



## Corporate Parenting Board

**Date:** Thursday, 28 May 2026  
**Time:** 3.00 pm  
**Venue:** Council Chamber, County Hall, Dorchester, DT1 1XJ

**Members (Quorum: 3)**

Bridget Bolwell (Chair), Duncan Sowry-House (Vice-Chair), Stella Jones, Julie Robinson, Cathy Lugg, Jindy Atwal and Carole Jones

**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](mailto: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.   | <b>WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS</b><br><br>The Chair of the Committee to open the meeting and welcome those present.  |       |
| 2.   | <b>APOLOGIES</b><br><br>To receive any apologies for absense.                                                      |       |
| 3.   | <b>MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING</b><br><br>To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 December 2025. | 5 - 8 |
| 4.   | <b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b>                                                                                    |       |

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](mailto:antony.nash@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk) / by 8.30am on **22 May 2026**.

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 - 40**

To receive a report from the Corporate Director - Care & Protection

## **7. CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD- ANNUAL REPORT 41 - 60**

To receive the report from the Head of Service.

## **8. FOSTERING SERVICE- ANNUAL REPORT 61 - 80**

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

- |            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |           |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>9.</b>  | <b>FOSTERING PANEL CHAIR REPORT</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 81 - 94   |
|            | To receive the report from the Independent Panel Chair                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |           |
| <b>10.</b> | <b>LEAVING CARE SERVICE- ANNUAL REPORT</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 95 - 114  |
|            | To receive the report from the Head of Service - Care Leavers & UASC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |           |
| <b>11.</b> | <b>YOUTH VOICE STRATEGY FOR CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 115 - 122 |
|            | To receive the report from the Youth Voice Team Manager.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |           |
| <b>12.</b> | <b>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |           |
|            | To confirm details and deadlines for papers for the next formal meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board which will be held on 26 November 2026. The next informal meeting will be held on 23 July 2026.                                                                                                                                 |           |
| <b>13.</b> | <b>URGENT ITEMS</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |           |
|            | 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.                                                                                                |           |
| <b>14.</b> | <b>EXEMPT BUSINESS</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |           |
|            | 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 THURSDAY 11 DECEMBER 2025**

**Present:** Cllrs Bridget Bolwell (Chair), Stella Jones and Matt Bell

**Present remotely:** Cllrs Julie Robinson and Cathy Lugg

**Apologies:** Cllrs Duncan Sowry-House

**Also present remotely:** Cllr Clare Sutton

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

Paul Dempsey (Executive Director of People - Children), Louise Drury (Head of Service Children in Care and Care Leavers), Paula Golding (Corporate Director for Care and Protection), Jane MacLennan, Jo Smark-Richards, Kaye Wright (Youth Voice Manager), Megan Cameron-Brown (Head of Quality Assurance and Partnerships), Antony Nash (Senior Democratic & Governance Services Officer), David Webb (Head of Service - Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service) and Tina Ironside (Strategic Commissioner)

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

**16. Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair welcomed officers and members of the committee to the meeting.

**17. Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 May 2025 were confirmed and signed.

**18. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**19. Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

**20. Independent Reviewing Officer's Annual Report**

The Quality Assurance Service Manager introduced the report and highlighted some of the key areas of progress and milestones that had been achieved over the past year.

The timeliness of minutes and the improvement beyond what is currently reported.

## 21. **Corporate Parenting Dataset**

The Head of Service for Children in Care introduced the Corporate parenting data set and described the context of children in care locally and nationally and the work that is going on to meet their needs.

The committee discussed the following areas.

- Children placed out of county and the costs involved in those placements.
- The competition of PETS and the upward trend of timely completion.
- The children in care school attendance in relation to general school attendance.
- The challenges around finding and maintaining safe and settled placements.
- Discussions about those in temporary placements and the reasons behind that.

## 22. **Advocacy and Independent Visitors**

The Senior Advocate, NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service) introduced the report and described the activities that have been undertaken over the last year and set out the aspirations for the future.

The committee investigate the continuity of advocates and the opportunities for young people to have stability of advocacy.

There was discussion of the opportunity to promote independent visitors and the potential to capitalize of people with existing relationships through different aspects of childrens services such as fostering.

## 23. **Annual Report of the Virtual School: Education of Children in Care**

The Corporate Director for Education & Learning introduced the report and set out the actions and progress of the virtual school over the past year.

The use of headsets that allow people to experience things through the lens of a trauma experienced young person was raised and the opportunity for the committee to trial these was planned for 2026.

There was discussion on the tracking and monitoring of the performance of pupils along with the availability of extracurricular enrichment activities.

## 24. **Annual LADO Report**

The Head of Quality Assurance & Partnerships introduced the report and set out the areas covered over the past year.

There was discussion as to how Dorset Council has influenced and improved attendance of police at meetings by ensuring attendance is requested when it meets criminal threshold.

Faith group referrals were discussed to improve engagement with the service.

25. **Children in Care at Risk of Offending and Custody**

The report was introduced by the Executive Director for Childrens who invited the Head of Service at Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service who spoke to the details of the report.

The committee discussed the earliness of intervention around speech and language needs.

The committee sought reassurance around the practicalities of meetings in the home and the ongoing support of children in the same setting after investigation.

26. **Annual Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People Report 2024/25**

The report was introduced by the Designated Nurse for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People.

The system approach to ensure the continuation of all health information through the child's journey through the system.

The use of population health management to support care leavers and the approach taken working closely with GPs to predict and manage needs was discussed.

Recognition was shared by officers and councillors for health colleagues for their continued support in the provision of health care for the children in care cohort.

27. **Complaints and Representations - Children in Care and Care Leavers**

The report was introduced by the Corporate Director - Care & Protection and the committee noted the contents of the report.

28. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next formal meeting to be held on 28 May 2026 and the next informal meeting to be held on 29 January 2026.

29. **Urgent items**

There were no urgent items.

30. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

**Duration of meeting:** 3.00 - 4.33 pm

**Chairman**

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**Dorset**  
Council

# **Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report**

**March 2026**

## Introduction

The purpose of this report is to present the **Corporate Parenting Board** with a comprehensive overview of performance metrics. The indicators are organised 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

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.

## Performance Direction

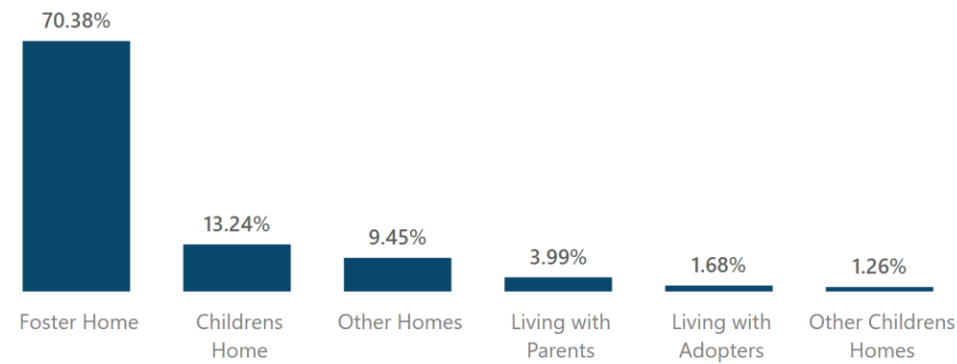
The latest performance is compared to the previous month, with icons indicating the direction of performance, based solely on whether the figures have increased or decreased. It is important to note that the '**Direction of Performance**' field is not related to the established targets; rather, it serves 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.

# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

## Summary

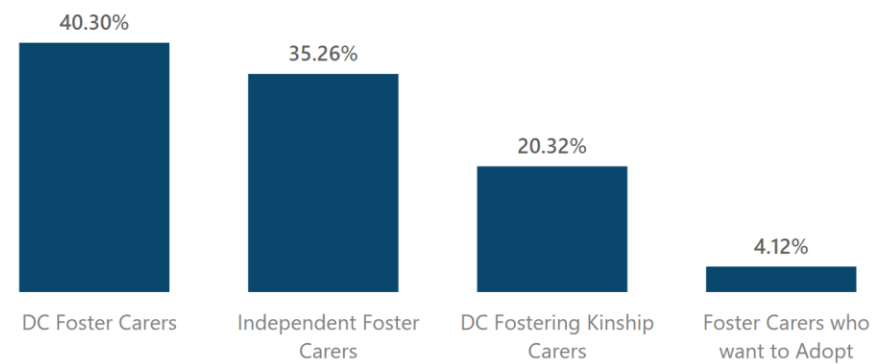
March 2026

Where Children Live



Page 11

Types of Foster Homes



### Summary

#### Children's living arrangements - March 2026

There has been a positive increase in the number of children living in fostering families, reflecting a strong commitment to ensuring more of our children grow up in stable, safe family environments.

Foster care provides children with greater opportunities, secure attachments, consistency and better long term outcomes.

Overall, this reflects how we are working to prioritise safe, nurturing and relationship based care which is fundamental to improving outcomes for Dorset's children and young people.

## > Children in our Care

We have **475** children in care (rate of **71** per 10,000), **43** of which are unaccompanied children.

Last month we had **472** , ( **70** ) and **43** respectively.

## > Adoption and Special Guardianship

In the last 6 months **10** % of children moved to live with adopters and **16** % became settled through Special Guardianship Orders (SGO).

Last month this was **10** % and **13** % respectively.

## > Distance from Family Home

**45** % of our children in care live over 20 miles away from home (excluding our unaccompanied children).

Last month it was **44** %.

## > Safe and Stable Home

Of our children in care who have been in care for 2.5 years (aged 16 or under) **71** % have been in their home for 2 years or more.

Last month it was **75** %.

We have **15** % of our children in care who have had 3 or more homes in the previous 12 months.

Last month it was **15** %.

## > 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 **47** %.

Of our new children in care last month, **38** % had their initial health assessment within 20 days. In the month prior to that it was **6** %.

## > Education

The average attendance for this academic year for our children in care is **88** %, ( **88** % up to last month). **94** % (up to March 2026) 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 **19** 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 **161** ( **166** last month).

The average number of days between entering care and moving in with adopted family (adjusted for foster carer adoptions) was **334** ( **336** last month).

## > Care Leavers

We had **0** care leaver(s) (active, aged 16-25 yrs) in B&B accommodation. In the previous month we had **0** . **98** % of our care leavers are living in safe, secure & affordable accommodation (active, 19-21 yrs). Last month this was **98** %. **69** % of our care leavers are in employment, education or training (active, 19-21 yrs). Last month this was **67** %.

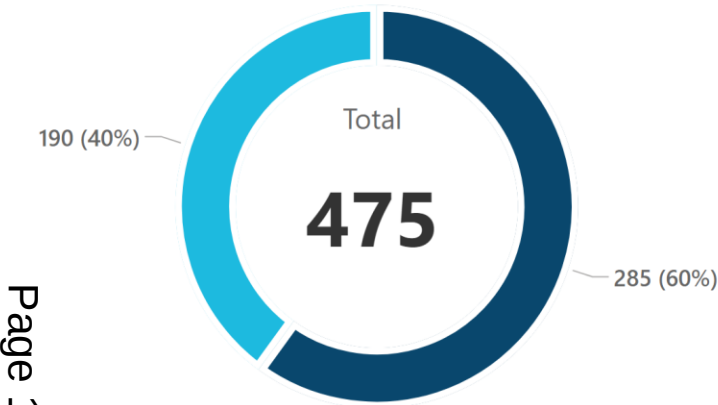
**97** % of our care leavers with an up to date Pathway Plan at end of month (active, 17-25 yrs). Last month this was **95** %. **94** % of our care leavers are in touch with us (active, 19-21 yrs). Last month this was at **93** %.

# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

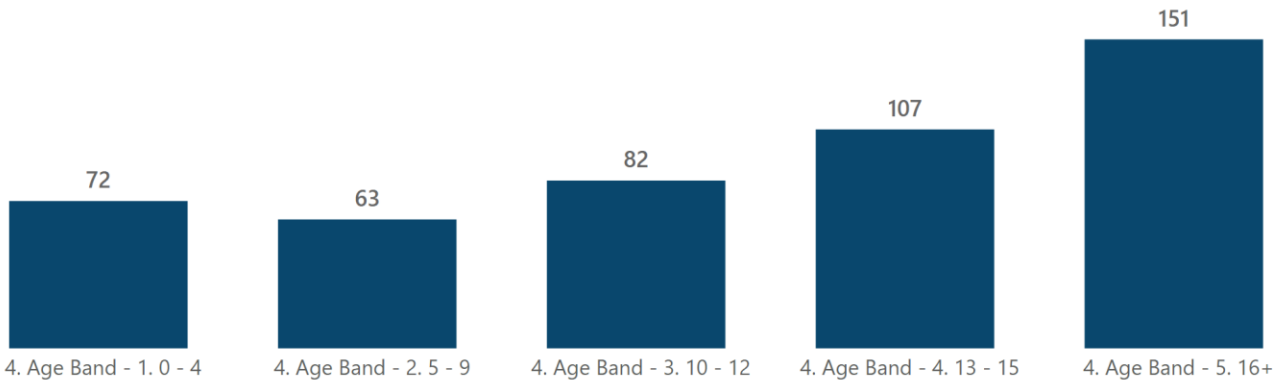
## Profile

March 2026

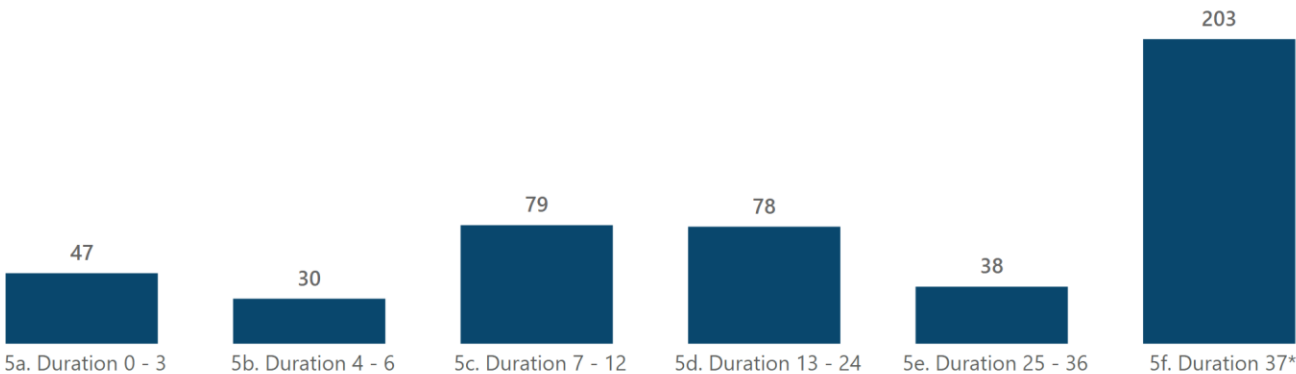
Children in Care



Children in Care (Age)



Children in Care (in Months)



>  
>

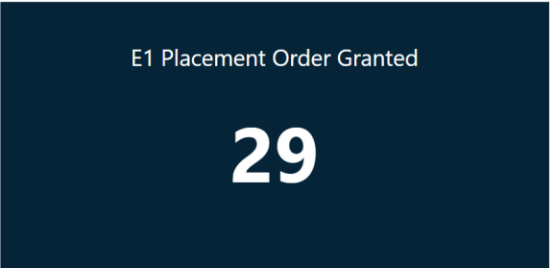
**557**  
**319**

Number of Care Leavers  
are Receiving a Service

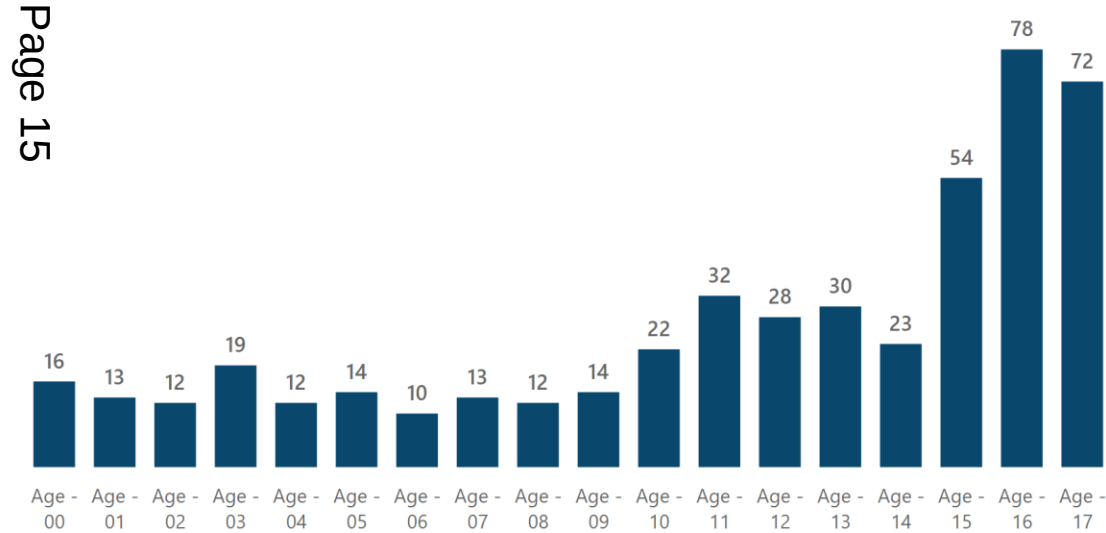
# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

## Profile

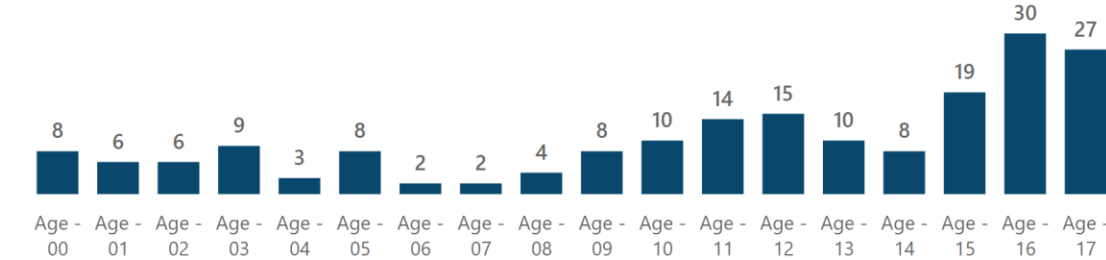
March 2026



Children in Care by Gender & Age (Male)



Children in Care by Gender & Age (Female)

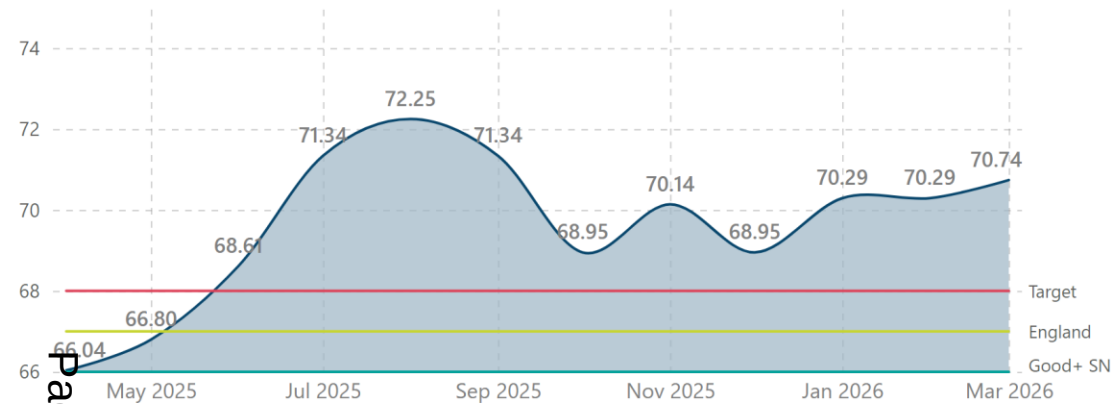


# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

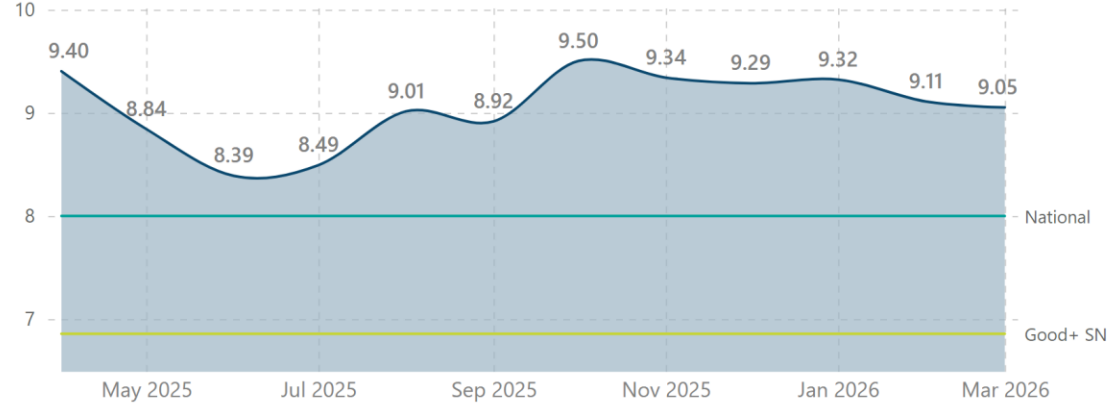
## Children and Young People

March 2026

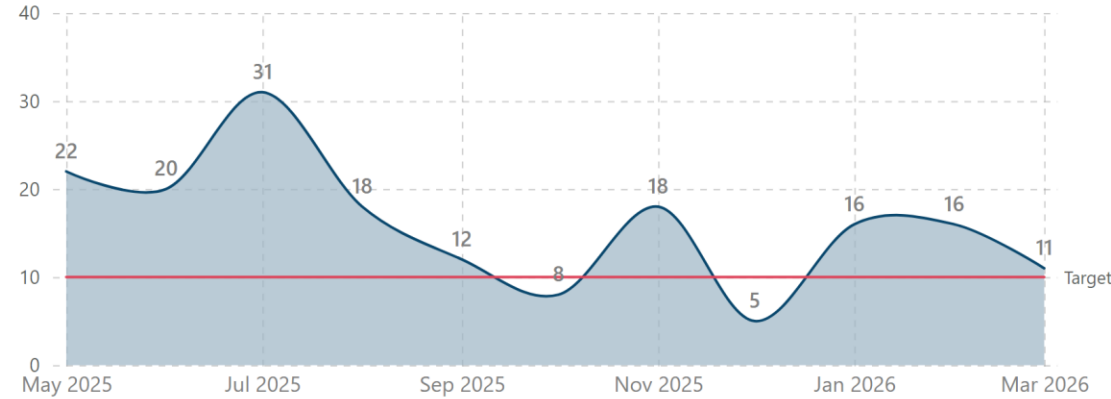
Rate of Children in Care at Month-End



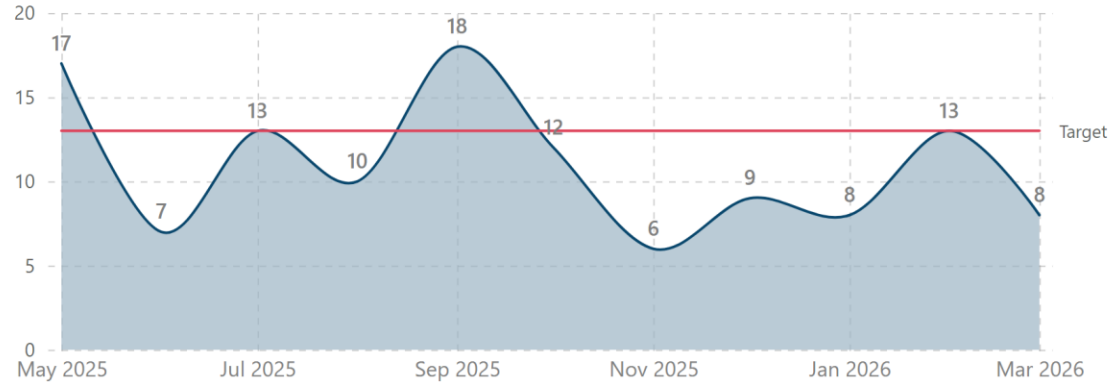
Percentage of Children in Care who are Unaccompanied Children



Number of Children who became Children in Care



Number of Children who ceased to be Children in Care



# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

## Children and Young People

March 2026

### Performance Measures & Metrics

| Indicator                        | Good<br>Is | Good<br>+ SN | Eng.<br>Avg | Target | Jan 26 | Feb 26 | Mar 26 | D.O.T       |
|----------------------------------|------------|--------------|-------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| Became CiC (Excl. UC)            | Low        |              |             | 10.00  | 13.00  | 15.00  | 10.00  | ✓ Improving |
| Became CiC (Month)               | Low        |              |             | 10.00  | 16.00  | 16.00  | 11.00  | ✓ Improving |
| Ceased to be CiC (Month)         | High       |              |             | 13.00  | 8.00   | 13.00  | 8.00   | ✗ Worsening |
| CiC at Month End                 | Low        |              |             | 420.00 | 472.00 | 472.00 | 475.00 | ✗ Worsening |
| CiC Rate at Month End            | Low        | 66.00        | 67.00       | 68.00  | 70.29  | 70.29  | 70.74  | ✗ Worsening |
| CiC Rate at Month End (Excl. UC) | Low        | 61.14        | 61.76       |        | 63.74  | 63.89  | 64.33  | ✗ Worsening |
| UC at Month End                  | -          |              |             |        | 44.00  | 43.00  | 43.00  |             |
| UC Share of CiC                  | -          | 6.86         | 8.00        |        | 9.32   | 9.11   | 9.05   |             |

Page 17

### Children and Young People

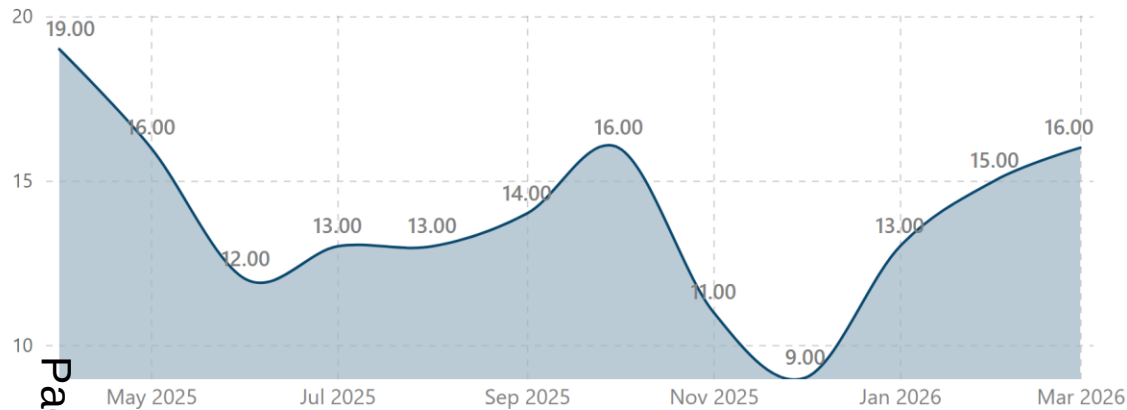
In the past year, there has been an increase in the number of children coming into care with an increase from 435 in March 2025 to 475 in March 2026. Primarily the large increase occurred in Q.1 and Q.2 between April 26 and August 26 with some fluctuations in the second part of the year. We have had more children enter than exit care over this period. This reflects levels of complexity and need within families. Significant effort continues to be directed toward prevention, including Edge of Care support, intensive family interventions, and our Safeguarding Families Together offer. While not all care entries can be avoided, these approaches have supported children to remain safely at home wherever possible and ensured that care is used where it is clearly in a child's best interests. We have invested in valuing care over the last year to support our understanding of children's needs and identify further opportunities for reunification with parents and permanence through special guardianship which will support children to exit our care. Further work is being undertaken over the next year to fully embed the valuing care tool and progress these opportunities.

# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

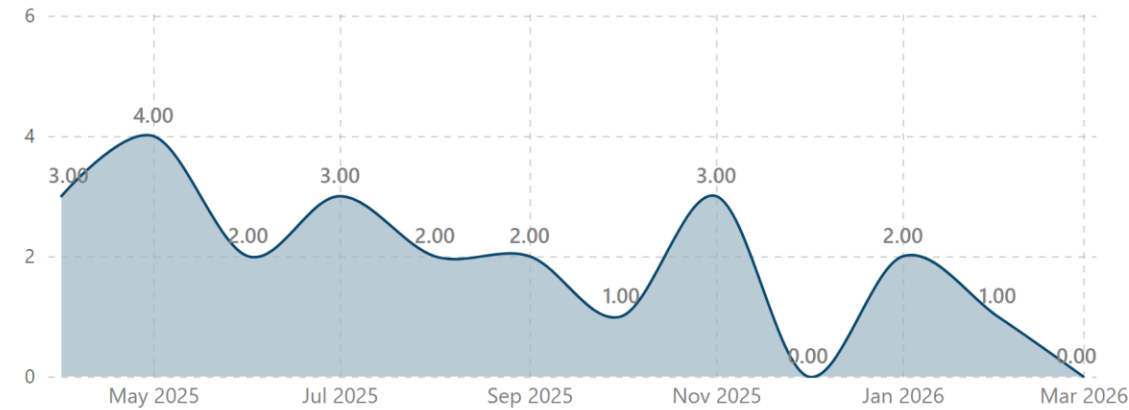
## Adoption

March 2026

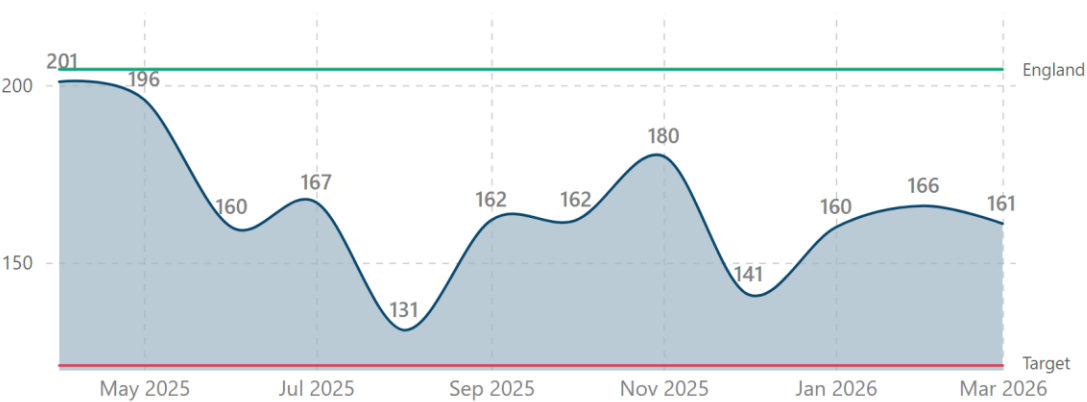
Children adopted in last 12 months



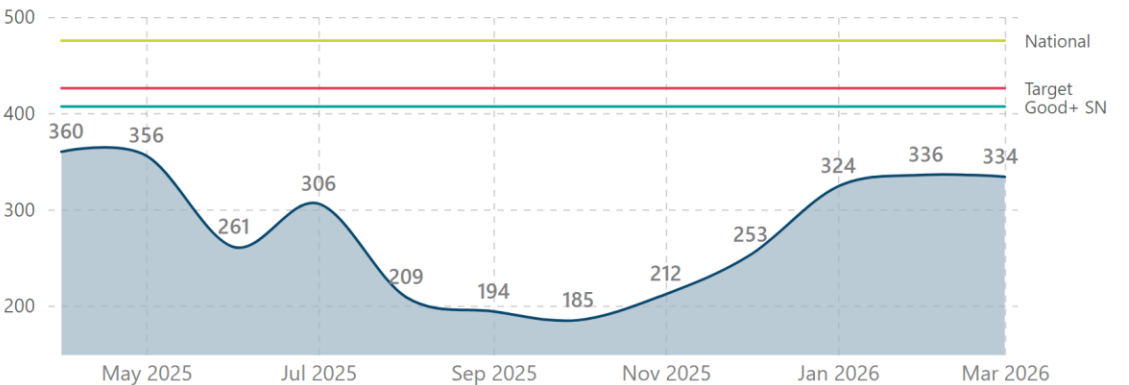
Number of adoptive families approved (ADM)



Average Days to match from placement order



Average days to move in with adoptive family



# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

## Adoption

March 2026

### Performance Measures & Metrics

| Indicator                                           | Good Is | Good + SN | Eng. Avg | Target | Jan 26 | Feb 26 | Mar 26 | D.O.T       |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| Adopted (Last 12m)                                  | High    |           |          |        | 13.00  | 15.00  | 16.00  | ✔ Improving |
| Adoptive Families Approved (ADM)                    | High    |           |          |        | 2.00   | 1.00   | 0.00   | ✘ Worsening |
| Adoptive Families in Assessment                     | High    |           |          |        | 9.00   | 12.00  | 15.00  | ✔ Improving |
| Days: Enter Care → Move-In (Adjusted) (Avg)         | Low     | 406.85    | 475.48   | 426.00 | 324.00 | 336.00 | 334.00 | ✔ Improving |
| Days: Placement Order → Match (Avg)                 | Low     | 204.46    | 204.68   | 121.00 | 160.00 | 166.00 | 161.00 | ✔ Improving |
| Placement Order Revocations (Last 12m) - Low Number |         |           |          |        | 3.00   | 5.00   | 5.00   | ⚠ Same      |

### Adoption

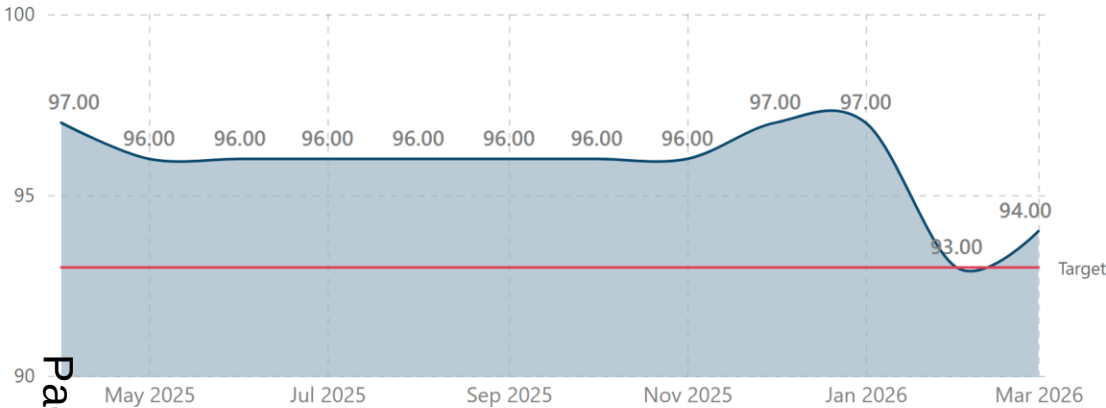
The percentage of children who have been adopted has slightly reduced this year. This is as a direct result of local and national shortages of adopters, particularly for older children and sibling groups. Q4 adoption performance has shown positive progress across key indicators, reflecting sustained focus on achieving timely and stable permanence for children. There has also been an increase in the number of adoption orders granted during this period, demonstrating improved momentum in progressing children through the final stages of the adoption pathway. This reflects stronger case progression, effective court engagement, and improved system oversight to reduce delay for children with adoption plans. Recruitment activity continues to strengthen, with an increase in enquiries and approvals of adopters over the last quarter. Targeted recruitment efforts and improved engagement with prospective adopters have begun to translate into a broader and more diverse adopter pool, supporting better matching and choice for children. While progress is positive, continued attention will be given to sustaining recruitment momentum, improving matching timeliness for children with more complex needs, and ensuring early permanency options are consistently explored wherever appropriate. Collectively, these achievements demonstrate Aspire Adoption Agency's commitment to improve permanence experiences and outcomes for children, ensuring adoption is achieved and sustained.

# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

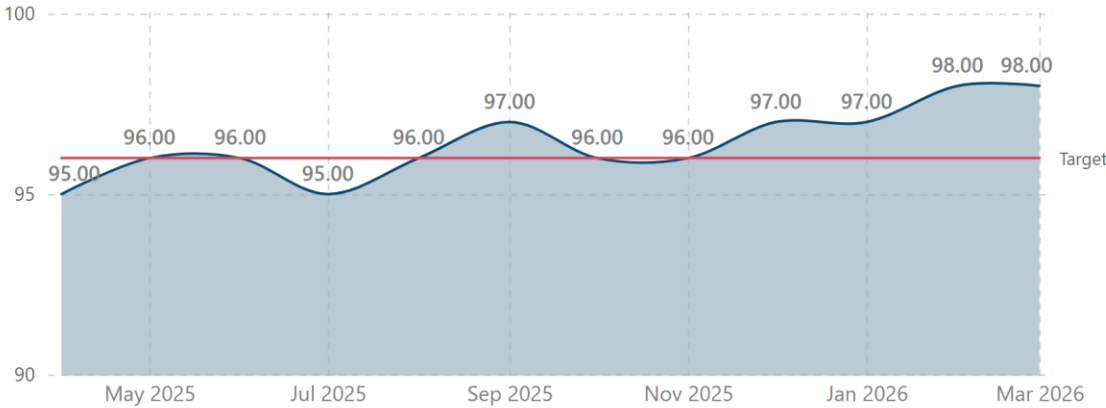
## Care Leavers

March 2026

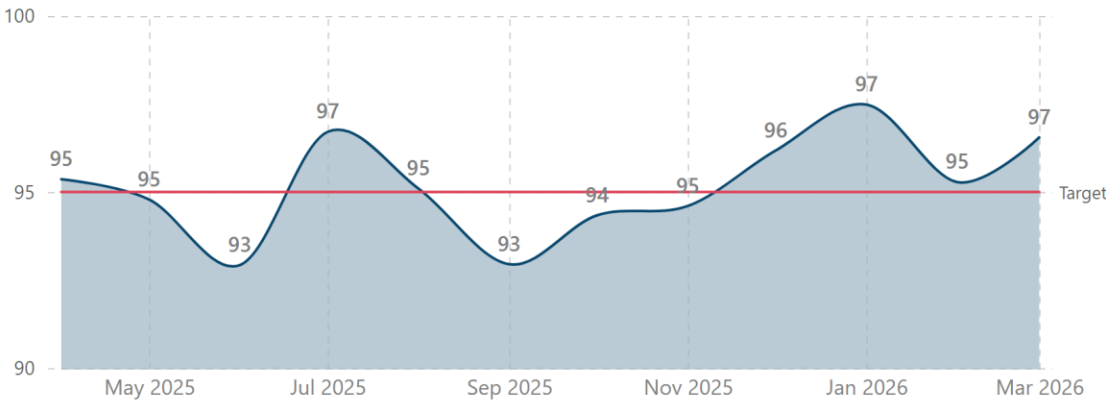
Percentage of Care Leavers in touch with Dorset Council (Active aged 19-21)



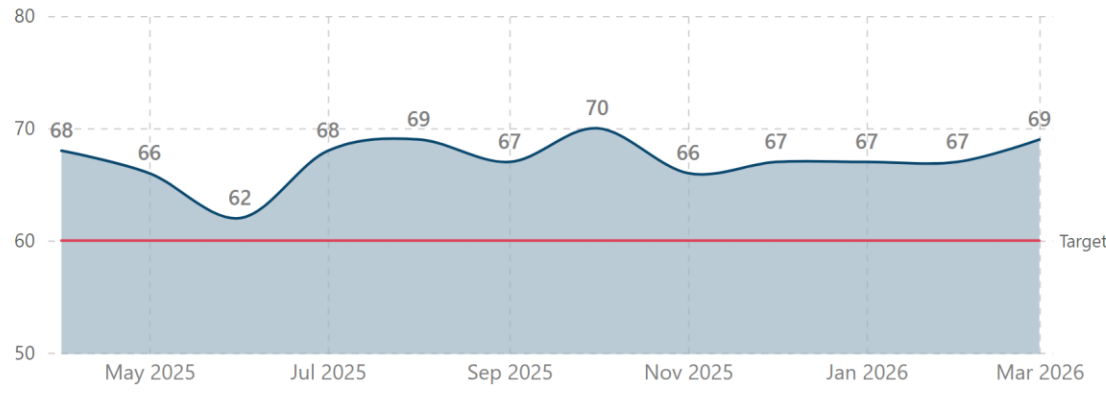
Percentage of Care Leavers who are living in suitable accommodation (Active aged 19-21)



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



Percentage of Care Leavers who in education, employment or training (Active aged 19-21)



Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

Care Leavers

March 2026

Performance Measures & Metrics

| Indicator                                        | Good Is | Good + SN | Eng. Avg | Target | Jan 26 | Feb 26 | Mar 26 | D.O.T       |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| Bed & Breakfast – Number (Active 17–25)          | Low     |           |          | 0.00   | 1.00   | 0.00   | 0.00   | ⚠ Same      |
| EET – Percentage (Active 19–21)                  | High    |           |          | 60.00  | 67.00  | 67.00  | 69.00  | ✅ Improving |
| EET – Percentage (Active 17–18)                  | High    |           |          | 60.00  | 59.00  | 62.00  | 59.00  | ❌ Worsening |
| EET (19–21) – Percentage (OC3)                   | High    | 54.00     | 54.00    |        |        |        | 58.80  | ❌ Worsening |
| Health Passports Completed – Number (2m Arrears) | -       |           |          |        | 6.00   | 10.00  |        |             |
| Health Passports Due – Number (2m Arrears)       | -       |           |          |        | 6.00   | 10.00  |        |             |
| In touch – Active (19–21)                        | High    |           |          | 93.00  | 97.00  | 93.00  | 94.00  | ✅ Improving |
| Pathway Plan Up-to-Date – (Active 17–25)         | High    |           |          | 95.00  | 97.48  | 95.28  | 96.55  | ✅ Improving |
| Suitable Accommodation – (19–21)                 | High    |           |          | 96.00  | 97.00  | 98.00  | 98.00  | ⚠ Same      |
| Unsuitable Accommodation – Number (Active 17–25) | Low     |           |          | 11.00  | 7.00   | 5.00   | 6.00   | ❌ Worsening |

Care Leavers

All young people are allocated a personal adviser at the age of 16 to provide a smooth transition and support young people with the skills they need as they move into adulthood. We have continued our focus to ensure that all young people have a current Pathway Plan which is ambitious and supports our young people to move towards increased independence. At the end of March 2026 97% of young people had a current Pathway Plan compared to 93% in March 2025. More young people are remaining in Staying Put arrangements with 36 young people remaining with their foster carer after turning 18. Young people are encouraged to develop their own networks and keep in touch with significant people in their lives. This is supported through our staying close and mentoring programmes. Care leavers have continued to make steady and encouraging progress across key outcome areas, supported by consistent personal adviser engagement and strengthened multi-agency working. As of end of March 2026, we were actively working with 319 care leavers compared to 300 last year. There has been a continued improvement in EET participation, with more young people sustaining education, training, or employment and fewer experiencing periods of NEET. This reflects earlier identification of risk, improved transition planning, and targeted support at key points of change. 98% of care leavers remain in suitable and stable accommodation, with a reduced number facing homelessness through our proactive and collaborative working with housing partners. Support to prevent tenancy breakdown has been effective, particularly for young people transitioning into independence. Engagement with personal advisers has remained strong, with regular contact supporting timely intervention and relationship-based practice. Care leavers' voices continue to inform service development through feedback forums and individual pathway planning. Overall, performance over the last year demonstrates continued improvement and a strong commitment to corporate parenting responsibilities, with outcomes moving in the right direction.

# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

## Education

March 2026

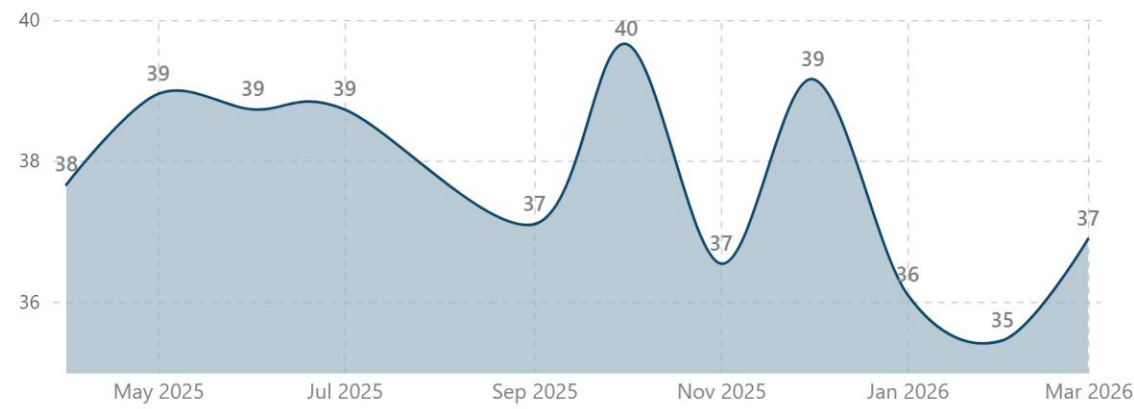
Percentage of Children in Care with a termly PEP completed on time



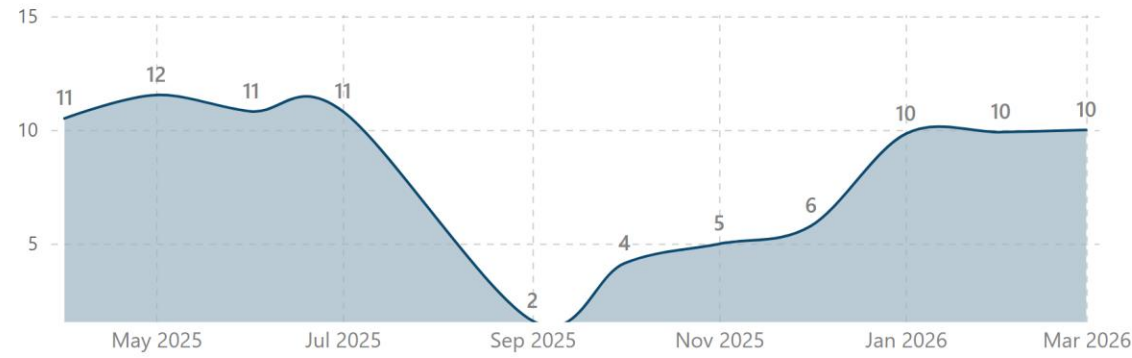
Average percentage attendance for school-aged Children in Care (Academic year-to-date)



Percentage of Children in Care with Education, Health, and Care Plan



Percentage of school-aged Children in Care who have had at least one suspension in the academic year



Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

Education

March 2026

Performance Measures & Metrics

| Indicator                                       | Good Is | Good + SN | Eng. Avg | Target | Jan 26 | Feb 26 | Mar 26 | D.O.T       |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| Average Attendance – AYTD – % (School-Aged CiC) | High    |           |          | 95.00  | 88.28  | 88.20  | 87.84  | ✗ Worsening |
| CiC with EHCP – %                               | -       |           |          |        | 36.10  | 35.45  | 36.89  |             |
| EET – % (CiC & Care Leavers, 16–18; Y12–Y13)    | High    |           |          | 72.00  | 76.40  | 76.40  | 76.25  | ✗ Worsening |
| NEET – % (CiC & Care Leavers, 16–18; Y12–Y13)   | Low     |           |          | 28.00  | 23.60  | 23.60  | 23.75  | ✗ Worsening |
| PEP Within 20 Days of Entering Care – %         | High    |           |          | 100.00 |        |        | 100.00 | ✓ Improving |
| Suspended ≥1 (AYTD) – % (School-Aged CiC)       | Low     |           |          |        | 9.83   | 9.90   | 10.00  | ✗ Worsening |
| Termly PEP Completed on Time – %                | High    |           |          | 96.00  |        |        | 94.00  | ✓ Improving |

Education

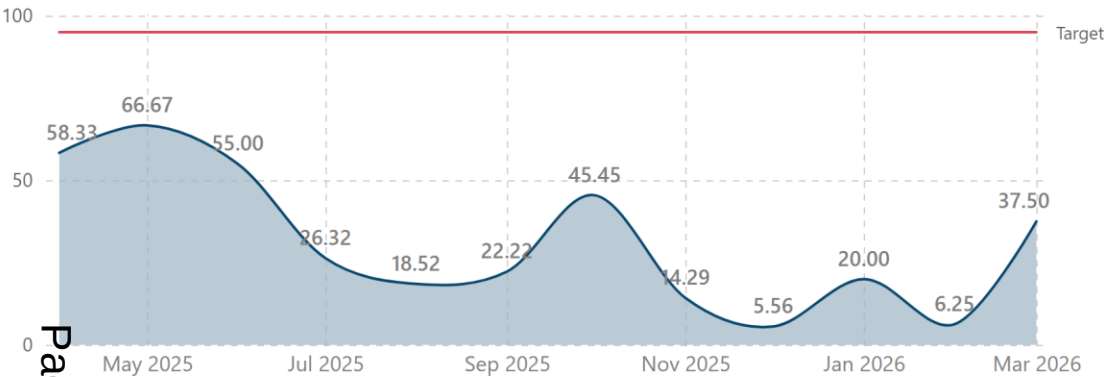
Dorset Virtual School continue to work hard to support our Children in Care and Care Leavers with their education. Dorset Virtual School continues to develop creative approaches to supporting children both educationally and in wider enrichment opportunities to raise aspiration and ambition. The Virtual School extends its reach beyond education settings to support the wider development of children and young people through arts participation, sport, cultural and leisure activities that enable children and young people to develop skills and interests beyond formal education. The Spring Term saw an improvement in the timeliness of PEP completion with 100% of initial PEPs and 94% of all PEPs completed and quality assured within the 20 day timeframes ensuring that all of our children were supported educationally with robust monitoring in place where there are concerns. The remaining PEPs were all completed within 26 days of the PEP date. PEP quality remained consistently high with 99% of Spring PEPs graded as good or better (double the number of golds from Autumn term 2025). 459 PEPs were completed and quality assured during the Spring Term with an increase in attendance at PEPs for children, social workers, Personal Advisors and Designated Teachers compared to Autumn 2025. Attendance for the cohort stands at 88% year to date. Attendance for all year groups is over 90% apart from year 9 (83%), year 10 (81%) and year 11 (81%). All children with below 50% attendance are monitored on the inclusion monitoring board and any child with a suspension is focused on during the monthly student progress meeting. Currently, 76% of our post-16 young people are in education, employment or training. All children who are NEET are monitored fortnightly on the Inclusion Monitoring Board to ensure that support is in place to re-engage with learning. 33 children have had at least one suspension in this academic year and 18 of these children have a SEN need or EHCP. All Virtual School Leads attend reintegration meetings for children who are suspended. The Virtual School Service Manager or Specialist Teachers will lean in to support any child that has had more than one suspension. Any child with a suspension in the month is discussed at the next monthly Pupil Progress meeting. The Virtual School has a planned event in place for our children and young people during May half-term, working with a literacy charity around developing a love for oracy and literacy and have offered a music collaboration project for young people during the Easter holidays. The Virtual School is also finalising its plans for the annual Virtual School Awards to be held in July to celebrate our children and young people who have achieved this year, both in education and the wider community.

# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

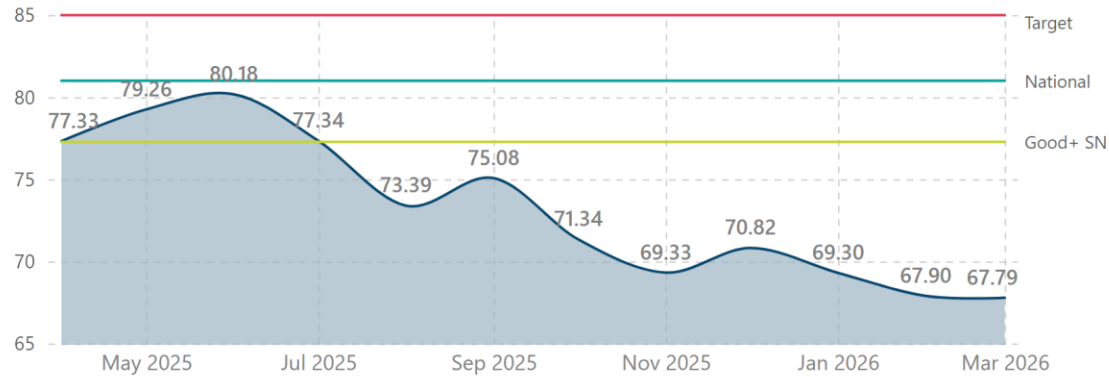
## Health and Emotional Wellbeing

March 2026

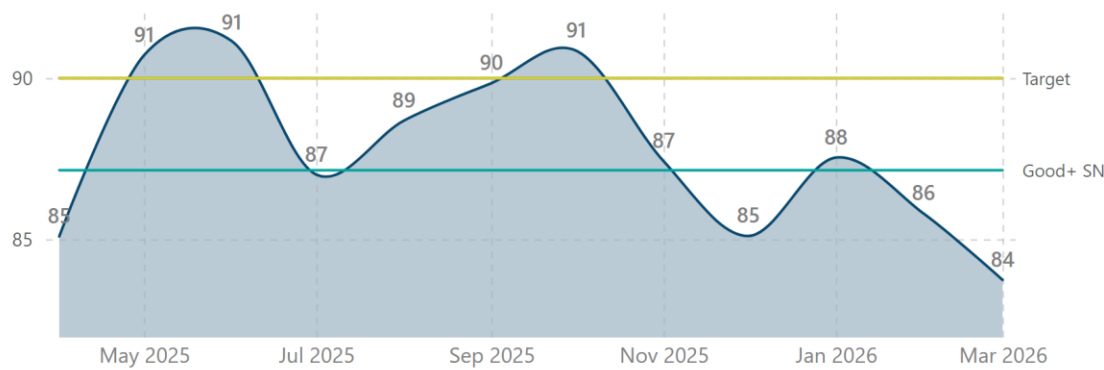
Percentage of new Children in Care (in the previous month) who received their initial health assessment within twenty days



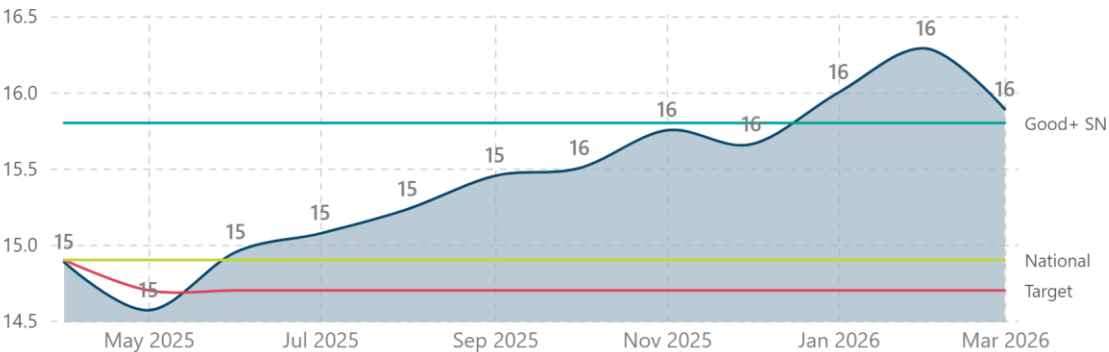
Percentage of Children in Care for twelve months or more who have had a dental check within in the last twelve months



Percentage of Children in Care for twelve months or more with an annual health assessment completed on time



Average Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) score for Children in Care for more than twelve months (Aged 4-16 years)



Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

Health and Social Wellbeing

March 2026

Peformance Measures & Metrics

| Indicator                                      | Good Is | Good + SN | Eng. Avg | Target | Jan 26 | Feb 26 | Mar 26 | D.O.T       |
|------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| CiC 12m+ Average SDQ Score (Age 4–16)          | Low     | 15.80     | 14.90    | 14.70  | 16.00  | 16.29  | 15.89  | ✔ Improving |
| CiC 12m+ SDQ Completed (Age 4–16)              | High    | 80.14     | 78.00    | 75.00  | 52.05  | 47.42  | 50.34  | ✔ Improving |
| CiC 12m+ with Annual Health Assessment On Time | High    | 87.14     | 90.00    | 90.00  | 87.54  | 85.80  | 83.74  | ✘ Worsening |
| CiC 12m+ with Dental Check ≤12 Months          | High    | 77.29     | 81.00    | 85.00  | 69.30  | 67.90  | 67.79  | ✘ Worsening |
| CiC 12m+ with Up-to-Date Immunisations         | High    | 87.14     | 84.00    | 90.00  | 88.75  | 87.65  | 85.28  | ✘ Worsening |
| New CiC IHA ≤20 Days (Prev. Month)             | High    |           |          | 95.00  | 20.00  | 6.25   | 37.50  | ✔ Improving |

Health and Emotional Wellbeing

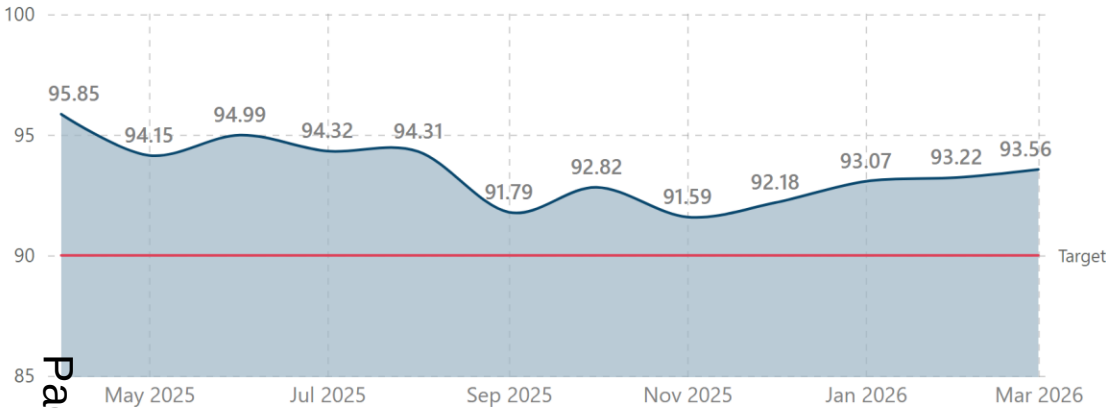
When comparing data in March 2025 to that in March 2026 we have seen a decrease in Dental, Immunisations and Annual Health Assessments, but continue to remain better than national average. Performance regarding initial health assessments continues to be variable throughout the year with the most significant impact on completion timeliness being associated with children living outside of Dorset. We work closely with our health partners to support completion of health assessments and ensure our children’s health needs are known, understood and appropriate support provided. The % of children who have completed a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire continues to be an area of challenge. While this performance indicator is a requirement for the DFE, children continue to have a low opinion of the questionnaire and question how the data is used and where the information goes. We are working with our youth network to explore alternative ways of reporting and understanding the emotional and health needs of our children and young people in care.

# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

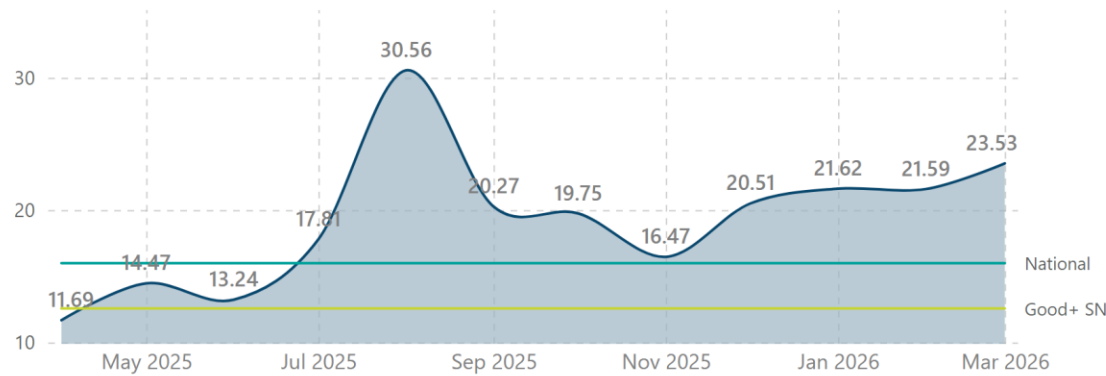
## Settled at Home

March 2026

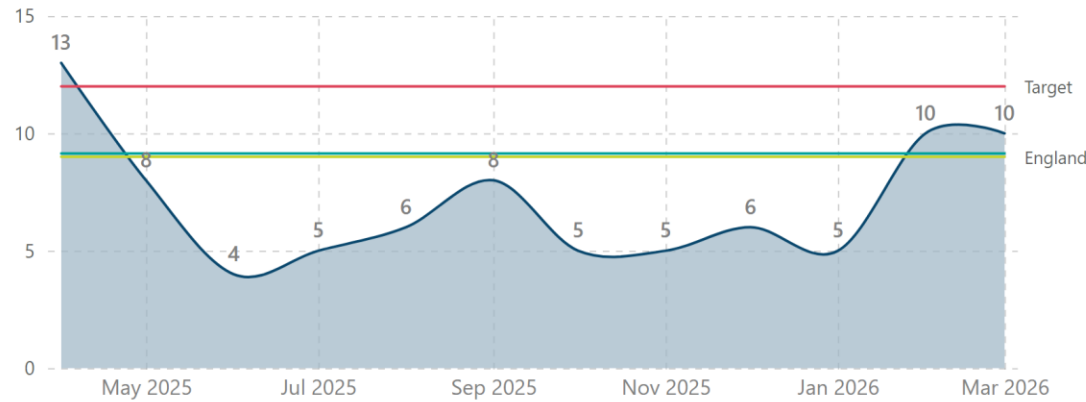
Percentage of Children in Care for four months or more with a completed permanence plan



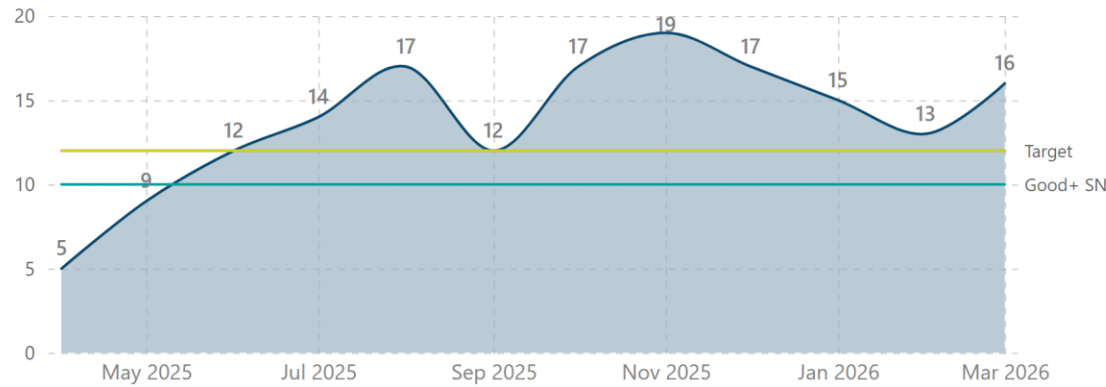
Percentage of children who achieved permanence by returning home to live with parents or relatives (with parental responsibility) (rolling six months)



Percentage of children achieved permanence adoption (rolling six months)



Percentage of children achieved permanence special guardianship order (Rolling six months)



# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

## Settled at Home

March 2026

### Performance Measures & Metrics

| Indicator                                           | Good Is | Good + SN | Eng. Avg | Target | Jan 26 | Feb 26 | Mar 26 | D.O.T       |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| Achieved Permanence – Adoption (Rolling 6m)         | High    | 9.14      | 9.00     | 12.00  | 5.00   | 10.00  | 10.00  | ⚠ Same      |
| Achieved Permanence – SGO (Rolling 6m)              | High    | 10.00     | 12.00    | 12.00  | 15.00  | 13.00  | 16.00  | ✅ Improving |
| Achieved Permanence by Return Home (Rolling 6m)     | High    | 12.57     | 16.00    |        | 21.62  | 21.59  | 23.53  | ✅ Improving |
| CiC 4+ Months with Permanence Plan Completed        | High    |           |          | 90.00  | 93.07  | 93.22  | 93.56  | ✅ Improving |
| LT Fostering Plan & Permanence Achieved (Excl. UC)  | High    |           |          |        | 58.95  | 59.21  | 61.47  | ✅ Improving |
| LT Fostering Plan & Permanence Achieved (Month End) | High    |           |          |        | 53.52  | 54.12  | 55.98  | ✅ Improving |

### Settled at Home

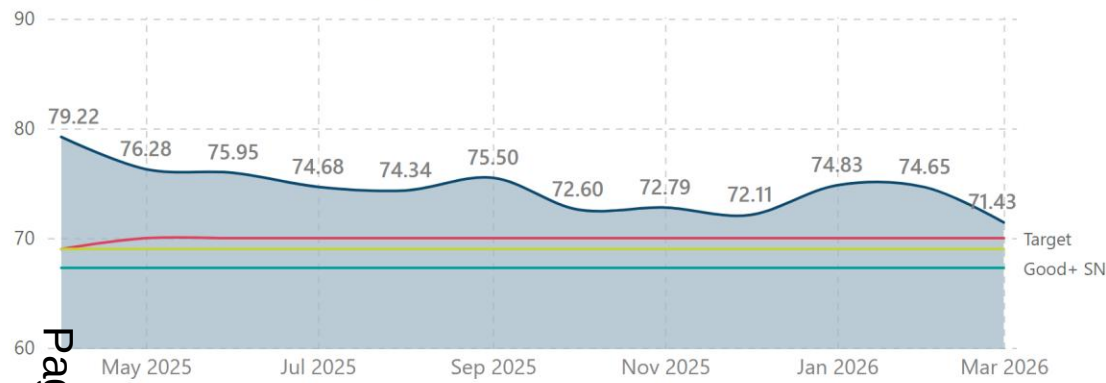
We have seen an increase in the % of children achieving a settled home by returning to the care of their parents or relative with parental responsibility. At the end of March 2026, 24% children achieved permanence by returning to live with their parents' following reunification compared to 16% in March 2025. This is higher than Good+ statistical neighbours and national average. There has been steady progress made over the year in progressing long term matching for children with their foster carers, increasing from 54% in March 25 to 56% in March 26, which represents greater stability and permanence for those who have a plan for long term fostering. A positive impact of our approach to family group decision making and our in house kinship service is the increase in special guardianship orders, with 16% of children leaving care in previous 6 months subject to SGO in March 26, compared to 5% in March 25. We are continuing to develop our Kinship care offer to support carers to consider SGO in achieving permanence for our children. Focus remains on consistency of visiting, clear permanence planning, and timely escalation where needed.

# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

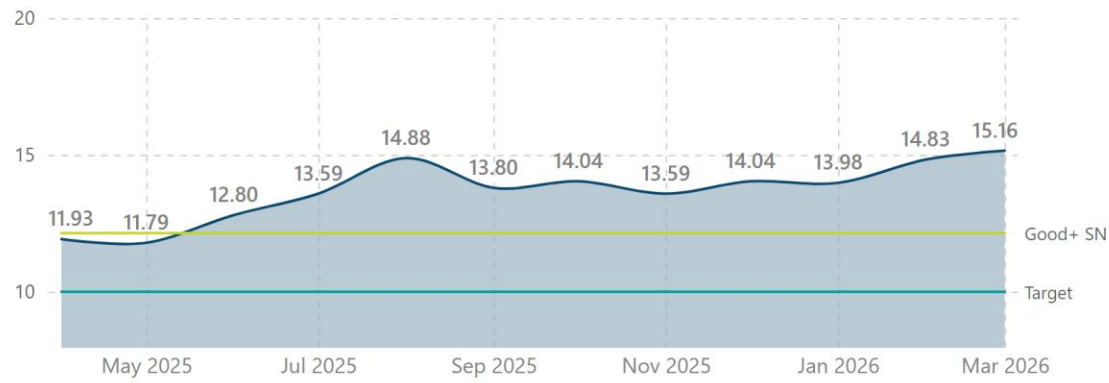
## Homes for Children

March 2026

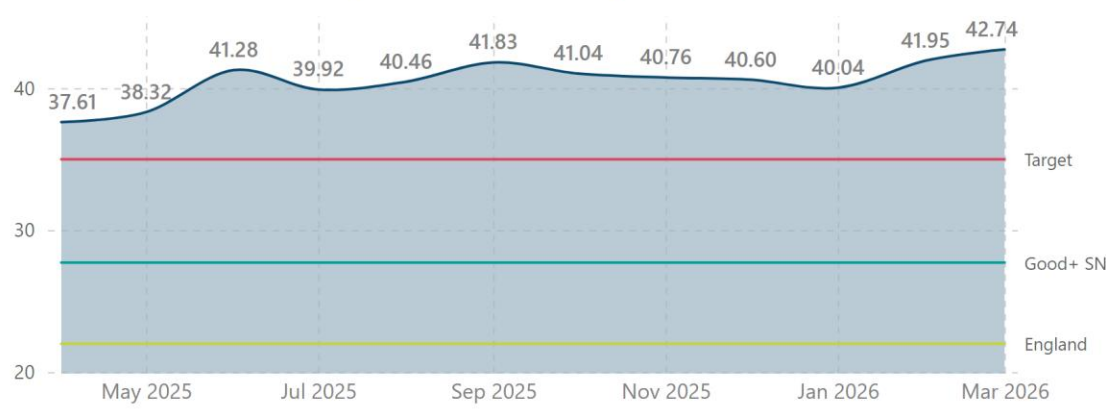
Percentage of Children in Care for two and half years or more, aged under sixteen, who have been in the same home for two or more years



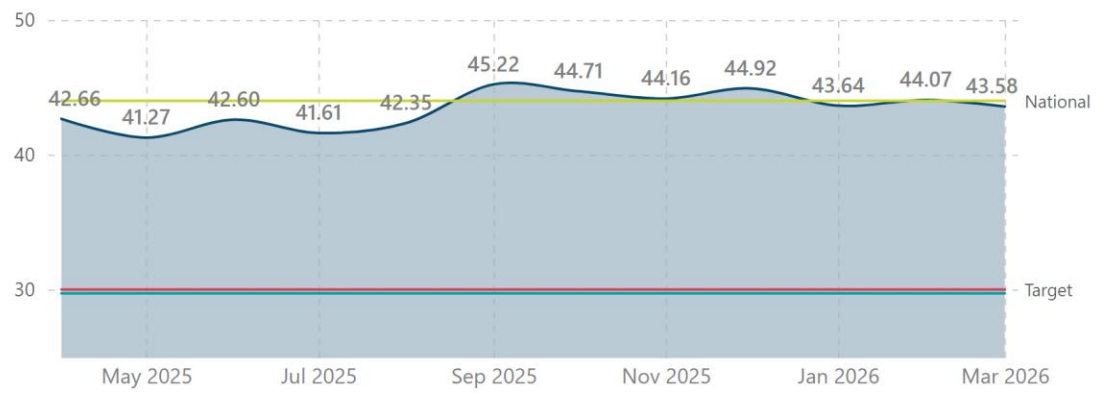
Percentage of Children in Care at month-end with three or more placement moves in the previous twelve months



Percentage of Children in Care placed more than twenty miles from home



Percentage of Children in Care living outside Dorset



# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

## Homes for Children

March 2026

### Performance Measures & Metrics

| Indicator                                               | Good<br>Is | Good<br>+ SN | Eng.<br>Avg | Target | Jan 26 | Feb 26 | Mar 26 | D.O.T       |
|---------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------|-------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| 3+ Moves in Last 12 Months (Month-End)                  | Low        | 12.14        | 10.00       | 10.00  | 13.98  | 14.83  | 15.16  | ✗ Worsening |
| In Foster Home – Percentage                             | High       | 55.71        | 67.00       | 71.00  | 69.92  | 70.55  | 70.53  | ✗ Worsening |
| In Private Provision – Percentage                       | Low        | 33.43        | 40.00       |        | 41.53  | 43.22  | 42.95  | ✓ Improving |
| In Private Provision – Percentage (Excl. UC)            | Low        |              |             |        | 36.21  | 37.76  | 37.50  | ✓ Improving |
| Living Outside Dorset – Percentage                      | Low        | 29.71        | 44.00       | 30.00  | 43.64  | 44.07  | 43.58  | ✓ Improving |
| Living Outside Dorset – Percentage (Excl. UC)           | Low        |              |             | 30.00  | 39.25  | 39.39  | 38.89  | ✓ Improving |
| Over 20 Miles from Home (Excl. UC)                      | Low        |              |             | 35.00  | 42.29  | 43.82  | 44.68  | ✗ Worsening |
| Placed with Parents                                     | -          |              |             |        | 22.00  | 19.00  | 19.00  |             |
| Under 16, 2.5 Years in Care, Same Home ≥2 Years         | High       | 67.29        | 69.00       | 70.00  | 74.83  | 74.65  | 71.43  | ✗ Worsening |
| Unregulated Placements (P2/R1/H5 pre-Nov-2023)          | Low        |              |             | 10.00  |        |        |        |             |
| Unregulated Placements (P2/R1/H5 pre-Nov-2023, Excl UC) | Low        |              |             |        | 0.00   | 0.00   | 0.00   | ⚠ Same      |

### Homes for Children

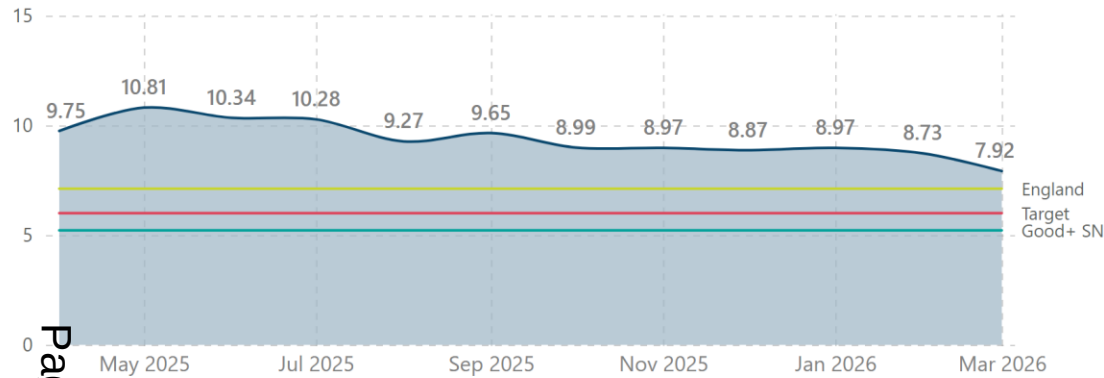
Stability of homes for children has remained a key strength across this period, with most children remaining settled in their homes. It is positive to note the increase in the % of children living in foster care. This is reflected in an increase in both the number of children living in mainstream (133) and kinship foster care (73). The % of children who have been in care over 2.5 years and are settled being with the same carer for 2 years or more remains above national average and good +stat neighbours. However, we have seen an increase in the number of children who experienced three or more moves within 12 months, this is primarily linked to sufficiency of foster carers to provide longer term care, with a small number of children experiencing multiple moves in a short space of time while we identify a suitable longer term home. Quality assurance arrangements continue to provide strong oversight of practice within homes. Regular monitoring visits, management oversight, and reflective practice forums have supported consistent standards of care, with a clear focus on children's emotional wellbeing, safety, and development. Feedback from children and independent visitors indicates that children generally feel safe, supported, and listened to within their homes.

# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

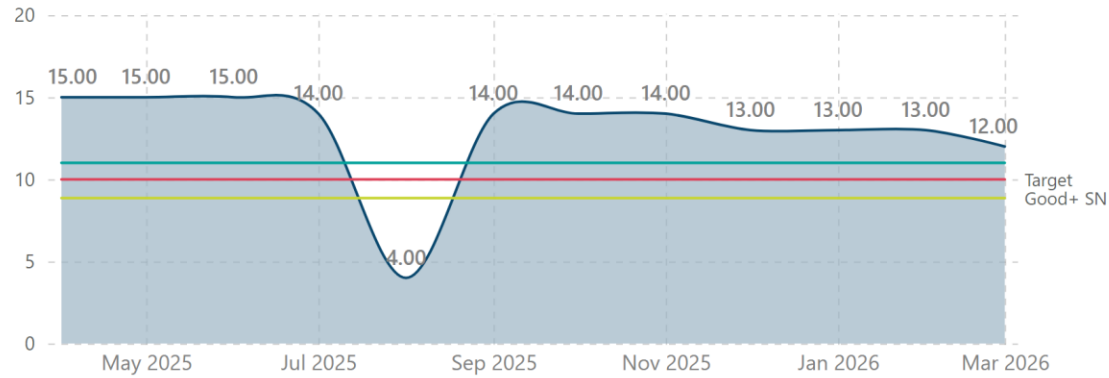
## Safety

March 2026

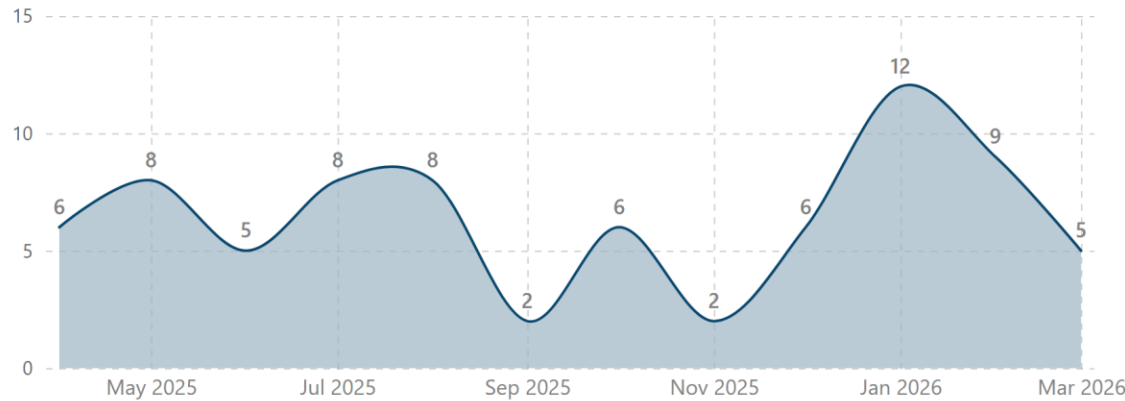
Percentage of Children in Care (at any point in the last 6 months) who have had more than one episode of missing (Annex A)



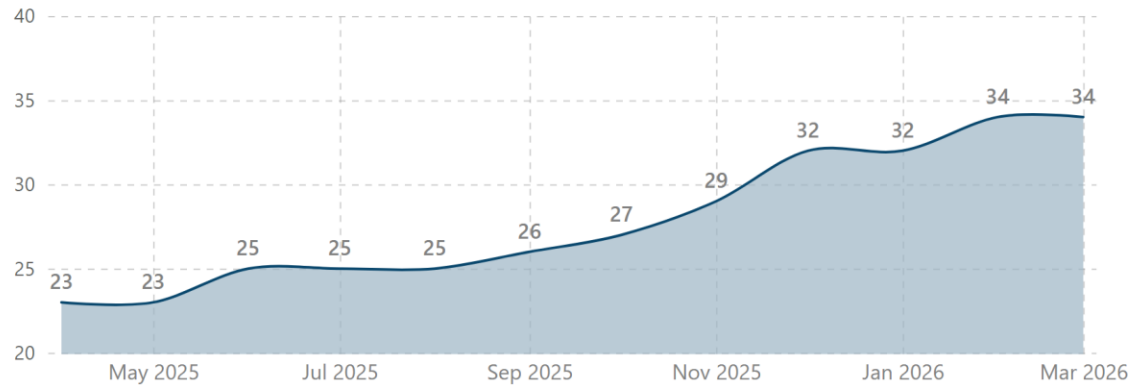
Percentage of Children in Care (at any point in the last six months) with a least one missing episode in the last 12 months (Annex A)



Number of formal independent reviewing officer (IRO) escalations



Total number of allegations made against Dorset Foster Carers in the last twelve months



# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

## Safety

March 2026

### Performance Measures & Metrics

| Indicator                                                   | Good Is | Good + SN | Eng. Avg | Target | Jan 26 | Feb 26 | Mar 26 | D.O.T       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| CiC with >1 Missing Episode (Any point last 6m) – (Annex A) | Low     | 5.22      | 7.11     | 6.00   | 8.97   | 8.73   | 7.92   | ✓ Improving |
| CiC with ≥1 Missing Episode in last 12m – (Annex A)         | Low     | 8.86      | 11.00    | 10.00  | 13.00  | 13.00  | 12.00  | ✓ Improving |
| IRO Escalations – Closed – Number                           | -       |           |          |        | 20.00  | 19.00  | 20.00  |             |
| IRO Escalations – Formal – Number                           | High    |           |          |        | 12.00  | 9.00   | 5.00   | ✗ Worsening |
| IRO Escalations – Informal – Number                         | High    |           |          |        | 2.00   | 7.00   | 4.00   | ✗ Worsening |

Page 31

### Safety

Children in care benefit from strong multi-agency working with health, education, police, and youth work. This supports timely responses to concerns such as exploitation, missing episodes, or emotional wellbeing needs.

Information-sharing and joint planning help ensure children are protected across all aspects of their lives. Children's voices are central to safeguarding. We have seen a reduction in children in care who are reported missing from 10% over the previous 6 months in March 25 to 7.92% in March 26 which is slightly above national average of 7.11%. Feedback from children, advocates, and participation activities informs service improvement and helps strengthen safety arrangements. The Coram Voice survey for children in care identified that 92% of children reported that they always felt safe in the home they live in now & all children 4-11 years old and all but 1 12-17-year-old trusted the adults they lived with. Where children raise concerns, these are taken seriously and acted upon swiftly. Foster carers and residential staff receive ongoing training in safeguarding, trauma-informed care, and managing risk, supported by regular supervision. This ensures carers feel confident and equipped to keep children safe while providing nurturing and consistent care. IROs use pre escalations to informally challenge and strengthen practice, often this doesn't lead to a formal escalation where it is resolved. IROs will use formal escalations to progress more complex issues, over the year this has varied but has seen an increase over Q.4. Escalations are encouraged as our IRO's provide challenge and support with addressing any issues in a timely way for our children.

# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

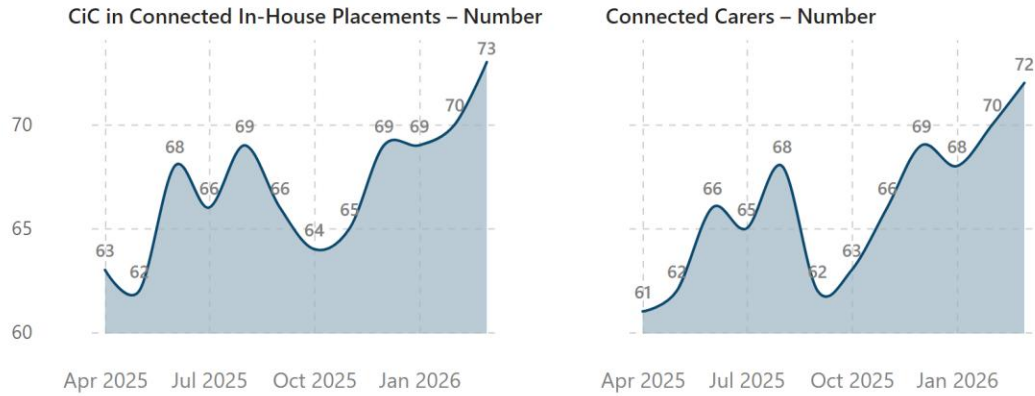
## Sufficiency

March 2026

Total number of new households recruited



In house connected carers



In house mainstream foster carers



Mainstream fostering utilisation rate



# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

## Sufficiency

March 2026

### Performance Measures & Metrics

| Indicator                                           | Good<br>Is | Good<br>+ SN | Eng.<br>Avg | Target | Jan 26 | Feb 26 | Mar 26 | D.O.T       |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------|-------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| Applicants in Assessment – Connected Person         | High       |              |             |        | 23.00  |        |        |             |
| Applicants in Assessment – Mainstream               | High       |              |             |        | 10.00  |        |        |             |
| CiC in Connected In-House Placements – Number       | -          |              |             |        | 69.00  | 70.00  | 73.00  |             |
| CiC in Mainstream In-House Placements – Number      | High       |              |             |        | 136.00 | 132.00 | 133.00 | ✓ Improving |
| Connected Carers – Number                           | High       |              |             |        | 68.00  | 70.00  | 72.00  | ✓ Improving |
| Foster Carer Visits Up to Date (Excl. FTA) – %      | High       |              |             | 85.00  | 84.86  | 76.60  | 74.21  | ✗ Worsening |
| Foster Carers – Month End                           | High       |              |             | 200.00 | 187.00 | 188.00 | 190.00 | ✓ Improving |
| Fostering Utilisation – Mainstream                  | High       |              |             | 1.30   | 1.14   | 1.15   | 1.05   | ✗ Worsening |
| Households Deregistered/Resigned – Connected Carers | Low        |              |             |        | 3.00   | 1.00   | 1.00   | ! Same      |
| Households Deregistered/Resigned – Foster to Adopt  | Low        |              |             |        | 0.00   | 2.00   | 0.00   | ✓ Improving |
| Households Deregistered/Resigned – Mainstream       | Low        |              |             | 1.00   | 0.00   | 0.00   | 2.00   | ✗ Worsening |
| Households Deregistered/Resigned – Temporary        | Low        |              |             |        | 0.00   | 0.00   | 0.00   | ! Same      |
| Mainstream Carers – Number                          | High       |              |             | 138.00 | 115.00 | 115.00 | 114.00 | ✗ Worsening |
| New Households Recruited – Connected Person         | High       |              |             |        | 0.00   | 0.00   | 0.00   | ! Same      |
| New Households Recruited – Foster to Adopt          | High       |              |             |        | 0.00   | 0.00   | 0.00   | ! Same      |
| New Households Recruited – Mainstream               | High       |              |             | 2.00   | 0.00   | 0.00   | 0.00   | ! Same      |
| New Households Recruited – Temporary                | High       |              |             |        | 1.00   | 3.00   | 4.00   | ✓ Improving |

### Sufficiency

There has been a continued increase in the number of approved foster carers, although primarily this increase relates to connected carers. There has been continued focus on marketing and recruitment to fostering, and we have positively seen an increase in initial enquiries in Q4. Dorset currently supports 206 children within fostering arrangements, demonstrating the central role fostering continues to play within the wider placement sufficiency strategy. There has been a continuing increase in kinship arrangements, strengthening the overall sufficiency offer. More children are being supported to remain within their family networks where it is safe and appropriate to do so, promoting stability, identity, and emotional wellbeing. The growth in kinship care has also contributed positively to placement sufficiency by reducing reliance on external provision. The Harbour multi-disciplinary team has grown steadily under consistent and committed leadership. The Harbour offers a combination of outreach, fostering and residential children's homes. All children's homes have been inspected and are graded as Good or Outstanding. The % of children living outside Dorset, has remained the same compared between March 2025 and March 2026 and is similar to national average, although above good+ stat neighbours. The % of children, excluding unaccompanied children, living more than 20 miles away from home has increased from 41% in March 2024 to 44% in March 2025. We know there are still too many children who live too far away from their home and continue to work with determination to increase the number of local foster carers so that our children are able to maintain their links with friends, education and their local community more easily. Overall, performance over Q4 demonstrates positive progress in fostering sufficiency, with a clearer alignment between capacity, demand, and quality of care for children in Dorset.



**Dorset**  
Council

# **Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report**

## **Appendix**

## Appendix A

This appendix summarises six months of Corporate Parenting KPIs, including targets, 'Good+' benchmarks and England averages to enable robust comparison. It also captures each indicator's latest direction of travel and provides totals for trend categories and RAG ratings to give a concise performance overview.

| Indicator                                                      | Good Is | Good + SN | Eng. Avg | Target | Jan 26 | Feb 26 | Mar 26 | D.O.T       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| Achieved Permanence by Return Home (Rolling 6m)                | High    | 12.57     | 16.00    |        | 21.62  | 21.59  | 23.53  | 🟢 Improving |
| Allocated Children (Open >4 Weeks) with Supervision in 8 Weeks | High    |           |          | 90.00  | 90.52  | 93.36  | 88.35  | 🔴 Worsening |
| Became CiC (Excl. UC)                                          | Low     |           |          | 10.00  | 13.00  | 15.00  | 10.00  | 🟢 Improving |
| Became CiC (Month)                                             | Low     |           |          | 10.00  | 16.00  | 16.00  | 11.00  | 🟢 Improving |
| Ceased to be CiC (Month)                                       | High    |           |          | 13.00  | 8.00   | 13.00  | 8.00   | 🔴 Worsening |
| Children & Young People Supported by Advocate (CP)             | -       |           |          |        | 11.00  | 29.00  | 21.00  |             |
| CiC 4+ Months with Permanence Plan Completed                   | High    |           |          | 90.00  | 93.07  | 93.22  | 93.56  | 🟢 Improving |
| CiC at Month End                                               | Low     |           |          | 420.00 | 472.00 | 472.00 | 475.00 | 🔴 Worsening |
| CiC Rate at Month End                                          | Low     | 66.00     | 67.00    | 68.00  | 70.29  | 70.29  | 70.74  | 🔴 Worsening |
| LT Fostering Plan & Permanence Achieved (Excl. UC)             | High    |           |          |        | 58.95  | 59.21  | 61.47  | 🟢 Improving |
| LT Fostering Plan & Permanence Achieved (Month End)            | High    |           |          |        | 53.52  | 54.12  | 55.98  | 🟢 Improving |
| Placed with Parents                                            | -       |           |          |        | 22.00  | 19.00  | 19.00  |             |
| UC at Month End                                                | -       |           |          |        | 44.00  | 43.00  | 43.00  |             |
| UC Share of CiC                                                | -       | 6.86      | 8.00     |        | 9.32   | 9.11   | 9.05   |             |

Appendix B

This appendix summarises six months of Corporate Parenting KPIs, including targets, 'Good+' benchmarks and England averages to enable robust comparison. It also captures each indicator's latest direction of travel and provides totals for trend categories and RAG ratings to give a concise performance overview.

| Indicator                                              | Good Is | Good + SN | Eng. Avg | Target | Jan 26 | Feb 26 | Mar 26 | D.O.T       |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| 3+ Moves in Last 12 Months (Month-End)                 | Low     | 12.14     | 10.00    | 10.00  | 13.98  | 14.83  | 15.16  | ⊗ Worsening |
| CiC (40 WD in Care) with Valid Passport at Last Review | High    |           |          |        | 40.00  | 40.00  | 38.94  | ⊗ Worsening |
| CiC 12m+ Average SDQ Score (Age 4–16)                  | Low     | 15.80     | 14.90    | 14.70  | 16.00  | 16.29  | 15.89  | ⊙ Improving |
| CiC 12m+ SDQ Completed (Age 4–16)                      | High    | 80.14     | 78.00    | 75.00  | 52.05  | 47.42  | 50.34  | ⊙ Improving |
| CiC 12m+ with Up-to-Date Immunisations                 | High    | 87.14     | 84.00    | 90.00  | 88.75  | 87.65  | 85.28  | ⊗ Worsening |
| EET – % (CiC & Care Leavers, 16–18; Y12–Y13)           | High    |           |          | 72.00  | 76.40  | 76.40  | 76.25  | ⊗ Worsening |
| In Foster Home – Percentage                            | High    | 55.71     | 67.00    | 71.00  | 69.92  | 70.55  | 70.53  | ⊗ Worsening |
| In Private Provision – Percentage                      | Low     | 33.43     | 40.00    |        | 41.53  | 43.22  | 42.95  | ⊙ Improving |
| In Private Provision – Percentage (Excl. UC)           | Low     |           |          |        | 36.21  | 37.76  | 37.50  | ⊙ Improving |
| New CiC IHA ≤20 Days (Prev. Month)                     | High    |           |          | 95.00  | 20.00  | 6.25   | 37.50  | ⊙ Improving |
| Over 20 Miles from Home (Excl. UC)                     | Low     |           |          | 35.00  | 42.29  | 43.82  | 44.68  | ⊗ Worsening |
| Valid Passport at Last Review (Excl. UASC)             | High    |           |          |        | 44.44  | 44.26  | 43.20  | ⊗ Worsening |

Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

Appendix C

March 2026

This appendix summarises six months of Corporate Parenting KPIs, including targets, 'Good+' benchmarks and England averages to enable robust comparison. It also captures each indicator's latest direction of travel and provides totals for trend categories and RAG ratings to give a concise performance overview.

| Indicator                                                   | Good Is | Good + SN | Eng. Avg | Target | Jan 26 | Feb 26 | Mar 26 | D.O.T       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| Bed & Breakfast – Number (Active 17–25)                     | Low     |           |          | 0.00   | 1.00   | 0.00   | 0.00   | ⚠ Same      |
| CiC 12m+ with Annual Health Assessment On Time              | High    | 87.14     | 90.00    | 90.00  | 87.54  | 85.80  | 83.74  | ✖ Worsening |
| CiC 12m+ with Dental Check ≤12 Months                       | High    | 77.29     | 81.00    | 85.00  | 69.30  | 67.90  | 67.79  | ✖ Worsening |
| CiC with >1 Missing Episode (Any point last 6m) – (Annex A) | Low     | 5.22      | 7.11     | 6.00   | 8.97   | 8.73   | 7.92   | ✔ Improving |
| Days: Enter Care → Move-In (Adjusted) (Avg)                 | Low     | 406.85    | 475.48   | 426.00 | 324.00 | 336.00 | 334.00 | ✔ Improving |
| Days: Placement Order → Match (Avg)                         | Low     | 204.46    | 204.68   | 121.00 | 160.00 | 166.00 | 161.00 | ✔ Improving |
| EET (19-21) – Percentage (OC3)                              | High    | 54.00     | 54.00    |        |        |        | 58.80  | ✖ Worsening |
| Foster Carers – Month End                                   | High    |           |          | 200.00 | 187.00 | 188.00 | 190.00 | ✔ Improving |
| Health Passports Completed – Number (2m Arrears)            | -       |           |          |        | 6.00   | 10.00  |        |             |
| Health Passports Due – Number (2m Arrears)                  | -       |           |          |        | 6.00   | 10.00  |        |             |
| Living Outside Dorset – Percentage                          | Low     | 29.71     | 44.00    | 30.00  | 43.64  | 44.07  | 43.58  | ✔ Improving |
| Living Outside Dorset – Percentage (Excl. UC)               | Low     |           |          | 30.00  | 39.25  | 39.39  | 38.89  | ✔ Improving |
| Unregulated Placements (P2/R1/H5 pre-Nov-2023)              | Low     |           |          | 10.00  |        |        |        |             |
| Unregulated Placements (P2/R1/H5 pre-Nov-2023, Excl. UC)    | Low     |           |          |        | 0.00   | 0.00   | 0.00   | ⚠ Same      |
| Unsuitable Accommodation – Number (Active 17–25)            | Low     |           |          | 11.00  | 7.00   | 5.00   | 6.00   | ✖ Worsening |

# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

March 2026

## Appendix D

This appendix summarises six months of Corporate Parenting KPIs, including targets, 'Good+' benchmarks and England averages to enable robust comparison. It also captures each indicator's latest direction of travel and provides totals for trend categories and RAG ratings to give a concise performance overview.

| Indicator                                           | Good Is | Good + SN | Eng. Avg | Target | Jan 26 | Feb 26 | Mar 26 | D.O.T       |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| Achieved Permanence – Adoption (Rolling 6m)         | High    | 9.14      | 9.00     | 12.00  | 5.00   | 10.00  | 10.00  | ⚠ Same      |
| Achieved Permanence – SGO (Rolling 6m)              | High    | 10.00     | 12.00    | 12.00  | 15.00  | 13.00  | 16.00  | ✅ Improving |
| Adopted (Last 12m)                                  | High    |           |          |        | 13.00  | 15.00  | 16.00  | ✅ Improving |
| Adoptive Families Approved (ADM)                    | High    |           |          |        | 2.00   | 1.00   | 0.00   | ❌ Worsening |
| Adoptive Families in Assessment                     | High    |           |          |        | 9.00   | 12.00  | 15.00  | ✅ Improving |
| CiC in Mainstream In-House Placements – Number      | High    |           |          |        | 136.00 | 132.00 | 133.00 | ✅ Improving |
| CiC with ≥1 Missing Episode in last 12m – (Annex A) | Low     | 8.86      | 11.00    | 10.00  | 13.00  | 13.00  | 12.00  | ✅ Improving |
| Connected Carers – Number                           | High    |           |          |        | 68.00  | 70.00  | 72.00  | ✅ Improving |
| EET – Percentage (Active 19–21)                     | High    |           |          | 60.00  | 67.00  | 67.00  | 69.00  | ✅ Improving |
| Foster Carer Visits Up to Date (Excl. FTA) – %      | High    |           |          | 85.00  | 84.86  | 76.60  | 74.21  | ❌ Worsening |
| In Touch – Active (19–21)                           | High    |           |          | 93.00  | 97.00  | 93.00  | 94.00  | ✅ Improving |
| Mainstream Carers – Number                          | High    |           |          | 138.00 | 115.00 | 115.00 | 114.00 | ❌ Worsening |
| NEET – % (CiC & Care Leavers, 16–18; Y12–Y13)       | Low     |           |          | 28.00  | 23.60  | 23.60  | 23.75  | ❌ Worsening |
| Pathway Plan Up-to-Date – (Active 17–25)            | High    |           |          | 95.00  | 97.48  | 95.28  | 96.55  | ✅ Improving |
| PEP Within 20 Days of Entering Care – %             | High    |           |          | 100.00 |        |        | 100.00 | ✅ Improving |
| Placement Order Revocations (Last 12m) - Number     | Low     |           |          |        | 3.00   | 5.00   | 5.00   | ⚠ Same      |
| Suitable Accommodation – (19–21)                    | High    |           |          | 96.00  | 97.00  | 98.00  | 98.00  | ⚠ Same      |
| Termly PEP Completed on Time – %                    | High    |           |          | 96.00  |        |        | 94.00  | ✅ Improving |

# Corporate Parenting Board Performance Report

## Appendix E

March 2026

This appendix summarises six months of Corporate Parenting KPIs, including targets, 'Good+' benchmarks and England averages to enable robust comparison. It also captures each indicator's latest direction of travel and provides totals for trend categories and RAG ratings to give a concise performance overview.

| Indicator                                           | Good Is | Good + SN | Eng. Avg | Target | Jan 26 | Feb 26 | Mar 26 | D.O.T       |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| Applicants in Assessment – Connected Person         | High    |           |          |        | 23.00  |        |        |             |
| Applicants in Assessment – Mainstream               | High    |           |          |        | 10.00  |        |        |             |
| Average Attendance – AYTD – % (School-Aged CiC)     | High    |           |          | 95.00  | 88.28  | 88.20  | 87.84  | ✖ Worsening |
| CiC in Connected In-House Placements – Number       | -       |           |          |        | 69.00  | 70.00  | 73.00  |             |
| CiC with EHCP – %                                   | -       |           |          |        | 36.10  | 35.45  | 36.89  |             |
| Fostering Utilisation – Mainstream                  | High    |           |          | 1.30   | 1.14   | 1.15   | 1.05   | ✖ Worsening |
| Households Deregistered/Resigned – Connected Carers | Low     |           |          |        | 3.00   | 1.00   | 1.00   | ⚠ Same      |
| Households Deregistered/Resigned – Foster to Adopt  | Low     |           |          |        | 0.00   | 2.00   | 0.00   | ✔ Improving |
| Households Deregistered/Resigned – Mainstream       | Low     |           |          | 1.00   | 0.00   | 0.00   | 2.00   | ✖ Worsening |
| Households Deregistered/Resigned – Temporary        | Low     |           |          |        | 0.00   | 0.00   | 0.00   | ⚠ Same      |
| IRO Escalations – Closed – Number                   | -       |           |          |        | 20.00  | 19.00  | 20.00  |             |
| IRO Escalations – Formal – Number                   | High    |           |          |        | 12.00  | 9.00   | 5.00   | ✖ Worsening |
| IRO Escalations – Informal – Number                 | High    |           |          |        | 2.00   | 7.00   | 4.00   | ✖ Worsening |
| New Households Recruited – Connected Person         | High    |           |          |        | 0.00   | 0.00   | 0.00   | ⚠ Same      |
| New Households Recruited – Foster to Adopt          | High    |           |          |        | 0.00   | 0.00   | 0.00   | ⚠ Same      |
| New Households Recruited – Mainstream               | High    |           |          | 2.00   | 0.00   | 0.00   | 0.00   | ⚠ Same      |
| New Households Recruited – Temporary                | High    |           |          |        | 1.00   | 3.00   | 4.00   | ✔ Improving |
| Suspended ≥1 (AYTD) – % (School-Aged CiC)           | Low     |           |          |        | 9.83   | 9.90   | 10.00  | ✖ Worsening |



Working together | ambitious for **Dorset**

## Corporate Parenting Board

29 May 2025

## Corporate Parenting Board- Annual Report For Review and Consultation

### Cabinet Member:

Cllr C Sutton, Children, Families & Education

### Local Councillor(s):

### Senior Leadership Team:

P Dempsey - Executive Director, Children's Services

### Report author and job title: Louise Drury, Head of Service

Email: [louise.drury@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:louise.drury@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)

### Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public Choose an item.

### 1. Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)

- 1.1 The Corporate Parenting Board includes Members of the Council who come together with officers, young people and relevant partner agencies to offer challenge and support to services for children in our care and for our care leavers. There is arguably no greater responsibility for Members than as corporate parents: to ensure that the care and support given to children and young people in the care of the authority and to those leaving our care, is as we would expect to be given to our own children.

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

### 2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Members of Corporate Parenting Board are requested to note the content of this report which captures the work of the Board over the last financial year

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

### 3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**

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

### 4. **The report**

- 4.1 This has been a very busy year, and we can see a number of positive developments:

- Continued to embed Corporate Parenting Partnership Delivery Group action plan against priorities identified by children and young people through the 'Bright Spots' programme and Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024 -2027
- Strengthened both the recruitment and retention of foster carers
- Strengthened the kinship care offer
- Expanded and registered Supported Lodgings
- Increased housing options for our care leavers
- Strengthened our offer for care leavers who are parents
- Registered The Rowans children's home in the east of Dorset and developed plans for a further short break home for children who are disabled in the west of Dorset
- All our children's homes inspected and graded 'Good' or 'Outstanding'
- Continued to work with children and young people through Dorset Youth Voice and The Network and created better and safer spaces to engage in
- Alongside our health colleagues worked together to improve health outcomes for our children
- Dorset Virtual School are working with schools to introduce Virtual Reality training which has evidenced short term impact reducing suspensions. Training is being adapted to focus on three whole school teams so that all staff have access to training and impact is felt more widely
- Worked with colleagues from Aspire to strengthen the recruitment of adopters

#### **Corporate Parenting Strategy.**

Having launched Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024- 2027 in June 2024, we have continued to publish Annual Reports in November and May and met at least 6 times in the financial year to ensure we're making the best impact against our priorities.

Our informal corporate parenting boards have been improved and authenticated by working alongside young people in a workshop environment centred around the pillars of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

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

| Indicator                                                                       | Mar-25 | Mar-26 | Good +Stat Neighbours | National Average | Direction of travel 25/26 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|-----------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| No. children in care                                                            | 435    | 475    |                       |                  | ↑                         |
| No. unaccompanied children                                                      | 41     | 43     |                       |                  | ↓                         |
| Rate of children in care per 10,000 children                                    | 66     | 71     | 71                    | 70               | ↑                         |
| % children seen in 6 weeks                                                      | 78%    | 75%    |                       |                  | ↓                         |
| % children living in foster care                                                | 70%    | 71%    | 67%                   | 67%              | ↑                         |
| % children living with Dorset carers                                            | 47%    | 45%    | 41%                   | 43%              | ↑                         |
| % children living outside Dorset                                                | 43%    | 43%    | 33%                   | 45%              | ↔                         |
| % children settled for 2.5yrs                                                   | 78%    | 71%    | 68%                   | 68%              | ↓                         |
| % permanence achieved through adoption                                          | 10%    |        | 13%                   | 9%               | ↑                         |
| Dental                                                                          | 81%    | 68%    | 77%                   | 79%              | ↓                         |
| Immunisations                                                                   | 91%    | 85%    | 86%                   | 82%              | ↓                         |
| Annual health assessment                                                        | 90%    | 84%    | 89%                   | 84%              | ↓                         |
| Initial health assessments*                                                     | 33%    | 38%    |                       |                  | ↑                         |
| % children who have completed a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)* | 53%    | 50%    | 68%                   | 77%              | ↓                         |
| Average SDQ score*                                                              | 15     | 15     | 15                    | 15               | ↔                         |
| % children with a missing episode                                               | 15%    | 12%    | 10%                   | 11%              | ↓                         |
| No.children entering criminal justice system for the first time                 | 3      | 4      |                       |                  | ↑                         |
| % children who have been permanently excluded from school*                      | 0      | 0      |                       |                  | ↔                         |
| % children missing education*                                                   | 3%     | 2%     |                       |                  | ↓                         |
| No. young people eligible to receive leaving care services                      | 558    | 557    |                       |                  | ↓                         |
| In touch with young people                                                      | 99%    | 99%    | 95%                   | 92%              | ↔                         |
| % young people in suitable accommodation (19-21yrs)                             | 96%    | 96%    | 91%                   | 88%              | ↓                         |
| Number of young people in bed & breakfast                                       | 3      | 0      |                       |                  | ↔                         |
| % young people in education employment and training (19-21 yrs)                 | 68%    | 69%    | 57%                   | 54%              | ↑                         |

We have worked collaboratively to:

- Develop a strong Corporate Parenting Board

- Create safe spaces for children and young people with youth voice to come together with Corporate Parenting Board members to hear, listen to and act upon feedback from children and young people.
- Embedded a Corporate Parenting Partnership Delivery Group (CPPDG) to operationalise the Corporate Parenting Strategy and Dorset Promise and co-ordinate the delivery of The Corporate Parenting Partnership Delivery Plan (CPPDP).
- Increase the number of homes for our children and young people by developing new children's homes across Dorset, increase the number of fostering households and homes for care leavers.
- Embed a dedicated Kinship Service, for special guardians and connected carers that recognises the unique needs of Kinship Carers
- Through our Corporate Partnerships we have supported 13 young people to secure employment.
- Ensure all Dorset children's homes are 'Good or 'Outstanding'.
- Partner with 'Coram' to participate in their 'Bright Spots' programme, increasing the reach and depth of hearing feedback from children and young people.
- Embed Mind of My Own to hear young people's voices

Throughout 2025-2026, the Corporate Parenting Board has considered progress against the priorities of The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024 – 2027. The following provides an update on some of the key areas of discussion by the board in this reporting period and highlights positive areas of development.

### **Our children and young people.**

Between end of March 2025 – end of March 2026 our total child in care population has increased from 435 to 475. Our local child in care population has also increased from 394 to 432. As of end of March 2026, we were actively working with 319 care leavers compared to 300 last year. We have a total of 557 care leavers, a decrease of 1 from March 2025.

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

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

Our children in care have taken part in a second 'Your Life Beyond Care' Coram Voice survey which closed in April 2025. 47% young people took part in the survey this year compared to 38% in the 2022 – 23. Results were presented to young people, carers and the wider partnership at an event at Carey Camp on 30th October 2025.

We continue to work with young people through The Network and partners to ensure that the CPPDG Plan is agile and informed by views which are captured through these surveys. The delivery of the CPPDG plan and actions from workshops has the scrutiny of young people and board members at our informal Corporate Parenting Board meetings.

These comprehensive surveys have given us insights across several areas:

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

Dorset Council have committed to run the Bright Spots Programme every 2 years. The next survey will be a third 'Your Life Beyond Care' survey in 2026.

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

The governance arrangements of Corporate Parenting Board having 4 informal Boards and 2 formal Boards continues to enable increased participation from young people. Feedback from young people attending informal boards which are arranged thematically in relation to The Dorset Promise and Corporate Parenting Strategy are increasingly positive and evidence impact of our children's voices.

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

- Identity – Ask me what matters – 20th March 2025
- Safe and Settled – Language that carers and friendships – 11th September 2025
- Education and Employment – Belonging in school and education - 29th January 2026
- Physical and Mental Health – Appearance – 12th March 2026

- Physical and Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing – supporting our children and young people’s physical and mental health

Corporate Parenting Board receives an annual report in addition to regular input to its meetings from designated professionals who work to provide services to children in care.

There are good working relationships between children’s social care managers, the Children in Care Health Service and NHS Dorset, with all partners committed to improving health outcomes for children in care.

When comparing data in March 2025 to that in March 2026 we have seen a decrease this month compared to this time last year in Dental, Immunisations and Annual Health Assessments, but continue to remain better than national average for in all other than Dental.

Performance regarding initial health assessments continues to be variable throughout the year with the most significant impact on completion timeliness being associated with children placed outside of Dorset. NHS England is aware of this and has commissioned a dataset to address some of the variations in areas.

The % of children who have completed a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire continues to be an area of challenge. While this performance indicator is a requirement for the DFE, children continue to have a low opinion of the questionnaire and question how the data is used and where the information goes. Over the last year Dorset Council have been working with Valuing Care, developing profiles of children to ensure better matching to the people and homes that care for them. This is experienced by children and young people and professionals as a much more accurate and effective way to describe children’s needs and therefore further thought is being given as to what next steps are to be taken to present this to the DFE as an alternative to SDQ questionnaires.

At the thematic workshop on Physical and Mental Health on 12th March 2026 members of the Corporate Parenting Board worked together in small working groups and held discussions on the following areas:

- Does the service respect the privacy of those in care the way it should do & how can we give children more privacy?
- What can be done to make NHS settings safer spaces for those with care experience?

- What can we change in the way we do things to prevent children in care becoming lonely when they are older & what can be done to help care leavers who are lonely now?
- How are we making sure our young people are ready to live on their own & is our expectation right?

From the discussions, actions have been identified and added to the Corporate Parenting Partnership Delivery Group Action Plan to take forward with a clearly identified feedback loop of 'You said, We did together' for children and young people.

Core CAMHS prioritises access for children in care, offering a 24-hour response for urgent referrals and an 8-week response for all other referrals. The children and young people Mental Health strategy is being revised as part of the children and young people mental health transformation.

We continue to identify better ways of working together and value the opportunities to embed clinical colleagues within integrated services such as Harbour, to ensure emotional wellbeing and mental health needs of our children are better understood and services are better organised to respond to their needs.

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

The purpose of the Virtual School is to raise the educational achievement of children in care, promote their emotional wellbeing and improve their life chances as a more vulnerable group. The Corporate Parenting Board receives an annual report from the Head of The Virtual School each year.

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

- 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 6
- 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

From the Virtual School Annual Report 2025, Board members noted that Dorset Virtual School continues to develop creative approaches to supporting children both educationally and in wider enrichment opportunities to raise aspiration and ambition. The Virtual School extends its reach beyond education settings to support the wider development of children and young people through arts participation, sport, cultural and leisure activities that enable children and young people to develop skills and interests beyond formal education.

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

The Virtual School has a strong focus on celebrating child successes and sharing these widely to ensure that our children's lived experience is in

everyone's minds in a positive, strengths-based way and also to celebrate good practice from teams working with our children.

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

- 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 and Schools 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.

We continue to support our young people to be in education, employment, and training, with 76% 16-18yr olds and 59% of 19-21yr olds being in Education, Employment or Training at the end of March 2026. This is an improvement from 69% of 16-18yr olds being in Education, Employment or Training at the end of March 2025 and sustained performance of 59% for 19-21yr olds.

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

The Harbour multi-disciplinary team has grown steadily under consistent and committed leadership. The Harbour offers a combination of outreach, fostering and residential children's homes.

All children's homes have been inspected and are graded as Good or Outstanding.

This year saw the registration of The Rowans and Sunnyside and the plan to de-register The Cherries has now been achieved.

Plans are being progressed to complete the development of a 3 bedroom short break home on Portland for children who are disabled and an additional short-term home in the east of Dorset. We would like to see these homes registered and operational before the end of 2026.

The % of children living outside Dorset, has remained the same compared between March 2025 and March 2026 and is lower than national average, although above good+ stat neighbours. The % of children, excluding unaccompanied children, living more than 20 miles away from home has increased from 41% in March 2024 to 44% in March 2025. We know there are still too many children who live too far away from their home and continue to work with determination to increase the number of local foster carers so that our children are able to maintain their links with friends, education and their local community more easily.

It is positive to note the increase in the % of children living in foster care. This is reflected in an increase in both the number of children living in mainstream and kinship foster care which has increased respectively from 126 to 133 and 66 to 73. The % of children who have been in care over 2.5 years and are settled being with the same carer for 2 years or more remains above national average and good +stat neighbours.

We have made significant progress in strengthening our kinship care offer, recognising the importance of children being supported to live safely within their family networks wherever possible. This has resulted in:

- Clearer identification and promotion of kinship care as a positive permanence option, ensuring family and friends carers are recognised as key partners in caring for children.
- Improved access to advice, assessment and support, enabling kinship carers to better understand their role and responsibilities and feel confident in meeting children's needs.
- A more consistent and equitable offer of support, including practical, emotional and professional guidance aligned with fostering and corporate parenting principles.
- Increased focus on stability and belonging, supporting children to maintain family connections and reduce unnecessary disruption or escalation in care arrangements.
- This strengthened kinship offer supports better outcomes for children while embedding a family first, trauma informed approach across fostering.

We have also strengthened both the recruitment and retention of foster carers, recognising that a stable, skilled fostering workforce is critical to achieving positive outcomes for children. This has been achieved by:

- Enhancing recruitment activity, with clearer, values led messaging that promotes fostering as a supported and rewarding role within Dorset's wider corporate parenting commitment.

- Improving support and engagement with existing carers, helping to retain experienced foster carers and sustain placement capacity over time.
- Having greater emphasis on relationship-based practice, ensuring carers feel listened to, valued and professionally supported through supervision, training and peer support.
- Focusing on supporting more children to remain closer to their communities, schools and support networks.

These developments have contributed to a more resilient fostering service, where we are confident in the skills and abilities of foster carers to meet the changing and complex needs of our children and young people.

Mockingbird continues to support the resilience and retention of our existing carers, and we continue to see the impact for the foster carers and the children they are caring for.

Achieving a settled home ensures children have a secure, stable, and loving family to support through childhood and beyond, to create a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity, and belonging.

### **Settled homes can be achieved in several ways:**

**Return Home to Parents** – We have seen an increase in the % of children achieving a settled home by returning to the care of their parents or relative with parental responsibility. At the end of March 2026, 24% children achieved permanence by returning to live with their parents' following reunification compared to 16% in March 2025. This is higher than Good+ statistical neighbours and national average.

**Adoption** – The % of children who have been adopted has slightly reduced this year. This is as a direct result of local and national shortages of adopters, particularly for older children and sibling groups. Aspire has given renewed focus to the recruitment of adopters including early permanency, timeliness in matching and achieving final order for adoption and access to post-adoption support. Collectively, these achievements demonstrate Aspire Adoption Agency's commitment to improve permanence experiences and outcomes for children, ensuring adoption is achieved and sustained.

**SGO** – Since the development of an in house dedicated Kinship Service, we have seen more children living with friends or family subject to a Special Guardianship Order. 5% of children who left care in the six months prior to March 2025 were placed subject to Special Guardianship Order compared to 16% in March 2026.

Through the Coram Voice survey 'Your Life Your Care' undertaken in 2025, members of the board heard that:

92% of children reported that they always felt safe in the home they live in now

The proportion of children who had felt happy the previous day increased from 72% to 93% for children age 4-7 yrs and from 52% to 62% for children age 11-17yrs.

All children age 4-11yrs and all but one of children age 11-17 yrs trusted the adults they lived with.

The area's we need to strengthen include:

- Increasing family time
- Ensuring that all children felt an adult had fully explained why they were in care.
- Support all our children to stay in touch with the people who are important to them and help them to build their support networks.
- Work with our schools so that children have a greater sense of belonging and describe liking school or college more.

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

All young people are allocated a personal adviser at the age of 16 to provide a smooth transition and support young people with the skills they need as they move into adulthood. We have continued our focus to ensure that all young people have a current Pathway Plan which is ambitious and supports our young people to move towards increased independence. At the end of March 2026 97% of young people had a current Pathway Plan compared to 93% in March 2025.

More young people are remaining in Staying Put arrangements with 36 young people remaining with their foster carer after turning 18 yrs. We continue to look at how we are supporting foster carers to continue to provide a safe and stable home for our young people after they turn 18 and continue to actively recruit supported lodging hosts for our care experienced young people.

Young people are encouraged to develop their own networks and keep in touch with significant people in their lives. This is supported through our staying close and mentoring programmes. We continue to employ 2 care experienced young people as co-ordinators which has been impactful in increasing the number of young people engaging with both programmes.

We have expanded our number and range of Dorset Council properties to provide affordable and local accommodation for our young people.

Relationships have been strengthened with private landlords which has yielded local and affordable accommodation for young people. We continue to provide rent deposit, rent in advance, act as a guarantor and in some situations “top up” rent so young people can maintain employment or further education.

We are now registered with Ofsted as a supported accommodation provider with 12 supported lodgings carers and 2 being assessed.

Dorset Council continues to underline its commitment to our young people through the offer of apprenticeships.

### **Our vision for the next 12 months is to:**

- Formally launch and embed Lifelong offer beyond 25 years.
- Ensure at least 65% of our care leavers (18-25 active) are engaged with meaningful education, employment or training
- Continue to strengthen our offer to care leavers who are parents
- Continue to increase the provision of high-quality accommodation that feels safe and is affordable in Dorset.
- To continue to work with colleagues and partners to support our care leavers with their mental health and emotional wellbeing, to develop the “Ask me What Matters” programme through our care and pathway planning and develop services that extend up to 25 years through CAMHS Transformation programme.

### **Membership and Governance**

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

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

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

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

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

There have been 2 formal meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board held in public on 28th May 2025 and 11th December 2025 that:

- Received annual statutory reports regarding children in care and care leavers including annual reports from IRO, Fostering, Adoption, Youth Justice, Fostering Panel Chair, Corporate Parenting, Leaving Care, Virtual School, Advocacy and Independent Visitors, Health and Wellbeing.
- There were also updates with regards to performance and other areas of interest in relation to children in care and care leavers.
- Agreed an annual report summarising the Board's activities.

All other Corporate Parenting Board meetings were held informally, engaging stakeholders and children and young people to ensure that the Board is accessible and able to encourage the very best input from everyone taking part in the meetings.

With these arrangements established, Corporate Parenting Board Members are better able to understand the issues, challenges and concerns and celebrate successes as they are experienced by young people and enables greater challenge of the Board Members in respect of the Council's Corporate Parenting role.

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

### **Priorities for the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024- 2027.**

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

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

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

## 5. **Alternative options considered**

5.1 N/A

## 6. **Legal considerations**

6.1 Under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 (Section 1), local authorities must have regard to the corporate parenting principles when exercising functions in relation to looked-after children and care leavers.

Sufficiency and Quality Duties (Children Act 1989) set out key statutory duties include: Section 22 – General duty to safeguard and promote welfare.

Ensuring placements are suitable and meet needs

Section 22G – Sufficiency duty- Duty to ensure sufficient accommodation within the local area

For care leavers (Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 & subsequent regs): Provision of Personal Advisers, Pathway Plans, and support up to age 25

Care Leaver Local Offer (Children and Social Work Act 2017): Local authorities must publish their Local Offer for Care Leavers.

Equality and Non-Discrimination (Equality Act 2010)

Data Protection and Confidentiality; GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018:

Safeguarding and Statutory Partnerships- Children Act 2004 & Working Together to Safeguard Children

## 7. **Financial implications**

- 7.1 Dorset Council continue to adopt a policy of committing to reduce the number of children in care, taking a rights-based approach, and developing services which support children to be able to grow up in a family setting.

However, an increase in our child in care population in terms of numbers has seen an increase in spend on homes for our children.

The National Transfer Scheme continues to impact on Dorset Council with a rise in the number of unaccompanied children in our care and supported by us as care leavers.

The challenges for fostering recruitment have been noted nationally within both local authority and IFA services. The Board recognises that it is all the more important for Dorset to be the fostering agency of choice for foster carers and supported lodgings carers and are committed to being ambassadors for the recruitment of Dorset carers.

The Board has supported investment in the residential estate for Dorset children in care and care leavers and members have maintained oversight by visiting throughout the year.

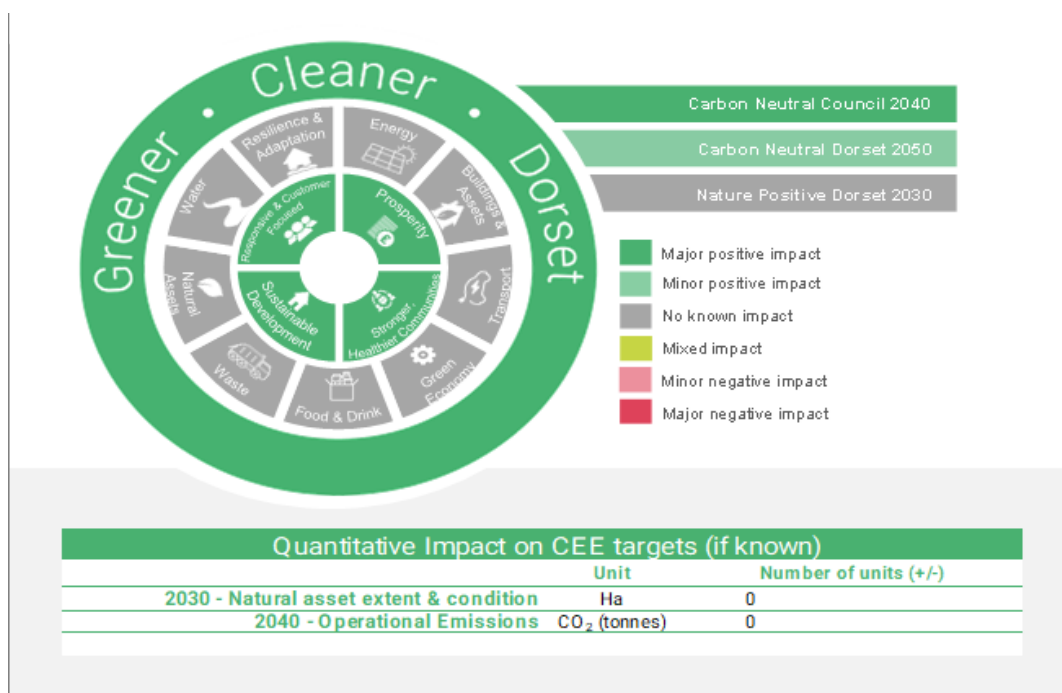
In all that we do today we aim to equip children and young people 'for life', and wherever possible reduce the likelihood of needing to support care leavers in vulnerable adult populations. Investment in the care leavers service has ensured we are in a strong position to deliver ever better services.

## **8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications**

- 8.1 As Corporate Parents we strive to ensure that our children are settled and experience love and care with carers, close to the people and places that are important to them, recognising the link to improved mental health and educational attainment.

Having sufficient homes for our children in Dorset also reduces the amount of travel undertaken by families, social workers, and other children's services employees. There are currently 207 children living in care outside Dorset an increase from 189 children in March 2025. While the majority of children live in neighbouring authorities, there are some children living as far afield as Birmingham, Newcastle, Leeds and Manchester.

Reducing the number of children living outside of Dorset would reduce travel and should result in a reduction in the associated emissions from travel which is in line with the council's priority of protecting the natural environment, climate and ecology.



## 9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 It is reported that children in care are four times more likely to have a mental health difficulty than children in the general population. children in care have double the rates of urgent dental treatment and are half as likely to attend dental services as the general population. This is significant as poor oral health is also associated with other chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease. We also recognise the importance of extra-curricular activities such as sports, creative arts and music lessons which contribute to a child's wellbeing and sense of belonging.

The number of unaccompanied children in care and leaving care has increased. Unaccompanied children and young people are more likely to live outside Dorset which can impact on the timeliness of services such as initial health assessments. There is also a need to raise awareness of the specific trauma experienced by unaccompanied children and young people due to their experiences in their home countries, their journey to the UK and anxiety caused by Right to Remain claims.

Supported by South London Refugee Association (SLRA) , Dorset Council have pledged to:

- identify all children in care and care leavers with immigration and nationality issues.
- connect children in care and care leavers with good quality legal support as soon as possible.
- take a proactive and informed role in supporting children in care and care leavers through any immigration applications and appeals.

- enable those who are eligible to apply for permanent status and British citizenship.

One of the roles of corporate parents is to ensure that with partners we are working to reduce health inequalities and support the needs of children in care and care leavers.

## **10. Other implications**

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

## **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 Equality considerations are fully embedded throughout the report, strategy, and delivery arrangements.

This report impacts Children in care (ages 0–18), Care experienced young people (up to and beyond age 25), Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, Children living in foster care, kinship care, residential care, and supported accommodation Care leavers who are parents, Kinship carers, foster carers and supported lodging hosts. These groups are recognised as particularly vulnerable and at higher risk of inequality.

Services are age-appropriate and promote continuity of care. Children with disabilities are supported through specialist provision, including plans for additional short-break homes. Education support, health planning, and placement matching consider individual needs. Targeted support reduces disadvantage and promotes inclusion.

Inequality is reduced through prioritised access and integrated services. The report highlights the Understanding cultural identity, language, and belonging is embedded in participation work as a result targeted actions reduce risk of discrimination and exclusion.

Support services apply equitably to all genders. Attention is given to Care leavers who are parents (predominantly young women) and Identity and self-expression discussions through youth workshops. no negative gender impacts have been identified. Identity, belonging and feeling safe to be yourself are priorities in youth participation work. Safe spaces and inclusive

practice are promoted across services. Services support inclusion and reduce marginalisation.

The report actively addresses known inequalities affecting care experienced children and young people. Equality, inclusion and participation are central to our strategy and delivery.

### **13. Appendices**

13.1 None

### **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)

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## **Corporate Parenting Board**

### **28 May 2026**

### **Fostering Service- annual report**

### **For Review and Consultation**

**Cabinet Member:**

Cllr C Sutton, Children, Families & Education

**Local Councillor(s):**

**Senior Leadership Team:**

P Dempsey - Executive Director, Children's Services

**Report author and job title: Jane MacLennan, Head of Service**

**Email: [jane.maclennan@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:jane.maclennan@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)**

**Statutory Authority:**

**Report status:** Public

**1. Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)**

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

This report details the advancements that the Fostering Service has made over the 2025/2026 reporting year.

The service has been successful in the recruitment of permanent staff including the management team.

We continue to provide stability and continuity to our fostering families, and in turn our children and young people feel supported.

Dorset Council continues its participation in the Southwest regional fostering hub which has provided a single point of contact for all fostering enquiries.

Towards the end of 2025 the number of enquiries and interest in Fostering for Dorset is starting to increase.

In February 2026, the government published *Renewing Fostering: Homes for 10,000 More Children*, setting out a major programme of fostering reform for England aimed at reversing the decline in foster carers and improving stability for children in care.

The reforms commit to creating 10,000 additional foster care places by the end of this Parliament, backed by new national investment and regional collaboration. Key measures include a national recruitment and awareness campaign, capital funding to help carers adapt or extend their homes (particularly for sibling groups) and expanded regional fostering recruitment hubs to provide a clearer, more consistent route into fostering.

Investment will expand peer-support models such as Mockingbird, strengthen training, and improve how allegations and standards of care concerns are handled to ensure fairness for carers and safety for children. The reforms also signal a simpler, more proportionate assessment and approval process, with clearer expectations on timescales and decision-making.

Importantly for corporate parents, the reforms place trusted, loving relationships at the centre of the system and align with wider children's social care reform to reduce reliance on costly residential homes and children living away from their families and communities.

## 2. **Recommendation(s)**

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

## 3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**

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

## 4. The report

### 4.1 Introduction

The service has had another busy year. We have continued to develop a focus on the support provided to our foster carers to ensure that the needs of our children and young people are safely and consistently met.

The service knows itself well, its strengths and areas for focus.

Over the last 12 months we have been able to:

- Support more children to live within their wider family network, if it is not possible for them to live safely with their parents.
- Improve outcomes for children & young people through the recruitment and retention of local foster carers.
- Ensure that all our foster carers can meet the diverse needs of our children and young people, enabling them to live close to the people and places that are important to them.
- Support foster carer resilience through the delivery of high-quality support, visits, supervision, annual reviews and training.
- Strengthen our Kinship service for both assessment and post approval/order support.

### **Recruitment, Assessment, Approval, and De-registration.**

As of 31 March 2026, we had 188 Dorset Council fostering households (Kinship and mainstream) caring for 206 children. This is an increase of 7 carers from March 2025 (183 carers caring for 187 children)

- 115 mainstream households (a decrease from 120 in 2025) caring for 133 children.
- 72 Kinship foster households (compared to 62 in April 2025) caring for 73 children.
- We currently only have 1 household approved as foster to adopt/early permanence. This is linked to reduced sufficiency of EP carers approved by Aspire regional adoption agency.

Despite the national decline in fostering households, Dorset has seen a small reduction of mainstream carers and a positive increase in connected carers which, overall has increased our fostering households. There are more children living with Dorset carers than in previous reporting years, with an increase from 187 to 206.

In the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 despite targeted local, regional, and national recruitment campaigns we have not seen a significant increase in initial inquiries across the year. The Southwest fostering hub now collates the information of all initial enquiries and tracks progress through approval. This

enables each of the 15 Local Authorities to compare and track progress across the region.

In this reporting period, the hub received 150 initial enquiries for Dorset. This is an increase from 139 in 2024/25. Of the 150 enquiries, only 45 were sent to the Local Authority to progress.

The expression of interest % rate for 2025/26 reporting period was 30%, compared to 37% in the previous year. 2025/26 reporting year saw 71% of enquiries close and progress to 12 approvals, compared to 54% closing in the previous year but a lower conversion to approvals (5).

Since the launch of the southwest fostering hub in May 2024, Dorset has received 289 initial enquiries. 96 were sent through to the Local Authority; 63% were closed in the period, with an overall expression of interest percentage of 33%. The hub has supported 17 approvals from May 2024 to March 2026.

As of 31 March 2026, there were a further 42 assessments in progress across the whole fostering service. These are broken down into

- 11 Mainstream fostering assessments
- 18 Kinship assessments for fostering
- 13 Special Guardianship (SGO) Assessments

The Kinship service also undertake Regulation 24 (Reg 24) viability assessments. These are short, initial assessment carried out by a local authority to determine whether a connected person can safely care for a child as an emergency or temporary arrangement. It comes from Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. Reg 24 allows a local authority to agree for a child to be cared for immediately with a connected person who is not yet approved as a foster carer. They are usually completed urgently- within 24-72 hours.

The fostering service has completed a total of 194 viability assessments in this reporting period, averaging around 16 a month/3 a week.

Nationally 14% of the mainstream foster carer workforce are retiring or leaving fostering every year. Reasons include planned retirements, voluntary resignations, de-registrations following allegations or a breakdown in relationships with the fostering service and health/age related exits.

In this reporting period, 17 mainstream foster households, 13 Kinship carers and 6 Early Permanence (Foster to adopt) carers were deregistered. All foster carers can meet with the independent foster reviewing officer (FRO) as part of the ending process. This allows for the foster carers to have the opportunity to share their thoughts and views and for the fostering service and Agency Decision Maker (ADM) to understand the reasons for carers leaving and help to inform the recruitment and retainment strategies.

Reasons for deregistration include:

**Mainstream: 17**

- 15 resigned (retirement, change of career, personal circumstances which impacted capacity within the home to continue fostering, & changes to personal health)
- 2 deregistered (due to fostering minimum standards not being met)

**Kinship: 31**

- 10 due to legal orders being obtained (Special Guardianship, adoption and child arrangement orders)
- 15 as the child moved on- reaching 18, returning to parents or alternative care arrangements were made.
- 1 was not approved as a connected carer by panel and ADM
- 3 moved from temporary registered approved as matches were not progressed due to care plans for the children changing.
- 2 were initiated by fostering- due to minimum standards not being met.

## **Recruitment and Marketing**

Dorset Council is part of the Southwest Regional Fostering Hub which was established in May 2024 and is hosted by Wiltshire Council. This is a partnership of 15 Local Authorities working in collaboration to improve the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

Published in February 2026 "Renewing fostering- Homes for 10,000 more children is the first standalone national fostering reform plan, building on Stable Homes, Built on Love but going significantly further on fostering specifically. There will be a focus for regional collaboration with shared recruitment, assessment and support models.

The marketing of recruitment and retention for foster carers is currently underpinned by the Dorset Council Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2023 - 2026. This will be reviewed and revised as the regional fostering hubs develop.

The Fostering Service maintain a strong local presence, interacting in community spaces with various stands, activities and more widely through social media to share what a difference becoming a fostering family could make to a child or young person and their future outcomes. Through the collaboration of the partnership, Dorset has benefitted from additional advertising campaigns and recruitment days.

The recruitment and marketing approach in Dorset is child-centred, targeted and values-led, aligning closely with national fostering reform priorities. Activity focuses not only on increasing the number of fostering households, but on attracting carers with the skills, capacity and resilience to meet the increasingly complex needs of children and young people coming into care.

Recruitment efforts are increasingly targeted rather than generic, focusing on areas of greatest need within the fostering service, including foster carers able to care for older children and teenagers, Households able to accommodate siblings, Carers with the capacity to support children with additional or complex needs and Local homes to reduce reliance on out-of-area provision.

Marketing activity uses a mix of digital platforms, local media, community engagement and word of mouth advocacy from existing foster carers. There is a strong emphasis on realistic and transparent messaging, ensuring prospective carers have a clear understanding of the role, responsibilities and challenges of fostering, alongside the support available.

We have run successful fostering recruitment campaigns over the last 12 months, regionally and locally. These were called “the run” and “stockings for Christmas”.

“The Run” was a fostering recruitment campaign led by the Southwest fostering hub, designed to illustrate the instability and uncertainty experienced by children who do not have a consistent foster home and to highlight the importance of having enough local foster carers to meet children’s needs.

The campaign used the concept of “*being on the run*”—moving from place to place—not in a literal sense, but as a metaphor for repeated moves and the emotional impact this can have on children and young people in care. Through this framing, the campaign helped the public understand that frequent moves are not just inconvenient, but can affect a child’s sense of safety, belonging, and trust.

“Stocking for Christmas” was a seasonal fostering recruitment campaign designed to highlight the shortage of foster carers and the impact this has on children and young people in Dorset during the festive period.

The campaign used the powerful image of an empty Christmas stocking to symbolise children who do not have the security, warmth, and consistency of a family home. By drawing on familiar seasonal traditions, it aimed to create an emotional but respectful connection with the public and prompt reflection on how fostering can transform a child’s experience of Christmas and beyond.

The service continues to be competitive, and a platform has now been provided to attract both individuals interested in fostering for the first time and foster carers currently with other agencies wishing to transfer to Dorset Council.

The service can monitor all digital marketing activity and to allow focussed and targeted advertising. This level of detail also allows for the fact that many foster carers take a prolonged period to decide on fostering, sometimes over several years and it is vital that their interest is maintained.

Face-to-face recruitment has continued over the past 12 months with attendance at events across Dorset. This has ranged from shows and events to family-friendly venues.

We work in partnership with Dorset Carers Voice to hear the voice of current carers and their views on areas we could develop to support our recruitment and retention priorities.

## **Fostering Panel**

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

- make a recommendation as to whether the applicant is suitable to be a foster carer and the terms of the approval.
- consider the first annual review for newly approved foster carers, as well as reviews following the managing allegations process, and where foster carers are seeking a change in the terms of their registration status.
- recommend whether a person still is suitable to be a foster carer, and whether the terms of their approval (if any) remain appropriate.
- give advice or make recommendations on other matters or cases referred to by the fostering service provider, including terminations of approval.

The fostering panel must also advise, where appropriate, on the procedures under which reviews in accordance with Reg. 28 are carried out by the fostering service provider, and periodically monitor their effectiveness

In addition, the National Minimum Standards 2011 requires that panels provide quality assurance feedback to the fostering service provider on the quality of reports being presented and the timeliness of assessments and decisions.

There is a separate fostering panel chair annual report 2025-2026, provided to Corporate Parenting Board which details the progress, performance and plans of Dorset's fostering panel.

## **Dorset Approved Fostering Households**

As of the 31 March 2026, there were 475 (an increase of 40 from March 25) children who were in Dorset's care.

70.19% of Dorset's children were being cared for by foster carers either through an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) or with Dorset's own in-house fostering service. This compares to the National average of 67%.

45.05% of all of Dorset's children in care, are living with mainstream or kinship carers (a total of 206/207 if including foster to adopt).

The table below shows the number of approved households by type and the number of children living in each type of fostering arrangement. April 2025

figures are in brackets for comparison. Despite fewer households we are caring for more children.

| Type of Fostering Household | Total Number of Fostering Households | Total Number of Children living with carers |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Mainstream                  | 114 (117)                            | 133 (126)                                   |
| Kinship Foster Carers       | 72 (61)                              | 73 (63)                                     |
| Foster for Adoption         | 1 (5)                                | 1 (5)                                       |
| Total Households            | 187 (183)                            | 207 (194)                                   |

The last 12 months show a stable but increasingly constrained fostering service. We have an increasing demand for mainstream fostering homes, placing pressure on matching, outcomes, and costs.

Despite some stability in overall numbers of foster carers, there has been an increase of children coming into care (40) and this does mask the underlying pressures of increased demand and sufficiency within the fostering service.

Fostering households may be approved for one, two or three children. This is usually due to bedroom space being available. In Dorset, we allow siblings (if appropriate) to share bedrooms. For reporting the number of availabilities for children, the maximum number is reported, acknowledging that not all are/can be utilised.

There may be several reasons why we are not able to use or match full availability with our foster carers. This can range from matching to carers being on hold due to ill health, personal or family circumstances. Foster carers may also be placed on hold by the service due to complaints or safeguarding concerns. We also need to allow foster carers to have periods where they can take a break, have the opportunity for some time to reflect and consider future fostering matches as their own needs and those of their family may change over time. It is common for fostering households not to be used to the maximum available because of the needs of children already living with them and we prioritise the stability and longer-term security within the foster family.

It is important to differentiate between foster households that have vacancies and have no foster children (primary vacancies) and those that have vacant availability but have foster children (secondary vacancies).

This means that whilst we need to identify the full capacity of our foster community, we cannot use all availability due to a range of complex factors and known vulnerabilities. The priority is always enabling children to have stability and security with carers who can meet their individual needs.

On the 31 March 2026 there were 38 foster carer primary vacancies. Of these, 37 are not available due to planned short breaks only, being home hub carer for mockingbird or being unable to place alongside the other children in the family home. Across the fostering service there is 1 fostering family who are new to fostering and approved for 1 child (2 if siblings) with a preference for a younger child (under 3 years).

Fostering supervising social workers regularly contact those foster carers who can offer short breaks to ensure that foster carer data is correct and that short breaks can be considered for children who are needing to move in an unplanned way. This recognises that there is limited capacity within the fostering service to meet the growing needs of children coming into care.

The foster utilisation rate measures the proportion of available foster carer capacity that is occupied by children at a given time. It answers the question: *"Of the foster care places we have approved, how many are we actually using?"*. The utilisation rate has been closely monitored and tracked throughout this reporting year. We maintained a steady rate of around 1.10 until March 2026, when this dropped to 1.05. Despite the reduction overall, this reporting period we have increased our utilisation from 0.99 in March 2025.

Stability in households is a strength, but it does not equal sufficiency. Capacity, not carer numbers alone, is now the critical pressure point with the service relying on a smaller pool of available foster homes.

## Fostering Reviews

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

The reviews are initiated by the Fostering Social Worker with a written summary of achievements and significant events within the foster carers home over the preceding year.

A Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FRO) convenes and chairs an independent annual review meeting.

Over the last 12 months, we have continued to support workers with timely completion of fostering reviews. This has primarily been achieved through the strong partnership working with fostering reviewing and quality assurance service.

The fostering review service manager provides quarterly reports to QPAG (Quality Assurance Performance Group) to share progress and to further strengthen practice and performance in this area.

Of significance is the improvement in quality assurance which has been built upon with every review now being audited by the fostering reviewing officers

(FRO). This has in turn led to an overall improvement in fostering household compliance and data and the quality of review reports.

As of 31 March 2026, there were 13 reviews showing as outstanding, a reduction of 28 compared to last year.

## **Foster Carer's Support**

Ensuring that foster carers feel valued is vital to maintain a strong service and to ensure that foster carers are retained. Both the Dorset Carer Voice and the service will continue in partnership to ensure that every foster carer feels their needs and in turn the needs of their children are met.

We continue to hold an annual award ceremony which is informal to acknowledge and celebrate the outstanding love, care and kindness Dorset council foster carers provide to Dorset children and their longevity of service.

Support groups take place face to face and virtually to ensure as many foster and kinship carers as possible can access them. The groups provide a regular opportunity for carers to come together supported by fostering social workers to discuss a range of topics.

Over the last 12 months we have supported the establishment of Dorset Carer Voice (DCV). A network for foster carers, run by foster carers. This is an opportunity for all carers to have the opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings and suggestions as a collective group with the fostering service to help inform and develop service delivery. The chair of DCV meets with the Head of Service and Service Manager every 3 months to agree priorities, feedback and track *"you said and together we have"*.

Following feedback from foster carers the fostering service now shares a regular newsletter which is an effective way of sharing news and information with our fostering community. We include progress on priorities, updates following their feedback and information on next steps and actions within the service.

We have established a foster carer birth children support group to ensure they have a space to ask questions, share their voice and be provided with support from peers and professionals.

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

development and updates, partake in service planning and speak directly to senior managers from across children's services.

In addition to the foster care forums we have also established a Kinship care reference group which has enabled us to develop and strengthen the service and support offer and continue to provide feedback and inform future service developments.

The establishment of the forums, groups & feedback channels have allowed the service to listen to foster carers and incorporate their views and ideas into ensuring that the needs of children in Dorset continue to be met.

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

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

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

There has been a focus upon developing a service that is proactive rather than reactive, to ensure we can provide a graduated response and to achieve this the following pieces of work have been undertaken:

- The development of a working group to improve and redesign therapeutic provision for all looked after children.
- Regular meetings between the fostering service and the clinical psychologists to continue to adapt provision to meet both the needs of children but also our foster carers.
- The Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP) training across the fostering service staff.
- Commencement of foundations of attachment training for our foster carers.
- Family support workers providing therapeutic life story work.

## **Child's Voice**

Listening to children's voices is key to improving fostering care practice. Throughout March 2025 the fostering service took part in the Coram Voice Bright Spots survey. The survey enables us to focus on what

children and young people say about their lives in care and what is important to them.

The outcome of the Bright Spots children in care survey ensures the views and experiences of children in care influence service development and strategic thinking. 92% of children and young people reported that they 'always' felt safe in the home they live in now, including all (100%) of the youngest children (4-7yrs). This is higher than for children (82%) in the general population.

All (100%) of the youngest children (4-7yrs) felt settled where they lived. 80% of young people (11-17yrs) 'always' felt settled, an increase from (71%) the last survey in 2022-23. All children (4-11yrs) and all but one of the older young people (11-17yrs) trusted the adults they lived with\*.

All of the youngest children (4-7yrs) and all but one of the children aged 8-11yrs felt the adults they lived with noticed how they were feeling.

Three-quarters (76%) of young people (11-17yrs) talked regularly with the adults they lived with about things that mattered to them, a notable increase from the last survey in 2022-23 (64%), and a greater proportion than young people (66%) in the general population.

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

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

Children in foster care also have access to a children's advocate. This service is provided independently through the NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service).

The Youth Voice Team work closely with the fostering service to take a 'whole family approach' to engagement, where foster carers, their birth families, and the children they foster can attend events together, creating an opportunity to engage with foster families at the same time.

The Network captures the voice of Dorset's children and young people and ensure their voice is heard in the right spaces whilst influencing positive change and outcomes.

## **Fostering Service Compliance**

As of 31 March 2026, there were 13 reviews showing as outstanding, a reduction of 28 compared to last year. Of these only 1 was waiting for fostering social worker to action (to start the review process) and was not required as it referred to a closure record, 6 awaiting fostering reviewing officer action (the review needs to take place and/or be written up) and 6 awaiting panel (for recommendation and ADM after first year of fostering and after an allegation or significant incident).

Fostering reviews continue to be monitored by the service manager in both fostering and quality assurance.

Social work visits to foster carers are currently 78%; this is below our target of 85% but has been increasing steadily over the last 6 months and a significant improvement from 69% last year. Visits to our foster families have been impacted by staff illness and recruitment. We now have a system in place to ensure that foster carers receive a visit and support from someone in the team to increase and maintain our visiting patterns and the support we provide our carers. The service manager provides a weekly report to the head of service so that we can identify where the areas of support need are and as a team can respond.

Foster carer diaries are completed on a weekly basis by carers to provide a narrative of a day in the life of a child living within their family. This helps provide a narrative of their journey, celebrations and identifies any worries or concerns. Through performance monitoring it is recognised these are not being signed off as read in a timely manner. Further service performance monitoring is in place along with individual support plans to ensure this area and focus of our work is compliant moving forward.

Fostering households are reviewed in case supervision every 8 weeks. Supervision timeliness as of the 31 March 2026 was 90.06%, an 8% increase from performance in March 2025. This continues to be an area of senior management oversight and focus, ensuring that the timeliness and quality of the recording of supervision is maintained and reflective discussions we know are taking place are evidenced.

## **Complaints and Allegations**

The Fostering Service always takes complaints and allegations against foster carers very seriously and allegations are thoroughly investigated.

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

During this reporting period there were 39 initial enquiries to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) concerning individual foster carers (26 households). For this report all data will be reported as households.

Of the 26 households, 15 resulted in contact/enquiry only. With 11 (42%) referrals going through the LADO management of allegations process.

|                   |           |
|-------------------|-----------|
| Emotional harm    | 6         |
| Physical harm     | 9         |
| Transferable risk | 1         |
| Neglectful care   | 0         |
| Sexual harm       | 0         |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>16</b> |

The total number of categories is higher than the number of referrals as some allegations covered more than 1 category.

Of the 11 referrals made to LADO:

- 1 had no further action- the standards of care process were followed with additional training and development identified to ensure the foster carers were able to continue their fostering journey evidencing they were able to meet fostering standards.
- 2 households received substantiated outcomes and were referred to a fostering panel for independent oversight.
- 6 households received unsubstantiated outcomes and followed the standards of care process
- 1 household received unfounded outcome
- 1 household has management of allegations process on going

There is a separate LADO annual report which will be presented to the next formal Corporate Parenting Board. This will provide further details of the role, activity and outcomes over the last 12 months.

Between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026 there were 6 complaints about the fostering service. This is a reduction in overall complaints received during this reporting period by 5. All complaints received were made by foster carers.

The focus of the Fostering Service in response to complaints made is to build rapport and repair relationships whilst delivering the best possible outcomes for children and young people in care. Our approach is to ensure learning from complaints becomes embedded and strengthens practice. Oversight of the learning is monitored through Quality Assurance and Head of Service.

The annual report provided by the complaints service will provide further detail of learning and changes implemented.

### **Foster Carer Training, Mockingbird and Supported Lodgings**

Foster carers have access to a comprehensive learning and development offer through the Foster Carers Training Handbook. We offer a variety of online and in person training. We continue to work collaboratively with the learning and development team ensure all training available to our carers is maximised.

All our foster carers (mainstream and kinship) have a subscription to the Fostering Network. This is the UK's leading charity for fostering, dedicated to improving the lives of children and young people in foster care. It supports foster carers, fostering services, and the children they care for by setting standards, influencing policy, and providing practical advice and training.

During the last 12 months, as a direct response to feedback from care experienced children & young people we have developed the journey to fostering training. We now include training with a focus on identity, supporting children who are impacted by bullying and helping foster carers to understand and support a child having friends at school. All new foster carers attend the "in my shoes" training. This is being rolled out to all foster carers with the aim of being part of mandatory training in 2026.

A further development over the last 12 months has been delivering the "journey to foster" training that is accredited and has a whole unit on identity. This is facilitated by the Fostering Network.

Training is monitored in several ways, this included data collected by our learning and development team, as well as supervision records, training plans and through foster carer reviews. This enables us to track mandatory training, support carers where this is delayed and as a service monitor compliance through our dashboards by team managers (weekly) and senior leadership monthly.

To support the training and development of foster carers they subscribe to The Training Hub which has a wide range of specialist e-learning modules targeted specifically at foster carers. The Foster Carer Training Hub offers the UK's largest cohort of online subjects. All their online training is built upon scientific evidence.

The standout achievement of the fostering service continues to be our Mockingbird model and progression to business as usual. The model is an evidence-based fostering approach that creates constellations of local foster families, centred around a hub home led by an experienced foster carer. These constellations provide peer support, shared care, and a sense of extended family for children and carers. It is designed to replicate the natural support networks that families typically rely on, reducing isolation and pressure on individual foster households.

With our fostering household numbers stable but availability reducing, the Mockingbird model is increasingly important as a retention, stability, and sufficiency strategy, not just a support offer.

For children and young people, Mockingbird offers greater stability through resilient support networks, improved emotional wellbeing from feeling part of a wider "family", opportunities for social connection, peer relationships, and normal childhood experiences, leading to fewer moves and crisis-driven decisions.

Across the 5 constellations we have 57 children being supported, with support from known carers that replicates that of an extended family.

Mockingbird constellations have not increased in numbers this year due to, the absence of a Mockingbird co-ordinator and fostering social worker and challenges in recruiting a suitable home hub carer. The service ambition for the next 12 months is to launch a further 3 Mockingbird constellations; this remains aligned to the 5-year plan to launch 10 constellations.

The Dorset Supported Lodgings Service ensures young people (16-25 years) who are care-experienced are provided with a stable home and receive high quality support and guidance to build on their life skills and prepare them for adulthood.

Supported Lodging arrangements offer a “step-down” from foster or residential care for those young people who are not ready for living on their own. Carers step into a young person’s life at this important time to offer support, guidance, care and offer their home to the young person.

The supported lodgings service currently has 12 providers, with 2 new households under assessment. Although a reduction from last year it is positive that we have the right people to support and meet the diverse needs of our young people. We continue to be ambitious and committed to increase our supported lodging homes over the next 12 months.

Our supported lodging carers have support from the dedicated co-ordinator and access to training and support that reflects that available for foster carers. We continue to ensure that our supported lodgings carers have a sense of belonging within our fostering community and are provided with the same service and learning opportunities to promote their professional development.

Dorset Council’s Supported Lodgings Service is now being regulated by Ofsted, to ensure there is explicit oversight to help make sure young people are safe, secure and living in appropriate accommodation which meets their needs.

## **Budget**

The 2025/26 budget for Inhouse Fostering Placements totalled £5,485,500, funding a maximum of 210 placements per week by the end of the financial year. The 2025/26 expenditure totalled £5,580,214, funding an average of 205 placements per week. The budget has overspent by £94,714 due to placements being above the budgeted level during the year. The number of IFA foster homes remains high and an area of budget pressure.

The overall average cost of an inhouse foster placement was £522 per week, compared to the overall average of an independent Fostering Agency (IFA) at a cost of £1,235 per week.

It is anticipated that usage of in-house provision will increase going forward through the recruitment of foster carers through the Southwest hub, our priority for targeted recruitment and continued growth of Mockingbird constellations.

Through increasing our in-house sufficiency, we will reduce the reliance on IFA and higher cost homes for our children and young people.

The budget for 2026/27 has increased to reflect the increases for the next financial year.

## **Service Developments for 2026 - 2027**

Our vision for the next 12 months is to:

**Strengthen Foster Carer Recruitment & retention.** To increase the number of foster carers who can provide safe and stable homes to our children and young people. We have identified the need to increase capacity for parent child foster homes, families for teenagers and capacity to offer emergency homes. We also need to ensure we support our current foster carers by reducing the number of de-registrations/resignations. We will need to be part of the development of the regional fostering hub in alignment with government strategy and update our own sufficiency, recruitment and retention strategies towards the end of 2026.

**Continue to strengthen our Kinship service.** By combining early identification of kinship carers, family group conferences, practical support, clear financial support and allowances will help to develop meaningful partnership with families helping carers understand their options and receive timely advice. Listening to carers' experiences and involving them in service design ensures support is relevant and respectful. Strong partnerships with voluntary sector organisations can further enhance advocacy, support, and long-term outcomes for children growing up safely within their families. We want more families to offer permanence through special guardianship as opposed to fostering, knowing this provides greater stability and security for our children and young people. We have invested in additional capacity for the kinship service and hope to recruit additional social and family workers. Our family workers will be supported to complete the therapeutic life story diploma which will not only support our children, young people and their carers but generate an income through the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF).

**Increase the number of supported lodgings arrangements.** Increasing the number of supported lodgings arrangements will enable more young people to move from residential care, often outside of Dorset, to a family where support is adapted to meet their changing needs towards independence. We will have target recruitment and ensure careful matching with building relationships as part of the movement towards independence for our children who are age 16+.

**Compliance.** Fostering reviews, foster carer training, visits and foster carer diary sheets completion are key areas of our work that need strengthening and

continued improvement. This ensures that we are adhering to regulations, statutory requirements and our standards of practice and care. This in turn minimises risks and supports both our workforce and foster carers to continue to work with our most vulnerable children and young people.

## **5. Alternative options considered**

5.1 N/A

## **6. Legal considerations**

6.1 Statutory Framework- Fostering Service Regulations 2011

National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Fostering 2011

Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010

Children Act, 1989, 2002

Safeguarding Duties- Working Together 2023

## **7. Financial implications**

7.1

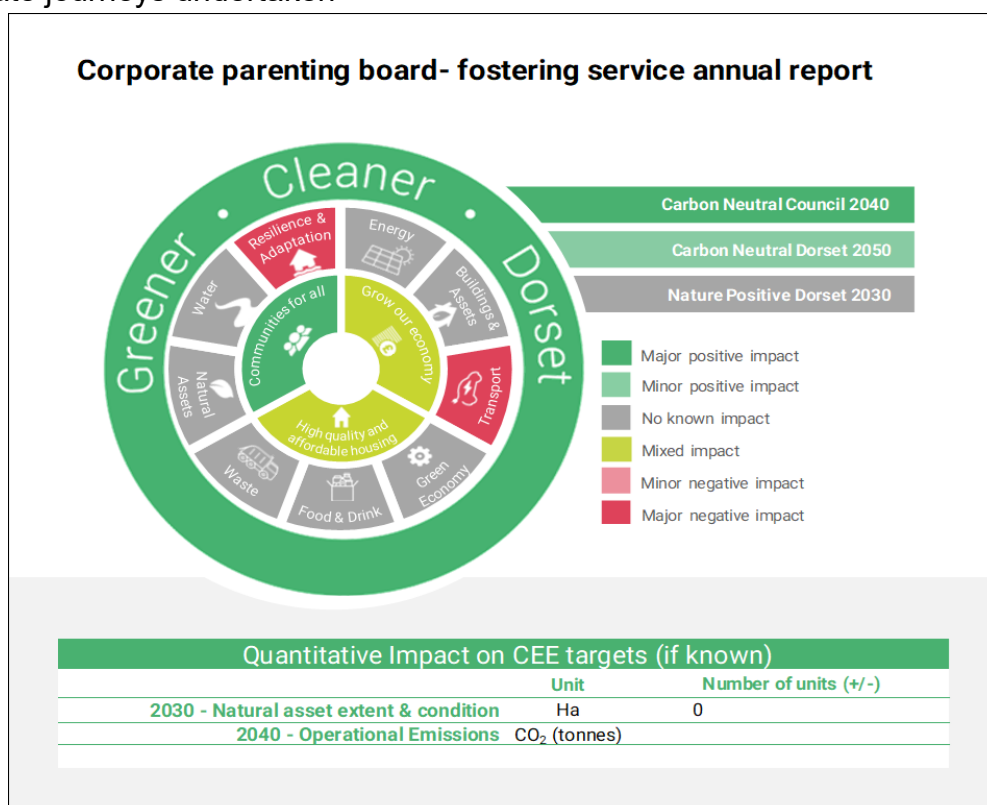
## **8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications**

8.1 There are no environmental factors to consider other than foster and kinship carers living out of the area.

Fostering social workers meet with foster carers face to face requiring at times long travel times.

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

separate journeys undertaken



## 9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 Having a sufficiency of foster carers to provide well matched, stable, caring and loving family homes to children and young people means that this is positive for their health and wellbeing. It is also key to be able to provide a home for children and young people within Dorset to maintain relationships important to them and support links local to their families and known environment.

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

## 10. Other implications

- 10.1 N/A

## 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 This EIA considers the equality implications of reduced availability and capacity, rather than policy change, recognising that service pressures can have unintended equality impacts.

There is no evidence of direct discrimination. However, the reduction in placement availability presents a risk of indirect and disproportionate impact on Disabled children, Children from minority ethnic backgrounds, Teenagers and children with complex needs & Children with protected identity characteristics.

The fostering service remains stable in household numbers, but reduced availability creates equality risks, particularly for children with additional needs or protected characteristics.

## **13. Appendices**

- 13.1 None

## **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)

## Corporate Parenting Board 28 May 2026 Fostering Panel Chair Report For Review and Consultation

**Cabinet Member:**

Cllr C Sutton, Children, Families & Education

**Local Councillor(s):**

**Senior Leadership Team:**

P Dempsey - Executive Director, Children's Services

**Report author and job title:** Deborah Forde, Independent Panel Chair

**Email:** [Deborah.forde@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:Deborah.forde@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)

**Statutory Authority:**

**Report status:** Public

1. **Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)**
  - 1.1 This report provides detail of Fostering Panel activity over the last financial year. There have been noticeable changes in panel processes and where there is more to do, this is being progressed through feedback to the service. There is a working relationship between Dorset Fostering Panel and Fostering Service. This report highlights several areas of progress and developing strengths.
2. **Recommendation(s)**
  - 2.1 Members of Corporate Parenting Board are requested to note the content of the report and the activity that has been undertaken during the reporting year and the impact for children.
3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**
  - 3.1 To be assured that the report had identified the strengths and areas for development and that steps are being taken for further improvement.

## 4. The report

4.1 This report covers the year from 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026. During this reporting period, there have been significant organisational changes, including changes in Chair / Vice Chair and the onboarding of a new panel Advisor. Despite the challenges, the panel maintained a strong performance. Hearing a total of 108 cases. We have noted several areas of progress:

- Annual appraisals were completed in February 2026 – overall there was positive feedback from members with regards to their experience of being members of Dorset Council Fostering Panel
- Preparation for panel continues to be thorough, using the pre panel preparation forms which are collated by the panel chair and discussed at panel. Panel members have maintained a trauma informed, strength-based approach with their questions.
- Compliance with regulations, policy, standards and best practice remains a notable strength
- Panel Members have also begun nominating exceptional Foster Carers for the “Star of the Week” recognition, including written feedback explaining their nomination. These are shared with the Executive Director. In this reporting year, three fostering household have received this acknowledgement for their outstanding support of Dorset’s children.
- There has been greater involvement from the children’s social workers attending panel, this is positive as they strengthen the voice of the child and when this is has not been possible, team leaders have stepped in to provide their input.
- Panel Members were invited to the Foster Carers Award Ceremony in September 2025, the chair and one panel member attended and it was evident the foster carers in attendance thoroughly enjoyed the event and appreciated the recognition given.
- Panel remains committed to ensuring that the child remains central to all recommendations and advice to agency decision maker.
- A significant development during this reporting year has been the Government’s proposals to reform fostering services ‘Renewing Fostering: homes for 10000 more children’ (February 2026)

### Panel Meetings and membership

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

30 panel meetings were held over the reporting period. In total 108 cases were presented including 8-week extensions, stage 2 approvals, connected person assessment and reviews.

This averaged 3.6 cases per panel.

There has been 1 panel member resigning during the reporting period, due to personal circumstances. The Panel Chair also stepped down from their role in September 2025, and the Vice Chair agreed to chair the panels until a new Panel Chair was appointed. When ending this reporting period there were 10 Panel Members on the central list.

Interviews for Panel Chair took place in February 2026 and the role was successfully appointed to. Interviews for Vice Chair roles took place in March 2026 and the two roles were successfully appointed to. Panel member interviews also took place in March 2026 and once the employment checks and induction process have been completed a further 4 panel members will be added to the Central List, including 1 independent social worker, adding valuable professional diversity to the panel. Notably, 3 of the 4 new appointments are male, which contributes to a more gender-balanced panel and supports Dorset's commitment to inclusivity and diversity

The Panel Administrator and Business Support Team continue to provide an efficient and high-quality service. The structure and guidance in place help the panel function smoothly.

In 2026/27, we are hoping to resume the quarterly meetings with Panel Advisor, Panel Chair and Vice Chairs to look at Panel's areas of strengths and areas for development.

Panel Meetings are face-to-face and facilitate a hybrid approach to allow for both in-person and virtual (in exceptional circumstances with prior agreement) attendance to enable full participation. The service aim is for all panels to be held face to face.

The panel continues to be open to children and young people attending connected carer approvals and appropriate portions of mainstream reviews. The panel are keen to hear their voice and be involved in conversation about their lives. This is an area we need to develop further in collaboration with the fostering and childcare teams.

The Panel Advisor appointed to the Panel in February 2025 left the service in September 2025. The role was temporarily covered by the Service Leader and Team Leaders until a new Panel Advisor was appointed in December 2025. The current Panel Advisor has worked collaboratively with panel and the fostering service to ensure the documents presented to panel meet the regulatory requirements.

Since December 2025, they have also taken the lead in preparing the reflective sessions'

### **Training, Development and Appraisals**

Dorset has made a commitment to provide 2 training opportunities to panel a year, with the minimum requirement being 1.

There has been continued investment in panel members knowledge with regards to key updates to legislation, practice and performance. This has included:

- June 2025: 'In My Shoes – What's it like to be care experienced' training
- August 2025: IRM Information session facilitated by IRM Service Manager

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

- TEAMS
- Safeguarding and Child Protection
- Equality and Diversity and Inclusion Pathway
- Gender Identity
- Safeguarding Adults
- Prevent
- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
- Data Protection Modules (to be completed on Day 1 in post)

Panel members also can access the Coram BAAF briefings and training events.

During this reporting year, the reflective sessions have continued. This is protected time for panel to discuss and share key updates and learning in a timely manner. Panel Members enjoy these sessions and find them useful. Themes have included:

- Philomena Protocol
- Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews
- LADO Investigations and Panel's responsibilities
- The Mockingbird Family Model

- The Valuing Care Panel
- Foster Carer's Payments
- Graduated response to Kinship Carers in rural areas
- NMS for fostering: Implications for Kinship Carers
- Government's fostering reforms: Proposals and Call for Evidence
- Learning from Feedback received from foster carers / social workers attending panel meetings

### Panel Activity

|                                                        | <b>Total<br/>by<br/>case<br/>type</b> | <b>Positive<br/>recommendation</b> | <b>Negative<br/>recommendation</b> | <b>Deferred</b> | <b>ADM<br/>Agreed</b> | <b>ADM<br/>Disagreed</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>New<br/>Mainstream<br/>– approval</b>               | 15                                    | 14                                 | 1                                  | 0               | 14                    | 1                        |
| <b>New Kinship<br/>persons –<br/>approval</b>          | 24                                    | 22                                 | 1                                  | 1               | 23                    | 1                        |
| <b>Reg 25 (8-<br/>week<br/>extension<br/>request)</b>  | 23                                    | 23                                 | 0                                  | 0               | 23                    | 0                        |
| <b>Reviews<br/>after<br/>allegation</b>                | 3                                     | 1                                  | 1                                  | 1               | 2                     | 1                        |
| <b>1<sup>st</sup> year<br/>review -<br/>Mainstream</b> | 18                                    | 15                                 | 1                                  | 2               | 17                    | 1                        |
| <b>1<sup>st</sup> Review –<br/>Kinship</b>             | 12                                    | 10                                 | 2                                  | 0               | 11                    | 1                        |
| <b>Change of<br/>status</b>                            | 10                                    | 8                                  | 2                                  | 0               | 9                     | 1                        |
| <b>Resignations<br/>to panel</b>                       | 1                                     | 1                                  | 0                                  | 0               | 1                     | 0                        |

|                        |            |           |          |          |            |          |
|------------------------|------------|-----------|----------|----------|------------|----------|
| <b>De-registration</b> | 2          | 2         | 0        | 0        | 2          | 0        |
| <b>Total to panel</b>  | <b>108</b> | <b>96</b> | <b>8</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>102</b> | <b>6</b> |

Fig.1.

| <b>Year</b>    | <b>Total new Applications</b> | <b>Mainstream Carers</b> | <b>Connected Carers</b> |
|----------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>2025/26</b> | 36                            | 14                       | 22                      |
| <b>2024/25</b> | 37                            | 17                       | 20                      |
| <b>2023/24</b> | 46                            | 15                       | 31                      |
| <b>2022/23</b> | 35                            | 12                       | 23                      |

Fig.2.

In comparison to 2024/25 we have seen a decrease in the number of new applications. Mainstream approvals reduced from 17 to 14 and the number of connected carers applications increasing from 20 to 22.

The number of resignations reduced from 33 to 6 in 2023/24, from 6 to 3 in 2024/2025 and have reduced further to 1 during this reporting period, however we need to ensure that all resignations are being presented and acknowledged at panel. There have also been 2 deregistration's during this reporting year, in comparison to 3 in 2024/25.

There have been 6 differing decisions made by the ADM, and panel have asked for clear rationale for the differing decisions to be shared with panel and this has been happening as and when necessary.

Following the introduction of the revised review policy and procedure in October 2024, panel have been informed that there is no longer a back log of cases waiting to be presented to panel. The new review policy and procedure was designed to streamline the review process, and this appears to have successfully reduced the back log. Although there are no longer 3 yearly reviews being presented to panel, panel have been assured that if there is a need for independent scrutiny identified at a review meeting, this will then be presented to panel for oversight.

## **Strengthening opportunities identified in previous reports**

Pre-panel preparation sheets continue to be completed jointly in Teams and submitted to the Chair in advance of panel to ensure compliance with regulations and remit of Panel. This is shared on the morning of panel with those attending as a live draft working document. These have been a great success and have had the additional benefit of supporting with minutes.

Independent QA feedback sheets continue to be completed independently and are shared appropriately via panel advisor with team managers, ADM (Agency Decision Maker) and fostering services managers. These highlight attendees' presentation as well as quality of reports. The feedback identifies strengths in practice and areas to strengthen if needed. The feedback sheets were reviewed and updated in January 2026.

Minutes are reaching panel members within 48 hours. They are finalised by Panel Chair and with Agency Decision Maker (ADM) generally within 7 days of panel. This has a positive impact for all awaiting ADM decisions.

## **Themes and Observations**

Panel remain determined that all standard of care concerns and allegations should be presented to panel without delay, to ensure that the focus remains on the child and the care they are receiving. Standard 22 (National Minimum Standards focuses on the handling of allegations however as part of the government's fostering reforms their proposal is to 'set out a simpler rulebook for fostering that puts trusted relationships first. This will include new sections on the handling of allegations and standards of care concerns.' (Foster Care Reform: Proposed changes assessment and handling of allegations of abuse – February 2026)

Within the Government's Fostering reforms there is also a proposal to remove the requirement for fostering panels to make recommendations about approval of foster carers and for the one-year annual review process. It also proposes to remove the requirement for panels to oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service. There was a call for evidence which panel members responded to. On behalf of its members, Coram BAAF in collaboration with The Fostering Network, NSPCC, Coram Voice, Barnardo's, Foster Talk and NYAS also responded to the call for evidence (please refer to letter dated 26th March 2026 to the Minister for Children and Families) In this letter, they are publicly raising their concerns about the proposed removal of fostering panels altogether, emphasising the essential role that panels play in safeguarding, scrutiny, and quality assurance. Panels bring together a breadth of professional expertise, providing a level of oversight that helps ensure children are placed safely and appropriately—an important safeguard recognised across the sector. The proposed reforms suggest a shift toward a "simpler rulebook", streamlining assessments and potentially altering how quality assurance is delivered.

There are still some delays in getting all the required paperwork to panel within the agreed timeframes. This has an impact on the timings of the agenda and compliance with policy and fostering standards (5 working days minimum to review all information). It is hoped that now there is a new Panel Advisor in post, there will be enhanced oversight and support from the Panel Advisor to track and ensure that all papers are completed and submitted to panel within the required timescales. They will be able to review paperwork and ensure there is improvement in this area.

During this reporting period it has been observed that there has been an increase in the need for regulation 25 extension requests. Regulation 25 sits within care planning, placement & care review (England) regulations 2010 and deals specifically with the extension of temporary approval of a kinship/connected person who has been approved under regulation 24 but not yet had a completed full fostering assessment. This has generally been necessary due to the delays in obtaining medical reports and DBS checks in a timely fashion.

Most of the reports being submitted are of good quality and are well written, clearly highlighting both the strengths and vulnerabilities of applicants/foster carers.

There has been an increase in attendance from Children's Social Workers compared with the previous reporting period. This has been a very positive development, as the child's voice is now being heard more consistently within panel discussions. Their contributions provide valuable insight into what life is like for the child living with the foster carers being recommended. This enhanced involvement has been warmly welcomed by the panel. However, there remains further room for improvement to ensure children's views are fully embedded in all assessments brought to panel.

Panel remain generally impressed with how well-prepared fostering social workers are to present to Panel, often answering and pre-empting any questions in their opening summary.

Panel has also raised ongoing concerns regarding delays in foster carers receiving Dorset Council laptops. These delays have had a direct impact on carers' ability to complete mandatory training within required timescales, with reports of some carers waiting over a year for equipment. Standard 20.3 & 20.4 (NMS 2011) set out the requirements for foster carers to complete the required training therefore it is essential they are given the tools to do so. However, it is acknowledged that work is already underway with the Training and Development Team to address these concerns. A new training platform is currently being developed, which is expected to improve accessibility, streamline the process, and support carers to meet their mandatory requirements more effectively.

Safer Care Plans for individual children placed with foster carers continue to be inconsistently completed, and this remains an area requiring improvement. However, it is understood this is an area of focus for the teams with an action plan in place

During this reporting period, Panel escalated two cases for management attention. One related to a foster carer employed by Dorset Council who experienced difficulties accessing his entitlement to 5 days of fostering-related leave. The carer reported that his supervisors were unaware of this entitlement. Given Dorset Council's position as a fostering-friendly employer, this gap in awareness at supervisory level was concerning and warranted escalation. This incident may indicate wider inconsistencies in understanding or implementing the fostering-friendly policy across departments. The other case was a Kinship review following an allegation and panel requested reassurance from the ADM that the recommendations from panel would be acted upon and the ADM offered reassurance and supported the panel's recommendation and felt they had been thorough and fair and agreed that a return to panel for further review in six months would also form part of the action plan.

Concerns have been raised regarding the lack of consistency in the allocated fostering social workers for some foster carers. Several carers have experienced 2, 3, or even 4 changes in social worker within their first year of approval. This level of turnover can significantly impact the continuity of support, the quality of supervision, and the carers' ability to provide the best possible care for the children living with them. While the Panel recognises that changes in staffing can be unavoidable—for example due to ill health, staff turnover, etc., frequent changes have a noticeable effect on foster carers' experience and support levels.

### **Developmental work & future plans**

There is a commitment from the panel chair and vice chairs to work with senior managers, developing open and strength-based communication, and feeding back to panel members on this work regularly.

We will continue inviting social workers and fostering team staff to observe panels to help them understand how cases are considered and recommendations are made from the panel's perspective.

An induction day will be planned for the new panel members in June 2026, and once they have completed their induction day and observed two panels, they will then be ready to fully participate in the panel process.

A meeting was held between the chair and a fostering team leader to look at the template report for Regulation 25 cases being presented to panel. In September 2025, the new template was then introduced and will be reviewed in May 2026

Ensure foster carers are welcomed and supported to attend panel and know what to expect. We will be working with our foster carers, social workers and panel to ensure

we respond to feedback to make the process friendlier and more inclusive. Panel meetings are usually held within the Committee rooms at County Hall, and we understand how intimidating it can feel for applicants and carers to attend panel meetings in such a formal setting. Consideration to be given to see if there are alternative venues available for panel meetings.

We will continue to explore the reasons behind the consistently low levels of feedback from foster carers, applicants and social workers who attend panel and develop strategies to improve response rates.

2 x training days for panel members to be planned for 2026/2027. One of the training events will be for panel members to attend the 'Journey to Foster' training, which will give them an opportunity to see the work that is undertaken with prospective carers.

Supported Lodgings Carers to join the panel process, this remains the same as 2024/2025 – we are yet to have any supported lodgings carers come to panel. Our first case is scheduled for May 2026

A commitment to ensuring the voice of the child is the golden thread in all paperwork and panel discussions.

### **User feedback**

Fostering panel feedback questionnaires were provided to all applicants, foster carers and professionals who attended the panel, requesting their feedback around their experience of panel. Unfortunately, feedback has not been received consistently, and I have only had sight of feedback between June 2025 – December 2025. During these 7 months, out of approximately 150, 64 responses were received, 31 foster carers and 33 professionals.

Their experience is rated from 1–5: and the following ratings were given:

- Foster carers average: 4.61
- Professionals average: 4.42

This demonstrates that on average foster carers/applicants and professionals feel comfortable and confident in attending panel and feel able to share their experience with panel members. It is important that we use this feedback to improve our practice wherever possible and analyse in detail to help us understand any themes and trends.

The Panel Chair has introduced a new way for applicants / foster carers to receive the feedback from panel. Instead of the panel chair feeding back directly to the applicants / foster carers after panel, they are given the opportunity to return into panel to hear from individual panel members, giving their recommendation and highlighting their reasons. Obviously, this approach is only used if it is appropriate to

do so, considering the sensitive nature of panel and the recommendations being given. This appears to be well received, and attendees are opting to return into panel and welcome the comments from panel members.

Social workers are feeling positive about attending Panel. New social workers observing have found this opportunity rewarding and appreciated being able to observe the whole process from report to formulation of recommendations and rational.

## **Conclusion**

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

Evidence from programmes such as the Mockingbird family model shows that peer supported networks can improve placement stability and carer retention. We have heard first hand from carers about the support they have received from their Mockingbird constellations, and we encourage prospective carers to consider the benefits of being part of this innovation.

In conclusion, I would like to thank those that have consistently worked on ensuring that the most vulnerable children in our care are provided with the highest quality foster care possible, showing continued dedication in striving to achieve best outcomes for all children.

## **5. Alternative options considered**

5.1 N/A

## **6. Legal considerations**

6.1 The Fostering Panel operates under the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011.

The Panel Chair must monitor whether Assessments presented to panel meet Regulation 26 (approval of foster carers) requirements and that Reviews comply with Regulation 28 (review of approval)

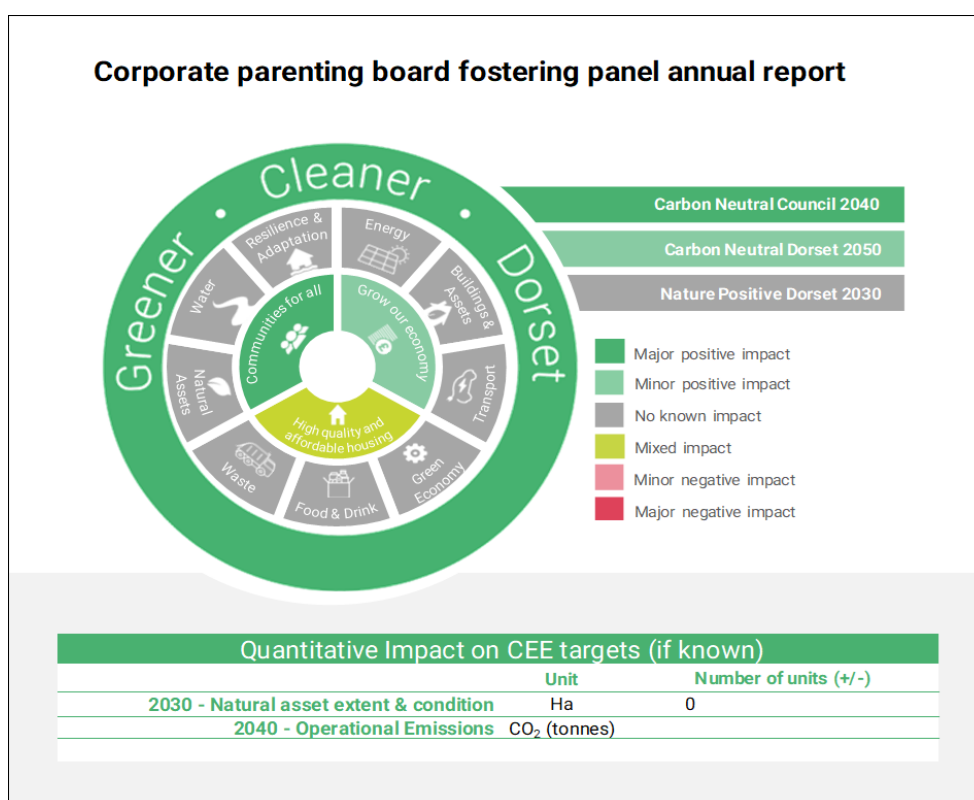
Panel recommendations have a direct impact on the Local Authority's ability to meet its sufficiency duty (Children Act 1989).

Panel must operate independently and without bias.

## **7. Financial implications**

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

## 8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications



8.1

## 9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 The fostering panel's activity supports the emotional well-being of children, foster carers and professionals through robust scrutiny, placement stability and a trauma-informed, child-centred approach. Some risks to well-being have been identified, particularly in relation to assessment delays, digital access and workforce continuity; however, these are recognised and subject to ongoing mitigation. Overall health and well-being impact is positive, with low residual risk.

## 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 An Equalities Impact Risk Assessment has been undertaken. The report overall demonstrates positive impacts in relation to inclusion, fairness and the promotion of children's rights. Some low-level equality-related risks have been identified around accessibility, digital inclusion and kinship care; however, these are recognised and subject to ongoing mitigation. Residual equality risk is assessed as low.

This report demonstrates that due regard has been given to the equality impacts of fostering panel activity. The fostering panel operates in a manner that promotes fairness, inclusion, and safeguarding, with a clear commitment to continuous improvement.

Current Equality Risk: Low

### **13. Appendices**

- 13.1 None

### **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)

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## Corporate Parenting Board

28 May 2026

### Leaving Care Service- annual report For Review and Consultation

**Cabinet Member:**

Cllr C Sutton, Children, Families & Education

**Local Councillor(s):**

**Senior Leadership Team:**

P Dempsey - Executive Director, Children's Services

**Report author and job title: Jane MacLennan, Head of Service**

**Email:** [jane.maclennan@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:jane.maclennan@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)

**Statutory Authority:**

**Report status:** Public

**1. Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)**

1.1 This annual report provides Dorset Council's Corporate Parenting Board with a comprehensive overview of the activity and impact of the Care Leavers Service between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026. Its purpose is to ensure senior leaders have clear insight into how well the service is fulfilling the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities to care experienced young people.

Over the last 12 months, the service has continued to support Dorset's care leavers to achieve positive outcomes as they transition into adulthood. The report highlights key developments, achievements, and areas of progress, alongside the challenges that have shaped service delivery during the year. It also outlines how the service has worked to meet statutory duties, improve performance, and respond to the evolving needs of young people.

The report brings together performance data, service improvements, and feedback from care experienced young people to provide assurance on the quality and impact of support delivered. It also identifies priorities for the year ahead to further

strengthen outcomes and ensure Dorset's care leavers receive the opportunities, care, and support they deserve.

## **2. Recommendation(s)**

### **2.1 That the Corporate Parenting Board:**

- Notes and welcomes the positive outcomes achieved by Dorset's care leavers over the reporting period and endorses the Care Leavers Service's plans to further improve outcomes throughout 2026/27.
- Continues to promote and champion the corporate parenting responsibility across all areas of Dorset Council, ensuring every service contributes to improving the lives of care experienced young people.

## **3. Reason for the recommendation(s)**

### **3.1 For the Board to continue providing effective support, oversight, and challenge to the Care Leavers Service, ensuring that Dorset Council maximises its offer to care leavers and fulfils its corporate parenting duties to the highest possible standard.**

#### **4. The report**

Dorset Council has high expectations and aspirations for all care leavers. As young people approach the transition from care, our focus is on ensuring they are well prepared, understand what to expect, and receive the emotional and practical support needed to thrive. We recognise that care leavers do not begin adulthood from the same starting point as their peers and may require additional support to build confidence, independence, and stability.

Our interdependence-based approach ensures that every care leaver from 16, has access to consistent, trusted support from a Personal Advisor (PA). PAs work alongside young people across key areas including housing, health, education, employment, financial wellbeing, and community engagement, helping them to remain connected and supported as they progress toward adulthood.

Since January 2023, the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) has included a dedicated judgement on the experiences and progress of care leavers. This has strengthened accountability for the quality of decision-making and support provided, while ensuring that care leavers' voices are central to inspection outcomes.

The March 2025 ILACS inspection judged the experiences and progress of care leavers in Dorset as Good. Inspectors recognised the strength of relationships between care leavers and their Personal Advisors, highlighting a committed and ambitious workforce that knows its young people well and is focused on securing the right support to meet their needs.

#### **Context**

Care leavers are young people aged 18 to 25 who have previously been in the care of a local authority. Their entitlements are defined in legislation and reflect differing care histories and levels of need. The four statutory categories are: eligible, relevant, former relevant, and qualifying care leavers, each carrying specific responsibilities for local authorities in relation to advice, support, and pathway planning.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 strengthened the Council's duties by requiring local authorities, from April 2018, to offer continuing Personal Advisor (PA) support to all care leavers up to the age of 25 where they choose to receive it. This marked a significant expansion from previous arrangements, which limited statutory support beyond age 21 in most circumstances.

In Dorset, we are currently providing active support to 96 care leavers aged 21–25, representing approximately 30% of the overall care leaver cohort. This

demonstrates both sustained engagement with services and the continued need for relationship-based support as young people navigate early adulthood.

Dorset Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy applies to all care experienced children and young people, with a particular focus on those preparing to leave care at ages 16 and 17 and those transitioning into adulthood up to age 25. The strategy sets out clear expectations and shared responsibilities across the Council and with partners to ensure care leavers are supported, enabled, and empowered to succeed.

The strategy is informed by key legislation including the Children Act 1989, Housing Act 1996, and Children and Social Work Act 2017, and is underpinned by five core outcomes:

- Improved access to education, employment, and training
- Greater stability, safety, and security
- Improved access to health and wellbeing support
- Increased financial stability and independence
- Stronger relationships, networks, and aspirational futures

Supporting care experienced young people is a shared responsibility across the whole Council and wider system. Dorset Council is committed to acting with the same care, ambition, and accountability that any good parent would expect for their own child. Our guiding principle remains that services must be "good enough for my child", and our ambition is to be recognised as an exemplary Corporate Parent.

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, Dorset Council is a partner in the Bright Spots New Belongings Programme, alongside seven other local authorities. The programme uses nationally benchmarked survey data to understand what matters most to care leavers, and what contributes to a good life. Dorset's most recent survey was completed in February 2024, with findings received in November 2025.

The findings were reviewed in partnership with our Care Experienced Network, leading to the identification of key priorities and the development of a targeted action plan. Delivery and impact are monitored through the Corporate Parenting Partners Delivery Group, which provides assurance and oversight through regular reporting to the Corporate Parenting Board.

We have commissioned a further Bright Spots survey to take place in Summer 2026.

The 2024/25 Bright Spots survey highlighted several strengths in Dorset's offer to care leavers:

- 99% reported it was easy to contact their Personal Advisor.
- 91% felt involved in the development of their Pathway Plan.
- 95% confirmed access to the internet, with 97% having access to a smartphone.

The survey also identified clear areas for further improvement. Through engagement with the Care Experienced Network and wider participation activity, the following priorities have been agreed for the 2025–2027 period:

- Increasing the range and availability of suitable housing options for care leavers.
- Ensuring care experienced young people understand their care history and the reasons they were in care.
- Supporting young people to maintain and build positive relationships and support networks.
- Strengthening confidence in future prospects, including access to employment and training, financial independence, and improved emotional wellbeing.

The Care Leaver Team works closely with the Youth Voice Team to capture feedback from care experienced young people using a range of inclusive and accessible engagement approaches. Methods are regularly reviewed and strengthened in recognition that young people have different preferences and needs, and that no single approach is effective for all.

Engagement opportunities include digital tools, one-to-one telephone contact, and face-to-face conversations. In addition, the Head of Service for Care Leavers attends care experienced networking meetings, providing direct opportunities for young people to share their views, influence service development, and receive updates on progress against agreed priorities.

Over the past 12 months, the Care Experienced Network has played a significant role in shaping service development and support arrangements for care leavers. Feedback has highlighted the importance of support for care experienced parents. In response, we have reviewed and strengthened our offer, alongside reinforcing the importance of young people having the right people around them to provide consistent help, guidance, and advocacy.

Dorset Council makes a clear and explicit promise to all care leavers to share responsibility for their wellbeing, working collaboratively with partners and

communities to make a meaningful difference in their lives. This commitment reflects our belief that corporate parenting is a shared responsibility across the whole council and wider system. Full details of **The Dorset Promise** - Dorset Council are available online via the Dorset Council website.

The Local Offer for care leavers has been developed in consultation with care experienced young people and key partners. It provides clear, accessible information about the support available, including both statutory entitlements and additional discretionary assistance offered by Dorset Council. The Local Offer is shared with young people from age 16 as they prepare to leave care and is also available online. It is reviewed and updated regularly (twice a year) to ensure it remains relevant, responsive, and reflective of young people's changing needs and priorities.

The Local Offer reinforces Dorset Council's commitment to equity of support. While equality of access is important, we recognise that care leavers have diverse experiences, strengths, and challenges. Our approach is therefore proportionate and needs-led, ensuring each young person receives the right level and type of support to help them achieve comparable outcomes and thrive into adulthood.

In January 2025, Dorset launched the Graduating Care Southwest (GCSW) app, providing care experienced young people with easy access to both local and regional offers of support. The app compliments existing access routes, including online and hard-copy formats, ensuring information is available in ways that suit different preferences. Young people's feedback has been actively sought and used to shape the design and functionality of the app, supporting accessibility, engagement, and relevance.

Our service continues to be needs led, with a strong foundation in relational practice. We recognise that the quality of relationships between Personal Advisors and care leavers is central to achieving positive outcomes, and this remains a core principle guiding our work.

At the end of March 2026, Dorset Council was supporting 557 care leavers, of whom 319 were former relevant care leavers aged 18–25 and in receipt of an active service. Supporting 57% of former relevant care leavers indicates Dorset is maintaining contact with a significant proportion of eligible young people. This aligns with statutory duties under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and later legislation extending support to age 25

Personal Advisors (PAs) play a central role in delivering high-quality, co-produced pathway planning with young people and key partners. Pathway plans are reviewed at least every six months, or sooner where circumstances

change, to ensure they remain responsive to individual needs, aspirations, and progress.

Feedback from care leavers consistently identifies pathway planning as a strength. Young people value the structured, purposeful conversations with their PA, which support clear goal-setting, identification of need, and regular reflection on progress.

Performance in this area remains strong. As of March 2026, 96.55% of pathway plans were completed within statutory timescales. Robust management oversight ensures that any delay is addressed promptly and that plans are updated swiftly when young people's circumstances change. Our approach remains collaborative, strengths-based, and outcomes-focused.

Maintaining contact with care leavers is a core function of the PA role and underpins effective support delivery. Through consistent relationships and regular communication, PAs ensure young people can access appropriate support across accommodation, financial stability, education, employment, training, and preparation for adulthood. This proactive approach enables timely responses to emerging needs and contributes to positive outcomes.

Throughout this reporting period we have remained in contact with 99.13% of care leavers aged 17–25, exceeding the local target of 93%. This represents sustained high engagement and reflects the strength of relationships across the service. The Head of Service provides monthly assurance to the Senior Leadership Team, with focused oversight and trauma-informed approaches in place to re-engage the small number of young people who are temporarily out of touch.

In addition, all care leavers receive at least annual contact up to age 25, ensuring they remain informed about their entitlements and how to access support at any time. This reinforces Dorset's role as a committed and dependable corporate parent.

We actively support care leavers to build and maintain positive relationships and wider support networks. This includes delivery of the Staying Close and Mentoring programmes, which were funded throughout 2025/25 by the DfE (Department for Education). Funding for the mentoring project has now ended and we are reviewing and considering our future mentoring offer in consultation with our care experienced young people.

Staying Close for care leavers is best described as a relationship-based, gradual transition model that recognises young people leaving care still need stability, trusted adults and a sense of belonging—not a sudden jump to full

independence. It ensures young people leaving residential or similar care settings remain emotionally, practically and relationally connected to the people, places and support that helped them feel safe. Crucially, support is available when needed, not restricted to office hours or rigid processes. As part of the Staying close offer, we employ 2 care experienced young people as programme coordinators. This has continued to have a positive impact on engagement and participation.

Dorset's pathway to employment and mentoring for care leavers is a flexible, relationship-based approach that supports young people to build confidence, skills and stability as they move towards education, training or work. Through personalised planning, practical employment support and access to trusted mentors, care leavers are helped to progress at their own pace, overcome barriers and develop the resilience needed for sustained employment and independence.

Rather than focusing solely on employment outcomes, the pathway supports care leavers to build the foundations for sustained participation in education, employment or training (EET) In this reporting period we have continued to work collaboratively across the council to develop pathway to employment programmes and support for care leavers (18+). This aligns with the council priority to ensure that at least 65% of care leavers are engaged with active education, employment or training (known as EET). We have developed a local offer which provides mentoring support and/or targeted employment focussed interventions and we have successfully engaged 68 young people through this programme over the last 12 months.

To support smooth transitions, Personal Advisors are allocated from age 16 and work alongside social workers before young people leave care. This enables early relationship-building, continuity, and clear transition planning. Most care leavers benefit from support from the same PA from age 18 through to 21, and up to 25 where required, providing stability and a consistent trusted relationship over several years.

A focus of the last 12 months has been on developing a lifelong offer for care experienced adults, extending our support beyond age 25. A life-long offer for care leavers is the local authority's commitment to remain available and responsive throughout a care-experienced person's life, ensuring they can access advice, signposting and trusted relationships whenever they need them. It reflects a corporate parenting approach that prioritises connection, belonging and sustained advocacy beyond statutory age limits, recognising that care experience can have lifelong impacts and that independence is not a one-off achievement but a process over time. By promoting enduring relationships and

a sense of belonging, the offer strengthens long-term wellbeing and support into adulthood.

The number of care leavers who were formerly unaccompanied children has increased from 81 in March 2025 to 95 by March 2026, and this cohort is expected to continue growing. To maintain a high-quality, responsive service, an additional 1.0 FTE Personal Advisor has been secured, increasing the dedicated UASC PA team to five. This investment strengthens capacity and ensures consistent, relationship-based support, promoting stability and continuity for young people as they transition into adulthood.

When care-experienced young people become parents or are expecting a child, Dorset Council acts as their corporate grandparent. We are currently supporting 35 care-experienced young people who are pregnant, expectant, or parents.

In response to inspection findings and direct feedback from young people, we have updated and strengthened our offer to this group. The enhanced offer provides targeted, trauma-informed, relationship-based support delivered through mainstream and targeted pathways, including Family Hubs, peer mentoring support, Family Network Meetings, and enhanced health, housing, education, and employment support.

The approach prioritises early help, continuity, and empowerment, reduces stigma, and improves outcomes for both parents and their children, underpinned by strong multi-agency collaboration, workforce development, and co-production.

An enhanced local offer for care-experienced young people who are parents recognises that they face greater structural disadvantage, reduced family support, and higher scrutiny than their peers. A strengthened, tailored offer improves outcomes not only for young parents, but also for their children, services, and the wider system. We can ensure that Care-experienced young people who become parents are not left to cope alone, and their children get the best possible start in life.

Personal Advisors (PAs) provide tailored support to help young people navigate parenting alongside employment, benefits, housing, and changing relationships. Support is proportionate and responsive, with increased contact where needed to provide reassurance without creating over-dependence. Practical assistance is also available, including clothing grants, financial support for essential baby items, and the provision of a new baby essentials box.

Increasing participation in Education, Employment and Training (EET) remains a key priority. Progress has been achieved through expansion of

apprenticeships, enhanced mentoring and structured support. The introduction of a pre-employment programme for young people requiring additional preparation. Working closely with the Pathway to Employment Team, this approach has sustained strong EET performance, with 71.02% of care leavers aged 18–25 in EET as of March 2026, exceeding the council target and consistently outperforming Good + statistical neighbours.

Dorset Council currently employs 15 care-experienced young people in Council apprenticeship roles, with a further 10 apprenticeship opportunities secured for the next 12 months. These posts are targeted at care-experienced young people who are not currently in education, employment or training (NEET) and who have engaged successfully with pre-employment programmes. This represents a significant corporate parenting commitment and provides flexible, supportive employment opportunities that reflect the stability and nurture care-experienced young people need to progress into sustainable employment.

Support for care-experienced young people in Higher Education remains a clear strength. We have 24 care leavers are studying at university, including one doctoral student and two post-graduate students. Young people benefit from enhanced Personal Adviser support, a Higher Education bursary, and practical assistance with accommodation during university holiday periods where required. This holistic offer supports both academic achievement and emotional wellbeing.

As of 31 March 2026, of the 319 active care leavers aged 18–25, 48 were engaged in full-time training, 53 in part-time training, and 92 in education. This demonstrates a wide range of progression pathways and reflects sustained focus on supporting engagement in education and training as a foundation for positive long-term outcomes.

Dorset Council has an established protocol with local Jobcentre Plus offices to provide coordinated support for care-experienced young people entering Education, Employment, Apprenticeships, Voluntary Work or Training. This includes early access to benefits, smooth transitions when leaving care, and timely payments where required. Strategic oversight is provided by a Senior Personal Adviser with lead responsibility for Education, Training and Employment, ensuring a focused and joined-up approach.

Personal Advisers support care leavers to access and sustain EET opportunities, with additional multi-agency input where young people are not currently engaged. This ensures coordinated tracking, timely intervention, and encouragement to participate in alternative learning or developmental activity while progressing toward employment or education.

Our overarching aim is to enable care-experienced young people to secure and sustain paid employment through tailored, strengths-based pathways aligned to individual aspiration, readiness, and long-term wellbeing.

Housing continues to be a key priority for both care-experienced young people and the Council. Dorset continues to take a strong corporate approach to securing and sustaining suitable accommodation, with 98.43% of care leavers living in appropriate housing as of March 2026. It is important to note that over the last 12 months over 95% of care leavers live in suitable housing arrangements.

Where accommodation is identified as unsuitable, robust escalation and management oversight arrangements are in place to ensure timely intervention. We have maintained 100% compliance with four-weekly supervision for all young people in unsuitable accommodation, ensuring risks are actively monitored and addressed.

This reporting period has seen a significant reduction in the number of care leavers accessing B&B accommodation. When and where they have, for those living in Dorset we have been able to utilise our own housing, work collaboratively with housing partners and enable young people to move into suitable housing within a few days. There is more of a challenge to identify suitable housing for young people who do not live in Dorset, where we do not have relationships with the local housing teams. We do reach out to convene urgent discussions along with the young person so they are aware of the options and choices available to them and where appropriate we will support with accessing private rented housing, in the area of their choice.

Ongoing engagement with care-experienced young people through the Sufficiency Strategy informs future housing provision. There is a commitment to develop additional housing options for care experienced young people who are ready to leave supported accommodation and move into full independent living.

The chart below shows the breakdown of the different housing arrangements for our young people as of 31 March 2026.

| Type               | Number |
|--------------------|--------|
| Independent living | 181    |
| Semi independent   | 36     |
| Supported lodgings | 7      |
| Foyers             | 26     |
| Staying put        | 36     |

|                                     |            |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| With parents/relatives              | 26         |
| Community Home                      | 2          |
| Unsuitable (custody, B&B, homeless) | 5          |
| <b>Total</b>                        | <b>319</b> |

Dorset Council has expanded the availability of local, affordable accommodation for care leavers, now providing housing for up to 24 young people across four properties in the Weymouth and Portland areas. Our housing strategy identified the need to create up to 50 different housing options for care leavers over 5 years. We currently have shared accommodation at Clarence and Sydney (three places each), dedicated provision at Leon for six former unaccompanied children, and a mix of shared and individual options at Kirtleton. Kirtleton, Clarence, and Sydney, also provide a short-term “crash pad” to enable young people to have a safe and suitable home, preventing the need/use of unsuitable accommodation.

Further expansion is planned for 2026 with the development of a three-bedroom shared property in Bridport, strengthening local capacity and ensuring care leavers have safe, stable, and accessible housing as they move toward independence. Sufficiency board continues to have oversight of the housing strategy and work towards continued increase of council owned properties for care leavers.

Within the Care Leaver Service, dedicated Housing Officers work alongside Personal Advisors to support young people to sustain tenancies and reduce homelessness within Clarence, Leon and Kirtleton. This includes support with move-on planning and ensuring accommodation remains safe, well maintained and of a high standard.

Through the rough sleeping grant, we have been able to secure funding to support a Senior Personal Advisor role focused on preventing rough sleeping and promoting emotional health and wellbeing. This is enabling us to strengthen early intervention and timely, relationship-based support.

Strong partnership working and clear protocols with housing services and providers ensure care experienced young people can access timely support when homeless or at risk of homelessness. This is strengthened by a dedicated Senior Personal Advisor role focused on rough sleeping prevention and emotional wellbeing, enabling targeted early intervention. As part of this approach, tenancy readiness training has been developed with BCHA for young people aged 16–17 and 18+, delivered through flexible face to face and online

formats to promote tenancy sustainability and support successful transitions into adulthood.

Our partnerships with private landlords, estate agents and property management companies both within and beyond Dorset have continued to grow, enabling us to secure accommodation in this area for 15 care leavers. These properties range from shared houses and flats to self-contained units, all centrally located to ensure good access to education, support networks and local communities.

Staying Put is a policy and practice framework that enables young people who have been living with foster carers to remain in that family home beyond the age of 18, when they would otherwise be expected to leave care. It recognises that most young people in the general population do not leave home suddenly at 18 and continue to rely on family support well into adulthood. Staying Put seeks to replicate this experience for care leavers by allowing them to transition to independence gradually, within the stability of a trusted home environment.

We have continued to grow our staying put numbers increasing to 36 in 2025/26. We continue to review our procedures to ensure staying put discussions start early with foster carers and young people as part of pathway planning so that arrangements post 18 are clear and in place in advance of a young person reaching 18. Responsibility for the oversight and management of staying put is now held within the care leavers team (within our lifelong links service) which has enabled us to improve clarity, equity, accountability and enhance oversight.

Supporting the physical and emotional health of care-experienced young people remains a priority. This is strengthened through a dedicated nurse for care leavers, close partnership with health services, and the introduction of a discrete health record marker (subject to consent) to promote trauma-informed, personalised care.

All young people receive a Health Passport to support effective communication with health professionals, are registered with a local GP, and have improved access to dental provision where needed. Partnership working with adult mental health services has been enhanced through dedicated management links, improving awareness of pathways and timely access to support.

In addition, through collaboration with Coram Voice and the Care Experienced Network, the Ask Me What Matters programme will go live in Q2 2026, enabling clearer understanding, reporting, and response to emotional wellbeing needs at both individual and service levels.

The Care Leaver Team has maintained a stable workforce, with successful recruitment to Personal Advisor vacancies and effective arrangements in place to ensure continuity of support during periods of staff sickness.

Reflective supervision continues to be strengthened, enabling Personal Advisors to demonstrate a clear understanding of their young people and intended outcomes. Supervision frequency and quality have improved year on year, with 98.73% of young people receiving supervision at least every eight weeks in March 2026, compared to 95.95% in March 2025 and 91.39% in March 2024.

Supervision records are written directly to young people, evidencing well-embedded, reflective, and person-centred practice, supported by strong and effective management oversight.

The Business Intelligence Dashboard is embedded into day-to-day management practice, with the Leaving Care Team remains the second highest user across Children's Services. It is used routinely to monitor key areas of practice, including accommodation suitability, Education, Employment and Training (EET), activity status, caseload management, supervision compliance, and the timeliness and quality of pathway planning. This supports informed decision-making, effective oversight, and continuous improvement.

The service provides robust monthly performance oversight to Executive and Corporate Directors through the Performance Board, regular reporting to the Corporate Parenting Partnership Delivery Group, and exception reporting to the Corporate Parenting Board. This framework benefits from strong challenge from members and care-experienced young people, enabling early identification of risks and areas requiring additional focus and supporting continuous improvement.

#### **Our vision for the next 12 months is to:**

- **Formally launch our lifelong/beyond 25 offer.** We will develop and embed our lifelong offer to support more care leavers to reconnect with people who are important to them or meet new people who could be supportive.
- **Maintain Education, Employment and Training (EET)** for care leavers 18-25 above 65%. We want to continue to provide the mentoring pathway to employment programme as well as increasing council apprenticeships and identifying work experience and employment opportunities within the public and private sectors.

- To **increase the choice of housing options** for young people 18+ within Dorset. We want to increase the provision of high-quality accommodation that feels safe and is affordable in Dorset. This includes increasing the number of young people in a staying put arrangement, accessing supported housing alongside independent housing options.
- To **launch the “ask me what matters”** programme, within pathway planning to support our care leavers with their mental health and emotional wellbeing. This will include strengthening our lifelong links service to ensure that care leavers have identified network of support from family, friends and professionals to meet their changing needs. We also need to work collaboratively with health partners to ensure the needs of care leavers are considered within the CAMHS transformation programme, with an ambition for the offer to extend to 25.

Despite the number of care leavers increasing, we have continued to strengthen the service and support we provide. The chart below indicates the distance travelled over the last 12 months for our key performance areas. Despite a small reduction in 2 areas, performance remains above our target.

| Indicator                                                         | March 2025 | March 2026 | DoT                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Total care leavers                                                | 558        | 557        |  |
| % care leavers in touch                                           | 99.33%     | 99.37%     |  |
| % care leavers 19-21 suitable accommodation                       | 96.00%     | 96%        |  |
| % care leavers 17-25 EET                                          | 68.20%     | 67.34%     |  |
| % care leavers 19-21 EET                                          | 68.00%     | 69%        |  |
| % care leavers (active) 8 weekly supervision                      | 95.95%     | 98.73%     |  |
| % care leavers with up-to-date pathway plan by end of month 17-25 | 92.67%     | 96.55%     |  |

The Care Leaver Team has a strong understanding of both service strengths and the challenges faced by care-experienced young people. Over the past year, there has been a clear focus on improving the quality, consistency, and impact of support. This has been driven by meaningful consultation and engagement with care-experienced young people, ensuring their feedback

directly informs practice, service development, and priority setting, and supports a culture of continuous improvement.

## **5. Alternative options considered**

5.1 N/A

## **6. Legal considerations**

6.1 Statutory duties- Children Act 1989 & 2000 as amended.

The Local Authority must safeguard and promote the welfare of eligible, relevant, and former relevant young people (s.23C).

There is a legal duty to: Provide a Personal Adviser (PA) up to age 25 (if requested) Maintain and review a Pathway Plan & Provide accommodation and financial support, where required.

Children & Social Work Act 2017- corporate parenting principles.

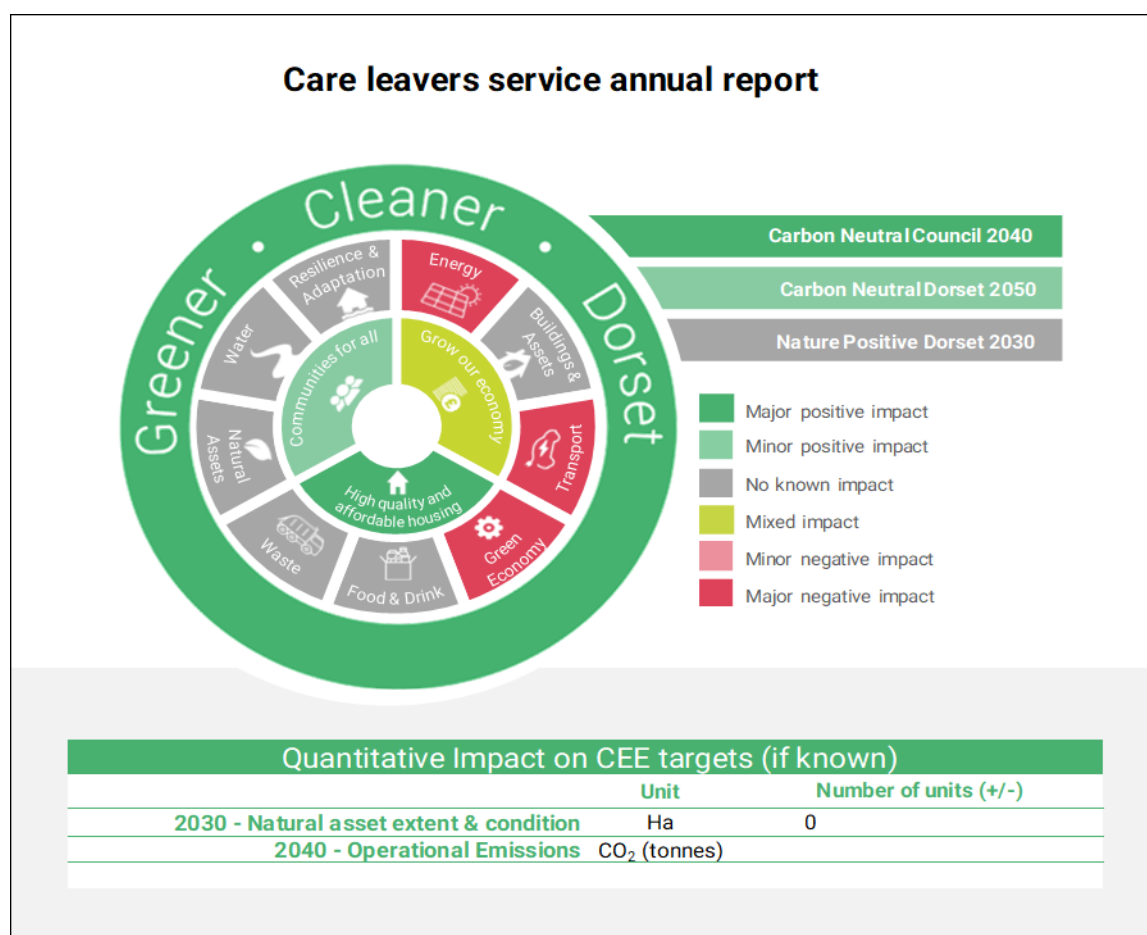
The Council must demonstrate it is acting in line with the 7 Corporate Parenting Principles, including: Promoting best outcomes, ensuring safety and stability and preparing young people for adulthood and independence.

## **7. Financial implications**

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

## **8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications**

8.1



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

We as a service try reducing our carbon footprint by using trains and linking Personal Advisors to young people near one another reducing the number of Personal Advisors traveling.

## 9. Well-being and health implications

While the report does not introduce new risks, it describes service activity that has a clear positive impact on the mental, emotional and physical wellbeing of care-experienced young people. This includes stable accommodation, strong relational support, access to health services, targeted emotional wellbeing initiatives, and trauma-informed practice. No adverse health or wellbeing implications have been identified.

## 10. Other implications

10.1 N/A

## **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**

The report does not propose changes to policy or service eligibility and therefore does not introduce negative equality impacts. Instead, it describes the delivery, impact and planned development of support for care leavers, a group that experiences disproportionate disadvantage across multiple equality domains.

The activity set out in the report is assessed as having a positive and supportive equality impact.

Dorset Council formally recognises care experience as a protected characteristic (from September 2023), strengthening accountability for addressing discrimination and inequality experienced by care-experienced people.

No adverse equality impacts have been identified. This report supports, rather than limits, equality outcomes.

## **13. Appendices**

13.1 N/A

## **14. Background papers**

14.1 N/A

## **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)



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## Corporate Parenting Board

28 May 2026

## Youth Voice Strategy for Care Experienced Children and Young People For Review and Consultation

**Cabinet Member:**

Cllr C Sutton, Children, Families & Education

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

**Senior Leadership Team:**

P Dempsey - Executive Director, Children's Services

**Report author and job title:** Kaye Wright, Youth Voice Team Manager

**Email:** [kaye.wright@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:kaye.wright@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)

**Statutory Authority:** This paper is for information rather than requiring a decision so this section is not applicable.

**Report status:** Public Choose an item.

### 1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This paper provides an update on our responsibility and duty as a corporate parent to listen, respond and act upon the voices of our care experienced children and young people. The paper also reflects on how we feedback to young people on the progress we are making about the things that are important to them. This report covers the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.
- 1.2 The Youth Voice Team continue to facilitate The Network<sup>1</sup>, a space led and shaped by care experienced children and young people whose lived experience guides our work. All work is underpinned by the Lundy Model of Participation<sup>2</sup> ensuring children and young people are given space, supported to express their voice, listened to by the right audience and supported to influence decisions. This model fully upholds article 12 of the UNCRC.

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<sup>1</sup> [Dorset Youth Voice – including details about The Network](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Lundy Model of Participation – UNICEF website](#)

- 1.3 This report highlights how children and young people in The Network, have made an impact and what we are doing next based on their feedback.

## 2. **Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 This report provides a service update only, therefore there are no recommendations.

## 3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**

- 3.1 Not applicable

## 4. **The report**

- 4.1 Impact and influence of young people:

- a) Participation levels remain consistent, reflecting sustained engagement. Young people continue to be involved in ways that allow them to use their strengths and talents. On average, 21 young people take part in The Network each quarter. Across the year, 36 different young people have contributed their thoughts, wishes and feelings with the Youth Voice Team, volunteering more than 500 hours between them. Of this 36, 8 are unaccompanied young people, with only 6 are under 18.
- b) The 'new to care' booklet co-produced with young people, is now complete and ready to help other children in care know their rights and the support available to them.
- c) Young people co-designed with the IRO Service Manager, a training session about identity. This has helped the workforce to have a better understanding of how complex identity is for care experienced young people and the intersectionality of this. Since October 2025, 58 people have received the identity training with further sessions planned with the Birth to Settled Adulthood team, foster carers and Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) social workers.
- d) 'In My Shoes' video<sup>3</sup> was co-produced and launched during National Care Leaver's month in November 2025. This further supported the acknowledgement of Care Day in 2026<sup>4</sup> with the video being shared publicly on social media and directly with education providers.
- e) 'In My Shoes' art exhibition<sup>5</sup> and 'talking tables' activity during National Care Leaver's month, was supported by local MP's, the leader of Dorset Council Cllr Nick Ireland, chair of Dorset Council Cllr Stella Jones and Dorset Council's Chief Executive, along with several members of the Children's senior leadership team. From this, one MP took a young person's comment about protected

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<sup>3</sup> <https://youtu.be/iJ-tdfcVZLc>

<sup>4</sup> [Dorset Care leavers share stories in powerful film | Dorset Echo](#)

<sup>5</sup> ["In My Shoes" exhibition Dorset Council news article](#)

characteristics to Parliament, and this could be viewed by young people via a live stream.

- f) 'In My Shoes' workforce training continues to deliver impact and is shaped and informed by the work we do with young people. Just over 100 people have attended the In My Shoes training in the last year, including the Children in Care Nursing team, members of fostering panels and adults involved in the mentoring program for care leavers.
- g) Corporate Parenting Board data set has been improved with language that cares and feels better for young people. We now aim to embed their work from the Ask Me What Matters project<sup>6</sup> into our digital systems so that the data set is enhanced with what matters most to them.
- h) A Network member recorded a podcast with colleagues in Quality Assurance about record keeping. They shared the impact of reading their records and why writing to the child with language that cares is so important. This podcast is shared with the children's services workforce.
- i) A Network member presented to town mayors about corporate parenting and how they can consider their role as corporate parents in their communities.
- j) The Networks art exhibitions have travelled around Dorset and continue to have an impact, long after the formal exhibitions have closed. This continues to raise the profile of care experienced young people and tackle stigma.
- k) A Network Ambassador has supported recruitment activities in the IRO Service.

#### 4.2 Wider strategic impact:

- a) The team has sustained participation with our unaccompanied young people thanks to a fixed term grant funded position.
- b) Decision makers are consistently present at workshops with The Network.
- c) The Youth Voice Team have updated the corporate parenting learning module, informed by lived experience. We are exploring an opportunity to make this a mandatory module for the Dorset Council workforce, as care experience is one of our locally adopted protected characteristics.
- d) The terms of reference for the Workforce Development Board have been updated to now include the Youth Voice Manager as a representative. The board have now received presentations on Children's Rights and the Ask Me What Matters project, with related objectives and actions being adopted by the board. The actions cover the following themes:

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<sup>6</sup> [Ask Me What Matters - Coram Voice website](#)

- **Becoming a rights-respecting, values-led workforce**  
Workforce development is being strengthened to operate consistently within a children's rights framework, embedding UNCRC principles and the Dorset Promise across recruitment, training, commissioning and leadership practice.
- **Meaningful participation of children and young people**  
Children and young peoples lived experiences and voices are being actively embedded within learning design, delivery, quality assurance and promotion.
- **Lived experience-informed learning**  
Training and induction increasingly centre on the real experiences of children in care and care-experienced young people, using approaches such as *In My Shoes* to deepen understanding, empathy and reflective practice across the workforce.
- **Stronger leadership, accountability and transparency**  
Clear mechanisms are being developed to connect Corporate Parenting Board priorities with workforce development activity, improve information sharing, and increase visibility of how learning, feedback and board direction translate into tangible change.
- **Quality, impact and continuous improvement**  
The focus is shifting from delivery alone to demonstrable impact, with improved quality assurance, post-training evaluation and rights-based assessment of commissioned training.

#### 4.3 What we have learnt from young people to help set priorities for the year ahead:

- a) The feedback loop to young people over the last year has vastly improved. However, there are still times when they remain unsure about what has happened with what they said and whether this made a difference. We continue to support decision makers to feedback to young people so that participation remains purposeful and fully upholds article 12 of the UNCRC.
- b) In continuing to strengthen the feedback loop, the Youth Voice Team will be using Citizen's Space every quarter to increase public transparency about the impact young people have.
- c) The Network continues to feedback on how well Corporate Parenting Board works for them. The Youth Voice Team will work alongside decision makers and councillors to continue to develop and strengthen this space. Co-design sessions will be hosted in the summer to reflect on the last year and strengthen this space.

- d) Through the Coram Survey, we have learnt that we need to hear more from our 8 to 11 year olds and this will be a focus for the year ahead.
- e) Youth Voice is everyone's business. Partnerships with external and internal colleagues are key in hearing both breadth and depth of voices. The Youth Voice team will continue to seek opportunities to increase this way of working.
- f) Themed events are a great opportunity to increase engagement which has been successful with care leavers and their annual art exhibition. The Youth Voice team plan to use a similar model for Care Day to engage younger voices.
- g) When young people feel confident in using their voice and can see and feel the impact they have, a success indicator is that they begin to demand more opportunities which are youth led. One example of this is the National Care Leavers month exhibition. In response to this, in 2026 we are seeking to give a grant to a community art organisation to facilitate the project with young people.

Young people involved will be able to achieve the Arts Award Explorer<sup>7</sup> if they wish to and those living across the country can be supported to take part. The art organisation will use a 6-stage trauma informed approach. This allows space for emotional safety, trust, expression, meaning making and closure – keeping everyone safe in the creative process.

## **5. Alternative options considered**

5.1 Not applicable as there are no recommendations to be considered.

## **6. Legal considerations**

6.1 The Children and Families Act 2014 states that local authorities must have regard to:

- the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people
- their participation as fully as possible in decisions
- providing support and information to enable that participation

Whilst this applies particularly to special education needs and disability (SEND), it sets a wider expectation of active involvement, not just consultation.

6.2 If we aren't systematically using children's voices to shape services, we are at risk of not meeting our statutory duties around welfare, participation, and child-centred practice.

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<sup>7</sup> [Arts Award Explore qualification](#)

- 6.3 If we aren't systematically using children's voices to shape services, we are at risk of not meeting our statutory duties around welfare, participation, and child-centred practice.

## **7. Financial implications**

- 7.1 Ideas and recommendations from children and young people are mostly achieved within the Youth Voice budget. Some activities, like the art exhibition, require shared financial resources with other teams.

## **8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications**

- 8.1 Climate wheel not required.

## **9. Well-being and health implications**

- 9.1 There can be improved health and wellbeing for children and young people when they belong and matter in safe, trauma informed spaces. The Network is also a place where new friendships are made
- 9.2 Young people are not expected to share their stories. It is recognised that there is a cost to young people when they bring their lived experiences into a space, and this must be given due care and consideration. Young people may find some projects and conversations difficult but when held safely with co-regulating adults, The Network can be a place for healing.

## **10. Other implications**

- 10.1 Children and young people may make disclosures to the Youth Voice Team, as safe and trusting relationships are built. Children and young people will be supported by their key worker, who would be informed of any disclosures. Officers have space in their 1:1's to reflect on the impact the work has on them, along with access to Dorset Council's wellbeing offer for further support.

## **11. Risk implications**

- 10.2 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 No equality impact implications that require an assessment.

**13. Appendices**

13.1 None

**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)

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