

YOS



Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2020 -2023

Summary of Approach

The right place to live at the right time for
Dorset's children and young people

1. Introduction

1.1 What is placement sufficiency?

We believe in supporting all of our children and young people to have a safe place to live and thrive. We recognise that most children and young people are best brought up within their own families. Where this is not possible, we look to find a family or a home that best meets their needs and offers access to the support and opportunities needed for success and happiness in later life.

To meet this vision, we need to have the right home, with the right people, in the right place, at the right time. This strategy sets out our aims and priorities to deliver this.

1.2 Guiding Legislation

The Children Act 1989 (section 22g) requires local authorities to take steps that are reasonably practicable to secure sufficient accommodation for children and young people under their care who cannot live at home and whose circumstances indicate that it would be in their best interests to be accommodated within the local authority's area, so that they can see their family and stay at the same school. This is commonly known as the 'sufficiency duty'.

1.3 Dorset Council Policy

In 2019, Dorset Council adopted a policy of committing to reduce the number of children in care, taking a rights-based approach, which develops services which support children to be able to grow up in a family setting. We have a combined strategy to establish placement sufficiency:

- Change commissioning approach - block contracting, or a similar vehicle, to identify providers who will guarantee access to a number of placements
- Hybrid provision - where DC owns or leases properties which providers use to run children's homes, or which are directly provided by DC.
- Use existing, or new, sources of capital investment, such as a Social Impact Bond, to buy or build additional capacity in the residential estate for Dorset

2. Our Aims

1. Promote an increased range of homes in Dorset for our children and young people that meet their needs and provide them with a safe place to live and thrive.
2. Provide stability for our children and young people, by providing planned care and support at the right time that leads to permanent homes.
3. Help children and young people have the best chance of being part of a family by increasing the recruitment, retention and availability of foster carers in Dorset who can meet the needs of the children they look after.
4. Give children and young people who need them residential homes in the Dorset Council area.
5. Commission smarter to support better matching, ensure quality and get best value from our relationships with partner organisations.

3. Dorset Children and Young People

3.1 What do we know

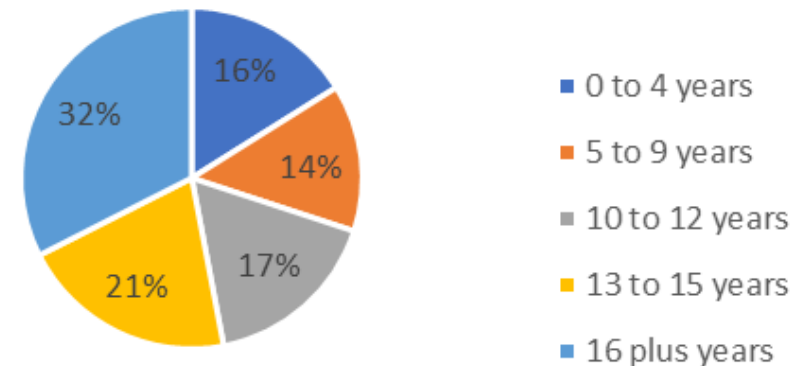
- The number of Children in Care in Dorset has increased over the past 5 years
 - There were 390 children on our care in 2015 and there are 482 now (July 2020)
 - The rate of children in care (71.2 per 10,000 population) is higher than the national rate and the rate in comparable council areas or the region
- One third of our children in care are from Weymouth and Portland
- Too many of our children in care are placed at a distance from home making it more difficult for them to keep in touch with family and friends and leading to changes of school
 - 47% of children and young people are looked after over 20 miles from their home address
 - 45% live outside Dorset
- Too many of our children have many moves before they find the right home for them
 - Long- and short-term placement stability is worse than national or statistical neighbour averages
- We need to be better able to support children and young people who have multiple and complex needs, are at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation, have mental health issues and additional communication needs
- We need to be better at supporting families with children with disabilities, improving the range of short breaks that provide a welcome break
- Dorset has responsibility for 264 care leavers and we need to be better at ensuring they have suitable places to live close to education and job opportunities

3.2 Demographics

Children in Care

- Over 60% of our children in care are aged over 13 years with a high number of adolescents coming into our care in last few years, this is changing and we are seeing increased number of young children now entering care
- Forty-five per cent are girls and 55% boys
- Fourteen per cent of our children in care are from Black, Asian, Mixed or other minority ethnic groups
- At any one time, there are around 10 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
- Ten per cent of our children in care are disabled but an even greater proportion have a Special Educational Needs

Age



Care Leavers

- Dorset has responsibility for 264 care leavers – 46% are male, and 54% are female.
- Eleven per cent of care leavers are from Black, Asian, Mixed or other minority ethnic groups
- Eleven per cent are disabled.

- As we have a large number of teenagers in our care we know that this number will increase over the next 2 years but we expect it to decrease after that as the age profile of children coming into care changes and we reduce the number of older teenagers entering care.

4. Finding the right home

We recognise that children and young people in Dorset have a wide range of needs. When it comes to finding a home, we want to support children and young people to have a safe place to live and thrive. To do this we need a range of different homes and settings.

4.1 Foster care

Our vision is for all children in foster care to have stable lives, build trusting relationships, to feel cared for and benefit from high quality foster care for as long as they need it.

- 69% of children in care are placed with foster carers which is below national and regional average
- 16% of children in care who are placed with foster carers do so under established permanent arrangements
- 15% of children in care are placed with foster carers who are relatives or friends
- 4% of children in care at any one time are placed with foster carers and awaiting adoption
- Dorset Council supports over 140 foster carer households, many of whom look after more than one child or young person in care.
- 212 children are placed with Dorset Council foster carers, and 103 with external fostering providers.

- For young people moving into adulthood, the Staying Put scheme offers the opportunity to remain with their foster carer after they have turned 18. We need to develop this further, as we do our Fostering to Adopt offer so that more children can be placed with foster carers who can then adopt them.

4.2 Children's homes and residential care

Our vision is that children and young people who live in children's homes and residential care do so within Dorset and to have great quality care in homely environments where support is flexible and planned to suit their needs. We want them to be supported to be able to live with families, whether this is with foster carers, their biological family, or for young people to move towards independent living

- Currently 97 children and young people, 20% of those in care, live in children's homes and residential care.
- There are 5 children's homes in Dorset registered with Ofsted offering up to 19 places.
- One of these is a Dorset Council home for children who are disabled.
- Of the 4 other private children's homes' 13 beds, four are occupied by Dorset children and young people.
- Most Dorset children and young people who are looked after in children's homes and residential care live outside of Dorset, sometimes in neighbouring counties but too often far away from their families and friends. Sometimes this is because their needs are particularly complex and they need specialist therapeutic provision or residential schools, but they need to have every opportunity to live within Dorset
- Some children and young people are living in residential children's homes because we have been unable to find a foster family to care for them

4.3 Supported accommodation and Independent living

Our vision is for all young people in living in supported accommodation to have a safe place to live, whilst developing their life skills to successfully transition into adulthood and independence. We want Dorset young people to reach their potential during their transition into adulthood and beyond. We want young people leaving care to be supported to get the right accommodation and get practical and financial support.

Dorset Council commissions supported accommodation for young people, but due to increases in demand and emerging complex needs, additional accommodation and housing related support for young people is sought through spot purchasing.

Only 86% of care leavers remain in care until their 18th birthday, and we know we need to work to increase this number, and reduce the number of 17 year olds in unregulated accommodation, while working to improve the quality of the support offered in these settings.

We have a total of 63 young people aged 17-21 living in supported accommodation, 16 in Staying Put placements, and 7 in bed and breakfast or emergency accommodation.

Dorset care leavers are more likely at age 18 to be in unsuitable accommodation than the national or statistical neighbour average, and more likely to be living independently at age 19 to 21. We know that supported lodgings and staying put schemes are underused for care leavers in Dorset compared to national or statistical neighbour averages.

5. What we will do about it

5.1 Foster care

We will work to increase the supply and improve the quality of our fostering offer. We will:

- Review our end to end recruitment and assessment process to ensure we can increase the supply of foster carers being presented for approval at the Dorset fostering panel
- Develop the Mockingbird model in Dorset to improve the support available to carers
- Make sure we use our in-house foster carers effectively by increasing occupancy levels (the number of carers who have children with them) to 85%
- Link clusters of carers with residential provision to enable step down arrangements to be improved
- Increase the number of children who stay put with their carers after their 18th birthday
- Commission an improved family based short break offer for children who are disabled.

5.2 Flexible intensive support at the Harbour

We will implement a different way of supporting and providing care to our teenagers through a new model of delivery at the Harbour in Weymouth and Portland.

The Harbour programme is based on the successful No Wrong Door model and replaces traditional young people's homes with hubs which combine residential care with fostering, outreach support, and supported lodgings. Each hub has a dedicated multi-disciplinary team which works with young people on the edge of care,

around placement stability and reunification – working with families on a strengths based, relationship based, restorative model in a shared approach with partner agencies.

Every young person in the Harbour programme is given one key worker supported by a single team of trusted and skilled workers. These workers stick with the young person through thick and thin to access the right services at the right time and in the right place to meet their needs.

We will:

- Reconfigure and expand our existing edge of care and complex placements services to deliver this model
- Use residential bases in Weymouth for the core hub and have a live service by winter 2021/22

5.3 Develop Dorset Council residential care and children's homes

We will increase the availability of local residential care and children's homes by:

- Building a new children's home in Weymouth by September 2021 for up to 5 young people, who need longer term residential care.
- Not using residential care which is not registered with Ofsted. We will do this using the Harbour and by registering residential provision with Ofsted as children's homes, operated either by Dorset Council or by partner organisations.
- Working with partner organisations to expand the range of residential care in Dorset. We will encourage existing partners to develop this provision and block contract the homes. We will also tender to offer Dorset Council properties to be developed as new independent sector children's homes for Dorset Council's exclusive use under 'block contracts', along with a lot to enable new providers to contract with us.

- Review our children's home for children and young people who are disabled and look at how the service can be provided differently – exploring the potential to deliver the service in less institutional homes, and linking the service with dedicated foster carers and short breaks providers to deliver a graduated response.

5.4 Deepen relationships with independent foster care providers, particularly those with carers in Dorset

We know that over 150 children from other local authorities are looked after by independent fostering agencies in Dorset. We wish to work with these providers to ensure that this provision is secured and available for Dorset children in the first instance.

Although this sector of the market is reluctant to enter into block arrangements, we believe that we can improve confidence by prioritising matching in the brokerage process and reducing delay.

We also believe that there is scope to commission specialist schemes from the sector including parent/carer and baby placements.

5.5 Supported housing and independent living

We will increase the availability and quality of local supported housing and independent living options for our Care Leavers through:

- Developing more supported accommodation options in Weymouth and Portland
- Commissioning a range of supported accommodation options with flexible support across the county
- Embedding our joint protocol between children's services and housing to ensure that young people who are at risk of homelessness receive a robust response

- Seeking opportunities to develop affordable housing options for care leavers through the council's Building Better Lives Programme
- Increase the number of shared lives carers

5.6 Improve our contract monitoring with partner organisations who provide placements

We have created new posts within the Commissioning service to improve our contract monitoring arrangements with providers. We believe that this will

- Give more assurance about quality and standards
- Ensure value for money
- Improve placement stability by enabling us to work closely with providers to address issues early