

Appendix 1



## **Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2020 - 2023**

## 1. Overview

### Background

1.1 Dorset Council's Placement Sufficiency Strategy for children and young people is based on the rights-based approach to reducing the number of children in care which was adopted by the Council in 2019. This policy emphasises the need to provide services which prevent the need for children to enter the care system, and the obligation to ensure that wherever possible children are able to live in a family setting while in care.

1.2 There are two key targets which underpin this work:

- Reducing the number of children in care per 10,000 to a level comparable with our statistical neighbours – 60 per 10,000
- Reducing the percentage of children in care placed out of area to a level comparable with our statistical neighbours – 30%

### Numbers of children in care

1.3 As of the end of November 2020, there were 476 children in care; a rate per 10,000 for Dorset of 70 exceeding that of statistical neighbour average of 55, and the neighbouring authority average of 65. To reduce the number of children to a rate per 10,000 comparable with neighbouring authorities would mean a care population of 390. It is estimated that this would take three years to achieve.

1.4 The target for the end of financial year 2021-22 is to reduce the number of children in care to 440. 82 young people will transition to care leaver services by the end of March 2022. Alongside other exit routes from care estimated to be between 40 and 50 children the net underlying increase in the number of children entering care would need to be no more than 90 to achieve this target.

1.5 During the first two quarters of 2020-21, 75 children left the care system and 74 entered. 27 of the leavers were transitioning 18-year olds. To reduce the overall figure, we require both fewer children entering the system, and the number of children leaving to return to their birth family or other permanence options such as SGO or adoption to increase. The percentage of children leaving care for adoption has been greater than statistical neighbour or national rates, and the rate of special guardianship has been greater than statistical neighbours in the last six months, but these figures can fluctuate from quarter to quarter as numbers are low. Overall, numbers of adoptions are rising in Dorset counter to the national trend, and Special Guardianship Order numbers are declining.

Year	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Target no. of CiC at year end	476 (Nov 20)	440	410	380

## Numbers of additional places required within Dorset

1.6 As of the end of November 2020, 41% of all children in care were placed outside of the Dorset area – some 194 children and young people. To reduce this percentage to the target figure of 30% would require the creation of, or assured access to, 51 additional places for children and young people in Dorset. This growth in capacity in Dorset would reduce the need to send children outside of Dorset and away from their family, friends and school

1.7 There are currently 35 children’s homes places for children available or in development in Dorset – some of these are being developed by Dorset Council, while others will be brought into block contract arrangements over the course of the year. It is reasonable to assume that 25 of these will be in use at any time. There is also a reasonable expectation that additional registered children’s home capacity will become available in Dorset, as a result of our tendering activity and the current national review of the use of unregulated provision for children.

1.8 It is also reasonable to set a target for the Council’s own fostering service to increase the number of available carers by 20 and to seek to secure an additional 20 places with independent fostering agencies in Dorset.

Total additional places required by March 2022	Additional places in residential homes by March 2022	Additional Dorset Council fostering places by March 2022	Additional independent fostering places secured by March 2022
51	20	20	20

1.9 Current costs, as of November 20, are £102,286.93 per week for the 106 children and young people placed with external fostering providers. 66 of these are placed outside of the border of Dorset.

1.10 Current costs, as of November 20, are £279,405.10 per week for the 57 young people in external residential provision. 49 of these are placed outside the border of Dorset.

1.11 An increase in our local placement availability as detailed above would lead to would result in an additional £100,000 per week being spent within the Dorset economy at a very conservative estimate. This would mean that our expenditure was benefiting the local economy, rather than the economy in other local authority areas.

## Unregulated provision

1.12 The government is currently considering feedback to a consultation on the use of unregulated provision for children. This is usually supported accommodation which provides independence or semi-independence. Neither Ofsted nor the CQC currently inspect or regulate such provision. Dorset currently has 43 children in this type of provision.

1.13 The government has consulted around four groups of proposals:

- banning the use of independent and semi-independent placements for children and young people under the age of 16;
- driving up the quality of support offered in independent and semi-independent provision, through the introduction of new national standards, and ensuring that young people's interests are appropriately represented by their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO);
- introducing new measures so that local authorities and local police forces liaise before a placement in this provision is made; and
- giving Ofsted new legal powers to act against illegal providers.

1.14 The proposals if adopted as set out would mean that providers would have to comply with a set of national minimum standards and would be subject to inspection by Ofsted, and there would be clarity about the difference between this type of accommodation and registered care provision.

1.15 There would be a transition period before the introduction of any new legislation and regulation, but the reality is that providers will have to choose between registering their provision, complying with the national standards, or exiting the market for housing 16- and 17-year olds.

1.16 Of the current cohort, 20 will transition to adulthood before the end of March 2021. It will be important going forward to reduce the number of young people entering this type of provision. An action plan will be developed to address risk issues in the remaining cohort:

- An over-representation of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- Spot purchase arrangements where further quality assurance is required.
- High support placements which risk being illegal unregistered care settings.

1.17 Current costs, as of November 202, are £43,560.72 per week for the 43 young people. 9 of them are currently living outside the Dorset area.

1.18 Young people's supported housing will be retendered during 2021. The tender will open in February and the contract will commence in August. The tender will have a lot for supported housing services for 18 to 25 years old, and a lot for vulnerable young people aged 16-25. The expectation will be that providers who bid for the vulnerable young people's lot will work towards compliance with any system of regulation brought forward by the government.

## **2. Background**

2.1 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.

## 2.2 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'.

From April 2010, local authorities had to include in relevant commissioning strategies their plans for meeting the sufficiency duty. From April 2011, working with their Children's partners, local authorities must be in a position to carry out the sufficiency duty.

## 2.3 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

## 3. Our Aims

3.1 Our [Strengthening Services Plan](#) and [Children and Young Peoples Plan](#) set out our short to medium service improvement agenda, and our long term transformation plans. Both plans are multi agency plans which are overseen by the Strategic Alliance. Our Placement Sufficiency Strategy, together with the Corporate Parenting Strategy, sits within the context established by these plans.

3.2 Our Strengthening Services plan states:

Children in Care and Care Leavers receive good quality help and support and thrive in a setting that is right for them achieving good outcomes that set the foundation for a stable and happy future

- Strengthen the Corporate Parenting offer in Dorset
- Improve the quality and timeliness of care and permanence planning so that children live in their forever home as soon as possible
- Strengthen arrangements to improve education, employment and training outcomes for children in care and care leavers
- Ensure robust arrangements are in place so that all children in care and care leavers are receiving health services that are improving their health outcomes
- Ensure children in care and care leavers with emotional health and wellbeing needs get the right help and support at the right time
- Strengthen contact / family time arrangements so that children in care are supported to have meaningful contact with family members
- Strengthen fostering arrangements in Dorset so that more children and young people are cared for close to their communities, friends and networks
- Ensure sufficiency and quality of local residential placements for children in care and suitable accommodation for care leavers

### 3.3 The Children and Young People's Plan states:

Our aim is to keep our children close to home and to be the best corporate parents we can be.

Where we can we want to support families to stay together. Where children and young people do need care, we want to make sure this is in family-based care wherever possible.

We want to make sure that:

- we have the right educational and housing options for our children in care and care leavers
- we improve the health and wellbeing of our children in care and care leavers
- there is a range of short breaks available to support families with children with SEND so that they're able to continue to care for their children

### 3.4 The [Corporate Parenting Strategy](#) has identified the following priorities for children on the edge of care, children in care, and care leavers:

1. Increase opportunities to hear the voice of our children and young people and to take their views, wishes and feelings into account.
2. Promote better physical and mental health and well-being through improved access to health information and services.

3. Have high aspirations for children in care and care leavers in their education, training and employment.
4. Ensure safe and stable accommodation within the family home or close relatives and friends. If not possible, children are moved to a permanent placement without delay.
5. For our children to have a good and enriching experience of care provision and to prepare for adulthood and an independent and successful life.
6. Effective governance and planning arrangements are in place to mean the Corporate Parent can be the best they can be.

#### **4. COVID Specific Context**

4.1 The experience of the pandemic in Dorset has been congruent with the themes identified by Ofsted in a briefing note [COVID-19 series: briefing on children's social care providers, October 2020](#)

- Better multi-agency working has often been a positive consequence of the pandemic, especially between education and LAs.
- Concerns about sufficiency, placement disruption and children entering care in an unplanned way have increased during COVID-19 (coronavirus) restrictions.
- Care leavers' personal advisers have shown strong commitment to them throughout the pandemic.
- Pressures on the family courts significantly impacted LAs' ability to issue care proceedings and to protect children. The backlog of public law cases has also made it harder to return children home or move them out of care.
- Contact between children and their families has largely been managed sensitively, in line with COVID-19 restrictions on a local and national level.
- Leaders did not always have a clear strategy to know which children known to social care should be attending school in person or to monitor attendance.
- There were differences in children's and young people's access to technology and therefore in their ability to engage in remote learning, access the job market or keep in touch with friends and family.
- Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) often already did not have enough capacity to meet children's needs, and this worsened during the pandemic.
- LAs appear to have made little use of the temporary flexibilities in the regulations.

4.2 Dorset Council has taken the following steps to support young people and providers during the pandemic:

- Despite the challenges in maintaining face to face contact, we have been making sure that we continue, wherever possible to keep in touch with and visit our children in care.
- Our social workers have used technology to stay in touch, and we are working closely with foster carers and placement providers to safely visit in a Covid secure way and reducing unnecessary footfall where possible by coordinating visits by professionals.
- Almost 85% of our children in care have been seen in the last six weeks and 14% in the last 6 to 12 weeks. Throughout Covid 19 we have also tracked social work contact with children within 4 weeks and on 13/7/2020 87% children had been contacted in the last 4 weeks.

4.3 One of the major challenges due to COVID19 has been a delay in 'move on' within both the private rented and home choice housing sectors. Limited private rented properties were advertised during this time and there were also COVID19 restrictions in place which prevented moving. The home choice bidding system was closed temporarily due to COVID19, preventing any bids on local housing association properties until this re-opened mid-July 2020. The impact of these delays and other emergency measures taken during COVID19 includes a current processing time of up to 16 weeks for housing register applications meaning that new applicants are unable to access the home choice system until their applications are completed. The impact of COVID19 delay will begin to reduce as colleagues in our Housing Departments are able to catch up with volume of work and demands, and the private housing sector become more confident to advertise properties once again.

4.4 Overall, Ofsted has noted that social care providers seem to express little concern about their future viability – in contrast to other sectors of the economy. This confirms the pre pandemic view that the children's social care market was currently provider led. This also supports the shift in our strategy to investment in our own provision, and a more active approach to market engagement and market shaping.

## **5. Dorset Children and Young People**

5.1 What we know from current data:

### **Children in need – the level of need for social work intervention**

- Our Child in Need (CIN) numbers are gradually decreasing and are in line with our statistical neighbours (292 per 10,000).
- Our CIN assessments are also reducing as a result of work taking place in the Childrens Advice and Duty team and ongoing work to embed Early Help.
- There has been significant improvement in recent months in timeliness of our social work assessments and our social workers direct work and contact with children and families is a high priority for us.

### **Children in Care**



- The number of Children in Care in Dorset has increased over the past 5 years. From 390 children in 2015 to 476 November 2020.
- The number of children in care aged 0-12 is consistently greater than the number of children aged 13 – 17 in the care system
- 43% are girls and 55% boys
- Fourteen per cent of our children in care are from Black, Asian or other minority ethnic groups
- At the end of November 2020, there were 14 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. These children are over-represented in unregulated provision
- Nine per cent of our children in care are disabled but around two thirds will have Special Educational Needs,
- 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 - 46% of children and young people are looked after over 20 miles from their home address and 40% live outside Dorset
- Too many of our children have placement moves before they find the right home for them – a third of all children in care have had more than one placement.
- Long- and short-term placement stability is worse than national or statistical neighbour averages

### **Care Leavers**

- Dorset has responsibility for 260 care leavers – 45% are male, and 54% are female. We are working to ensure they have suitable places to live close to education and job opportunities
- Eleven per cent of care leavers are from Black, Asian 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 can expect it to decrease after that as the age profile of children coming into care changes,
- The number of care leavers receiving support after the age of 21 falls off sharply.
- 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

## **6. Supporting the right to family life**

6.1 The sufficiency duty applies to all children who are Looked After, but it also applies to Children in Need who are at risk of care or custody, known as children 'on the edge of care', and needs to incorporate permanency.

6.2 Children in care are supported by social workers across locality teams and with the children who are disabled service. Within the locality teams we have created 3

locality-based permanence teams to support our children in care from 0-18 years of age.

6.3 The creation of permanence teams embedded within our new place-based structure ensures that our children in care have a managed transfer between social workers at the right time for them, whilst maintaining a focus on their needs when permanence has been achieved.

6.4 The trend in Dorset is towards better performance around permanency. The percentage of children who have a permanence plan after 4 months has increased from a low baseline. Long term placement stability is better than our comparators.

6.5 We have improved our systems for tracking and monitoring children who are pre and in proceedings in the family courts. As of November 2021, there were 40 children from 23 families. All cases in proceedings are reviewed at 13 weeks and action taken if there are signs that the timescale for resolution may be at risk.

6.6 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, including respite and effective short breaks for children and young people with disabilities.

## **7. The Harbour**

7.1 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.

4.1 The Harbour approach is a multi-agency partnership that pools resources to achieve improved outcomes for children, families and communities, and reduce spending across the public sector.

4.2 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 strength based, relationship based, restorative model in a shared approach with partner agencies.

4.3 The approach involves working with children on the edge of care, at risk of placement breakdown, or in insecure housing in order to ensure that they can continue to live at home, or can live in a stable family setting. In this approach, residential care is a time limited intervention for young people – not a destination.

4.4 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.

4.5 So far there has been successful engagement of partners including Police, the CCG, healthcare providers and housing providers to shape and deliver The Harbour. The project will deliver a reduction in service delivery costs for all partners which will support securing long-term financial investment.

4.6 For Dorset Council, the most tangible benefit to be realised will be a reduction in the number of children placed in residential care and in out of county placements.

4.7 The delivery of the Harbour approach will require effective and robust staffing arrangements, including the successful recruitment of specialist foster carers. This will require new ways of working and a consistent set of behaviours and values across the residential homes, family placements and community settings, including staff from partner agencies.

4.8 A task group is working on process design and new guidelines for staff. The group will produce a workforce development plan and document supporting procedures and guidance for all staff and agencies who will deliver services in The Harbour.

4.9 45 Dorchester Road, Weymouth will see the development of a 3 bed roomed home which can be used as a short-term intervention in emergencies, and a 5 bed roomed home will be suitable for children who need a residential intervention the medium term. Both are expected to be available in the winter of 2021/22.

4.10 Hayeswood Bungalow, Wimborne is being registered as a children's home and has a single young person living there. At the point when she moves on to her own accommodation, the home will be available to be used in the same way at the 3 bed home in Dorchester Road and will mean that the approach can be offered in the east and north of the county with a base that is closer to home.

4.11 Clarence Road, Portland can be refurbished and registered by the end of February 2021. This will either enable a young person to exit unregistered provision and move closer to their family, and/or will be available as part of the Harbour offer.

4.12 Sunnyside, Weymouth is currently occupied by a young man who has transitioned to Adult and Community Services. He will move to his permanent adult care setting in 2021. At this point, this property will be able to be registered as a children's home.

4.13 Avon Heath is two cottages in the country park which are currently being used as unregistered provision. Early in 2021, an existing local provider will take on a lease for the properties and will register them as children's homes in a block contract arrangement.

4.14 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

## 8. Foster care

8.1 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.

- 67% 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 205 foster carer households, many of whom look after more than one child or young person in care. Just over a quarter of these are connected person arrangements.
- 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.

### 4.15 Increasing sufficiency of foster care

We will work to increase the supply and improve the quality of our fostering offer. The following steps will be taken to increase sufficiency of foster placements:

- Fostering recruitment will be tendered to replace the current arrangements with a complete through service that delivers foster households to our Fostering panel ready to approve.
- Recruitment will focus on carers for teenagers who are able to care for young people with complex needs and offer a home to the diverse population of children in care.
- The management of the fostering service will increase the proportion of registered foster carers who are active and available to receive children. Currently, around 60% of fostering households are active – we need to increase this to 85%. The proportion will be increased both by supporting more carers to provide placements, and by deregistering those carers who have reached the end of their fostering career.
- We will review the terms of reference and structure of our current fostering panel with a view to identifying changes which support our direction of travel – both in terms of the work required to increase the number of new carers, and

to strengthen the quality assurance and review mechanisms around our existing carers.

- The fostering service will move to implement the Mockingbird model of support for foster carers. A transformation bid is being prepared to support this work.
- The fostering service will establish a specific Mockingbird network for teenagers as part of the Harbour which will establish a step-down pathway for children in residential care.
- Increase the number of children who stay put with their carers after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. The fostering service will increase the percentage of children who are able to benefit from Staying Put arrangements that it is in line with our statistical neighbours. This will reduce the number who live in unregulated provision.

#### 4.16 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.

- Tendering will take place for a short break fostering service for children with additional needs. This is a gap in our current short break offer.
- Activity including retainer schemes and matching panels will take place with independent fostering providers within Dorset to increase our access to the fostering households in the county.

## 9. Children's homes and residential care

9.1 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 – The Cherries, Weymouth. This originally designed as a short break provision for children and is a large institutional building. It is registered for 9 young people,

but is currently home to 5. Work will take place early in 2021 to review whether these young people could live in more domestic accommodation or whether they could live with foster parents.

- 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

9.2 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 the statement of purpose of 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.
- Joining up our placement sufficiency strategy with our SEND Capital Strategy to identify opportunities for young people with additional needs to go to school and live in Dorset, if they cannot live at home.

## **10. Supported accommodation and Independent living**

10.1 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.

10.2 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.

10.3 Only 86% of care leavers remain in care until their 18<sup>th</sup> 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.

10.4 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.

10.5 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.

10.6 We have a duty to support care leavers up to the age of 25, but we know the number of care leavers receiving a service declines drastically after age 21. Our development of 1 and 2 bedroom flats at Kirtleton Avenue will provide additional accommodation for up to 12 young adults, and their children if they are parents, and enable them to access support but also to have a settled tenancy which will provide a stepping stone to adult life. The accommodation will be available from winter 21/22.

10.7 Work will continue with colleagues in Adult Services and Housing to:

- Embed 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

## **11. Working with partners**

11.1 Outcomes for children in care are determined not just by the quality of placement, but also by the quality of their care plan and the wrap around support to them and their carers.

### **Virtual school and early years**

11.2 Dorset Virtual School undertake three Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings a year for our children in care, one each term, in partnership with young people and their carers, social workers and the designated teachers in schools/settings. The current PEP return rate is over 99% which although not nationally reported on, compares favourably with regional informally reported return rates amongst South

West Virtual School Heads' termly meetings. The Virtual School Governing Body also has a Governor Champion for the quality of Personal Education Plans. A BI dashboard has been developed by commissioning staff to enable the school population of children in care to be tracked. Options appraisal is taking place on dedicated software to enable the virtual school and partners to develop PEPs in a digital space and track attendance and attainment in year in real time.

### **Family Time - Keeping in touch**

11.3 Our current arrangements for helping children in care stay in touch with their families and other people who are important to them are in need of an overhaul – starting with the cessation of the use of the work “contact” to describe it – which young people have told us they dislike. Some of this will involve changes in awareness about the role of the corporate practice and ensuing practice. There is also a need to review the service which enables children to meet family under supervision when there is an identified risk. Most of this work is done by employees in the Community Resource Worker service. These are employed on zero hours contracts with a view to providing a flexible and responsive service. The service is currently under review with a view to creating a more established service with dedicated meeting venues, which will reduce travel costs and over avoidable overheads. Our aim is to have new arrangements in place by April 2021.

### **Keeping healthy**

11.4 Overall, our practice is improving in ensuring we understand the health needs of children entering our care, with improvements in timeliness of gaining consent for Initial Health Assessments as a result of increased management oversight and weekly monitoring. However, we lag behind comparators on the percentage of children who receive an Annual health Assessment on time, and on the percentage of children who access dental services. Our average Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) scores are also higher (negative) than comparators.

11.5 We have a Child in Care Psychologist based in the council who works with our children in care and their carers to ensure that we have a good understanding of the therapeutic needs of our children and that the placement can meet the identified needs. In addition, there are psychologists based in the NHS. There has been a rise in the numbers of requests for support, advice and guidance to foster carers from the Children in Care Psychologists which has had an impact on their offer. One off consultations have more often been provided rather than a series.

11.6 The Youth Offending Service obtained NHS England funding for a Speech and Language Therapist and to support the introduction of trauma informed practice. A 4-month pilot saw all new young people being assessed by the Speech and Language Therapist. About 80% of these assessments identified some level of speech, language or communication needs, with recommendations for the young person, for YOS workers, other professionals and for family members about how best to respond to the child's needs.



11.7 This learning will be incorporated into the Harbour and discussions are taking place with the CCG and health providers about establishing dedicated psychology and speech and language therapist support as part of the Hub team.

### **Adoption and Special Guardianship**

11.8 Adoption Services are provided since July 2017 through the Regional Adoption Agency (Aspire), which serves the Dorset Council and BCP Council areas. Dorset Council retains the Agency Decision Maker responsibility. A review is being undertaken with Aspire to fully consider impact and outcomes for children within the existing RAA to support future plans for service delivery. This will be completed by January 2021.

### **12. Improve our contract monitoring with partner organisations who provide placements**

12.1 We have created new posts within the Commissioning service to improve our contract monitoring and quality assurance 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

All current external placements are RAG rated by the Quality Assurance Manager and a program of checks and visits is underway. The team is able to respond to notifications from Ofsted where inspections or investigations have raised concerns, or where judgements about individual settings have changed.

12.2 A programme of monthly case file audits is also carried out which provides oversight of the quality of care planning for individual children.

12.3 We have also taken steps to establish a procurement business partner role with the corporate procurement hub. This will enable us to make best use of the resources and expertise of the corporate hub, and focus our contract officers on contract monitoring.

12.4 Our current Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements have been made from the tendered sub-regional frameworks (South West until 31.3.17) and South Central since 1.4.17 that can provide for special and needs, where these cannot be met within local provision. There were 36 independent fostering service providers pre-qualified to provide placements on the South West framework the individual placement agreements persist for as long as the placement is required even after the framework period has ended. The South-Central Independent Fostering Framework provides the consortium of local authorities with 49 foster agencies able to provide standard foster placements, 43 children with a disability placement and 43 parent and child placements. This Framework has 9 providers who can provide a new service of Alternatives to Residential placements. The successor to the South-Central Framework will be tendered in 2021.

12.5 Dorset does not have enough children's homes to accommodate children who require residential care. To date we have not attracted external providers to invest in or set up provision in Dorset. Therefore, the vast majority of our residential placements are made out of area, sometimes in adjoining local authority areas, but also at a considerable distance from Dorset in other LA areas. A number of steps have been taken to address this shortage of provision. We began by hosting a local market engagement event in September 2019. This was attended by thirteen children's home providers. We outlined our placement needs and discussed with providers possible ways to address our lack of children's home capacity. Block contracts were felt to be a useful way to secure capacity in Dorset. Initially this would be through using the flexibility of the Local Authorities of the Southern Region (LASR) framework to 'call-off' block contracts for Dorset children's homes. We have established a block contracts with the Beaufort Care Group for two of their homes in the East of Dorset. We are in discussion with other Dorset-based providers to see if similar block contracts could be established. For all Dorset-based providers we are aiming to get notified ahead of other local authorities of vacancies and planned vacancies.

12.6 A more medium- term solution would be to encourage providers to set up new provision in Dorset, perhaps utilising Dorset Council land or re-purposing Dorset Council buildings. We will tender for this in 2021 with a view to attracting providers who are not part of the current frameworks.

12.7 The LASR flexible framework is now in its third year and the reopening of the tender resulted in an increase in the number of homes available for calling-off placements as and when required in the following categories

- i. Planned and Same Day Residential Care
- ii. Crisis Care
- iii. Residential Care with DFE Regulated Education
- iv. Residential Parenting Assessments
- v. Therapeutic Residential Care
- vi. Children with Disabilities

However, the difficulties of sourcing beds cannot be underestimated, and spot purchasing is still required on occasion.

12.8 Since February 2019 a Post 16 Accommodation and Support South-Central Framework contract has been in place following a joint tender. This is a framework of 18 providers covering 4 lots (Looked after Children including UASC -16 providers; Care Leavers -16 providers; Young People with Complex Needs – 14 providers and parent and child – 7 providers) and also provides us with the ability to block contract for specific numbers and types of placements. The Consortium of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council, Bracknell Forest Council, Dorset Council, Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth City Council, Southampton City Council and Wokingham Borough Council are currently considering a reopening of this framework to new bidders or bids for further provision from current providers. This remains a difficult market where conditions mean that we still need to make occasional spot purchases.

12.9 Dorset Council's joint Adult Services and Children's Services Supported Housing contract (also known as the Vulnerable Young People's Service) was due to expire in July 2020, but was extended for a year due to the pandemic. Services are to be reconfigured to secure sufficient higher needs accommodation and support and with lower level needs met by enhanced housing management and floating support. The tender will be led by Children's Services with active involvement from colleagues in Adult services and Housing. The remainder of our post 16 accommodation and support or supported housing is currently subject to a block contract with a Dorset provider. This will be rolled into the new tender to drive efficiency, effectiveness and choice.







