in child protection work. They are managed by a Safeguarding Standards Service Manager. We currently have an interim service manager covering this post, following the permanent service manager moving roles.

- 3.3 The Designated Officers attend the regional designated officer meetings and the annual national designated officer meetings, and this enables an opportunity for peer reflection and discussion around key issues and challenges within the role.

4 Allegation Process

- 4.1 The flowchart below describes the local process used when an allegation is made against an adult working with a child.



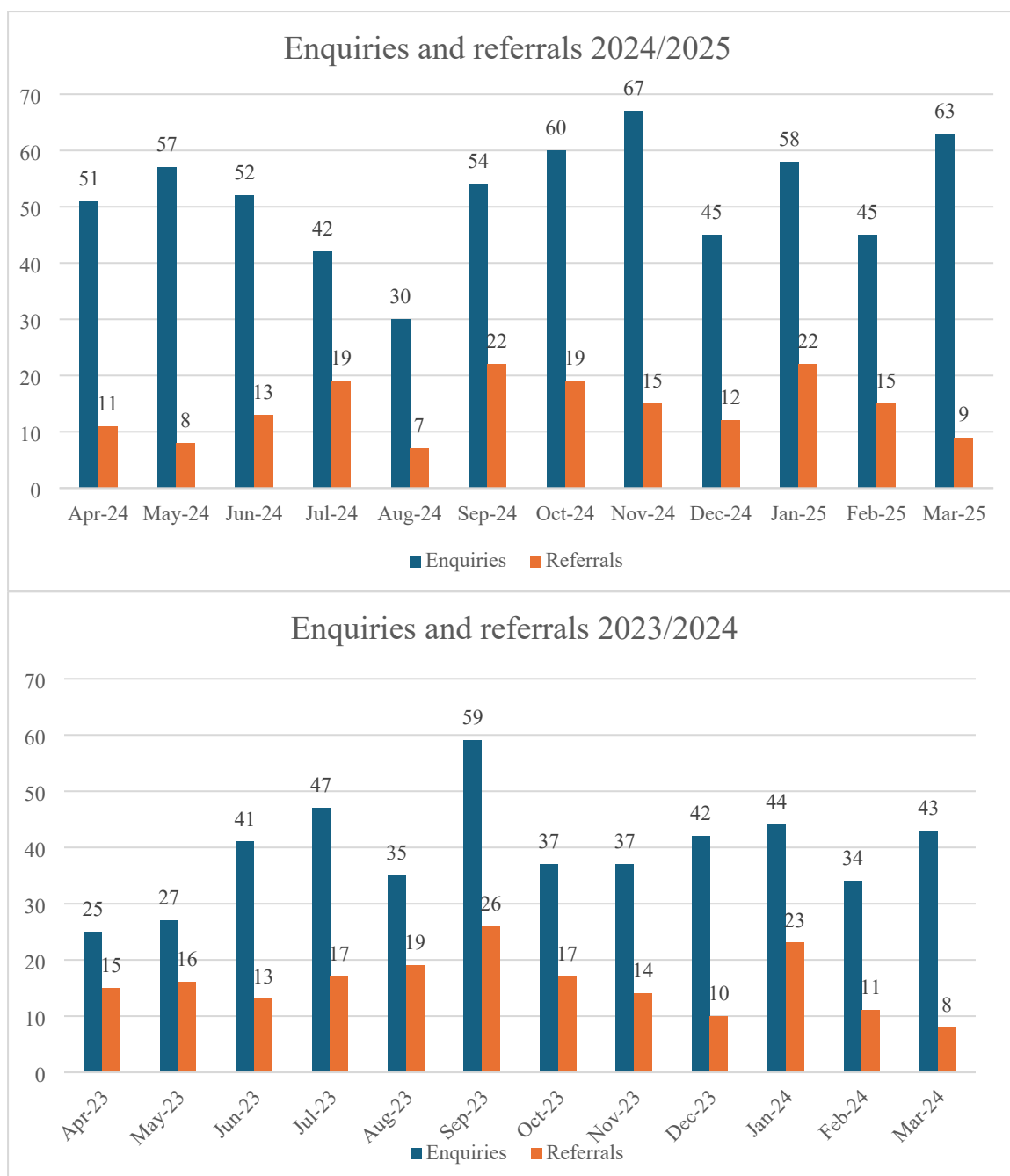
- 4.2 All referrals continue to be recorded on our case management system (MOSAIC) where details of allegations, minutes of meetings and outcomes are recorded, including where necessary referrals to DBS. We also record all contacts on mosaic; these are referrals that do not progress to an Initial Evaluation Meeting and may require an internal investigation without Designated Officer oversight. Recording contacts on mosaic ensures that there is a clear record of enquiries undertaken and decision making. A secure database is also used to record all enquiries/contacts/referrals that agencies make with the designated officer and the outcome, whether this is a referral or a low-level enquiry. The database enables information to be easily accessed so patterns and repeat concerns about an individual can be identified. It also provides the ability to track the number of contacts/referrals and progress

which enables easier analysis of service effectiveness and areas for development and improvement.

- 4.3 The Management of Allegations Service is carried out online and this continues to be effective in securing a good level of participation from our key partner agencies, such as HR, fostering, social care and schools. All Initial Evaluation meetings (IEM's) and Post Allegation Investigation Meetings (PAIM's) have been held via Microsoft Teams.
- 4.4 The Ofsted report commented on police attendance at allegation meetings. We do have good police attendance and engagement when police investigations are being led by the Child Abuse Investigation Team (CAIT), Police Online Investigation Team (POLIT) or the Professional Standards Unit. In cases involving transferable risk—such as domestic abuse, sexual offences against adults, rape, and fraud—we need to see enhanced attendance and engagement by the investigating police officer. While we recognise these offices work shift work and cases can take a long time to reach an outcome, increasing the engagement of police in the allegation meetings will significantly support timely and informed decision-making and conclusions of the allegations process, ensuring safety for our children.

5 Enquiries and Referrals (2023/24)

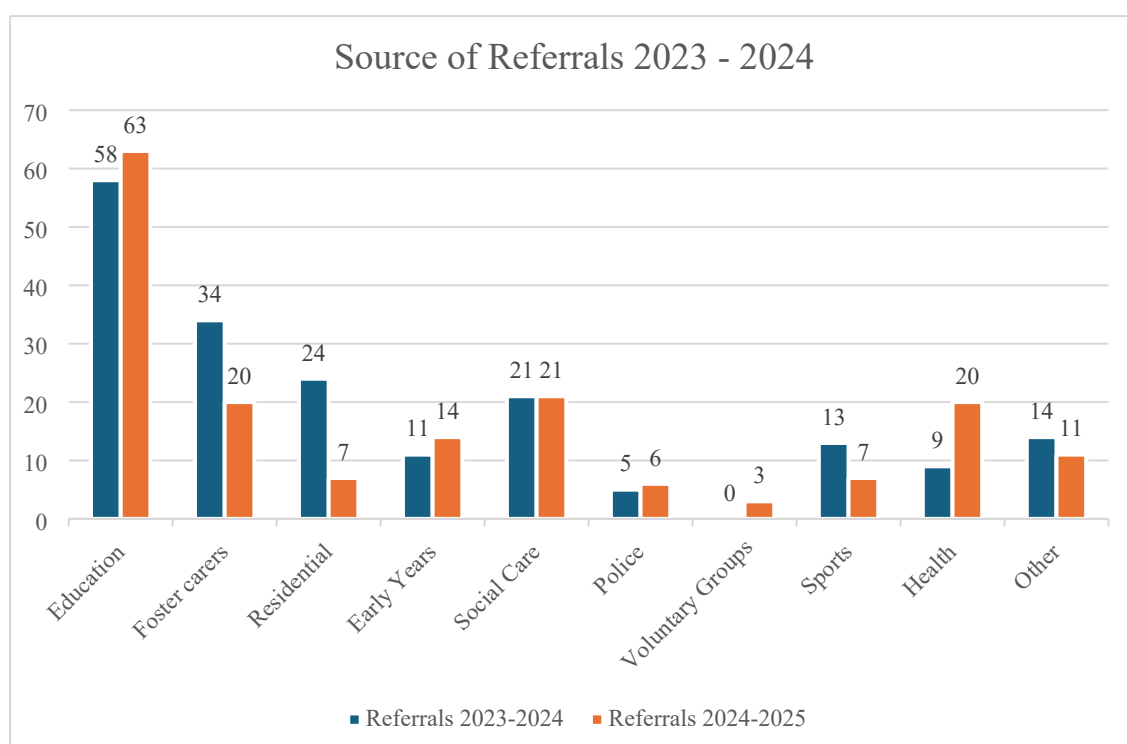
- 5.1 There were 796 contacts with the Designated Officer Service during 2024-2025, which marks another increase compared to the 658 contacts during 2023-2024. The Designated Officers continue to provide training to a variety of different agencies, and this has likely contributed to the increase in people seeking advice and guidance from the service.
- 5.2 Out of the 796 contacts with the service during 2024-2025, 172 progressed to referrals and Initial Evaluation Meetings which is around 22%, this is slightly lower than previous years which had a conversion rate of around 30%. The graph below shows the enquiries and referrals to the Designated Officer during 2024-2025. As can be seen below the highest number of contacts with the service was in November, where there was a total of sixty-seven contacts with the service, fifteen of which progressed to referral. August was the quietest month, with only thirty contacts with the service in this month. However, it should be noted that this figure is still higher than April 23, which was the quietest month in 2022-2023, so the demand for support and guidance regarding allegations/concerns about staff continues to increase.



6 Source of referrals:

- 6.1 The below chart shows the agency where the adult was working when the allegation was made about them. The number of referrals relating to those employed in education was sixty-three this is 37% of all referrals, this is a slight increase from last year, though within expected numbers, as our children spend the most time at school. This is still lower than 2022-23 where education represented just under 50% of all referrals. The LADO service continues to see referrals from a diverse range of settings. Indicating an impact on referrals through training.

- 6.2 The number of referrals for those working in the sports sector, has dropped slightly from 23/24. The figures remain low considering the number of sports clubs and groups that are operating within Dorset. There continues to be some barriers to hearing about concerns relating to sports activities and this is largely because many clubs are set up by self-employed individuals, with no external oversight.
- 6.3 Referrals from faith groups remains at 0. This indicates we are not reaching Faith groups when it comes to training regarding the managing of allegations.
- 6.4 The number of referral against police officers remain low, despite a slight increase in 2024-2025. The Designated Officers relationships with police professional standards is an area for ongoing development.

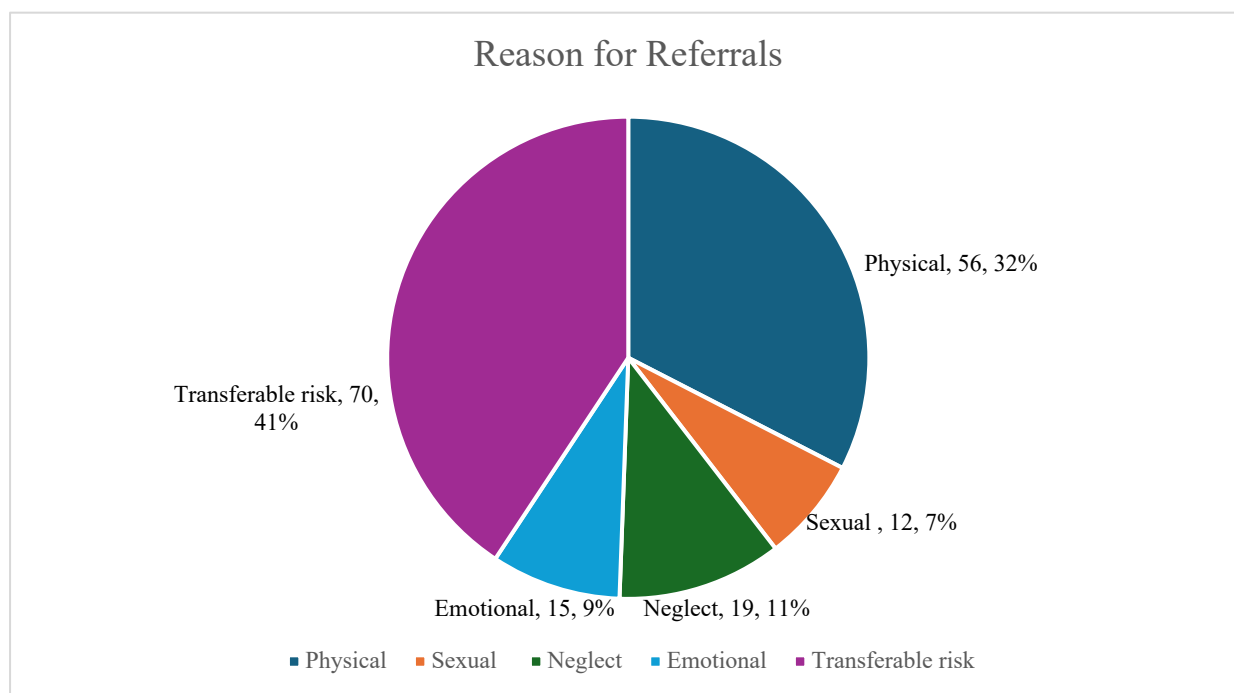


7 Reason for referrals

- 7.1 Between 2024-2025 the most common reason for referral relates to transference of risk, 41%. This is where there are concerns about someone's behaviour outside of the workplace that may present a risk to children they work with. This is the same as 2023-2025, where transferable risk was also the highest reason for a referral. This would continue to indicate that there is a greater understanding regarding transferable risk amongst our colleagues now, specifically in the police and social care and it is likely that training has contributed to this increase. The number of referrals relating physical abuse

remains high, with 32% of referrals relating to this category. Physical abuse is easier to identify, and this is reflected in the referral rate.

- 7.2 For 2024-2025, Emotional Harm, Neglect and Sexual Abuse have all seen a slight decrease in the number of referrals.



8 Foster carers

- 8.1 In 2024-2025 we had twenty referrals regarding foster carers living in Dorset. The Designated Officer has case management responsibility for all carers that live within Dorset, even if they are foster carers not employed by Dorset Council. In looking specifically at those carers employed by Dorset Council, during this last year we have had seventeen referrals to the service which progressed under the management of allegations process. This is slight decrease on last year.
- 8.2 Of the seventeen referrals that progressed under the management of allegations process, eight were Substantiated, eight were Unsubstantiated and one was Unfounded. Following this process those foster carers that were substantiated have been presented back at foster panel for review of their approval.
- 8.3 Allegation referrals concerning foster carers who care for Dorset children but reside outside the county are managed by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) in the foster carer's home local authority. The child's allocated

Dorset social worker is responsible for ensuring that any such allegations are appropriately overseen by the external LADO. If there is any uncertainty regarding the decisions or actions taken by the external LADO, the Dorset social worker may seek guidance from the Dorset LADO service. In such cases, the Dorset LADO will liaise directly with the external LADO to support resolution and ensure appropriate oversight. Where deemed necessary and appropriate, a Dorset LADO may also attend allegation meetings convened by the external LADO to support the process and advocate for the child's best interests.

- 8.4 The Designated Officers and the fostering management team continue to meet on a regular basis to discuss cases that are being managed under the management of allegations process and look to identify areas of learning for carers.

9 Referral outcomes

- 9.1 The outcome of investigations of allegations are categorised as follows:

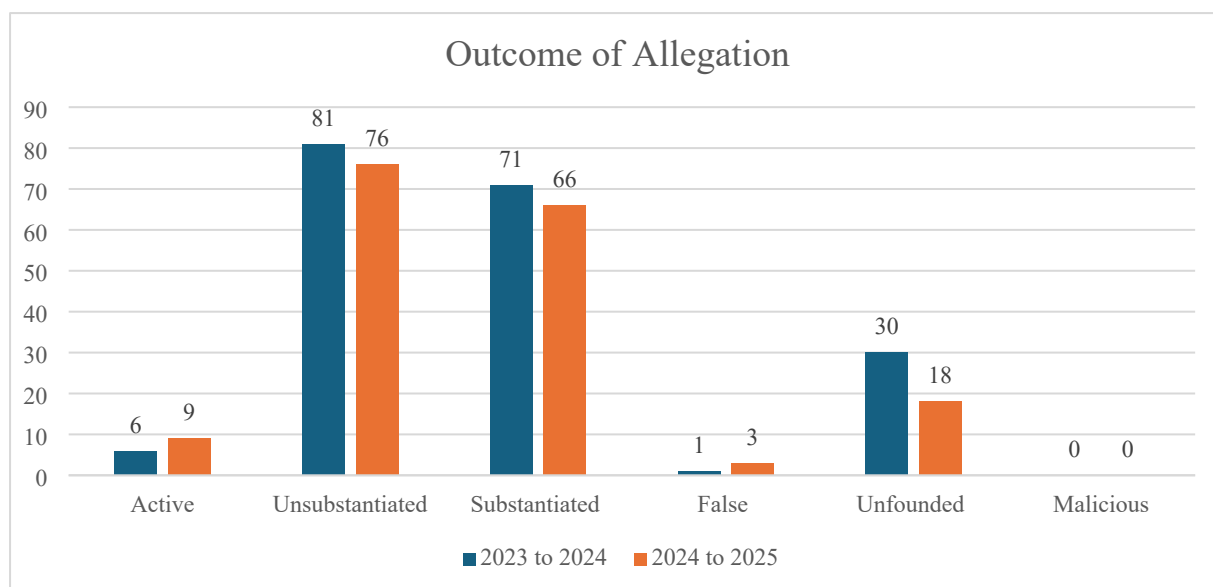
Substantiated – which means there is sufficient identifiable evidence to prove an allegation.

False – which means there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation.

Malicious – which means that there is clear evidence to prove there has been a deliberate act to deceive and the allegation is entirely false.

Unsubstantiated – which means that there is insufficient evidence to prove or disprove the allegation.

Unfounded - which means there is no evidence or proper basis to support the allegation being made.



9.2 The above graph provides an overview of the outcomes of those referrals which were dealt with through the management of allegation process during 2024/2025 and how this compares to 2023/2024.

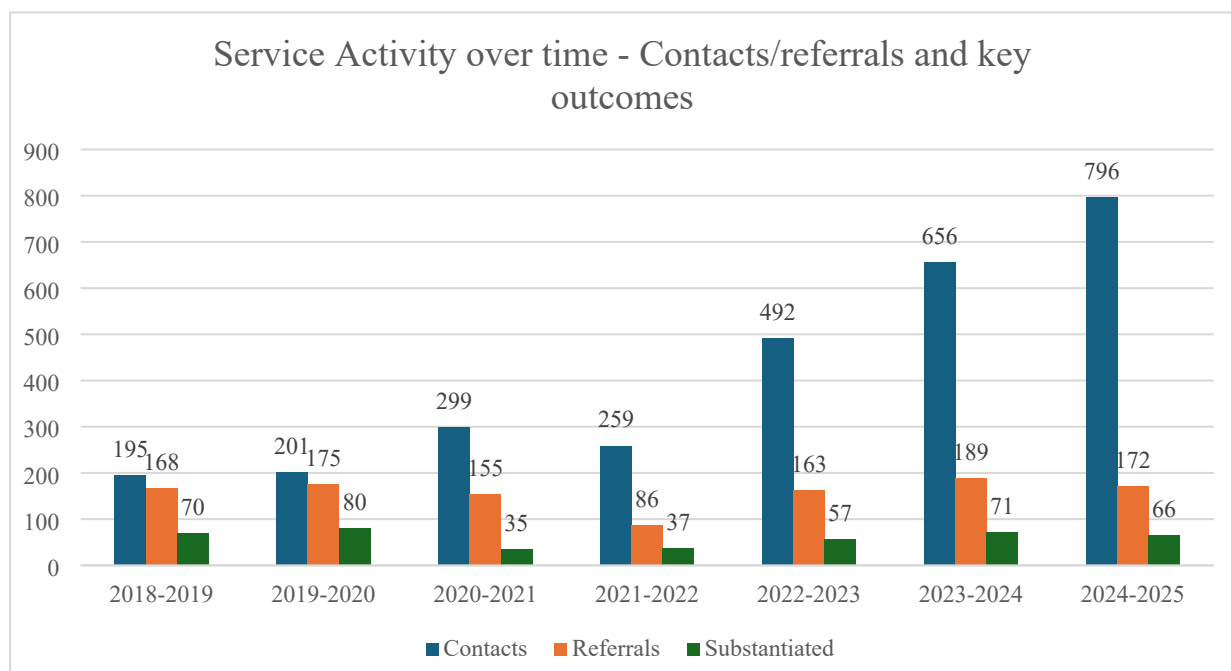
9.3 For the reporting year 2024-2025 all outcome areas have decreased on last year's numbers. We have completed the year with a slight increase of active cases still open, these are police investigations, which can take some time to conclude.

9.4 There was a total of 66 Substantiated allegations from 172 referrals, which is around 38% of referrals concluding with a Substantiated outcome, this is consistent with last year, which was 37%.

10 **Service Activity**

10.1 The below graph shows service activity over time.

- 10.2 The chart shows that the number of contacts with the service continues to increase, not just in terms of referrals that progress under the process, but also in terms of seeking advice and guidance on concerns being raised about staff. While there has been an increase in contact with the service the conversion rate in terms of those cases that progress under the LADO process remains between 20 and 30%.



11 Key Performance indicators

- 11.1 Below is a review of the Key Performance Indicators for the Designated Officer Service, over the last year.

Activity

An Initial Evaluation meeting should be held within ten working days of the referral.

The Post-Allegation Investigation (PAIM) meeting should be held within 28 days.

Progress

On average over the reporting period of April 24 to March 25 we met this target 96% of time.

The majority of cases have a PAIM held within the 28 days. Exception to this is usually in relation to police investigations that may take an extended period of time due to further investigatory work, such as forensics on devices.

12 Multi-agency Practice Development

- 12.1 The Designated Officer has continued to work closely with the Safeguarding Standards advisors. Where there are complaints or concerns regarding safeguarding within schools there are at times also elements that meet the criteria for the managing allegations process and therefore this close working relationship is important. The safeguarding standards advisor provides valuable support for schools and has helped to address more broader safeguarding concerns and learning which may arise through the managing allegations process.

13 Training

- 13.1 The designated officer service has continued to deliver management of allegations training to schools virtually via MS Teams and this has been well received.
- 13.2 The Designated Officer has also developed some shorter training presentations which have been delivered to a range of services and provisions, particularly providers where there have been either repeat referrals or referrals which have raised concerns about their understanding of the process or safeguarding procedures.
- 13.3 During 2024-2025, alongside regular training delivered to our education colleagues, we have also delivered management of allegations training to; residential services, police, social care teams, the military and fostering. There has been a mix of some in-person sessions and some online training, with positive feedback having been received.

14 Self-employed service providers

- 14.1 A continuing area of work for all Designated Officers is the issue of self-employed service providers (sometimes referred to as 'headless organisations'). These are groups or activities where there is little or no structure or any evidence of lines of accountability. These are groups or services set up by an individual that are not affiliated to any agency. In the absence of accountability this is an additional challenge for Designated Officers. However, referrals of this nature have been received this past year and have been managed through the Designated Officer communicating directly with the subject giving advice and guidance where necessary to reduce risk.

15 Professional collaboration

- 15.1 The Designated officer has developed good links with the designated officers in our neighbouring local authorities. The regular Southwest Regional LADO meetings also support those links and also provides some valuable peer support.
- 15.2 The Designated officer continues to be in in regular communication with Ofsted, particularly where there have been investigations relating to early years providers or child minders.

16 Updates on priorities set for 2024-2025

Action	Expected Outcome	Project Lead	Due Date
Review and update referral form.	Creation of a more detailed referral form that will seek all of the information that is needed by the designated officer	Martha	Completed and embedded.
	This will free up designated officers time, chasing for required information.		
Continue to deliver training bespoke training to raise awareness & professional development	The newly formed family help teams to receive LADO awareness training	Martha (supported by Lynne and Laura)	Not completed carried to 2025-2026 priorities.
	Family Help colleagues will understand what meets LADO threshold and how to refer.		

External validation of the service	Regional partner to be invited to undertake audit activity of Dorset LADO. Feedback to be used for further service development	New Service Manager (starts 06/01/25)	Carried forward to 2025-2026 due to neighbouring LA availability.
Develop a system for tracking that recommendations following investigations are implemented.	Further work required to embed this action with the team.	New Service Manager.	Not completed carried to 2025-2026 priorities.

17. Priorities for 2025-2026

Action	Expected Outcome	Project Lead	Due Date
Continue to deliver training bespoke training to raise awareness & professional development	The newly formed family help teams to receive LADO awareness training Family Help colleagues will understand what meets LADO threshold and how to refer.	Martha (supported by Lynne and Laura)	Dec 2025
External validation of the service	Regional partner to be invited to undertake audit activity of Dorset LADO. Feedback to be used for further service development	New Service Manager (starts 06/01/25)	2025-2026. Date TBC.

Develop a system for tracking that recommendations following investigations are implemented.	Further work required to embed this action with the team.	New Service Manager.	Dec 2025
Reviewing and updating process for evaluation meetings.	To have a more streamlined process and less meetings for the LADO service.	Head of QA with LADO Service.	Currently Trialling new process. New process embedded by Dec 2025.
Creating a regular internal audit process for the LADO service.	To regularly quality assure our thresholds and process.	Head of QA and Interim SM.	Embedded by Dec 2025
Increased attendance by police for all relevant allegation meetings.	Police attend and engage in the allegation meeting for all LADO cases that have met criminal threshold.	Interim SM and Head of QA	Improved by November 2025

18. Alternative options considered

18.1 Not applicable.

19 Legal considerations

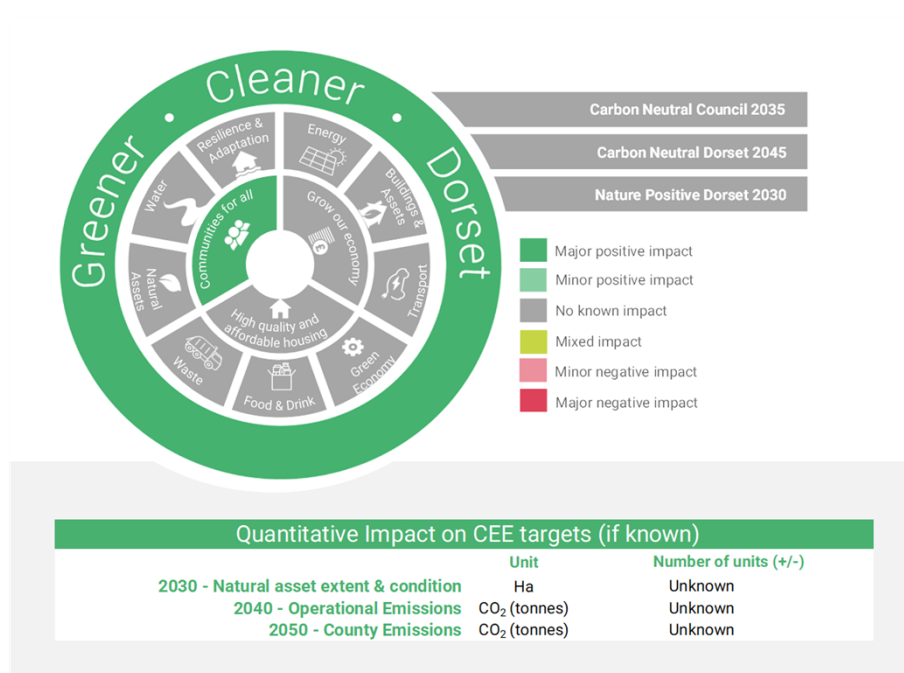
19.1 Not applicable. Statutory Report.

20. Financial implications

20.1 The LADO services is embedded within the children services budget.

21. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

21.1



22. Well-being and health implications

22.1 The well-being and health of all children in Dorset is at the centre of the work undertaken by the Designated Officer, the child's voice and understanding of the impact of the staff and volunteers behaviour of said organisation is considered at every meeting.

22.2 There is always consideration of the well-being of staff and volunteer being considered by the designated officer, and the support available to them is a standard consideration as part of the meeting agenda.

22.3 The wellbeing of the LADO's dealing with what can be complex allegations is managed via regular supervision and support from their service manager and head of service. Staff also have access to Dorset Council's wellbeing offer.

23. Other implications

23.1 None

24. Risk implications

24.1 There is no decision needing to be made, this report is for information only. No risk.

25. Equalities

- 25.1 The LADO service plays an essential role in promoting equality by ensuring safeguarding concerns are managed consistently across all sectors and professional groups working with children. Through its commitment to fair and proportionate investigation processes, the service helps protect both children and professionals, ensuring that all individuals are treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their background, role, or sector.

26. Appendices

- 26.1 Appendix 1: Dorset LADO Annual Report 24.25

27. Background papers

- 27.1 None.

28. Report sign-off

- 28.1 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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Youth-friendly summary of the Dorset LADO Annual Report 2024–2025

Title of Report

Dorset LADO Annual Report 2024–2025.

Who Wrote the Report

The report was written by the Head of Quality Assurance and Partnerships.

Date Written

The report covers the time from **April 2024 to March 2025**.

Summary of What the Report Is About

This report talks about how Dorset keeps children safe when someone working with them might have hurt them. The LADO team checks out worries about adults who work or volunteer with children, like teachers, foster carers, or sports coaches to name a few. They make sure children are protected and that we understand what the adult has or hasn't done, while making sure the adult is treated fairly.

What Are the Key Messages of This Report

- More organisations are asking the LADO team for help and advice.
- Most worries are about things adults do outside of work that might mean they are still unsafe to work with children.
- The team works with children services, schools, police, and other services to keep children safe.
- Training is helping more people understand what to do when they're worried about an adult's behaviour.

Important Facts and Figures

- The LADO team had **796 contacts** this year – that's more than last year.
- **172 allegations** were serious enough to look into more closely.
- Out of those 172 allegations, **17 allegations** were about Dorset employed Foster Carers
- Out of the 172 allegations, **66 allegations** were proven to be true (called "substantiated"). Out of the 66 proven to be true, **8** were about Dorset Employed Foster Carers.
- Most referrals came from **schools**, but some came from carers, health workers, and others.

- The biggest reason for referrals was **transferable risk** – when an adult's behaviour outside work might still mean they are unsafe to work with children.

Actions or Recommendations

- Keep offering training to help people know when and how to report concerns.
- Make sure police come to more meetings when needed.
- Improve how the team checks that changes are made after an investigation.
- Make the process easier for everyone.
- Start regular checks to make sure the service is working well.

N.B Copilot has generated this summary, and it has been reviewed the responsible officer.



1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report will provide an overview of the management of allegations in Dorset, and the role of the Designated Officer between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. The statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 sets out the requirements for all agencies providing services for children to have procedures in place for reporting and managing allegations against staff and volunteers. This is mirrored in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024.
- 1.2 The guidance highlights the need for a Designated Officer to oversee the process, by giving independent advice on thresholds and the other aspects of safeguarding when an allegation is made. This will include a range of measures, in consultation with the employer, including risk assessments, the use of suspension for more serious conduct matters or criminal investigations, alongside other issues including managing duty of care to the employee and proportionality to ensure the process is concluded fairly and as soon as possible.
- 1.3 The procedures for the management of such allegations are contained in the Pan- Dorset Child Protection Procedures Pan Dorset Multi Agency Safeguarding Procedures - Allegations against Staff. This report summarises the key activity and themes in the past year.

2 The Role of the Designated Officer

- 2.1 Working Together (2023) and Keeping Children Safe in Education (2024) states the criteria for Designated Officer involvement applies when an individual working or volunteering with children has:
- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child.
 - Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child.
 - Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children.
 - Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.
- 2.2 This last bullet point refers to situations that arise in a professional's personal life, which may give rise to concerns about their suitability to work with children, this is known as transferable risk.

2.3 All agencies have a duty to contact the Designated Officer directly or make a referral through the Family Support and Advice Line if there is a child protection concern or an allegation made that a criminal offence may have been committed or related to a child.

2.4 Allegations are considered in the context of five main categories of abuse: sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and Transferable Risk (safeguarding concerns arising in a person's private life).

2.5 The role of the Designated Officer is varied, but key tasks include:

- Providing independent support and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations regarding allegations or when a pattern of conduct concerns arises.
- Liaison with the Family Support and Advice Line, Multi-Agency partners, Children's Services Teams, and Police when child protection or criminal concerns become known about at the point of referral or during an investigation.
- Participation in strategy meetings and chairing of meetings involving Dorset Council employees or foster carers.
- Chairing evaluation meetings and professional meetings when the evidence for 'significant harm' for strategy meetings has not been met, but where a meeting is needed to consider complex issues and plan to reduce future risk.
- Ensuring the child's voice is heard.
- Monitoring progress of referrals and investigations to ensure progress on actions identified are all fully completed.
- Ongoing advice and guidance throughout the process, including organisational learning if gaps in practice are identified.
- Liaison with other local authority Designated Officers when there are cross-boundary issues, including Adult Safeguarding in Dorset when risks are linked to a role with adults.
- Maintaining confidential case records on the secure database (MOSAIC), tracking systems and the Designated Officers database
- Liaison with partner agencies and other departments to improve practice, including police, education, health, transport and Ofsted and

contribution to meetings and supporting the development of policies and procedures to improve safeguarding.

- Ongoing practice development and delivering of allegations management training.

3 Service Structure and Supervision

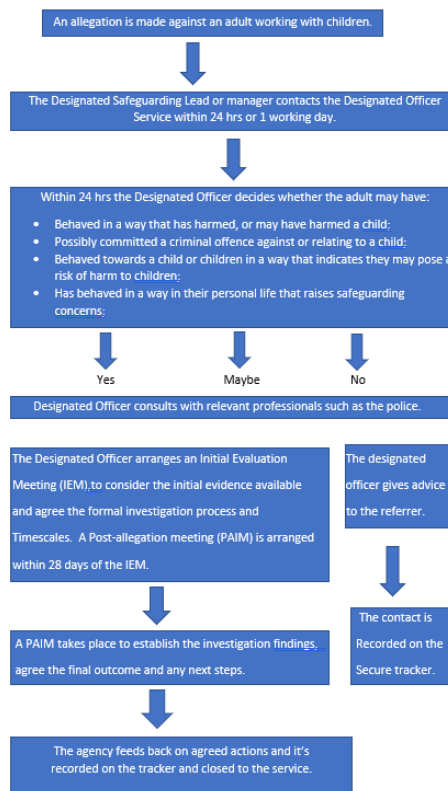
3.1 The Designated Officers are located within the Quality Assurance and Partnership Service based at County Hall, Dorchester. There are two full time Designated Officers and a further 0.5fte supplement from a Safeguarding Standards Advisor who works flexibly across both roles.

3.2 All three Designated Officers are qualified social workers with a background in child protection work. They are managed by a Safeguarding Standards Service Manager. We currently have an interim service manager covering this post, following the permanent service manager moving roles.

3.3 The Designated Officers attend the regional designated officer meetings and the annual national designated officer meetings, and this enables an opportunity for peer reflection and discussion around key issues and challenges within the role.

4 Allegation Process

4.1 The flowchart below describes the local process used when an allegation is made against an adult working with a child.



4.2 All referrals continue to be recorded on our case management system (MOSAIC) where details of allegations, minutes of meetings and outcomes are recorded, including where necessary referrals to DBS. We also record all contacts on mosaic; these are referrals that do not progress to an Initial Evaluation Meeting and may require an internal investigation without Designated Officer oversight. Recording contacts on mosaic ensures that there is a clear record of enquiries undertaken and decision making. A secure database is also used to record all enquiries/contacts/referrals that agencies make with the designated officer and the outcome, whether this is a referral or a low-level enquiry. The database enables information to be easily accessed so patterns and repeat concerns about an individual can be identified. It also provides the ability to track the number of contacts/referrals and progress which enables easier analysis of service effectiveness and areas for development and improvement.

4.3 The Management of Allegations Service is carried out online and this continues to be effective in securing a good level of participation from our key partner agencies, such as HR, fostering, social care and schools. All Initial Evaluation meetings (IEM's) and Post Allegation Investigation Meetings (PAIM's) have been held via Microsoft Teams.

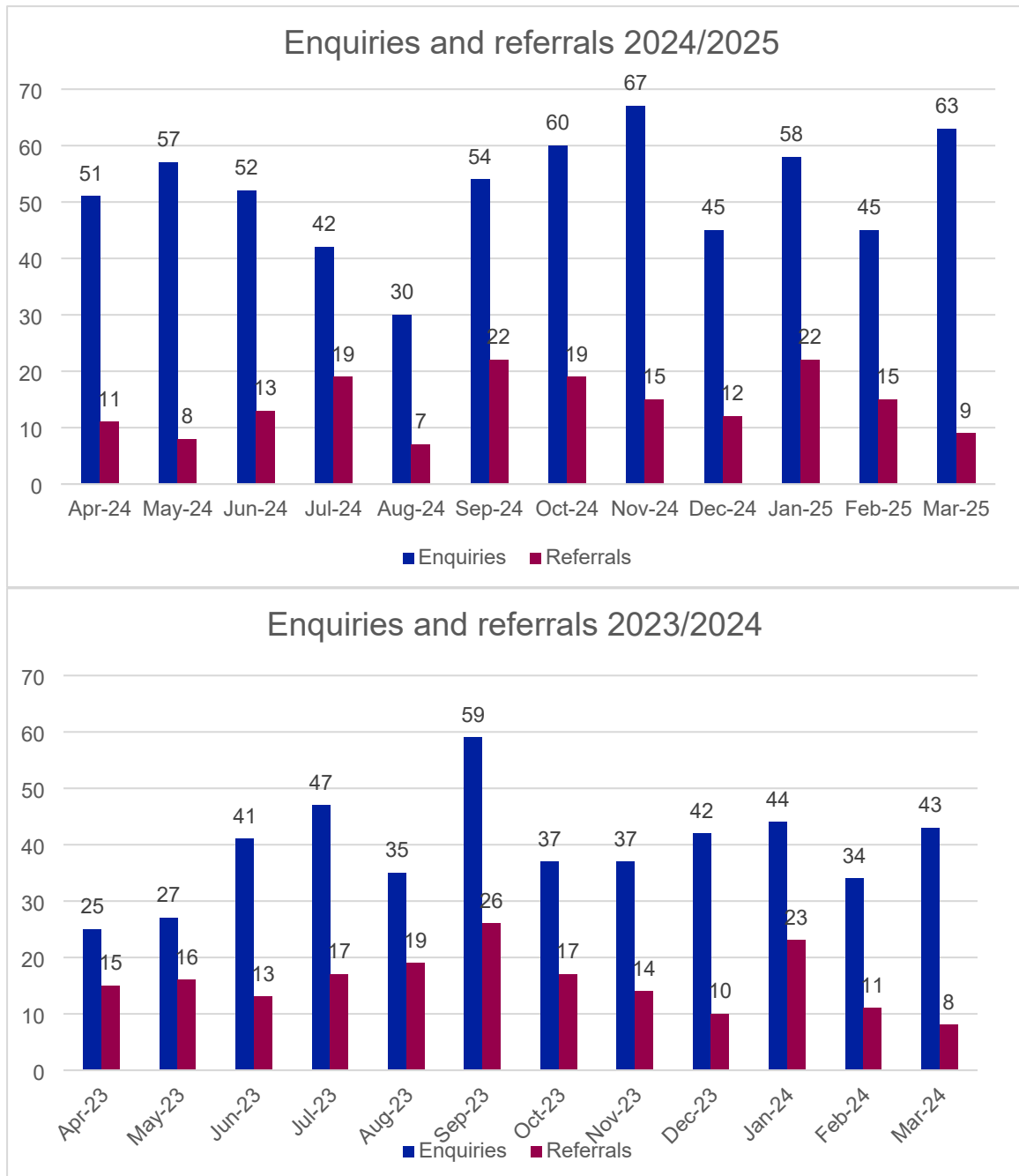
The Ofsted report commented on police attendance at allegation meetings. We do have good police attendance and engagement when police investigations are being led by the Child Abuse Investigation Team (CAIT), Police Online Investigation Team (POLIT) or the Professional Standards Unit. In cases involving transferable risk—such as domestic abuse, sexual offences against adults, rape, and fraud—we need

to see enhanced attendance and engagement by the investigating police officer. While we recognise these offices work shift work and cases can take a long time to reach an outcome, increasing the engagement of police in the allegation meetings will significantly support timely and informed decision-making and conclusions of the allegations process, ensuring safety for our children.

5 Enquiries and Referrals (2023/24)

5.1 There were 796 contacts with the Designated Officer Service during 2024-2025, which marks another increase compared to the 658 contacts during 2023-2024. The Designated Officers continue to provide training to a variety of different agencies, and this has likely contributed to the increase in people seeking advice and guidance from the service.

5.2 Out of the 796 contacts with the service during 2024-2025, 172 progressed to referrals and Initial Evaluation Meetings which is around 22%, this is slightly lower than previous years which had a conversion rate of around 30%. The graph below shows the enquiries and referrals to the Designated Officer during 2024-2025. As can be seen below the highest number of contacts with the service was in November, where there was a total of sixty-seven contacts with the service, fifteen of which progressed to referral. August was the quietest month, with only thirty contacts with the service in this month. However, it should be noted that this figure is still higher than April 23, which was the quietest month in 2022-2023, so the demand for support and guidance regarding allegations/concerns about staff continues to increase.



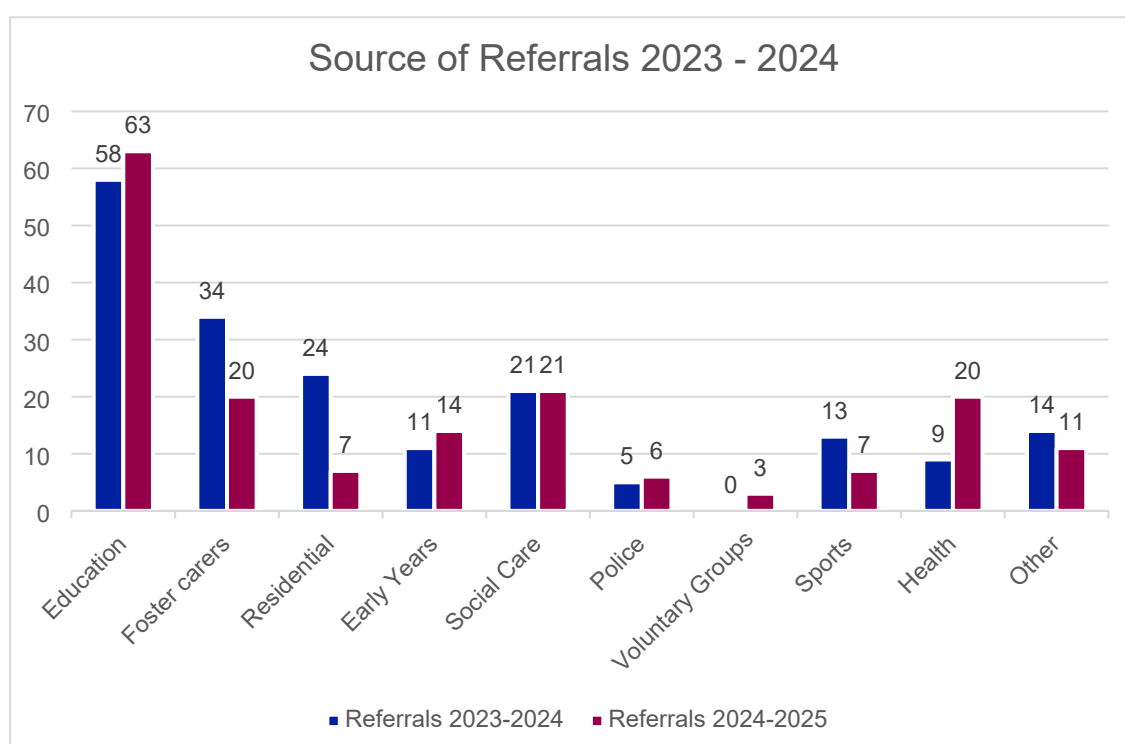
6 Source of referrals:

6.1 The below chart shows the agency where the adult was working when the allegation was made about them. The number of referrals relating to those employed in education was sixty-three this is 37% of all referrals, this is a slight increase from last year, though within expected numbers, as our children spend the most time at school. This is still lower than 2022-23 where education represented just under 50% of all referrals. The LADO service continues to see referrals from a diverse range of settings. Indicating an impact on referrals through training.

6.2 The number of referrals for those working in the sports sector, has dropped slightly from 23/24. The figures remain low considering the number of sports clubs and groups that are operating within Dorset. There continues to be some barriers to hearing about concerns relating to sports activities and this is largely because many clubs are set up by self-employed individuals, with no external oversight.

6.3 Referrals from faith groups remains at 0. This indicates we are not reaching Faith groups when it comes to training regarding the managing of allegations.

6.4 The number of referral against police officers remain low, despite a slight increase in 2024-2025. The Designated Officers relationships with police professional standards is an area for ongoing development.

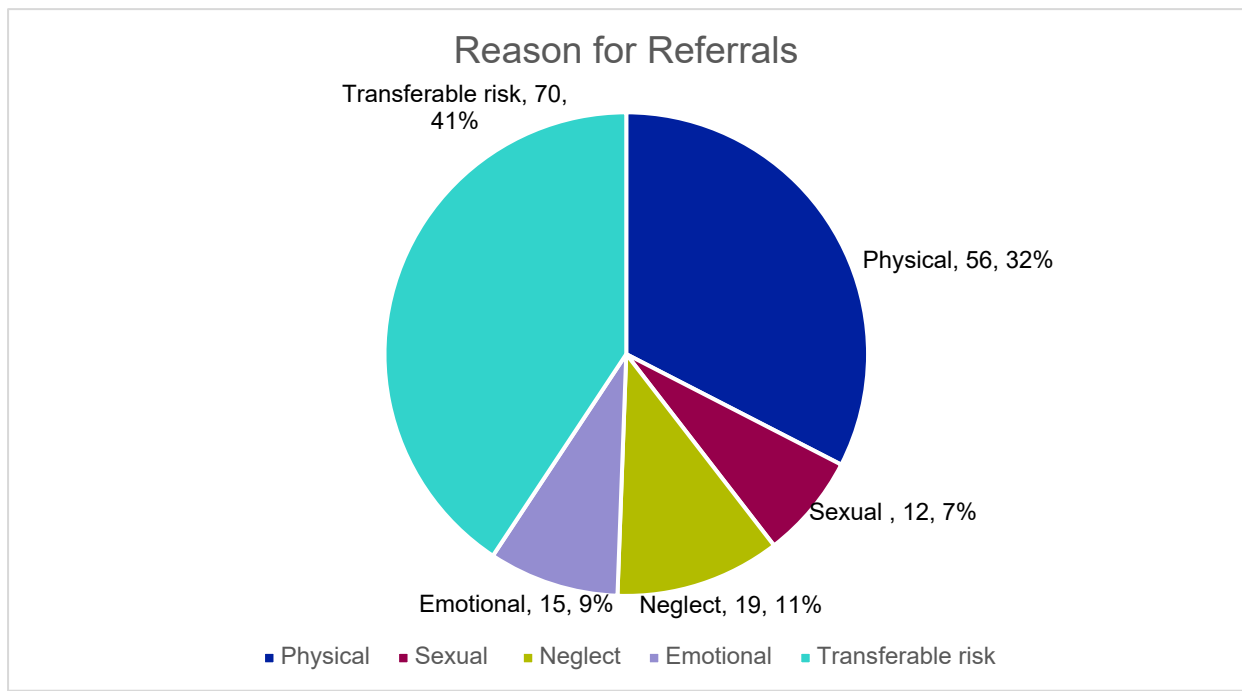


7 Reason for referrals

7.1 Between 2024-2025 the most common reason for referral relates to transference of risk, 41%. This is where there are concerns about someone's behaviour outside of the workplace that may present a risk to children they work with. This is the same as 2023-2025, where transferable risk was also the highest reason for a referral. This would continue to indicate that there is a greater understanding regarding transferable risk amongst our colleagues now, specifically in the police and social care and it is likely that training has contributed to this increase. The number of referrals relating physical abuse remains high, with 32% of referrals

relating to this category. Physical abuse is easier to identify, and this is reflected in the referral rate.

7.2 For 2024-2025, Emotional Harm, Neglect and Sexual Abuse have all seen a slight decrease in the number of referrals.



8 Foster carers

8.1 In 2024-2025 we had twenty referrals regarding foster carers living in Dorset. The Designated Officer has case management responsibility for all carers that live within Dorset, even if they are foster carers not employed by Dorset Council. In looking specifically at those carers employed by Dorset Council, during this last year we have had seventeen referrals to the service which progressed under the management of allegations process. This is slight decrease on last year.

8.2 Of the seventeen referrals that progressed under the management of allegations process, eight were Substantiated, eight were Unsubstantiated and one was Unfounded. Following this process those foster carers that were substantiated have been presented back at foster panel for review of their approval.

8.3 Allegation referrals concerning foster carers who care for Dorset children but reside outside the county are managed by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) in the foster carer's home local authority. The child's allocated Dorset social worker is responsible for ensuring that any such allegations are appropriately overseen by the external LADO. If there is any uncertainty regarding the decisions or actions taken by the external LADO, the Dorset social

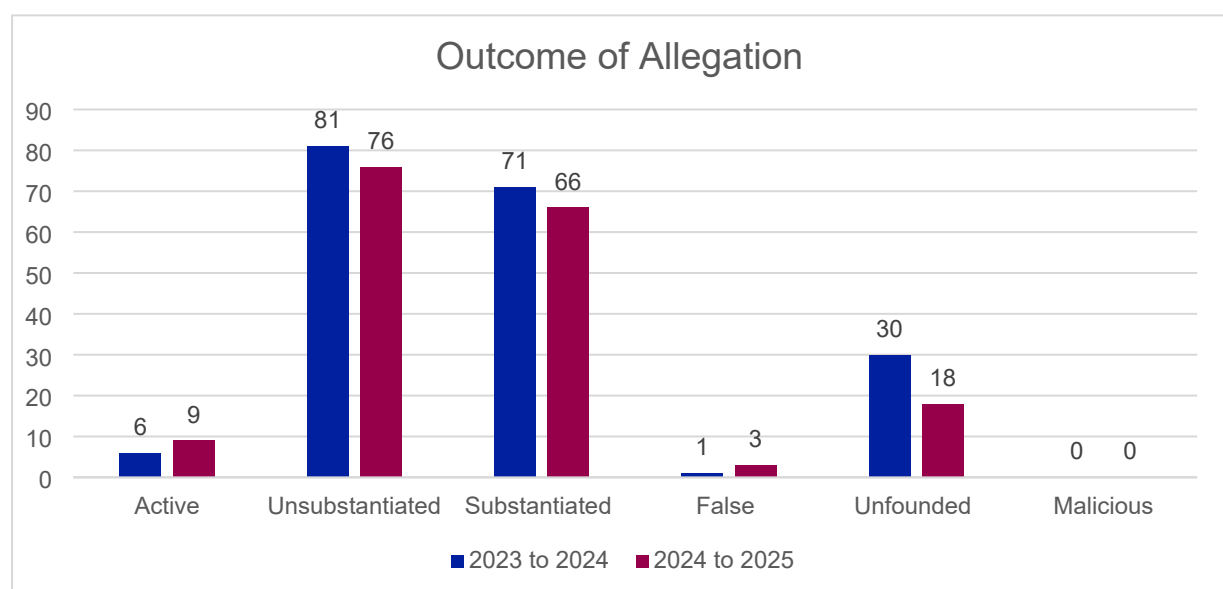
worker may seek guidance from the Dorset LADO service. In such cases, the Dorset LADO will liaise directly with the external LADO to support resolution and ensure appropriate oversight. Where deemed necessary and appropriate, a Dorset LADO may also attend allegation meetings convened by the external LADO to support the process and advocate for the child's best interests.

8.4 The Designated Officers and the fostering management team continue to meet on a regular basis to discuss cases that are being managed under the management of allegations process and look to identify areas of learning for carers.

9 Referral outcomes

9.1 The outcome of investigations of allegations are categorised as follows:

- Substantiated – which means there is sufficient identifiable evidence to prove an allegation.
- False – which means there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation.
- Malicious – which means that there is clear evidence to prove there has been a deliberate act to deceive and the allegation is entirely false.
- Unsubstantiated – which means that there is insufficient evidence to prove or disprove the allegation.
- Unfounded - which means there is no evidence or proper basis to support the allegation being made.



9.2 The above graph provides an overview of the outcomes of those referrals which were dealt with through the management of allegation process during 2024/2025 and how this compares to 2023/2024.

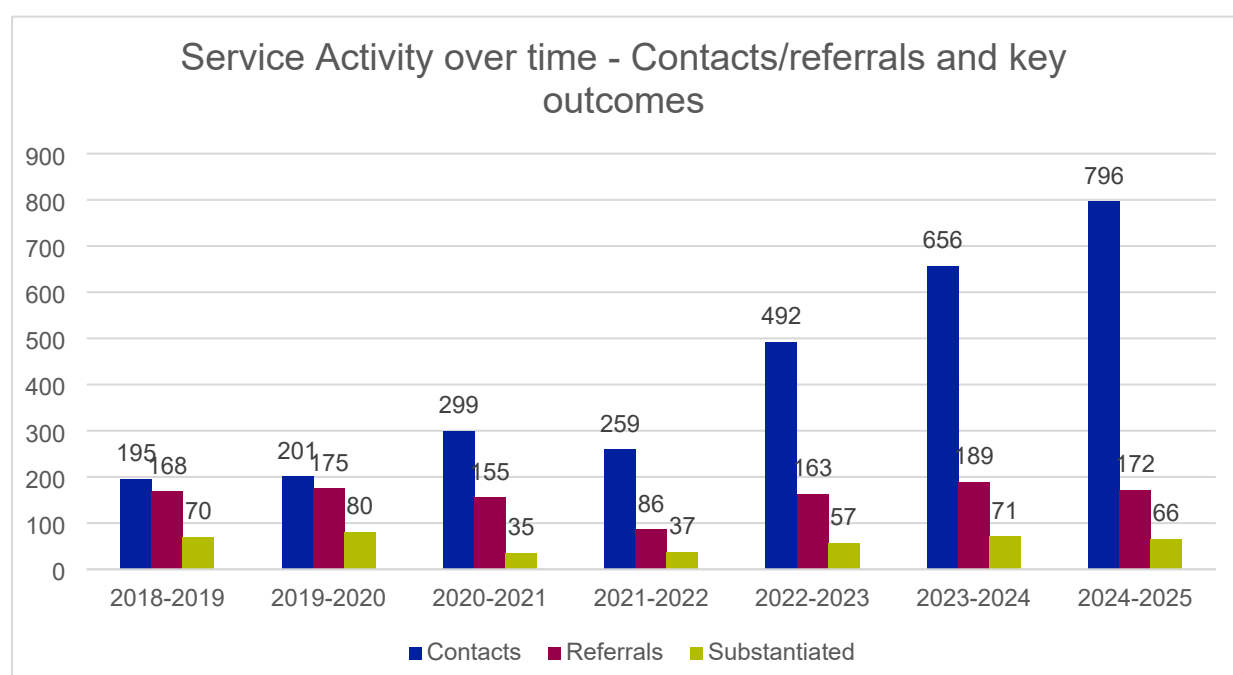
9.3 For the reporting year 2024-2025 all outcome areas have decreased on last year's numbers. We have completed the year with a slight increase of active cases still open, these are police investigations, which can take some time to conclude.

9.4 There was a total of 66 Substantiated allegations from 172 referrals, which is around 38% of referrals concluding with a Substantiated outcome, this is consistent with last year, which was 37%.

10 Service Activity

10.1 The below graph shows service activity over time.

10.2 The chart shows that the number of contacts with the service continues to increase, not just in terms of referrals that progress under the process, but also in terms of seeking advice and guidance on concerns being raised about staff. While there has been an increase in contact with the service the conversion rate in terms of those cases that progress under the LADO process remains between 20 and 30%.



11 Key Performance indicators

Below is a review of the Key Performance Indicators for the Designated Officer Service, over the last year.

Activity	Progress

An Initial Evaluation meeting should be held within ten working days of the referral.	On average over the reporting period of April 24 to March 25 we met this target 96% of time.
The Post-Allegation Investigation (PAIM) meeting should be held within 28 days.	The majority of cases have a PAIM held within the 28days. Exception to this is usually in relation to police investigations that may take an extended period of time due to further investigatory work, such as forensics on devices.

12 Multi-agency Practice Development

The Designated Officer has continued to work closely with the Safeguarding Standards advisors. Where there are complaints or concerns regarding safeguarding within schools there are at times also elements that meet the criteria for the managing allegations process and therefore this close working relationship is important. The safeguarding standards advisor provides valuable support for schools and has helped to address more broader safeguarding concerns and learning which may arise through the managing allegations process.

14 Training

The designated officer service has continued to deliver management of allegations training to schools virtually via MS Teams and this has been well received.

The Designated Officer has also developed some shorter training presentations which have been delivered to a range of services and provisions, particularly providers where there have been either repeat referrals or referrals which have raised concerns about their understanding of the process or safeguarding procedures.

During 2024-2025, alongside regular training delivered to our education colleagues, we have also delivered management of allegations training to; residential services, police, social care teams, the military and fostering. There has been a mix of some in-person sessions and some online training, with positive feedback having been received.

15 Self-employed service providers

A continuing area of work for all Designated Officers is the issue of self-employed service providers (sometimes referred to as 'headless organisations'). These are groups or activities where there is little or no structure or any evidence of lines of accountability. These are groups or services set up by an individual

that are not affiliated to any agency. In the absence of accountability this is an additional challenge for Designated Officers. However, referrals of this nature have been received this past year and have been managed through the Designated Officer communicating directly with the subject giving advice and guidance where necessary to reduce risk.

16 Professional collaboration

The Designated officer has developed good links with the designated officers in our neighbouring local authorities. The regular Southwest Regional LADO meetings also support those links and also provides some valuable peer support.

The Designated officer continues to be in in regular communication with Ofsted, particularly where there have been investigations relating to early years providers or child minders.

17 Updates on priorities set for 2024-2025

Action	Expected Outcome	Project Lead	Due Date
Review and update referral form.	Creation of a more detailed referral form that will seek all of the information that is needed by the designated officer This will free up designated officers time, chasing for required information.	Martha	Completed and embedded.
Continue to deliver training bespoke training to raise awareness & professional development	The newly formed family help teams to receive LADO awareness training Family Help colleagues will understand what meets LADO threshold and how to refer.	Martha (supported by Lynne and Laura)	Not completed carried to 2025-2026 priorities.
External validation of the service	Regional partner to be invited to undertake audit activity of Dorset LADO. Feedback to be used for further service development	New Service Manager (starts 06/01/25)	Carried forward to 2025-2026 due to neighbouring LA availability.

Develop a system for tracking that recommendations following investigations are implemented.	Further work required to embed this action with the team.	New Service Manager.	Not completed carried to 2025-2026 priorities.
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18. Priorities for 2025-2026

Action	Expected Outcome	Project Lead	Due Date
Continue to deliver training bespoke training to raise awareness & professional development	The newly formed family help teams to receive LADO awareness training Family Help colleagues will understand what meets LADO threshold and how to refer.	Martha (supported by Lynne and Laura)	Dec 2025
External validation of the service	Regional partner to be invited to undertake audit activity of Dorset LADO. Feedback to be used for further service development	New Service Manager (starts 06/01/25)	2025-2026. Date TBC.
Develop a system for tracking that recommendations following investigations are implemented.	Further work required to embed this action with the team.	New Service Manager.	Dec 2025
Reviewing and updating process for evaluation meetings.	To have a more streamlined process and less meetings for the LADO service.	Head of QA with LADO Service.	Currently Trialling new process. New process embedded by Dec 2025.
Creating a regular internal audit process for the LADO service.	To regularly quality assure our thresholds and process.	Head of QA and Interim SM.	Embedded by Dec 2025
Increased attendance by police for all relevant allegation meetings.	Police attend and engage in the allegation meeting for all LADO cases that have met criminal threshold.	Interim SM and Head of QA	Improved by November 2025

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Corporate Parenting Board

11 December 2025

Children in Care at risk of Offending and Custody

For Decision

Cabinet Member and Portfolio:

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

Local Councillor(s):

Cllr

Executive Director:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

Report Author: David Webb
Job Title: Head of Service, Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service
Tel: 01202 794321
Email: david.webb@bcpcouncil.gov.uk

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

Brief Summary:

Children in care are over-represented in the national and local youth justice systems, both in terms of numbers entering the justice system and among those who are detained in custody. Information about the numbers of Children in Care in the local youth justice system is included in section 1.

There is a local multi-agency protocol to reduce the criminalisation of children in care. The scope and implementation of this protocol is summarised in section 1, along with other measures to reduce the numbers of children in care entering the justice system.

Section 2 includes analysis of the needs of Children in Care in the justice system. The Youth Justice Service provides a multi-disciplinary response, in partnership with other services, to reduce the risk of further offending and to avoid the use of custodial remands and sentences. The impact of a custodial sentence is considered in section 2.

Recommendation:

That the Corporate Parenting Board notes and supports the work being done to reduce the criminalisation, offending and incarceration of children in care.

Reason for Recommendation:

To ensure that the Corporate Parenting Board is informed of the issues relating to children in care at risk of offending and of the work being done to address these issues.

1. Over-Representation of Children in Care in the Youth Justice System

- 1.1 The overall numbers of children in the youth justice system have reduced significantly in the last 20 years. This reduction in numbers has not been evenly distributed; some disadvantaged groups of children, including Children in Care, continue to have an increased risk of entering the justice system and progressing through the system.
- 1.2 Children in Care in Dorset are more likely than other children to enter the justice system. One of the Youth Justice Board's Key Performance Indicators for Youth Justice Services is the rate of first-time entrants to the justice system. A 'first-time entrant' is a child who receives a caution or court order for the first time. In the past 2.5 years, since April 2022, 17% of first-time entrants in Dorset were Children in Care.
- 1.3 Children in Care are also more likely than other children to 'progress' through the justice system through repeat offending. At the start of October 2024, 27% of Dorset children on the Youth Justice Service caseload were Children in Care.
- 1.4 Very few children are sentenced to custody. Custodial sentences reflect serious offences, usually involving violence, and a record of repeat offending. 4 Dorset children have been sentenced to custody between April 2023 and October 2024. All 4 of them were Children in Care.
- 1.5 One of the reasons for children in care being over-represented in the justice system is that they can be criminalised for their behaviour at home when similar behaviour in a family setting would not lead to the police being called. Locally, we work to a multi-agency protocol which gives guidance to children's homes, supported housing projects and foster

carers about when to call the police to respond to behaviour by a child at their home.

- 1.6 A multi-agency group meets four times a year and reviews all incidents when the police have been called to a children's home or supported housing provider in response to the behaviour of a child in care (safeguarding issues and missing persons reports do not fall under this protocol). The protocol also covers foster placements but there is less of an issue with foster carers calling the police to deal with the child's behaviour at home.
- 1.7 The multi-agency group also tracks performance data about the number of police call-outs across the whole Dorset Police force area. It is difficult to compare data from one year to the next because the number of addresses being monitored changes as we become aware of new providers and as some projects close. Having noted that caveat, the data shows that in 2023/24 there were 26 police call-outs for criminal behaviour by children in care at their residential setting (including in the BCP Council area), compared to 46 call-outs in 2021/22.
- 1.8 It is harder to apply our local protocol to placements outside our area. Although there is a national concordat, which requires local areas to have a protocol in place, the coverage and application of these protocols is inconsistent. We sometimes see our Children in Care being criminalised for behaviour in their home, in another local authority area, which would have been dealt with differently in Dorset. Colleagues from our commissioning services participate in our local group and aim to include the protocol's principles when commissioning and overseeing placements in other local authority areas.
- 1.9 If a Child in Care does commit an offence which is investigated by the police, the child's care status is taken into account when deciding what action to take. The "Child Gravity Matrix" is a national document which provides guidance on the seriousness of child offences, aggravating and mitigating features, and suitable decision-making. This document cites a child's care status as a mitigating feature, noting that "children in care are more likely to be vulnerable as a consequence of experienced trauma. This affects their behaviour disproportionately and increases their risk of becoming a victim of crime or being exploited. It is important to take this into consideration when choosing an appropriate disposal option".

- 1.10 The Youth Justice Service (YJS) and Dorset Police have been working to increase the use of diversion in response to offences by children. The police can decide to deal with an offence informally, on the basis that the YJS will meet with the child to complete an assessment and agree a suitable intervention and support plan to reduce the likelihood of further offending. The Ministry of Justice have supported the use of diversion options by funding a programme called 'Turnaround', but Children in Care are excluded from this programme on the basis that local authorities are already funded to work with these children. Locally we have taken the decision to apply the same diversion route to Children in Care and to fund the work from the Youth Justice Service budget.

2. Support for Children in Care in the Youth Justice System

- 2.1 At the start of October 2024, there were 11 Children in Care from Dorset on the YJS caseload. While recognising that each child has their own individual story and identity, analysis of case records showed some recurring issues.
- 2.2 All 11 children were born male and identify as male. 1 of the children was aged 15, 4 of the children were aged 16, 5 were aged 17 and 1 had turned 18.
- 2.3 7 of the 11 children had been placed out of area at some point. 2 of them had previously been in youth custody, placed at Feltham Young Offenders Institution in West London.
- 2.4 As well as experiencing multiple placement moves, these children have also experienced multiple changes of education placement. All 11 children had experienced temporary or permanent exclusions from school. 2 of the children are still school-age; both of them receive part-time education in Alternative Provisions. Amongst the 9 children who are older than school-age, 8 of them are Not in Education, Employment or Training, and 1 is attending college.
- 2.5 9 of these 11 children have been assessed as having Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.
- 2.6 6 of the 11 children have been assessed by a YJS Speech and Language Therapist. All 6 were found to have communication needs. 5 of the 6 have significant communication needs. These needs had not been identified

- before the child entered the justice system and met the YJS Speech and Language Therapist.
- 2.7 10 of the 11 children have been in contact with CAMHS. 2 of the children also have significant physical health needs.
 - 2.8 9 of the 11 children have used cannabis or other drugs. The average age of first use was 12 years old.
 - 2.9 8 of the 11 children have been identified as being at risk of experiencing harm outside the home, through child criminal or sexual exploitation.
 - 2.10 It is reasonable to assume that these children have experienced significant trauma in their earlier years, affecting their mental and emotional wellbeing, and contributing to the reasons for them coming into care. There is also a pattern of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, speech, language and communication needs, exclusion from mainstream education, and the harm caused by multiple changes of home and school. The interaction of these multiple areas of need compounds the disadvantage faced by Children in Care in the youth justice system.
 - 2.11 The YJS is a multi-disciplinary team. As well as youth justice officers, the team includes CAMHS nurses, a psychologist, speech and language therapists, education and careers specialists, restorative justice specialists, a probation officer and two police officers. In recent years the service's priorities have included a focus on children's speech and language needs and the application of trauma-informed practice.
 - 2.12 The YJS Speech and Language Therapists complete a speech and language assessment for all children on the YJS caseload, which enables the child to understand their communication needs and to support YJS workers to improve their work with the child. These assessments are also shared with the child's social worker and carers to help them adjust how they communicate to meet the child's individual needs. A one-page version of the assessment report is also produced, described as a Communications Passport, which is shared with the court and with Dorset Police to help ensure that the child is supported to understand and engage with court and police processes.
 - 2.13 Trauma-informed practice means that the team seeks to understand the impact of past traumatic experiences on the child and how it affects their current behaviour to work out the best way for workers to respond to these needs. The YJS Psychologist leads multi-professional formulation

meetings, under an approach known as ‘Enhanced Case Management’, to develop a shared understanding and consistent approach to meet the child’s needs. Social workers are asked to contribute to these formulations and to use the formulations to guide their work with the child.

- 2.14 Although it is relatively rare for a child to receive a custodial sentence, the impact of going into custody can be acute. Inspection reports for youth custodial establishments confirm that these are not safe places for children. The high risk of violence and harm in youth custody exacerbates the trauma experienced by Children in Care. Difficulties operating a safe regime in custody can prevent children from accessing education. A recent thematic inspection report on work with children who have been remanded in custody showed that support for Children in Care during their time in custody can be inconsistent. The report did note that a period in custody can lead to physical health problems being treated, when this may not have been achieved in the community.
- 2.15 As well as the impact of the period in custody, it can be difficult to find suitable release accommodation for Children in Care coming out of custody. It is important to confirm a child’s post-custody accommodation well in advance of the release date. Effective resettlement is based on multi-agency plans to address health and education needs, possibly alongside risk management controls such as electronically monitored curfews. The difficulties in finding suitable residential placements can make this hard to achieve, with accommodation sometimes not being confirmed until the day before release.
- 2.16 The work of the YJS is overseen by the Youth Justice Service Partnership Board, chaired by the Executive Director of People – Children. The Board used its most recent meeting, in October, to focus in depth on the over-representation of Children in Care in the youth justice system. The Board requested a Task and Finish group to focus on issues including earlier identification of children at risk of entering the justice system and the support for Children in Care who do enter the justice system.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 There are no financial implications from this report.

4. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications

- 4.1 No environmental, climate or ecological implications have been identified in this report.

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

- 5.1 The health workers in DCYJS liaise with the Child in Care health team to help meet the health needs of children in care who have contact with the justice system. It is recognised that young people in the youth justice system often have unmet, and sometimes unidentified, health and communication needs. The above report contains more information about how the YJS works to meet these needs.

6. **Other Implications**

- 6.1 No other implications have been identified.

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: Medium

8. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

- 8.1 This report does not relate to new working arrangements and therefore an Equalities Impact Assessment has not been undertaken.
- 8.2 It is recognised, however, that Children in Care, are over-represented in the youth justice system, adding to other disadvantages experienced by this group. This report sets out some of the actions taken to prevent children in care entering or progressing through the justice system.

9. **Appendices**

None

10. **Background Papers**

None

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.

Title of report

Children in Care at Risk of Offending and Custody

Who wrote the report

David Webb, Head of Service at Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service

Date written

27 October 2025

Summary of what the report is about

This report talks about how children in care are more likely to get into trouble with the police or go to court. It explains what Dorset is doing to help stop this from happening and how different services are working together to support these children better.

What are the key messages of this report

- Children in care are more likely to be involved with the police and youth justice system.
 - Many of these children have extra needs like problems with speaking, learning, or mental health.
 - Dorset is working hard to stop children in care from being unfairly treated or getting a criminal record.
 - Services like social workers, youth justice workers, and health teams need to work together better.
 - Listening to children's views helps improve the support they get.
-

Important facts and figures

- **90%** of children in the youth justice system have speech and language needs.
- Children with **SEND** (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) are more likely to get into trouble.
- A special project called **Re-Engage** helps children at risk of being excluded from school.
- An audit looked at **8 children in care** who had contact with the youth justice system:

- **4 girls** got informal help (no court).
 - **4 boys** went to court.
 - Most had problems like moving homes a lot, missing school, or needing help with health and emotions.
-

Actions or recommendations

- Keep using the local rules that help stop children in care from being unfairly criminalised.
- Make sure all services work together and share information.
- Create a plan to fix problems found in the audit and check progress regularly.

This summary has been produced by CoPilot. I have reviewed it to make it more accurate.

Corporate Parenting Board

11 December 2025

Corporate Complaints Team Annual Report 2024-25

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

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

Local Councillor(s):

All

Senior Leadership Team:

J Mair, Director of Legal & Democratic

Report author and job title:

Email: antony.bygrave@Dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Statutory Authority: Local Government Ombudsman

Report status: Public

Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)

This annual report provides an update on the numbers, types and outcomes of complaints made against Children's Services at Dorset Council, and also focuses on Children in Care.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That the Corporate Parenting Board reviews and scrutinises the annual report, and are assured that it complies with statutory and regulatory guidance.

2. Reason for the recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To have an awareness of the numbers and types of complaints and the organisational learning.

3. The report

Key Messages for 2024/25

- 3.1 For context Dorset Council received 1919 Complaint Contacts. This is a 17% increase from the 1659 received in 2023-24 and the highest number of complaints in Dorset Council's history to date.
- 3.2 Children's Services complaints for social care matters have increased significantly in volume and complexity (34%). Non Social Care complaint contacts have also risen, showing a 21% increase.
- 3.3 We received just three Complaints from Children in Care in 2024-25 which is the same as the previous year. What is of interest is that 2 of the 3 formal cases at Stage 1 have progressed to stage 2 or beyond. 1 case has had Ombudsman involvement . These complaints by young people came to the Complaints team via an advocacy service. The numbers continue to be low, but the Stage 2 escalations indicate a greater level of awareness of the process, and confidence in using it the have their voices heard.
- 3.4 Of the total number of complaints received for Children's Social Care in 2024-25 11% were considered fully justified by operational managers, with 11% considered partially justified. This is the same as previous year.
- 3.5 The Complaints Team, as an Assurance function, continue to make a difference in promoting a culture of learning from complaints.

4. Alternative options considered

N/A

5. Legal considerations

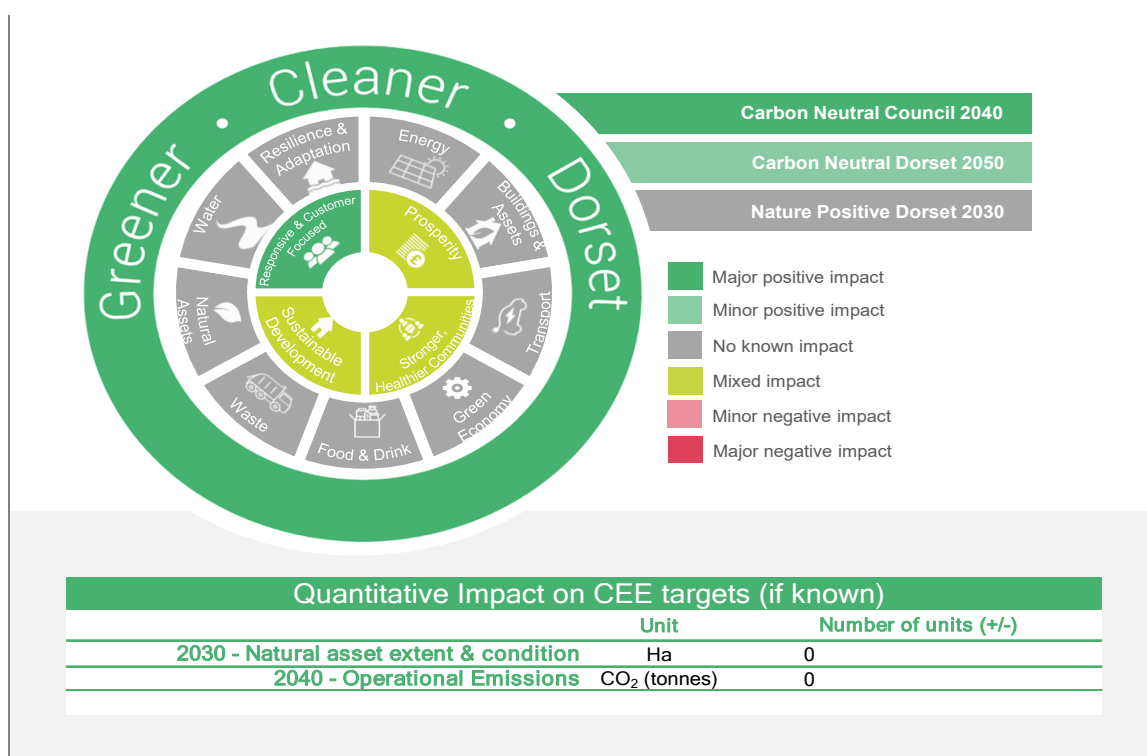
N/A

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 Although not relating to Children in Care, Dorset Council financial remedies in 2024-25 resulting in a total cost of £40,630 which is consistent with previous years although there was a single payment that was not claimed from previous year £63,150.
The total sum paid from Ombudsman cases was therefore £103,510 .
- 6.2 In addition to this, we have worked hard to pre-empt Ombudsman outcomes as part of the complaint handling process and have also paid £42,621 for SEND related complaints, outside of any involvement from the Ombudsman.

- 6.3 Stage 2 investigations cost Children's Services £15,986 on Independent Investigators compared to 12,394.84 the previous year
- 6.4 Whilst reporting on the outgoing finance it is important to note that the Complaints Team have generated **£9,240.17** (up from £7376) from schools by providing a complaints advice service.

7. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications



8. Well-being and health implications

- 8.1 The high volume of complaints across the directorates have had an impact on staff wellbeing and the team are regularly encouraged, through line management and other Dorset Council support, to be mindful of themselves and their colleagues in-keeping with our behaviours.

9. Other implications

None

10. Risk implications

- 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

None

12. Appendices

12.1 Appendix 1: Complaints and Representations Childrens Appendices
Expanded 2024 25

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)

Complaints About Children's Services – What Happened in 2024–25

Antony Bygrave, Senior Assurance Officer at Dorset Council.

27 November 2025

Summary of what the report is about

This report talks about the complaints people made about Dorset Council's Children's Services. It looks at how many complaints were made, what they were about, and what the council did about them. It also includes complaints from children in care.

What are the key messages of this report

- Dorset Council got more complaints than ever before – nearly 2,000!
- Complaints about social care (helping children and families) went up a lot.
- Only 3 complaints came from children in care, but more of these were taken seriously and looked at in detail.
- Some complaints were found to be right or partly right.
- The complaints team helps the council learn from mistakes and improve.

Important facts and figures

- **1919 complaints** were made in total – up 17% from last year.
- **Children's Services complaints** went up by **34%**.
- **3 complaints** came from children in care – same as last year.
- **11%** of complaints were fully agreed with, and another **11%** were partly agreed with.
- The council paid out **£103,510** for complaints looked at by the Ombudsman.
- Another **£42,621** was paid for SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) complaints.
- Investigations cost **£15,986**, which is more than last year.
- The complaints team earned **£9,240** by helping schools with complaints.

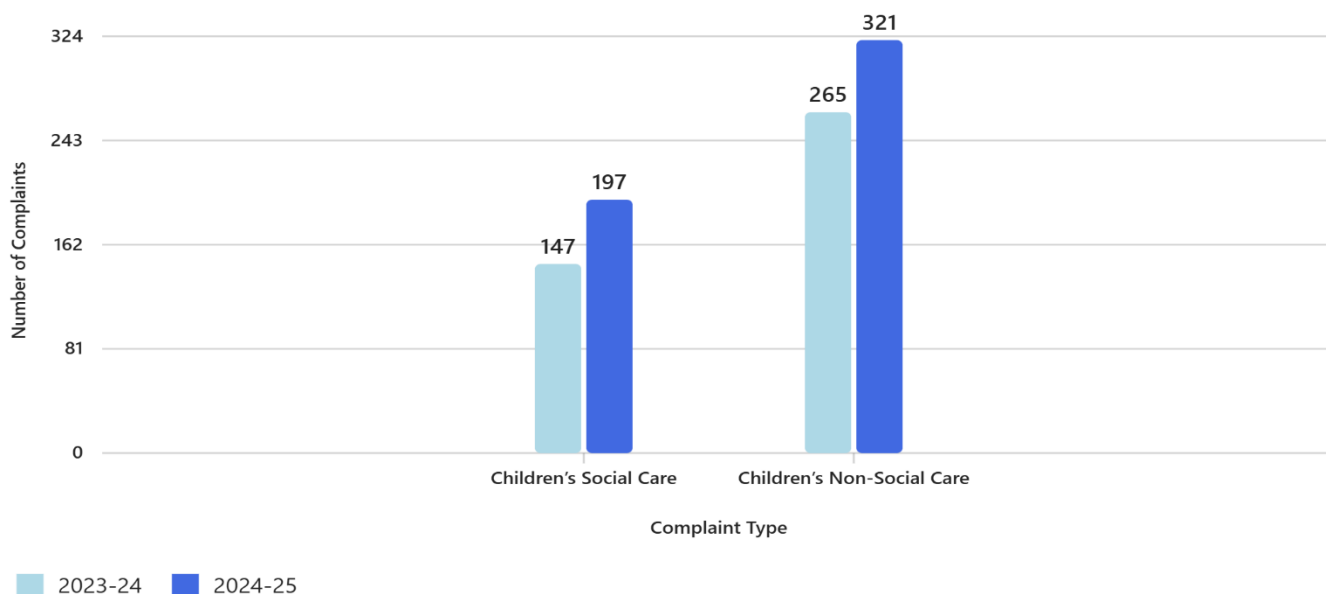
Actions or recommendations

- The Corporate Parenting Board should read and check the report.
- They should make sure the council is following the rules and learning from complaints.
- Staff are reminded to take care of their wellbeing because dealing with complaints can be tough.

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Children's Service Statutory Reporting Requirements

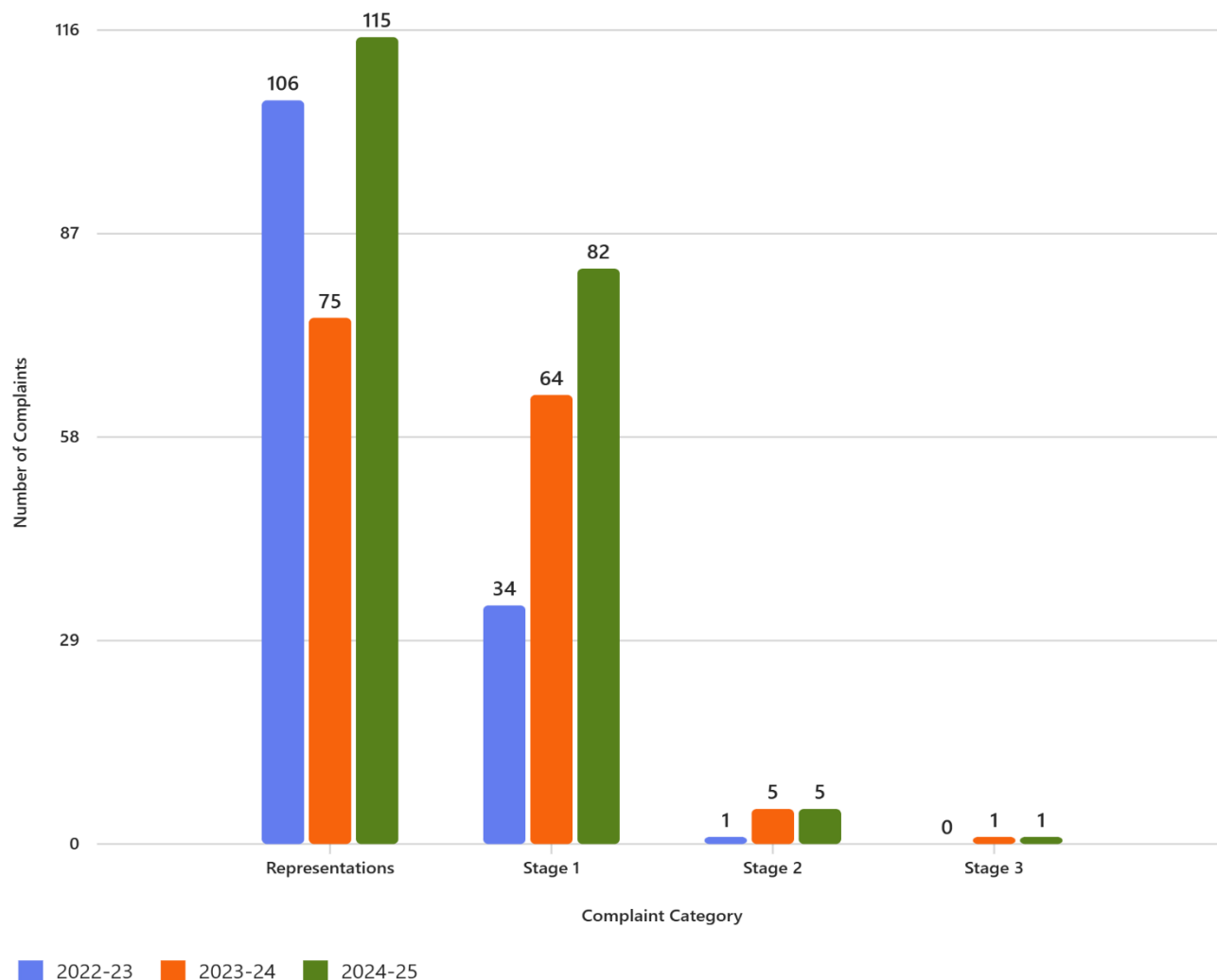
There has been an overall 17% increase in Complaints across Dorset Council, but the increase in Childrens Services complaints is proportionately higher on 2024-25 with a 34% increase in Social Care complaints, and 21% increase for Non Social Care.



Complaint Type	2024-25	2023-24	%
Childrens Social Care	197	147	+34%
Childrens Non Social Care	321	265	+21%

Most complaints received are from parents and not necessarily representing the voice or best interest of the child. However, more of the issues raised in 2024-25 have qualified for the statutory process and escalation route to stage 2 and 3.

Children's Social Care	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23
Representations	115	75	106
Stage 1	82	64	34
Stage 2	5	5	1
Stage 3	1	1	0
LGSCO approaches	1 but with no injustice	1 with 1 upheld (passed back to Council)	5 with 1 upheld



Again 5 cases were accepted at Stage 2 detailed below. This is the same as the previous year. A SWAP audit pointed towards a delay at STAGE 1 being the main cause of the increase in escalation requests. However in each case, there was a financial element that was the cause of a disagreement over the outcome at Stage 1. Timescale is however a factor and we have introduced an escalation protocol to ensure senior oversight. This only tells a small part of the story as the Complaints Team and service Managers have worked together really effectively in 2024-25 and managed to de-escalate several requests for stage 2s, by meeting and resolving matters. [Interestingly, 2 Stage 2 requests are from Young People, which indicates more comfort in escalating complaints](#)

Children's Whole Authority (Non Social Care)	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23
Representations	62	66	129
Formal Complaint	253	182	180
LGSCO approaches	25 with 15	24 with 21 upheld	35 with 16 upheld

Stage 2 Complaints

These are the cases that progressed to Stage 2 in 2024-25

CASE no	Team locality	Brief Subject	Outcome Upheld/ Part/Not	Total cost of IO	Total cost of IP	Additional cost
COM/6406	CWAD	There has been a delayed and insufficient response to address the family's need for support.	Partially Upheld	£3745.00	£1992.50	None
COM/3472	Purbeck	Via Advocacy – Role of Social Worker in supporting a parent in Prison	Still Under investigation after delay and change of IO	TBC	TBC	TBC
COM/6872	CWAD	Via Advocacy -Issues relating to the way social services has behaved towards young person. Newly presented historic matters could not be investigated at stage 2	Original Complaints resolved at stage 1.	£1,752	£405	
COM/5670	CWAD	Safeguarding and failure to act for a child in need with Autism and intellectual disability	Largely not upheld and heard at Stage 3	£1459	£90	
COM/6660	Child Protection	Formal complaint regarding the family's interactions with children's social care.	Still Under investigation	TBC	TBC	TBC
TOTALS				£6,956	£2,487.50	
OVERALL COST					£9,443.50	

Local Government Ombudsman (LGSCO)

The Local Government Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) investigates complaints from the public about councils and other bodies providing public services in England. It also investigates complaints about registered social care providers.

Social Care

Only 1 Social Care Case was presented to the Ombudsman:

Dorset Council (24 002 245)

Statement Upheld Child protection 17-Jan-2025

Summary: Mrs X complained about failings in the Council's child protection investigation. There was some fault in the Council's communication and record keeping, as well as a delay giving Mrs X a report before a meeting. However, there was no fault in the Council's decision-making processes and no significant injustice.

Non Social Care

Of the 33 UPHELD cases across Dorset Council in total, 15 of 33 were in Childrens Services relating to SEND matters and children out of education. Although a concern, this is a 29% reduction in upheld cases

The findings are outlined below

CHILDRENS NON SC (SEN)

- **Dorset Council (24 004 153)**

Statement Upheld Alternative provision 31-Jan-2025

Summary: Mrs X complains the Council failed to provide her child with a suitable education. There were delays in arranging alternative provision after the Easter break in 2024 and this is fault. It resulted in a loss of education for a period of nearly seven weeks. The Council has agreed to remedy this injustice.

- **Dorset Council (24 012 300)**

Statement Upheld Special educational needs 16-Jan-2025

Summary: We will not investigate this complaint about missed special education provision for Miss X's child. The Council has already upheld her complaint and offered Miss X a suitable remedy for the injustice to her and her child, and further investigation by us would therefore not be proportionate.

- **Dorset Council (24 000 817)**

Statement Upheld Special educational needs 23-Dec-2024

Summary: Miss Y complained about the way the Council dealt with Z's Education, Health and Care needs assessment and the special educational provision in their Education Health and Care Plan. We have found fault by the Council, causing injustice, in failing to: consult with school A or other schools before issuing the final EHC Plan in 2023; properly consider Miss Y's request for free school transport; and deliver the SEN provision in Z's EHC Plan. The Council has agreed to remedy this injustice by apologising to Miss Y, making payments to reflect the impact on Z of the missed SEN provision and the time and trouble, travel costs and distress caused to Miss Y and a service improvement.

- **Dorset Council (23 019 263)**

Statement Upheld Alternative provision 17-Dec-2024

Summary: Miss X complained the Council failed to secure suitable education provision for her son from late 2022 to mid-2024. She said the Council had not addressed her concerns, or adapted the provision to meet her son's needs. We have found the Council at fault for failing to properly consider its section 19 duty between October 2022 and January 2023. However, on a balance of probabilities, we find this did not cause an injustice. Other parts of Miss X's complaint, about later time periods, concern matters which are part of, connected to, or could have been part of, an appeal to the SEND Tribunal. We cannot investigate these matters. We explain why in our decision statement.

- **Dorset Council (24 003 542)**

Statement Upheld Alternative provision 05-Dec-2024

Summary: Ms X complained the Council failed to provide a suitable education for her daughter, Y, between November 2023 and July 2024 when she was unable to attend school due to anxiety. The Council was at fault. It will apologise to Ms X and pay her £2,400 to recognise the period of suitable alternative provision Y missed, and the distress this caused Ms X.

- **Dorset Council (24 002 157)**

Statement Upheld Special educational needs 08-Oct-2024

Summary: Miss X complained the Council failed to provide her child, Y, with appropriate education and provision in line with Y's Education, Health and Care Plan. The Council was at fault which caused Miss X and Y frustration and distress and meant Y missed out on some education provision. The Council should apologise and make a payment to Miss X.

- **Dorset Council (23 019 593)**

Statement Upheld Alternative provision 30-Sep-2024

Summary: The Council was at fault because it did not issue an amended EHC Plan for Y within statutory timescales. This caused avoidable frustration, distress, uncertainty and a delay in appeal rights. The Council did not secure educational provision in Y's Education, Health and Care Plan for half a term. This caused Y a loss of educational provision to which he had a legal entitlement. The Council will apologise, make payments of £150 to Ms X and £1000 to Y and issue Y's amended Education Health and Care Plan without further delay.

- **Dorset Council (23 018 030)**

Statement Upheld Special educational needs 29-Sep-2024

Summary: Miss Y complained about the way the Council dealt her child, Z's special educational needs support and alternative provision. We have found finding fault by the Council, causing injustice, in failing to: provide Z with a suitable education; and complete the EHC Plan review process within statutory timescales. The Council has agreed to remedy the injustice by apologising, making a payment to reflect the distress caused and the impact on Z of the missed education.

- **Dorset Council (23 019 949)**

Statement Upheld Alternative provision 08-Sep-2024

Summary: Mrs C complained about the Council's decision not to assess her daughter for an Education, Health and Care Plan and a statutory Care Needs Assessment. We found the Council was at fault. This caused Mrs C unnecessary distress and meant that S missed two terms of education. The Council agreed to our recommendations to address the injustice its actions caused Mrs C and S.

- **Dorset Council (23 015 263)**

Statement Upheld Alternative provision 21-Aug-2024

Summary: The Council failed to ensure Y received suitable fulltime education, either by supplementing provision when Y was put on an extended part-time timetable by the school, or when Y became unable to attend school due to medical needs. This was fault and caused loss of education, distress, created additional caring responsibilities and caused unnecessary time and trouble. The Council will apologise, make a symbolic financial payment, and carry out service improvements. The complaint is upheld.

- **Dorset Council (23 014 194)**

Statement Upheld Special educational needs 05-Aug-2024

Summary: Mrs E complains her son's school was following an out-of-date Education, Health and Care Plan. We uphold her complaint due to fault by the Council in its actions around this. Mrs E also complains about the school's actions around a teacher's use of language, inappropriate emails and suspensions of children with special educational needs. Our decision is these are internal management issues within the school, and so not in the Ombudsman's jurisdiction.

- **Dorset Council (23 015 090)**

Statement Upheld Special educational needs 01-Aug-2024

Summary: Mrs Y complains there were failings in the way the Council provided her grandchild Z with alternative educational provision while carrying out an education health and care needs assessment and Z could not attend school causing distress and loss of educational provision. We found fault as the Council delayed the education health and care needs assessment and issuing a final education health and care plan. The Council has accepted it was at fault and apologised which is suitable action for it to take. We have found no evidence of fault by the Council in the way it considered whether to provide Z with alternative provision. So we have completed our investigation.

- **Dorset Council (23 015 704)**

Statement Upheld Special educational needs 06-May-2024

Summary: The Council was at fault for delays in issuing an Education, Health, and Care Plan, for Mrs X's son. That fault caused Mrs X an injustice because she was left with avoidable distress and inconvenience in following up as to what the Council were doing, as well as having a delayed right of appeal. It also has left Mrs X with uncertainty about what special education provision her son may also have missed out on because of delays. The Council have agreed to remedy Mrs X's injustice in line with my recommendation.

- **Dorset Council (23 012 891)**

Statement Upheld Special educational needs 21-Apr-2024

Summary: Mrs X complained about delays in the education, health and care plan process. She said the Council has failed to provide suitable alternative provision; delayed naming a suitable school for her son and said the communication has been poor. We find the Council was at fault. This caused significant stress to Mrs X and her son missed out on education. The Council has agreed to several recommendations to address this injustice caused by fault.

Dorset Council financial remedies in 2024-25 resulting in a total cost of £40,630 which is consistent with previous years, although there was a single payment that was not claimed from the previous year of £63,150. The total sum paid from Ombudsman cases was therefore £103,510.

In addition to this, we have worked hard to pre-empt Ombudsman outcomes as part of the complaint handling process and have also paid £42,621 for SEND related complaints, outside of any involvement from the Ombudsman.

Which customer groups made the complaints;

Of the small number of complainants who categorised themselves, we present the following data on who is complaining to children's services Social Care

Advocate	3
Child in Care	4
Customer	53
Grandparent	5

Individual	3
Other Relative	3
Parent	26
Solicitor	1
Young Person	3

The types of complaints made;

Most complaints fall under subcategories of Service Provision, largely around delays of perceived failures to deliver a

Communication	6%
Data	2%
Disagreement with Decision	12%
Misconduct	2%
Service Provision	78%

The outcome of complaints;

Of the complaints received for Children's Social Care in 2023-24 only 11% were considered Fully Justified by operational managers shows there is some level of justification as outlined below:

Fully Justified 11% the same as previous year

Partially Justified 11% down from previous year

(NB: The Ombudsman often consider partially as upheld)

Not justified 78%

In 2024-25 the Complaints Team have improved the quarterly reporting and added extra value in terms of learnings and actions from complaints. In many cases however the complaints process is used by parents who are unhappy with records held that cant be legally altered, or require compensation for a sense of wrongdoing, this cannot be achieved through the process.

Children in Care

The table below demonstrates a breakdown of Children in Care complaints. All complaints by young people are coming to the Complaints team via an advocacy service. The numbers continue to be low, but we have had 2 cases progress to Stage 2 which indicates a greater level of awareness of the process, and confidence in using it the have their voices heard.

Year	Number of Complaints
Children in Care 2024-25	3
Children in Care 2023-24	3
Children in Care 2022-23	10
Children in Care 2021-22	8
Children in Care 2020-21	15

Children in Care 2019-20

10

Advocacy is described as supporting children to have their say and making sure their views and wishes are taken into consideration on decisions and matters that affect them, it is also about ensuring that rights are upheld. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the right of children to be listened to in decisions which affect them.

There is a statutory duty to provide an independent advocacy service that supports children and young people to have their views and wishes taken into account when key decisions are being made about their lives.

An advocate can help if:

something needs to be started, changed or stopped, for example, if the child is unhappy about their treatment by children's social care or there are worries about plans being made, such as a move a child needs support during meetings to make sure their voice is heard children need advice and want to know their rights

a child needs support to make a complaint

In 2023-24 we have identified just the 3 cases that related to children in care, all via an advocate representing the voice of the child through the complaints process. You will note the figures are consistently low by comparison to the overall figures.

Children in Care (CIC)

In Q1 there were no complaints from CIC or advocacy, but one that progressed to stage 2 from the previous year. This complaint was largely not upheld and contained a lot of historic complaints which were out of scope of the process. We did our best to resolve the case, but the IO and IP agreed that the outcomes requested were financial

In Q2 there was 1 CIC complaint regarding a young person (YP) that wanted to make it known their views regarding placements being a place of safety, with carers that understood young people with traumatic backgrounds.

In Q3 there was 1 CIC complaint where a YP felt that their carers had no experience with young people, who have had a traumatic background. The complaint was also against the foster carers, not providing a caring environment. Also a complaint against the Local Authority for failing in their duties by placing them in an environment where he experienced abuse and was not kept safe.

In Q4 there was 1 complaint from CIC via advocacy regarding a request to change their Social Worker

Compliance with timescales, and complaints resolved within extended timescale as agreed;

The table below shows the majority of all Stage 1 cases for Children's Services Social Care were within the 20-day statutory timescale. However there was a concern identified in Q2 and an escalate protocol was put in place to seek improvement. We expect to see progress on 24-25

Timescales	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23
0-20 Working Days	77%	86%	85%
20+ days	23%	14%	15%

As always, closer observation reveals that some cases exceed the 20 days as a result of agreeing a more informal approach and resolution after the receipt of the original complaint, with good work from locality managers. This can

include follow up calls and meetings, so the figure in isolation does not tell the whole story of the journey of the complaints.

learning and service improvement, including changes to services that have been implemented and details of any that have not been implemented;

Learning points are collected at all stages of the complaints procedure. At stage 1, Operational Managers identify learning from complaints and learning actions. At Stages 2 and 3, action plans are compiled based on the recommendations of the investigator's or panel chair's report. In addition, the LGSCO will include recommendations to remedy complaints, and actions are monitored by the complaints team to ensure that they are completed.

How we disseminate learning

Quarterly reports to Children's Services Leadership Team produced by the Complaints team

Dissemination of the quarterly report to Operational Managers to be discussed at Service Team Meetings.

The complaints team also feed into the performance data for SLT each quarter

How we learn from complaints

Improvement in Stage 1 responses - Additional Training to be provided to Team Managers on how to complete and present and stage one investigations, within statutory timescales. The Complaints Team Manager will be attending meetings to advise and update

Operational Managers to ensure that Team Managers and Social Workers are clear about the need to record meetings. Robust quality assurance processes put in place.

Improved use of complaints as a measure of performance and quality control:

Evidence of sharing of quarterly reports in QAudits and closing loop with service managers. Identifying trends early

Examples of learning from Complaints:

We have collected 46 really good quality and robust organisational learnings in 24-25 which is really encouraging. This is a 48% improvement on the 31 learning cases in 23-24.

Case ID	What we have learned from Complaints	What we have done as a result to improve practice
COM/6315 and COM/6345 (C SC – LW)	Family repeatedly stepping in to provide care for a child should generate curiosity as to what is happening for the child and why the parent is not able to provide care themselves; this is particularly the case when risks have previously been identified. Professionals should not justify inaction through a "family arrangement" if there is enough information on record to suggest this is not the case	Ensuring assessments are holistic and include information held by other agencies and consider the views of those people important to the child, including wider family. Assessments need to ensure that known risks around mental health are given sufficient weight in terms of the impact this has upon a child now and in the future. The absence of information being shared by Health is going to be escalated further to prevent other



	Special Guardianship payments have been delayed.	children potentially being at risk as a result of an absence of information sharing. This has now been remedied and complainant will receive a back payment and ongoing payments, as per the support plan.
COM 6500 (C WA) DMc	It took seven months to issue an EHC plan	Training under Section 44 (2) of the Children and Families Act 2014 with regards to duty to reassessment of children or young person with an EHCP
COM6179 (CSC) Fostering BL	1. Important learning – The impact of changes in social workers upon foster carers and children living within the foster family. Has and can lead to not feeling supported, instability and/or inconsistent support. 2. EHCP drift, it is recognised at strategic level improvement are required around processes. Important for Foster carers to be supported in meetings	1. On going work to reduce changes in social workers. This should be on going- but is already recognised. 2. Process being improved. This is part of much bigger process and work is on going 3. Permanent workers where practically possible to attend necessary meetings or arrange for alternative support person to attend. This has been completed- conveyed to staff members. Other key notes; Social Worker would like the opportunity to repair the relationship and move forward. Work towards this has begun but understandably will take time. When will the educational psychologist assessment report be available/ shared? This was shared in February When can the complainant expect to receive the further amended draft EHCP which was prepared on 5th Feb? This is completed The Educational psychologist has shared in a recent email that Reese's name is onto panel to request specialist assessment on 12th March. This is correct
COM/6411 C WA (LC)	As a father with parental responsibility not being met	The importance of not signing off the social workers assessments without



	informed or included during the period of our involvement with child. • Parent should have been contacted at the time of the referral and views included within the Children & Families assessment. • Should have been invited to attend all Child in Need meetings and these should have been held separately to enable both parents to attend and be part of the planning • Should have been kept up to date about any new concerns and been involved in the safety planning for child during these times, and should have been a part of the decision making • Parent raised these issues with the social worker during the period that the child remained open to service and they were still not addressed to a satisfactory level.	both parents having been contacted and given the opportunity to have their views and input included. • To ensure that through 1:1 supervision and case oversight officer continuously reminding social workers to ensure their practice is inclusive and that at point of closure being agreed, both the resident and non-resident parent are a part of this.
COM/6732 SEN (LW)	Manager recognises that we should have been more proactive in our searches for educational provision by speaking to our settings on the telephone when consultations were being sent out.	Manager to ensure that, in future, we are not only relying on emails when we are consulting for educational provision for our young people, and that we keep families regularly updated also. LW has queried how and when this will be implemented.
COM 7223 CSC (DMc)	Need to focus on cases during transfer from CP to Permanence and that identified actions are checked and followed up	Discussed at a Team meeting under 'Practice Matters'
COM/6975 CSC (BL)	We have recognised that learning needs to take place around SGO orders and the need to continue to share information and involve those who hold the order even if the child has left their care.	An assessment to look at risks outside the home which include drugs and influences that can take place in the community has been started and TM has requested this is completed within two weeks and that the outcomes are shared with guardians The youth workers in Weymouth and Portland are also aware of the YP and we keep in close contact to ensure any worries are shared and acted on.



COM/7239 C SC (LC)	Team have not always got things right, particularly in managing consistent communication. The impact of this has been to leave the complainant feel marginalised and disempowered.	Manager has asked the team to ensure that an email with an update on progress made and a forward plan, alongside any relevant advice is sent to the key family members each week so that all know the same thing at the same time. Manager has also asked those involved to ensure that all meetings are minuted and shared with those present promptly.
COM/6926 C SC (LC)	The social worker failed to produce a written assessment in a reasonable timescale and there were inaccuracies within that assessment. Social worker also talked about her personal life and her broader caseload which was inappropriate.	Manager has confirmed that the social worker's conduct has been formally addressed with her.
COM/6524 C WA (KR)	Alleged mistreatment by social worker, insufficient support, and lack of consideration for other agencies' information	Although no immediate issues were found with the social worker's practice, Dorset Council acknowledges the need for improved professional curiosity and apologises for the impact on the complainant's trust.
COM 7140 C SC (DMc)	Section 20 not explained properly to young person and all options explored	Leaflet for young people has been produced to make it clear what options are available to them.
COM/7064 LC	We would like all social workers for our children and young people in care to text them or call them to wish them happy birthday and happy Christmas. Sending a card is also something that can be done, especially if the social worker is not in so you would know you are cared about. We have heard you and I will ask the team manager to talk to the social workers about why this is so important.	<i>CIC had a new phone number in April and asked SW to save the number when she dropped you and your friend off. She was driving at the time and may have then forgotten to do so. I accept that these little things can mean so much and we need to be mindful of this.</i> In respect of the meeting, I have spoken to SW, and she has said there was a genuine misunderstanding. She was expecting confirmation from your foster carer that the time was ok to see you and as did not receive this. Your foster carer did not realise she was waiting for this. We need to remember that no matter how busy we get, our young people need to be seen and heard.
COM/7566 LC	When spoke to SW, unsympathetic and refused to accept language such as aggression, abuse and SW made us feel that we were lying about the severity of the incidents and appeared to dismiss them. We also felt that she was patronising and lecturing us when she spoke to us on the phone.	met with SW to discuss complaint and recorded the reflection in personal supervision. We talked and reflected on how we can ensure the families are treated with care and compassion, having their views listened to and considered. Within that we thought about how we as practitioners consider our working style and how this may be perceived by parents. SW has been able to reflect on how approach was perceived by parent and is sorry for any upset



		that she may have caused as this was not her intention.
COM/6315 C SC (LW)	Action 1 Ensuring assessments are holistic and include information held by other agencies and consider the views of those people important to the child, including wider family. Assessments need to ensure that known risks around mental health are given sufficient weight in terms of the impact this has upon a child now and in the future. Family repeatedly stepping in to provide care for a child should generate curiosity as to what is happening for the child and why the parent is not able to provide care themselves; this is particularly the case when risks have previously been identified. Professionals should not justify inaction through a “family arrangement” if there is enough information on record to suggest this is not the case. Action 2 The absence of information being shared by Health needs to be escalated further to prevent other children potentially being at risk as a result of an absence of information sharing. Action 3 Special Guardianship payments have been delayed.	Action 1 Meeting held between to discuss outcomes of file review. Encourage consultations with MH SFT practitioners for advice and guidance where MH is factor. If there is a challenge in receiving information this should be escalated. Ensure through supervision and oversight that all agencies are being consulted. Ensure learning and development (which take place as part of pathfinder) for importance of family networks and those connected to a child. SMs and TM’s to review other cases in teams in chesil where maybe family arrangements where there has been no legal. Ongoing learning and development. Review of family arrangements from will be shared. Action 2 Encourage consultations with MH SFT practitioners for advice and guidance where MH is factor. If there is a challenge in receiving information this should be escalated. Ensure through supervision and oversight that all agencies are being consulted. Ensure learning and development (which take place as part of pathfinder) for importance of family networks and those connected to a child. Reflective session to take place by SMs with TM. Action 3 This has now been remedied and complainant has received a back payment and ongoing payments as per the support plan.
COM 7223 CSC (DMc)	Need to focus on cases during transfer from CP to Permanence and that identified actions are checked and followed up	Discussed at a Team meeting under ‘Practice Matters’
COM/7792 LC	Childs missing episode on the 23 rd September 2024	XX are now instructed/guided to call mother immediately if child leaves the sight of supporting adults whilst in the community, this includes leaving the XX without a supporting adult. Once a telephone call is made to Mother XX supporting adult will call the police and then drive to your mother’s property, positioning the car on the road leading to the property in attempt to prevent and discourage any unwanted behaviour.



		In response to your complaint, manager has scrutinised the incident documentation for factual information and has completed a lesson's learnt to understand what changes can be made to improve response to situations that may occur in the future and learn from this. We have amended child's risk assessment to instruct/advise supporting adults to call parent before calling the police. Our embedded police colleague has completed sessional work with child in managing safety and behaviours. We have also liaised with our local police service and there is a marker put on your mother and grandparents home address.
COM/6847 C SC (INFORMAL) (BL)	Data Breach Learnings The assessing social worker had misunderstood the consent to share form, believing this to mean that you had given your permission for this information to be included.	Following this incident, the manager worked with the complainant and his ex-partner to compile an assessment that was agreeable to both parties and the new document does not contain this personal information. A request has been made for all copies of the previous document to be deleted and the new assessment is now recorded on our electronic record. To ensure that this does not happen again the issue was immediately brought to the notice of the whole team and clarification of the consent to share process was communicated.
COM/7826 C SC (LW)	Child was assaulted by another individual living at an address, whilst in care.	The manager changed the Social Worker, and the team the child is in, the day following the incident. Manager will be very careful in matching child with any young people if he does move somewhere else with other young people. Manager to speak to the Police to check an area before child is moved, to consider the risk within the area. Manager is also completing a viability assessment on the brother of the complainant.
COM 7358 C SC (DMc)	Language and behaviour used by foster carer unacceptable	Training to be provided for foster carers To explore training opportunities for previous carer and family



	Carers had no experience with young people who have had a traumatic background	
COM/7863 C SC (KR)	The Social Worker sent the complainant the review Child and Family Assessment which outlined Dorset Council's recommendation and decision to step down our involvement from a Child in Need Plan. The Complainant stated that they did not receive the email.	In response to the complaint, manager has identified some key areas for learning, including ensuring that families are aware of our intention to step down our involvement from a Child in Need plan and for this to be discussed in a meeting with professionals and with the family prior to the meeting. Manager to work with the Social Worker to ensure these conversations are had verbally with families so our decision can be talked through, and so families do not feel this has been sprung upon them.
COM/7863 C SC (KR) (same complaint)	It was the Social Worker's understanding that an Advocate would be able to support a parent, regardless of Dorset Council stepping down the child's Child in Need plan. This was incorrect and the appropriate service for free, confidential, accurate and impartial advice and support relating to Education to families living in Dorset with children and young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND) and parents and carers is SENDIASS.	Manager will be reminding the team of the referral and eligibility process for the Advocacy services within our local offer to ensure that everyone is clear on the eligibility for accessing these services and to avoid any confusion or undue stress on families.
COM/4647 C SC (KR)	In this case, the lack of consistent involvement and delays in response are recognised as sources of frustration for the father warranting compensation as a goodwill gesture to acknowledge these service lapses and the resultant impact on the family.	An apology and the £500 payment aligns with the Local Government Ombudsman's Financial Remedies Guidance, which advises symbolic payments when service failures cause inconvenience or distress.
COM/7846 C SC (CB)	Complaint about having to chase SW for dates of meetings and minutes.	Social worker now aware of the need to get Core Group meeting minutes recorded and to send the records to everyone who attended the meetings. 3 month reminder set for complaints to check that this is being actioned.
COM/7921 C SC (CB)	Our Social Worker is from overseas and sometimes communication can be a barrier. We are working alongside them to help reduce this.	A support plan is already being created alongside Social Worker in helping to aid and develop their communication style.
COM 8111 C SC (DMc)	Not all information recorded	Reminded the Team of importance of recording at the time of event so they have all the right information on hand



COM/8092 C WA (KR)	Social workers should avoid taking work-related telephone calls during personal emergencies.	The social worker involved has been advised not to take work-related calls during personal emergencies. This learning will be shared with the wider team during the next team meeting on 6 February 2025.
COM/8198 C WA (KR)	- The importance of ensuring clarity and proper understanding of concerns and requests through appropriate channels. - The need to address and differentiate safeguarding concerns, information requests, and court-related matters clearly. The significance of maintaining positive working relationships between all parties involved for the child's best interests.	- Reviewed records and engaged with relevant social workers to ensure accurate understanding and response. - Confirmed procedures for handling safeguarding concerns and thresholds for investigations. - Allocated a new social worker with a planned handover to ensure continuity and support. Offered a meeting with senior staff to clarify roles, responsibilities, and improve collaboration.
COM/8390 C WA E&P Permanence (KR)	Contact for visit arrangements should be confirmed by phone if not agreed in person or via email and unannounced visits can cause frustration and should be avoided where possible.	Social workers will be instructed to confirm future visits either during a visit or by phone if prior agreement is not reached.
COM 8293 C SC (DMc)	Team Manager been advised that good practice would have been to share the ongoing communication with Miss X with the Complaints Team and Miss X be offered the opportunity to submit formal complaint	Discussed at supervision meeting
COM/8453 CSC LC	character statement from someone who said they are a trainee social worker for Dorset Council. She later identified this person as *****. Customer stated that officer has provided completely false information in their witness statement. Customer is concerned that officer is having a lot of involvement with ex on a personal level. X told me the purpose of her call was that she wants to ensure that someone who is giving these false statement, giving advice and stating they are a trainee Social Worker are not accessing her records.	Whilst employees can provide character references for friends/family, xxxx should not have submitted this character reference using her student social worker title. This is not appropriate and should not be associated with Dorset Council. This has been discussed with the officer and is being addressed with her. checked the systems and xxxx has not had access to records, or children's records or files or ex's children's records. As an outcome of this investigation and peace of mind and the protection xxxx we will now lock down the records so xxxx will not have access to any of these records.

Professionals need to ensure they have explicit permission to share information, either through statutory guidance or with the consent of the children and family involved. This includes when sharing information with other family members.

Maintaining confidentiality within a family is complex and checks should always be made of the records to confirm what can and cannot be shared with each family member. A handover of key information between practitioners and their managers in respect of any changes in family's circumstances should take place after periods of absence to ensure clarity about what has happened and what information can be shared with whom.

Data Protection and Appropriate Action to take

Managers need to contact Data Protection Team as soon as possible following a potential breach to seek advice about immediate actions to mitigate risk and distress to the family. When aware that a data breach has occurred, advice must be obtained from the Data Protection Team about immediate actions required. Information on how to report a data breach can be found at <https://intranet.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/task/report-a-data-breach/> Unless advised otherwise, contact should be made with the family to alert them to the breach and to provide apologies, reassurance and information about what the service will be doing to rectify the situation and mitigate the risks.

Safeguarding, the Legal Framework and Good Practice

Reference Information Sharing: Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers.

A summary of statistical data about the age, gender, disability, sexual orientation and ethnicity of complainants

All complainants to Dorset Council are sent an equality and diversity monitoring form as part of the complaint process. Complainants are asked to complete this form but it is completely voluntary. This year we had a 70% uptake. The percentages are based on those who completed the form only and not specific to Children's Services as they are anonymous

Gender

- **Female:** 49.2%
 - **Male:** 34.0%
 - **Prefer not to say:** (6.5%)
 - **Prefer to self-describe:** (0.7%)
 - **Non-Binary:** (0.3%)
 - **Missing:** (9.3%)
-

Gender Assigned at Birth

- **Yes:** (80.5%)
 - **Prefer not to say:** (8.5%)
 - **No:** (0.7%)
 - **Missing:** (10.4%)
-

Age Group

- **55–64:** (17.7%)

- **35–44:** (16.7%)
 - **45–54:** (16.2%)
 - **65–74:** (13.5%)
 - **25–34:** (12.8%)
 - **75–84:** (5.6%)
 - **19–24:** (3.2%)
 - **Over 85:** (1.2%)
 - **16–18:** (0.8%)
 - **Missing:** (12.4%)
-

Disability Status

- **No:** (54.0%)
 - **Yes:** (21.1%)
 - **Prefer not to say:** (13.9%)
 - **Missing:** (11.0%)
-

Ethnicity

- **White - British:** (69.1%)
 - **Prefer not to say:** (4.0%)
 - **White - Other White background:** (1.6%)
 - **Other ethnicities:** <1%
 - **Missing:** (22.2%)
-

Sexual Orientation

- **Heterosexual/Straight:** (66.2%)
 - **Prefer not to say:** (14.7%)
 - **Bi:** (1.8%)
 - **Other:** (1.7%)
 - **Gay Woman/Lesbian:** (1.0%)
 - **Gay Man:** (0.9%)
 - **Missing:** (13.8%)
-

Religion or Belief

- **None/no religion:** (34.8%)
- **Christian (all denominations):** (29.9%)
- **Prefer not to say:** (12.0%)
- **Atheist:** (2.5%)
- **Other religions:** <3%
- **Missing:** (17.4%)

A review of the effectiveness of the complaints procedure

The Complaints Team send out forms to gather feedback from complainants about their experience of complaining in order to continually improve the service. Regrettably there has been very little uptake on this and there is no reportable data of any value established.

Compliments

Finally we are happy to advise that Childrens services received 95 compliments in 2024-2025 so genuinely heartening to see

The positive sentiments and hope it presents more of a balanced critique of the service

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NHS Dorset

Annual Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People Report 2024/25

May 2025

Meeting Title	Quality, Experience and Safety Committee
Date of Meeting	<u>26.06.2025</u>
Paper Title	Annual Report for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People 2024-25
Responsible Chief Officer	Pamela O'Shea
Author	Ms Louise Harris Smith Designated Nurse for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People

Confidentiality	N/A
Publishable Under FOI?	Yes

Prior Discussion and Consultation		
Job Title or Meeting Title	Date	Recommendations/Comments
Designate Doctor & Nurse meeting	04.06.25	Outcomes and themes discussed from DHC and UHD annual reports for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People (CiC and CEYP)
Head of Safeguarding	06.06.25	Review of draft report
CNO and Deputy CNO	09.06.25	Report submitted for sign off

Purpose of the Paper	The purpose of the report is to provide the ICB board with an overview and assurance of Children in Care services for the year 2024-25.						
	Note:	✓	Discuss:		Recommend:		Approve:
Summary of Key Issues	This report provides an overview of development since the previous reporting period 2023-24, demographics for children in care, key areas of work and impact on health outcomes, challenges, and next steps for 2025-26. • Development of the Pan Dorset Children in Care Health Forum • Reducing serious violence role • Extended scope of PCNs to the PCN project for care leavers • Representative for CiC when requests for health funding made • National and Regional representation • CiC and CEYP representation in Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) and Birth to Settled Adulthood (B2SA) workstreams • Launch of the CiC dental premium scheme						

	• Providing clinical leadership of the NHS contribution to corporate parenting in Dorset and BCP councils • Offered learning and development opportunities to health workforce and beyond • Health lead and advocate for individual escalations • Raising quality and financial issues around fostering and adoption medicals Demographics – as at end March 2025 a total of 1011 children were in care for BCP and Dorset, giving a 1.1% increase from previous year, with another 334 children placed in Dorset by other local authorities. 1263 care leavers are known to BCP and Dorset which is an increase of 12.5%. The number of children placed outside of Dorset has increased this year to 33.5%, with 80% of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) living outside of Dorset. Challenges • Out of area delays for health assessments • 30% of CiC are aged 16-18 years • Numbers of UASC required to be accommodated by local authorities • Number of children placed in Dorset from other local authorities Next Steps 2025-26 Reducing the health inequality gap • SEND joint work • Achieving health assessments within statutory timescales • Transformation of emotional and mental health pathways for CiC and CEYP • Population Health Management • Extending specialist health services for CiC and CEYP • Adoption redaction of records guidance
Action recommended	The Quality and Safety Committee is recommended to: 1. NOTE the assurance, challenges and areas for development provided in the annual report for children in care and care experienced young people.

Governance and Compliance Obligations		
Legal and Regulatory	YES	Under the Children Act 1989, The Care Planning and Placement Regulations 2010 and Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked After Children (DoH 2015) it is made clear the NHS responsibilities to contributing to meeting the health needs of looked after children (and, by extension, to care leavers) in three ways: commissioning effective services, delivering through provider organisations, and through individual practitioners providing co-ordinated care for each child.
Finance and Resource	NO	
Risk	NO	

Risk Appetite Statement	
ICB Risk Appetite Statement	N/A

Impact Assessments		
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	NO	Whilst children in care and care experienced young people are not a protected characteristic, they experience significant inequalities due to adverse childhood experiences and by merit of being in care. Core20Plus5 has acknowledged this with children in care and care leavers as part of the inclusion health groups requiring a tailored healthcare approach. NHS England » Core20PLUS5 – An approach to reducing health inequalities for children and young people
Quality Impact Assessment (QIA)	NO	This report is focused on ensuring the quality of services for children in care and care experienced young people are of a high standard, meeting specific needs and are making a difference.

Fundamental Purposes of Integrated Care Systems	
Improving population health and healthcare	NHS Dorset has a major role in ensuring the timely and effective delivery of health services to children in care with the objective of improving the health of this population.
Tackling unequal outcomes and access	Although children in care have many of the same health issues as their peers, the extent of these is often greater because of their past experiences. Ensuring effective service delivery will help to maximise their chances of reaching their potential and leading happy and healthy lives as adults.
Enhancing productivity and value for money	This report aims to provide assurance that existing services are delivering value for money and to consider ways to increase productivity.
Helping the NHS to support broader social and economic development	Children in care and care experienced young people touch many services throughout each ICS, this report provides insight and raises awareness of the importance of leadership and collaboration to deliver against the purpose of supporting social and economic development.

System Working	
System Working Opportunities	This report provides many opportunities for system working, from active involvement in corporate parenting boards to recognising the importance of working in collaboration with providers such as Dorset HealthCare and University Hospitals Dorset. Reports from both these organisations have been integral in providing oversight and informing the report.

Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People Annual Health Report 2024/25

Introduction

This strategic report describes how NHS Dorset ICB met its statutory duty in commissioning services in identifying and meeting the health needs of the children in care (CiC) and the care experience young people (CEYP) population of Dorset. This report covers the period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

The demographic data for Dorset shows a total of **1011** children in care supported by Bournemouth, Christchurch & Dorset Council (BCP) and Dorset Council (DC) in and outside the Dorset conurbation (BCP 568, DC 443). This is an increase of 1.1% in the reporting period. In addition to this there are **1263** care leavers known to BCP and Dorset and **334** children living in Dorset from other local authorities.

Of note, **33.5%** of the 1011 children in care are living outside of the county of Dorset. The impact of this will be explored within the report. Of the 90 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, **80%** are living outside Dorset. Also of note is the percentage of children in care aged 16-18 years (**30%**), again the impact will be explored further into the report.

In England, the number of children in care was recorded at 83,630 at the end of March 2024 (SSDA903 DfE) which is a 0.5% decrease from the previous year. The rate of children in care per 10,000 children population has increased since previous year for BCP from 70 to 74 and from 66 to 68 for Dorset Council. Both are above the Southwest region rate of 63 per 10,000 children. [Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting year 2024 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

The focus for this report will highlight the following areas:

- The voice of children and young people.
- Children in care population health outcomes.
- Reducing the health inequalities gap for children in care.

Author: Louise Harris Smith

Title: Designated Nurse for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People

Date: 06.06.2025

Key areas of work during 2024-25

Development of the Pan Dorset
Children in Care Health Forum

Reducing Serious Violence
dedicated role

Extended scope of Primary Care
Networks to the PCN project for
care leavers

Representative for Children in
Care when requests for health
funding made

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Presented at two Children in Care
focused national and regional
conferences

Children in Care and Care
Experienced Young People rep in
both PfA & B2SA workstreams

Launch of the Children in Care
dental premium scheme

Providing clinical leadership of the
NHS contribution to corporate
parenting in Dorset and BCP
Councils

South West rep for National
Network of Designated Health
Professionals

Offered learning and development
opportunities to health workforce
and beyond

Health lead and advocate for
individual escalations

Raising quality and financial
issues around fostering and
adoption medicals

Impact of 2024-25 work on health outcomes for children in care.

Development of the Pan Dorset Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People Health Forum	Newly formed in September 2024, chaired by designated nurse, this quarterly forum brings together the wide network of professionals working with children in care and care experienced young people across Dorset. The aim is to share common themes, raise inequality gaps and identify areas where the system can work collectively to make improvements. Examples of progress so far: engagement with participation officers to ensure child and young people voice present within the forum, exploring need for bespoke pathway for CiC referrals for neurodiversity assessments, recognition that transition is significant issue across all services for CiC.
Reducing serious violence in children in care	This band 7 role was funded by the Dorset Community Safety Partnership and launched in June 2024. The role works directly with children identified as vulnerable to being exploited or exploiting others, to reduce risk of harm. Outcomes in this first year are: 66% of caseload identified as needing speech and language intervention, 100% of caseload referred for assessment or receiving intervention for emotional, mental health or neurodevelopmental conditions, exploitation risk moved from significant to moderate whilst being supported by this role. Further year funding agreed by CSP for Dorset.
Extended scope of Primary Care Networks to the PCN project for care experienced young people	This year the number of PCNs who have agreed to offer additional support to the care experienced population has increased from 5 to 7, this incorporates 30 GP practices. Care co-ordinators and social prescribers have joined the regular touch base meetings with NHS Dorset and Dorset HealthCare, taken advantage of the local care leaver specific vulnerability training and worked in partnership with the care leaver transition nurse to enhance relationships and awareness of the needs of care leavers with successful outcomes.
Representative for children in care when requests for health funding made	The designated nurse attends the NHS Dorset Virtual Panel meeting where requests for funding from local authority are discussed, to give oversight and subject matter expertise for children in care. This is essential as knowledge of existing local services, and understanding of children placed outside of Dorset combined with effective relationships with peers in out of area teams ensures that the most appropriate intervention is procured.
Represented Dorset health system at national and regional conferences	In conjunction with Dorset HealthCare, and for the national conference a peer designate nurse, the care leaver transition nurse role and its positive outcomes were presented. Dorset is the only area regionally that offers this service to children in care transitioning to adult services, currently there are 1263 care leavers known to Dorset. Since the launch of the post in 2018, the overriding focus for the care leaver transition role is supporting care leavers with their emotional and mental health, as well as physical co-morbidities and navigation of the health system as adults.
Children in care and care experienced representative in Preparation for adulthood and Birth To Settled Adulthood workstreams	The designated nurse attends both workstreams as advocate and advisor for CiC with special educational needs and disabilities. This is vital as understanding both the local health landscape across Dorset and the health processes for children in care as they transition to adulthood ensures that their voice is clearly heard in a strategic forum and the gaps in healthcare for young people leaving care are understood. Emotional and mental health support for this cohort has been identified as a priority by young people themselves, capacity is limited in current services.

Launch of the children in care and care experienced dental premium scheme	Launched in January 2025, the CiC and CEYP dental premium sought to provide a dental appointment and treatment if necessary for those children and young people who were unable to access an NHS dentist in Dorset. To date the scheme has received 35 requests for appointments, supporting a combination of children in care, care leavers, and children placed in Dorset by other local authorities to have their dental needs met. Performance data for children in care being up to date with their dental checks has now exceeded target of 90%.
Providing clinical leadership of the NHS contribution to corporate parenting in Dorset and BCP	The designated nurse and doctor are active participants of both corporate parenting boards in BCP and Dorset, acting as representatives for the ICB and the wider health system. Leadership sometimes requires a robust response when challenges to health are raised, this can be seen as an opportunity to offer learning and information to board members around the existing work health teams undertake to promote positive outcomes for children in care, and to understand where changes need to be made.
Southwest representative for National Network of Designated Health Professionals Designated Doctor representative at Coram Baaf	Both designated doctor and nurse have taken on roles to represent the southwest region children in care network nationally. These are vital roles in ensuring the needs of children in care continue to be discussed strategically and that central governance changes are disseminated for a consistent approach to services across the region.
Offered learning and development opportunities to health workforce and beyond	Throughout the year, training in the needs of children in care and care leavers have been offered in a number of forums by CiC professionals, examples are student nurses on placement in the ICB, GP colleagues, medical students, paediatric registrars and dental clinicians. This has been a valuable opportunity for those involved, who may not have had any previous knowledge or experience of children in care, to hear why although children in care only make up 1% of the children population, their health needs impact disproportionately to this figure.
Health lead and advocate for individual escalations	The designate nurse and doctor act as advocates for children in care when there is need for a resolution of individual circumstances. The role allows oversight of services across Dorset and where the gaps and inequalities mean that the needs of children in care and their voice are not central to professional decision making or that more clarity is needed around multi disciplinary roles and responsibilities.
Raising quality and financial issues around fostering and adoption medicals	The designate nurse and doctor have responded to issues raised around the process of fostering and adoption medicals by writing a position statement to present at Safeguarding Assurance Group and adding to the departmental concern log. Specifically, the timeframe for medicals, and the payment for GP's completing the medicals against a backdrop of collective action has impact on the number of prospective adopters and foster carers able to provide homes for children in care to remain living in Dorset. When children are moved out of county, it becomes more difficult to maintain continuity of their health care, particularly if specialist referrals are needed for developmental assessments or therapeutic input is required.

Challenges

Over **1/3** of Dorset children in care are placed out of county, this has significant impact on achieving statutory duty for health assessments resulting in early identification of health needs being delayed for these children who tend to require more intensive support. **80%** of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are placed outside of Dorset.

30% of children in care are aged 16-18 years – a high proportion of which sit in the 'targeted' caseload due to levels of contextual risk and exploitation. The safeguarding duty has increased putting pressure on health teams and the care leaver transition role.

9% of children in care are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, although this shows a small decline in numbers since the start of the year, there is a requirement for both local authorities to accommodate 0.1% of the child population. This continually increases into care and leaving care workload as most young people are aged 16 and over.

Approximately **334** children are placed in Dorset by other local authorities, an additional **183** initial and review health assessments have been completed this year by health teams. This impacts on local capacity and there are challenges around notification of placements and the health needs of children being shared from teams outside of Dorset.

Next Steps 2025-26 Reducing the health inequality gap

Continue to progress joint work to improve pathways for children in care with special educational needs and disabilities – through workstreams focusing on the reciprocal sharing of assessments for those children with an Education, Health and Care Plan as well as increasing knowledge across the health and social care landscape, understanding the need through improved population health management, improving Section 23 notifications across health system.

Continue to understand the barriers to achieving health assessments within statutory timescales, for children placed in and outside of Dorset.

Proactively support and advocate for the transformation of emotional and mental health pathways for the unique needs of children in care and care experienced young people.

Further develop the benefits of population health management to evidence the health deficit and disproportionate health need for children in care and care experienced young people, with a focus on obesity.

Consider the positive impact on reducing health inequalities for children in care of extending specialist health services that are focused on expertise, advocacy and collaboration, e.g. participation in resource panels discussing children in care, children in care reviews, extending the emotional health and wellbeing role to 18+, increasing capacity to support transition to adult services when leaving care.

Work collaboratively to adhere to new guidance regarding redaction of adoption records across primary and secondary care.

Feedback for services working with children and young people who are care experienced

94% of carers felt their concerns were listened to during initial health assessments

(From young person) 'I feel safe, secure and comfortable to share my experiences, I feel more confident about how I navigate situations and emotions'

(From a foster carer) 'Thank you for getting a dentist and for all you do for looked after children and carers'

(From professional team) 'Our safeguarding team is fortunate to work with such a wonderful group of hardworking people in the CiC team. I hope you are proud of your teamwork and effort'

All CYP aged 10+ felt listened to at their initial health assessments



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Summary Health Report for Dorset Young People

Title of Report

Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People Annual Report 2024–2025

Who Wrote the Report

The report was written by **Louise Harris Smith (now Louise Maple)**, who is the **Designated Nurse for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People**.

Date Written

The report was finished on **6th June 2025**.

Summary of What the Report Is About

This report talks about how NHS Dorset helped children in care and young people who have been in care. It looks at how their health needs were met between **April 2024 and March 2025**. It also shares facts about how many children are in care, what help they got, and what still needs to be done to make things better.

Key Messages

- There are more children in care this year than last year.
 - Many children in care live outside Dorset, which can make getting health help harder.
 - NHS Dorset is working hard to make sure children in care get the health support they need.
 - Listening to children and young people is very important.
 - The goal is to help children in care live healthy and happy lives.
-

Important Facts and Figures

- **1011** children are in care in Dorset (Dorset Council: **443**).
- **1263** care leavers are known to both BCP and Dorset councils.
- **334** children from other areas live in Dorset.
- **35%** of children in care live outside Dorset.
- **87%** of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children live outside Dorset.
- **31%** of children in care are aged 16–18.

Summary Health Report for Dorset Young People

- In England, there were **83,630** children in care at the end of March 2024.
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Actions or Recommendations

Here's what NHS Dorset plans to do next:

- Work better with schools and special needs services.
 - Make sure health checks happen on time.
 - Improve mental health support for children in care.
 - Use data to understand health needs better.
 - Offer more specialist health services.
 - Give clear guidance for adoption records.
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This report has been generated by Copilot and has been reviewed by the author as the responsible professional.

Louise Maple

Designated Nurse

October 2025